



CHAPTER 4

IMMEDIATE PHYSICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The immediate physical, social and economic environment that the farang wife enters and her expectations thereof are influential factors in her ability to adjust to living in Thailand. All the informants had stories to tell about other farang women married to Thai men, whose reactions were to escape to their home country (the place where they had met) in the belief that life and their relationships with their husbands would improve. Unfortunately, this did not always bring the 'magical cure' these women had expected and the majority of these returnees reportedly divorced their Thai partners. As many of those who left Thailand still divorced, then perhaps their living environment was not their only problem! While those that have already left were obviously not available to give their side of the story, the accounts of women who remain suggest that the physical and social environment could indeed be too much for some women. Can 'living in Thailand' really cause a marriage to breakdown, and if so, why? What makes a woman want to run back home, or is living in Thailand used as a channel for blame by those with underlying problems?

Most of the women interviewed (from both generations) said they knew nothing, or very little about Thailand and their future living environment before they

came here with their husbands. Many of the older-generation confused the country with Taiwan and were under the impression that households with maids would be grand estates, not wooden houses full of mosquitoes! Other age-generational differences will reveal that the new-comers were in fact more prepared than they thought! However, many women (particularly new-comers) were not even sure how permanent the move was supposed to be, nor had they met the family with whom they were to live, perhaps for the rest of their lives. Women from both generations often experienced an initial drop in living standards, necessitating co-habitation with the in-laws but as Christine, a new-comer says, "it doesn't matter if you have a good husband if his parents are difficult! The way to living in Thailand means you need to be able to get on with all of them!" Living with, or in close proximity to the in-laws has been cited as an unexpected challenge that many women could not survive. Many have left their husbands/Thailand because they could not cope with the demands of such a situation, but wouldn't such living arrangements cause problems anywhere? Nonetheless, such difficulties may be easier to tolerate in a woman's own social environment, compared to the farang wife in a strange country who is isolated from her own support networks and faces additional pressure to adapt to different cultural expectations of her family role. Indeed, this pressure appears to be a common problem among mixed-marriages and Kitivipart notes,

inter-cultural couples are reported to have had more external problems attributed to extended family members, and wives in particular apparently had more pressure to assimilate culturally to their husbands' culture and had to make greater adjustments. (Kitivipart 1987:8)

Thus, how the farang woman reacts and adapts to the challenges involved in living with or in close proximity

to the extended family in Thailand, affects her ability to stay in Thailand, and her marriage.

The experiences of all the women interviewed, who have all faced the challenges and remain in Thailand, will serve to provide a general framework of the factors that affect a woman's ability to adapt to the external pressures of her new environment. Among the factors to be discussed in this chapter include a woman's prior knowledge and expectations of her living conditions; the couple's economic independence and initial period of residence; the woman's perception of her immediate physical environment; and her promiximity to, and relationship with her in-laws. Age-generational differences in these factors will highlight patterns of social-economic change and development in Thai society and the influence of such upon the survival of such relationships.

The Women's Prior Knowledge and Expectations of Thailand

Less than half of the older-generation women interviewed knew something about Thailand, their future home, before they married their husbands and some even confused it with Taiwan! In contrast, most of the new-comers had some idea of what Thailand was like from literature and television, and many had visited on holiday, either with their future husbands or at the time when they met their husbands. But although information sources and travel opportunities were more readily available to the new-comers than for the older-generation, the new-comers still felt that they were somewhat unprepared for their future lifestyles. Thus while the majority of women interviewed from both

generations said they knew very little about Thailand, in reality, the new-comers were subconsciously better prepared than the older-generation.

Older-generation

Most of the older-generation informants for this thesis knew nothing at all about Thailand prior to arrival, which coincides with Khambu's research in the 1960's. Khambu suggested that many women were deliberately ignorant of their future homes, considering it to be too different and difficult for them to imagine, and at the same time not wanting to build up any hopes and risk disappointment. In addition, there was little opportunity for the older-generation women to travel and see for themselves before they came. Although Catherine would have preferred to have visited Thailand before making her decision, she says it was not the done thing for a single woman to travel alone 38 years ago. Her father was very strict and gave her the ultimatum, 'marry the boy and go, or don't go at all!'

However, a quarter of the older-generation women were in an unprecedented position to have already been living and working in Thailand which is actually how they met their husbands. (Though numbers were equal for both generations of interviewees, from the survey and general observation this was a particular rarity for the long-timers.) All these women feel that having lived and worked in Thailand before marriage helped them adapt to their immediate environment in terms of already having linguistic skills, cultural familiarity and social networks, before having to adapt to their new spouse and married life. Pat felt that she had been extremely

fortunate to have sorted out any problems with the lifestyle, language and culture before having to adjust to her new husband, and social role as well. However, another long-timer Margaret, said that while this experience had helped her adjust to the external environment, it had not helped prepare her for the way her relationship with her husband turned out.

New-comers

In contrast, a third of the new-comers had been to Thailand before they married. In fact most of these met their husbands here. While half of these believe this helped prepare them, others like Sharon, who met her future husband whilst on holiday here, say they had no idea what to expect when they came here to live. Sharon says, "I did not know if he lived on a barge or what. I had only seen the tourist Thailand so (I) didn't really know what to expect." Others had visited and stayed with their husbands' family, but like Diane noted, "of course on holiday everything seems wonderful." And although Helen had read a lot to prepare herself she said, "its different from theory actually coming here and knowing what things actually are."

Despite such protests of ignorance, the younger generation, by means of global media and greater travel experiences were more prepared than their older-generation counterparts. As Helen continues, "Having come from another culture (lived in Japan) that's not completely dissimilar its not such a shock. Nothing shocked me."

Husbands' Role in Preparing Wives for Their New Environment

Though age-generational differences were found amongst the women's prior knowledge, none was found among the husbands, who were in general unhelpful in preparing their wives for their new environment. However, a few women gave their husbands some credit for preparing them. Alice, a long-timer said that her husband tried to warn her about life over here, half as a test to check that she really loved him, and half to make sure that she would stay if she came. He warned her that the physical conditions would not be as comfortable as she was used to and in fact she says she was a little disappointed as Bangkok was more developed than she had expected and there were no bullock carts as she had romantically imagined! Her husband says that he would get annoyed with his Thai friends boasting to their English girlfriends that they had a big house, a cook, and a maid. Although his friends were not exactly lying, the thought of anyone with a cook and a maid in England gives the impression of real luxury which is not necessarily the case over here. Alice said,

these guys may not actually have been lying, but (they) were definitely misleading their girlfriends, who naturally would feel deceived once they arrived and saw for themselves!

It can be seen from the above that those that had some idea, from husbands, literature, or travel experience appear to have been somewhat better prepared for their environment than those with no idea at all. This is clearly shown by the experiences of those who lived here before marriage, as well as by age-generational differences in life experience before

marriage. That the new-comers were more likely to have visited Thailand before marriage emphasises a change in social acceptance and opportunities for women to travel, which may in turn broaden the woman's horizons and affect her own sense of independence, and thus perhaps facilitate her ability to adapt. In addition, Thailand's modernisation process has meant that differences between western cities are not so apparent as they were over 2 or 3 decades ago, and therefore much easier for the new-comers to imagine and later adapt to.

Physical and Economic Environment

The most obvious adjustment that a farang wife has to make is to the physical environment of her new home and city. Many of the women interviewed experienced a sharp drop in living standards which affected their ability to adapt to the physical environment around them. As all but one of the women interviewed live in Bangkok, the following issues concern life in this city and the 'urban' Thai culture within. More than half of the women said they enjoyed Thailand's hot climate, but all were concerned about the pollution, and frustrated by the traffic! The impressions of the older generation, and even those from Khambu's research in the 1960's, compared with the those that have lived in Thailand for less than 20 years, are remarkably similar. All noted the traffic, dust and dirt, as well as the obvious divide between rich and poor, tall buildings and wooden shacks standing side by side! Likewise, many also had financial difficulties.

Economic Conditions

Half of the older-generation, compared to a third of the new-comers, had to accept an initial drop in living standards when they first came to live in Thailand, which often resulted in the need to live with the in-laws for the initial period of residence. For the older-generation, financial difficulties were usually due to the husband having studied abroad on a government scholarship or family funds, and returning to low-paid government service or family controlled business and finances.

In contrast, more than half of the new-comers' husbands put themselves through school, either overseas or at home and all but 2 now work for private and commercial companies, while a quarter have even set up their own businesses. Thus, the drop in living standards for the new-comers was equally likely to be due to the husband's financial independence funding his own studies (abroad or in Thailand) and/or trying to start up his own business after graduation. Fran's husband had worked and paid for his own studies overseas and when they returned together to start up their own business they had financial problems but like most new-comers they never lived with the in-laws. "When we came here I was living worse than I had when I was 15 yrs old, just moved to New York and was living on 45 dollars a week! It was a real struggle." However, after a difficult start they both feel that their lifestyle here is now better than it would be in the United States.

In fact, the majority of all the women noticed that the opportunities to accumulate finances and improve one's position has been more favourable here than in the

economically depressed West. Those that have stayed long enough to find this out can admit that their way of life is more comfortable now than it might have been after the same amount of time back home. Nonetheless, it took the majority of the older women many years of financial hardships and sacrifices to become comfortable, and some of the new-comers are still in the process! Interestingly, a third of the new-comers, compared with a quarter of the older-generation, improved their standard of living by marriage/coming to live in Thailand, while, a third of the new-comers and a quarter of the older-generation maintained the level to which they were accustomed.

Physical Environment

Financial status and economic constraints also had a great impact on the physical hardships the women were to suffer. In the past, transportation was difficult and cars were unaffordable, public transportation was limited, taxis or sam-lors were expensive, and at that time their houses were considered to have been out of the way (the same house is now in the middle of town!). Thus their mobility was limited. However, though most of the women today have their own cars (on credit!) or can at least afford to travel in metered-taxis, the infamous traffic jams still make transportation a nightmare for everyone, Thai or farang!

However, modern tele-communications and a more efficient postal service, allow the women better and more frequent communication with their friends and families back home. In addition, air travel is more economical and it is now socially acceptable for women to travel

living in Thailand is faced with the more subtle challenges of social pressures that affect her everyday life and are not always so easy to see or comprehend. And economic and/or family pressures often determined that the couple's initial place of residence was shared with the in-laws.

Living with the In-Laws

Compared to the patriarchal system of the Chinese, traditional Thai residence patterns are matrilocal whereby the married couple usually take-up residence with the bride's family. In practice though, married Thai children could live with either the husband's or the wife's family. However, for the foreign women marrying Thai men there was no choice of residence pattern and 17 of the total 28 interviewed lived with their husband's families at least during the initial period of residence.

Over half of the older-generation women spent some time in the family home and/or compound, the exceptions being those whose in-laws had died or were living upcountry. In contrast, over three-quarters of the new-comers have managed to live separately from the start, or within the first few years of moving here. While most of the older-generation lived with the in-laws, usually for 5 years or more (up to 37 years!), most of the new-comers did not live with their in-laws, but if they did, they moved out within 5 years. This difference appears to be as much a reflection of Thai social change and expectations of residence patterns and of change in the farang women's expectations, as it is of economic conditions.

Most of the women who lived with their in-laws for any period of time experienced problems with such living arrangements. More than two thirds of the women in Kambhu's study lived with their in-laws, the overwhelming majority of whom are no longer married or living in Thailand. Khambhu described when a couple moved in with the in-laws they were usually, "stuffed in a corner, in a room or 2, furnished to someone else's tastes and servants under someone else's orders with which came a distinct lack of privacy." (Khambhu 1960:47) Indeed, Alice complained about the lack of privacy and says that her in-laws assumed that she would be unhappy here and worried that she would find another man! Therefore, wherever she went, they would send a maid out after her - even when she went to the hairdressers at the end of the soi!

Sharon, who has been married and living in Thailand for 15 years, says that her life would have been easier if they hadn't lived with the in-laws from the start,

I think its the case in any culture - living with your in-laws. I don't think it really works out - not unless you really get on well! I couldn't imagine living with my own parents let alone the in-laws.

Don't Thais also have problems with their in-laws sometimes? So, what does living with the in-laws involve? What are the social expectations and how can a farang woman adjust herself to this lifestyle? We have already looked at the couple's marriage expectations, but the expectations of the husband's family also bear a strong influence over the future of the relationship. In general there appeared to be little sense of independence of offspring living in a Thai family compound, and as

Klausner notes, "Obligations to one's parents is a cultural and moral imperative in Thai society.." (Klausner 1970:69) This duty would be quite alien to farang women who believe that marriage indicates social independence. Thus, a number of inter-related factors are involved and will be discussed as follows: the family's expectations of and socic-economic control over the married couple; and the couple's own social and economic independence.

Effects of Husband's Ethnic Background

Three quarters of all the women interviewed are married to ethnic Thais (8 older-generation and 11 new-comers). Half of all these have lived with the in-laws from 6 months, to 37 years. Apart from one new-comer who is married to a wealthy Thai-Indian (and lives with the family), the other quarter of all women are married to Thai-Chinese, two thirds of whom have lived with the family for over 2 years.

A quarter of the older-generation are married to Thai-Chinese and they still live in the family compound. However, they consider themselves to have been extremely lucky as they all knew of other women who had experienced many difficulties with their Thai-Chinese in-laws and eventually left their husbands/Thailand. In addition to oral reports, that many of the Thai students who studied abroad (and presumably took foreign wives) over 20 years ago were in fact Thai-Chinese, it was suggested that many other farang women who have married and since separated and/or left Thailand were married to Thai-Chinese.

A quarter of the younger generation are also married to Thai-Chinese, Diane lived with her in-laws for

only the first year, and Sharon for the first 12 years, but both found the family interference too much. The other women have never lived with the family and are not troubled with any interference at all. In general, most foreign women experienced greater difficulties living with a Thai-Chinese family than a Thai one, which may reflect a difference between Thai and Chinese expectations of marriage. Is there a difference between Thai and Chinese family expectations?

Thai vs Chinese Family Expectations

As is well documented, the Chinese patriarchal system favours sons to daughters, and parents expect sons to marry well, formerly perhaps an arranged marriage but essentially with a Chinese woman within the same social class. As suggested in the research of Hong-Kong men married to foreign wives, "the husband, whose early socialization has stressed a 'filial son' identity may be in a fair amount of conflict with his family for having taken a non-Chinese wife." (Culture Shocked Marriages:14) The Chinese family are therefore more likely to be disappointed with their son's choice than their Thai counterparts, who had little or less resistance from their family. Sharon is married to a Thai-Chinese and thinks,

if his family were 100% Thai I probably wouldn't have had any problems because the elderly Thai people I've met, parents of friends - they speak to me differently, they are more accepting.

Kitivipart describes Thai marriage as, "essentially a personal agreement involving social sanctions" (Kitivipart 1987:8) which is subject to

parental approval. However, if the union disrupts these social sanctions or is formed without parental approval problems are likely to be encountered. In Chula Chakrabongse's account of his own parents mixed-marriage in 1906, the first of any Thai royal to a farang, his father, Prince Chakrabongse, sent no words of warning about his marriage to a 'farang' to his own father king Chulalongkorn, "his reason being that if they [his parents, the king and queen] were to refuse their consent, he would not be able to marry her; but as they had said nothing, he could do so." (Chula 1960:258) Upon hearing the truth, through the court grape-vine, the "King's grief was acute, and Queen Saowabha was both furious and sad." (Chula 1960:259) Again, in the novel Sii Phaendin, Kukrit Pramoj describes Khun Ploi's shock when her son brought home, unannounced, a new 'Maem'* wife. Apparently she was shocked, not because she was a 'Maem' but,

by the word 'wife' when she was expecting a single son. She would have reacted in the same way had Un brought home a Burmese wife, or a Mon, or even a Thai. Well, perhaps not quite, for the presence of a European daughter-in-law in a Thai household was bound to bring forth a special domestic situation. (Kukrit 1981:166)

Apart from the high status of the former family, such reactions would seem understandable in a society of strict age-deference. Even for 'ordinary' citizens like Khun Ploi, it would seem natural that much of the parents' hurt was in not having been asked, told or forewarned of their son's marriage.

Most of the women interviewed believe that their husbands forewarned their families, and that the

* 'Maem' is an old formal term for farang women.

families' reactions were favourable. Alice (a long-timer)'s husband wrote to tell his family that he wanted to get married, and his father replied with a long letter, advising him that if he really wanted to marry an English girl he should think about the difficulties carefully to prepare themselves for their future. His father was not trying to stop him, just giving advice and at the end of the letter he gave his blessing if his son decided to marry her! In fact her husband thinks his family were quite excited to meet her! On the other hand, Christine's husband deliberately did not tell his parents about their marriage as at that time they were both still studying in her home country. Finally, when she fell pregnant with their first child 4 years later he wrote to his father. His brothers and sisters who had also been studying abroad were already aware and approved of the relationship and so helped to smooth the situation when both parents came to visit after the child's birth.

Family Control Over Married Offspring

Family social and economic control used to be quite oppressive among the upper-class and wealthy urban Thai families, as well as amongst the Chinese.* When the Thai family provided the young couple with a room, or house in the family compound and financial security, they often also felt entitled to control the couple's behaviour as they would with their own unmarried children. Indeed, Thai (and Chinese) offspring are imbued with a sense of an eternal debt of gratitude to

* Some informants noted that western families may also try to exert social control over their offspring, especially if the family follows a strict 'world religion' such as Catholicism or Islam, or amongst families in which money and/or business are involved

their parents and in respect for familial hierarchy accept the 'advice' or 'control' of their elders and superiors. Central to this is the Thai belief in meritorious debt for another's *bunghun* (generous favour) but while most 'debts' may be paid for at anytime and in anyway, a Thai child's debt to his parents should be paid all the time and in every way. "One is in a life-long debt relationship to one's parents for having been born and brought up and should constantly repay this debt through kind and generous behaviour." (Klausner 1993:275)

This is in stark contrast with the individualism of western, 'farang' cultures, in which autonomy or separation from the older generation is usually encouraged. According to Smith,

in the Thai view, the married offspring and spouse should be grateful for the care they receive from their parents and show appropriate respect for their elders. Conversley, the person who is accustomed to the relative freedom of initiative and decision making of the American nuclear family would be frustrated by the lack of privacy and the stronger parental control which is never openly questioned in the Thai family.

(Smith 1971:134)

Indeed, of the long-timers who lived with their in-laws, all the husbands easily played the 'little boy' again in their family role. The long-timers' husbands never seemed to question their families' expectations and would usually 'stand-up' for their families, or keep-out of conflicts altogether!

However, as Margaret, who has been living here for almost 40 years has noted, many farang wives have been unable to adjust to the fact that their husband's primary responsibility is to his family and not to his wife.

Clarisa says that her Thai-Chinese husband's commitment to his family and the family business was not obvious to her when they first got married. Now she realizes that all decisions are made on the basis of what is right for the extended family, not what she wants for herself and him. But while Alice says her husband always persuaded her to accept his family's view, rather than stand-up to them for her, once she realised that whatever she did, she would never 'win', she tried not to let it upset her and learnt to accept it.

However, many older-generation women who have since left, and some of those who chose not to be interviewed, appear to have resented the economic handouts and the social obligations that were attached to them, but very few were prepared to give up such economic benefits, and thus if they did not leave, had to learn to live with the in-laws' interference, or continue to complain about it for the rest of their married lives (some have been complaining for over 20 years!). As Fran, a new-comer says of other women she knows who always complain about their in-laws,

The wives become grateful and resentful at the same time to the relatives who provide the roof over their heads and shackles over their lives ... These women have a lot of material comforts, but everything they have, has strings attached. They have a house, a car, return airfares home, finance for the kids' education etc.. but all from the rest of the family who then feel the right to interfere or control their lives. These women want everything but don't like the strings, but are not prepared or brave enough to say, 'screw the car and everything else,' and try to make it on their own.

Are the economic benefits worth sacrificing their personal independence? Perhaps this suggests that farang women, particularly in the past, also looked for economic security in their marriage partners.

In contrast, the majority of new-comers do not live with the family but even so, many still complained about the family interference. However, three quarters of the new-comers' husbands apparently also feel oppressed by their families' demands. While some try to ignore them, most oblige reluctantly and the majority discuss the issue with their wives. In addition, while most of the new-comers' husbands consult their wives about any family obligations, they are also more inclined to consider their wives and children's needs before that of the extended family and will also 'stand-up' for their wives more often. As the new-comers do not live with the in-laws, this suggests that the physical and economic distance of living separately, increases the ability to avoid or ignore family interference. It may even be that family expectations have also been changing over the decades. However, it also seems to indicate that the new-comer's husbands are more socially independent from their families and therefore more able to focus on their immediate family units.

Social and Economic Independence Before Marriage

A major factor which determined a couple's relationship with the in-laws was their sense of social and economic independence before marriage. Age-generational differences found in these variables suggests that there is a correlation between economic independence and social independence.

Indeed, the husband's independence was an important consideration for many new-comers. One of the factors that helped Sarah make-up her mind to marry her husband was that, like her, he didn't have parents and was totally independent. Independence was important for both of them as they had heard horror stories about women being totally reliant on their husbands to keep them happy, and of families dictating every move and criticising the daughter-in-law.

The womens' independence prior to marriage can also be seen as a significant factor for determining their attitudes and reactions to living with the in-laws. The majority of long-timers were quite young (18-25) when they married, with little 'real-world' experience and thus moved from their own parents home and control, to that of their in-laws, and had a lot of their own 'growing-up' to do here whilst trying to adjust to everything else and raise families! Many of the older-generation, and presumably those that have left, thus transferred their dependency on their own families (from which many may have been trying to escape!) onto their husbands and in-laws. Fran describes them as,

young girls from small towns who married 'rich' Thai guys and moved from their parents home and came here to live in someone else's parents home. They never really grew-up themselves - have never been independent or responsible and therefore find it difficult to face up to problems - it's easy to blame country and culture.

In contrast, the new-comers tend to have been more independent before marriage than the long-timers. Though some still married when they were 20-25 and after a short-time (6 months - 2 years), most had lived away from home, supported themselves and/or travelled before

marriage. And many of 'the new-comers said that it had never even occurred to them that they might have to live with their husbands' families. To this extent the new-comers had a greater sense of their own identity and independence. Whereas the older generation became 'Wives of Thais' (as the original Community Services of Bangkok (CSB), social group was called) the newcomers became 'Women Across Cultures', the name emphasising that they are women in their own rights!

In addition, as the new-comers' husbands have more economic independence and better economic prospects than those of the older-generation, they appear to also have a greater sense of responsibility, as they now have to take care of the financial needs of themselves, their wives and children, and sometimes that of the in-laws. This may be a sign of greater independence of Thai offspring due to increased opportunities for social mobility. Such financial independence seems to help them be 'socially' independent too, and changes can also be seen in the direction of economic dependence, perhaps reflecting a change in the direction of social dependence. Fran, a new-comer, said that she and her husband started with little and received little when they first came to Thailand and,

therefore it was easy to refuse the strings - you can't attach strings to nothing - its easier to choose when you have nothing to loose. They (the in-laws) were dependent on us, they tried to tell us what to do, but we could say 'No -sorry' - and now, if anything, we call the shots!

Thus, as the newcomers were more likely to be independent women before they met their husbands, they did not depend so exclusively on their husbands let alone the in-laws. Not only does this reflect a change in

western female expectations, but that their husbands were also more independent may reflect a change in social mobility and Thai family roles, obligations and expectations.

However, as both Kukrit and Khambhu suggested, a foreign daughter-in-law in a Thai home would require adjustments by both sides, the effects of which would make an interesting study in itself. And looking at the situation from her in-laws' point of view, June, who is now returning to her homeland after unexpectedly living with her in-laws for 4 years notes, "they will probably be just as relieved (as I am) when I'm gone."

Special Relationships With In-laws

As Fran, a new-comer, commented, "the extended family can be a wonderful thing if the family is functional, but one bad apple can easily ruin the whole lot!" Karen, who has been married and living in Thailand for 23 years, has witnessed many other women having problems with their in-laws and sums the difficulties up as follows:

Sometimes the in-laws turn against the wife and the husband follows suit. Maybe she (the wife) doesn't, or they think she doesn't, try to adapt, and, depending on the class of the family they may expect her to be subserviant and she's straight out of a society where nobody is subserviant - it's difficult for both sides to accept. When there are problems with her and the in-laws, her husband sees her as causing him

great grief and embarrassment - there's just so much conflict.

Many women from both generations reported problems with particular members of the family, most often suffering jealousy from the mother and sister-in-laws. While problems were reportedly common between farang wives and their Thai female relatives, the father-in-law was surprisingly often mentioned as a source of support. However, as Kitivipart noted, the division of loyalty to the family of origin and to marital partners, may be seen as a challenge to the shared family loyalty. (Kitivipart 1987:19) Does this mean then that a female Thai relative sees the farang woman as a threat to the family unity? For example, she may fear that the foreign wife might make problems for the Thai husband and thus for his family, or perhaps even worse, the husband might put his wife before the extended family.

Mother-in-Laws

Klausner notes that, tales of woe and conflict between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law are very much part of Thai life and folklore. While the mother-in-law is viewed as somewhat troublesome the world over, in Thailand, the daughter-in-law is often viewed in folk literature as lazy and ungrateful and not showing proper respect to her mother-in-law. (Klausner nd:21)

Conflicts often developed with the mother-in-law, perhaps due to jealousy for taking her son's attention, or simply because both women wanted to be mistress of the

same house. Margaret, an older-generation woman said that often the mother-in-laws went about to destroy their sons' marriage relationships and often succeeded as many women she knows left because of their mother-in-laws' interference. In her study in the 1960's Khambhu noted a particular area of conflict between wife and mother-in-laws was that the wife expected independence and the mother-in-law expected to continue directing her son's life. The majority of the women in that study did not get on well with their mother-in-laws, and interestingly, the majority are no longer married/living in Thailand. Indeed, Thai mother-in-laws traditionally expect deference, subservience and obedience from their daughters-in-law, which often causes conflict with their Thai daughters-in-law. Hence the situation would no doubt be far worse with a farang daughter-in-law who would not be prepared, or willing to perform in the subservient manner required.

Interestingly, this has been one area in which little in the way of age-generational differences can be seen from the interviewees. Compared to the women in Khambu's study most the interviewees in this thesis do not feel they have any great difficulties with their mother-in-laws though some did concede that things could be better! Sharon says,

My mother-in-law still calls me Maem after 13 years. I get on OK with her - I like her - I could love her as a mother figure but I don't think she looks on me as her number one daughter-in-law as such.

In contrast, Helen, says her mother-in-law accepts her more than anyone else here. However, she only visits her mother-in-law up-country two or three times a year and thus admits, "I suppose it might be different if we had to live with them."

That only a few of the long-timers who have 'survived' to tell their tales in the interviews for this study feel they have (had) any problem with their mother-in-laws, suggests that those who have had problems with their mother-in-laws may have already left, and that perhaps it has been easier for those without this difficulty to stay in their marriage/in Thailand.

Sister-in-laws

More common among the interviewees were difficulties with the younger sister-in-laws, who were often jealous of and two-faced towards their brothers' farang wives. Mandy says she is sometimes aware of a two-faced attitude by her sister-in-law, who is nice to her but makes comments to her husband about things concerning him and his farang wife. Diane and her husband had problems when they lived with the sister-in-law for the first year here but Diane says her sister-in-law seems like a bitter and lonely person who is jealous of her brother's happy relationship.

Bridget's Thai sister-in-law came to live with her in the US where Bridget looked after her like her own sister. When the sister-in-law had to return home Bridget decided it would be a good time to visit Thailand. However, her sister-in-law was jealous of the attention that was given to the farang daughter-in-law instead of to her and refused to speak to Bridget again! The parents-in-law told their daughter not to be so silly or unkind, but as she says, "in 'true Thai style' they didn't 'do something about it' they just let it be!" Clarisa, also a new-comer has to communicate with her mother-in-law through her English speaking sister-in-law,

but she doesn't think the sister-in-law really passes on all the messages.

Such jealousy and backstabbing by sisters-in-law is apparently quite common among Thais too and thus this may be due to unusually close sibling relationships in Thai society rather than any anti-farang sentiments. This is particularly so if the husband is her older brother whose attentions (and finances!) are now going elsewhere. Nonetheless, quite a few women said that their sister-in-laws have helped them to settle into their new environment and are quite friendly.

Father-in-law

Despite King Chulalongkorn's refusal to accept his farang daughter-in-law, and the father's distress of having a 'maem' daughter-in-law in the novel *Sii Phaendin*, the most common ally for the interviewees was in fact found in the father-in-law. When Christine first came to Thailand her husband often stayed out late and her father-in-law would sit and wait with her to keep her company everytime! She has a lot of affection for her father-in-law and says he is a very caring man! Liza, a long-timer who is now separated from her husband said that the only person in the whole family who ever really helped her was her father-in-law. It was him who told her to register her marriage here straight away 'to protect yourself' and later told her not to divorce in order 'to get your fair share of inheritance'. Most women speak very affectionately of their father-in-laws, Vanessa said he was the most supportive and even gave her a hug one day - much to everyone's surprise! Likewise, Mandy says her father-in-law is quite proud of his

foreign daughter-in-law and grandchildren. At large family gatherings he tends to 'show her off' and introduce her to people as if to say, 'aren't we clever to have a farang in the family!'

The father-in-laws had no need to feel jealous of their son's attention going elsewhere, but instead they themselves had had greater life experiences and education than the female members of the family and were thus perhaps in a better position to empathize with their farang daughters-in-law.

That the older-generation women in Khambu's study had problems with their mother-in-laws, but that the majority of the women interviewed in this thesis do not, seems to imply that this can be a serious problem which may have caused other women to leave, and without which life was less difficult for the women. However, that the sister-in-laws were most problematic for both generations of the farang women interviewed suggests that there has been little social change in sibling relations and sexual jealousy. However, that such problems appear to be less critical to the marriage relationship as problems with the mother-in-law are believed to have been, difficulties with sister-in-laws can perhaps be more easily ignored and/or overcome. The father-in-law's role is most interesting and as with each of these relationships, deserves further research.

Chapter Summary

Thus in this chapter we have seen how Thailand's economic development has aided the women's physical adaptation to the Bangkok environment. In addition, the

increased socio-economic independence of both men and women and simultaneous changes in Thai family expectations, residence patterns, and socio-economic obligations, have given greater autonomy to the Thai nuclear family and thus eased tensions between the mixed-couple and their in-laws. Thus it would seem that to have a farang in a Thai family in the 1990's is less stressful both for the Thai family and the farang entering it than it must have been over 20 years ago.

Having analysed the effects of the immediate external pressures upon the Thai-farang couple, let us look at the women's perceptions of their husbands and the internal pressures on their relationships.