

# **REPRESENTATIONS OF SINGLE WOMEN IN THAI FILMS :THE REPRODUCTION OF PATRIARCHY IDEOLOGY<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this study is to explore the representations of single women and to analyze the relationship between the representations of single women and ideology in Thai romantic comedy films from 2006 to 2017. The study reveals that representations of single women are constructed in seven categories: professional working women; women who struggle to marry; worthless women; unfortunate women; over-sensitive women; women who would be an ideal housewife; and women who have younger partners. These seven representations closely relate to mainstream ideologies, especially the ideology of patriarchy; that is to say the seven representations of single women not only accentuate, but also reproduce, the ideology of patriarchy by defining marriage and being a mother as the ultimate goal of a female life. Such a relationship is strong evidence that patriarchy is profoundly embedded in Thai culture.

**Keywords:** Representation; single women; Thai romantic comedy films; patriarchy ideology

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## Introduction

Single women lead lonely, depressing, and incomplete lives. Their unhappiness increases exponentially with each passing birthday, because past a certain age a woman is “used up.” All women are desperate to marry or remarry because marriage is their only real chance for security and happiness.

(Anderson and Stewart, 1994, Cited in Spielmann et al.,2013)

The above quotation is contained in Anderson and Stewart’s book, *Flying solo: Single women in midlife*, which describes how women can enjoy their lives being single. Being single is not only a social status, but also relates to values norms, as well as ideologies. The attempt to constitute marriage as the “**only real chance for security and happiness**” implies the opposite aspect of being single, that is insecurity and unhappiness. There is no doubt that the negative aspect of being single is a direct consequence of a social construction.

While some research, such as Rattanaprasit (2009) and Boonranawut (2013), reveals that there are many single women who live happily in their single marital status, many films tend to portray women as not being happy if they reach thirty years old and are still single. It is important to note that representations of single women in films are selected to portray the negative aspect of being single, so representations of unhappy single women are accentuated, while representations of single women being satisfied with their marital status are generally ignored. Furthermore, it can be said that these representations relate to values, as well as ideologies, as mentioned above. Turner (2006) suggests a relationship between film and cultural construction:

Film does not reflect or even record the reality; like other medium of representations it constructs and represents its picture of reality by way of the codes, conventions, myths and ideologies of culture as well as by the way of the specific signifying practices of the medium. Just as film works on the meaning system of culture- to renew, reproduce, or review them- it also produced by those meaning system.

Following Turner's concept, the representations of characters in film are cultural codes that can be interpreted and analyzed in various ways. Accordingly, representations of single women in films are interesting to study because this not only explains why such representations are constructed with negative aspects, but also draws obvious lines between the function of film as mass media and the influence of ideology on a film's audience.

This study examines the representations of single women by exploring the following questions: What are the representations of single women that have been constructed in Thai modern films? How do the constructed representations of single women relate to mainstream ideology in Thai society?

### **Research Objectives**

1. To study the representations of single women in Thai romantic comedy films from 2006 to 2017.
2. To analyze the relationship between the representations of single women and ideology in Thai romantic comedy films from 2006 to 2017.

### **Materials and Method**

This is a qualitative research effort, with the data selected using three designated attributes. Firstly, the films were romantic comedy released between 2006 and 2017 – this period was selected because there were many romantic comedy films about single women released by main film producers during this period; secondly, the main and the support female characters are single; and thirdly, marriage is used as an element of conflict in the films. Thirteen films were selected to study as set forth in Table 1.

**Table 1:** The List of Selected Films

Number	Title	Year	Producer
1	METROSEXUAL	2006	GTH
2	BANGKOK TRAFFIC LOVE STORY	2009	GTH
3	BEFORE VALENTINE	2009	Five Stars Production

**Table 1:** (continued)

Number	Title	Year	Producer
4	MY VALENTINE	2010	Five Stars Production
5	30+ SINGLE ON SALE	2011	Sahamongkol Film
6	FABULOUS 30	2011	M 39
7	FIRST KISS	2012	Five Stars Production
8	CRAZY CRYING LADY	2012	M 39
9	ATM ERRUK-ERROR	2012	GTH
10	LOVE ON THE ROCKS	2014	M 39
11	SINGLE LADY	2015	Transformation Film
12	PA HAPPY SHE TA YER	2015	M39
13	FANDAY	2016	GDH

### Definition of Terms

**Single** in this article is used as defined in the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2013): “not married, or not having a romantic relationship with someone.” It is noticed that “married” is used as one of the criteria to define “single”; therefore, married is a subject to be studied and analyzed as well.

**Ideology** in this study is used as explained by Dijk (2006): “shared representations of social groups and more specifically as the ‘axiomatic’ principle of such representation.”

**Representation** in this study is used as explained by Stuart Hall (2013) as follows:

At the heart of the meaning process in culture, then, are two related ‘systems of representation.’ The first enables us to give meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondence or a chain of equivalence between things-people, objects, events, abstract ideas, etc.-and our system of concepts, our conceptual maps. The second depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organized into various

languages which stand for or represent those concepts. The relation between ‘things’, concepts, and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call ‘representation’

According to Hall’s theory, representation is the production of one culture since a “system of representation” is interrelated with many elements in a culture, such as ideas, language, concepts, signs. Therefore, representation of one aspect of one culture differentiates one culture from another. This article applies the theory of “system of representation” to analyze how the representations of single women in films are constructed and how such constructed representations of single women relate to Thai society in which those representations are produced.

**Patriarchy** in this study is used as explained by Rakoczy (2004): Patriarchy is an ideology and a way of thinking which legally, politically, socially, religiously and economically reinforces male dominance and power.

## **Literature Review**

This study of the representations of single women in Thai film focuses on the relationship between representation and ideology. Therefore, two groups of research are relevant: representations of women in literature and ideology in Thai films.

### **1. Representations of Women in Literature**

A vast body of research has studied the representations of women in many forms of literature, such as novels, short stories, poems, as well as television soap operas.

Charoenporn (2003) studied the significance of the representation of women in Thai literature from the B.E. 2530s.

Suvattanavanich (2007) studied women and motherhood in Thai novels between 1967-2004 through an analysis of diverse concepts of motherhood presented in Thai novels in connection with gender, class and social status.

Sriratanasomboon (2010) analyzed the representation of Thai women in contemporary German writings, both fiction and semi-fiction, published between 1970 and 2008.

Tularak (2010) investigated the representation of women in contemporary Lao literature after the national and democratic revolution in 1975 and examined factors affecting the representation of women in Lao literary works.

Panachapakti (2015) examined the representations of women in three prime-time TV soap opera in Thailand with a focus on the relationship between the construction of women's representation in television drama series and Thai social ideologies in the context of the Thai feminist/women's movement.

Ketchart and Phongpheng (2017) analyzed the representation of women in young adult romantic literature produced by the publisher, Light of Love, covering 10 issues by applying the concept of representation, storytelling techniques and feminism.

Additionally, Hasawasdi (2001) studied images of women in films, but limited the scope of data to films released in 1999. Furthermore, Rodpech (2018) studied the relationship between women and patriarchy, but her data was just Uthis Haemamool's novels.

## **2. Ideology in Thai Films**

Although film is used as data in many research works, especially in cultural studies, the research that focuses on ideology in Thai films can be found in only two dissertations. Sausamut (2009) studied the ideology of love in popular Thai tragic romances from 1997-2007 in order to see the persistence and change of the ideology of love in Thai society. Jiamtiranat (2011). analyzed the reproduction of patriarchal discourse found in Thai films released from 2000 to 2009, both on the surface and the deep structures.

From a review of the relevant literature, there is no research which has studied the representations of single women in Thai films during 2006-2017.

## **Result**

The results of the study are divided into two topics: first are the representations of single women and second is the relationship between representations of single women and ideology in Thai society.

### **Representations of Single Women in Thai Films**

The analysis of the selected films indicates that representations of single women are constructed with seven characteristics: professional working women; women who struggle to marry; worthless women; unfortunate women; over-sensitive women; women who would be an ideal housewife; and women who have younger partners.

#### **1. Representation of Professional Working Women**

Some main characters in the selected films are portrayed as working women who have a strong determination to achieve success in their career. They not only turn their single status to great advantage for work, but also persuade other single women to behave similarly.

In the film, *SINGLE LADY*, the narrator's voice, along with an image showing Bright, the main character, posting her status on her Facebook page – Be Bright with Being Single – appears simultaneously:

...How many times are we faced with depression because of the word “single”? Stop being concerned and anxious!! It seems better to be single if you have a bad boyfriend since single ladies have more free time to make more money. Being obsessed with a boyfriend is a stupid action wasting your valuable time. We should change our attitude about being single. Single ladies can take good advantage of this situation. By being single you can enjoy every aspect of your life all the time.

That is to say, both the narrator's voice and the action emphasize that being single can be satisfying, as well as an opportunity. The profile picture of Bright not only introduces the audience to the main character, but also illustrates that being a single woman can be smart and successful. This

challenges the audience to reconsider the outdated belief that most females are single because of their unattractive appearance.

Although the films in this category – SINGLE LADY, 30+SINGLE ON SALE, FABULOUS 30 – open with the success of the female characters who do not want to marry, some events take place and lead these working women to change their mind so that in the end they want to get married. It is noticed that most of professional working women work as freelancers, such as blogger, organizer or photographer. This implies that an insecure job does not make single women as anxious as an insecure marital status.

## 2. Representation of Women Who Struggle to Marry

More than half of selected films narrate the story of main characters who struggle to marry, with their family playing a significant role in their marital status. It can be seen that these female characters are portrayed with similar characteristics – thirty years old with Chinese heritage. These female characters are constructed to represent a '*stereotype*'. Gledhill and Ball (2013) compare the function of a '*stereotype*' with '*a shorthand reference to specific cultural perceptions*.' This notion can be clearly seen in **MY VALENTINE**, the story of Mild, a Thai-Chinese insurance seller who has chances to choose three men of different styles.



**Figure 1:** Poster of **MY VALENTINE**

Source: <https://movie.mthai.com/film/51862.html>

Figure 1 is the poster from MY VALENTINE, by which the nature of the main female character is underscored by a change in the wording: “A beautiful woman has many chances to choose the best man” is changed to use a Chinese loan word for young girl “muai” instead of “beautiful women”. This harmonizes with the large picture of Mild posed in the center of the poster. By this means, the ‘*stereotype*’ of a Thai-Chinese single woman is constructed. This ‘*stereotype*’ plays two roles: the first allows the audience, many of whom are likely Thai-Chinese women, to relate with this ‘character’. The second refers to Chinese norms that say a daughter must marry, otherwise she embarrasses her family by becoming pregnant without being married or becoming an old-maid. These Chinese norms are derived from the Chinese fertility belief that descendants must marry in order to carry on the family. Within Chinese norms and beliefs, women have only one option, which is marriage. In other words, a single Chinese woman is a symbol of ‘infertility’. Creating the main character as a ‘stereotypical Thai-Chinese woman’, the film-producer reveals many notions about Thai culture.

Apart from being Thai-Chinese, another similar characteristic that the main characters share is being thirty-years old. Many main characters are abandoned by their boyfriends who they had planned to marry. This action leaves the main characters in trouble because they are insecure about their status.

In 30+ SINGLE ON SALE, Ing, the main character, indicates the attitude of women dissatisfied with being thirty and single, which constitutes a deadline for marriage:

A fortune-teller said that my fate and my boyfriend’s fate are antagonistic toward each other; if I and he marry, we will need get a divorce in order to change our destiny. But, I never expect that he will marry another woman ... I am now 30 years old, and will be 40 years old in the near future, I do not want to begin a new relationship with anyone...I am so stupid that he deceives me for a long time

It can be seen that this dialogue is constructed in order to steer the audience into seeing the point that marriage is the primary goal of thirty-year old women. Moreover, this also reveals the influence of fortune-telling on Thai women's belief.

The notion that thirty is the deadline for marriage is accentuated in many films. BEFORE VALENTINE, by mentioning the passage of love in a lifetime – friend to lover, lover to married couple, just married and happy couple to long-term and fighting couple – is a prime example demonstrating this point.

Table 2 shows the imagination of the main characters at their 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of being together. During their celebration, Chidchanok, the female character, asks Suthee, the male character, to get married, while Suthee wants to stop their relationship.

**Table 2:** Parallel Imagination of the Main Characters in BEFORE VALENTINE

Suthee's imagination	Chidchanok's imagination
Chidchanok: Are you sure about asking me for marriage? We must have a luxurious wedding ceremony, because my parents are rich. How about your income? Do you have enough money to take care of me and our children? Can you accept, if I will be a fat mother?	Suthee: Are you sure you want to break up with me? You are almost 30 years old and that means you will be an old maid. No one can understand you like me.

Their respective imaginations represent the many myths regarding certain social and cultural elements concerning gender, class and seniority that have a significant impact on their actions, rather than their real intentions. As mentioned above, the theme of this film is the passage of love in a lifetime; therefore, their imaginations indicate that being married or single is a significant stage of life. However, the factors contributing to get married are controlled by social norms or values.

On the other hand, marriage is not necessarily the ultimate aim for young women who have other goals to fulfill. This is clearly shown in LOVE

ON THE ROCKS, the story of Fai-Lieu and Baggio who are co-habiting after graduation. When Fai-Lieu's mother gets a divorce, Baggio asks Fai-Lieu to get married, but Fai-Lieu wants to end their relationship:

**Baggio:** Is it my fault that I asked you to get married?

**Fai-Lieu:** Please reconsider. Do you really want to marry?

**Baggio:** If we do not get married now, we will get married in the future; we have lived together for a long time. This makes us bound together. You should accept this fact.

**Fai-Lieu:** I accept that I love you, because I have ever thought about marriage, but can you see us now. Should people like us get married?

The conversation between Fai-Lieu and Baggio represents many aspects of the notion of marriage. Firstly, sexual intercourse can happen before marriage; with sexual intercourse and love not necessarily the main factors leading to marriage. Secondly, financial stability plays a critical role in marriage. Owing to their unreliable occupations, Fai-Lieu refuses to get married. Moreover, this dialogue connotes the power of females to be able to decide herself regarding marriage.

Apart from LOVE ON THE ROCKS, the power of a female to decide for herself regarding marriage is accentuated in two other films: FABULOUS 30 and BANGKOK TRAFFIC LOVE STORY. FABULOUS 30 is the story of Ja, a professional organizer who is abandoned by Nob, a smart flight engineer, when Ja is 31 years old. Although Ja is disappointed with her failed relationship, she insists that she will not start a new relationship with Por who is seven years younger than her.

The plot of BANGKOK TRAFFIC LOVE STORY is somewhat similar to MY VALENTINE that narrates the story of a Thai-Chinese woman, Meili, whose parents play a dominant role in her marital status. Meili is deceived to go on a blind date arranged by her parents, but Meili refuses to start a relationship with the son of her parents' friend.

It seems reasonable to conclude that a variety of factors regarding marriage are described in the films. Although the films portray the representation of women who struggle to marry, these single women decide

not to marry just anyone, but wait for someone who is suitable for them. Refusing the chance to have a partner shows the courage of conviction, even though they will probably face loneliness when they get older.

The analysis of representation of women who struggle to marry reveals that the circumstances leading to marriage are a social construction. Films play a dominant role in conveying the many discourses on marriage: first is regarding the suitable age for marriage; second is that both success in career and marriage constitute perfections of life. Many films cite “the suitable time to give birth” as a strong reason to regard thirty-years old as the deadline for marriage, however medical research indicate that women can give birth even though they are almost forty-years old.

### **3. Representation of Worthless Women**

In Thai culture, “the last express train” is compared with “the last chance for marriage” and this conceptual metaphor is modernized as Bangkok’s Skytrain mass transit system in BANGKOK TRAFFIC LOVE STORY. The shift of domain from “the last express train” to “the Skytrain” conveys the meaning that females now have more opportunities to marry. However, the same concept of waiting for transportation connotes the meaning of “waiting to be chosen”. This meaning is communicated by the action of Meilii, the female main character, trying to begin a relationship with Lung, a BTS engineer, who never responds to Meilii’s action since he will study aboard and does not want to have a relationship with anyone. By this conceptual metaphor, the value or worth of the female does not depend only on herself, but also depends on the selection of a male partner.

Another metaphor appearing in films selected in this research is the comparison between being single to a discounted product. This metaphor is shown in the title of 30+ SINGLE ON SALE, which emphasizes the diminished value of being single as you get older. Remaining single is an unwanted status, thus females must reduce their “price” or “value” in order to “be bought” or “be chosen” by a male partner. This metaphor not only portrays the negative aspect of being single, but also devalues the social status of females in general. Moreover, this metaphor reflects the influence of capitalism as part of the construction of representations of single women in films.

Apart from the metaphor conveyed, the representation of worthless women is communicated by conflict. FANDAY narrates the story of Nui, an administrative staff, who has a strong ambition to marry before turning thirty. Nui is the mistress of her boss who deceives Nui into thinking that he will get a divorce and will marry her after the divorce. Nui, having endured being a mistress for three years, feels worthless, but she cannot stop this relationship since she has fallen into a trap of waiting for marriage.

#### **4. Representation of Unfortunate Women**

Representation of unfortunate women can be found in SINGLE LADY, CRAZY CRYING LADY and PA HAPPY SHE TA YER, all of which present misfortunes of single women in various ways – they are unfairly dismissed from their jobs; they suffer from a serious disease that cannot be treated; they breaking their relationship with their boyfriends. These misfortunes change the female character's life and lead them to meet the main male characters.

It is important to note that all the films end with a good relationship between the male and female characters, despite the fact that misfortunes, such as disease or unemployment, still exist. This connotes that being single is the most unfortunate thing that should be eliminated; moreover, being happy with one's relationship status, in spite of being sick or unemployed, indicates that marriage is the ultimate goal of a female life. In other words, in the opinion of women, being a happy couple can be a substitute for all misfortunes.

The factors discussed above are clearly found in PA HAPPY SHE TA YER, the story of Peesuk, an over-optimistic seller. Peesuk is dismissed from her job; furthermore, her close male friend, who Peesuk secretly likes, tells Peesuk he has a girlfriend. All this bad news is the cause of stress that leads to heart disease. According to the doctor's diagnosis, Peesuk will die a month later. After she knows the bad news, Peesuk finds a clip on YouTube that says her heart disease can be cured by dancing exercise at every noon. Peesuk follows the advice in clip, but Golf, one of Peesuk's close friends, discovers that the information in the clip is not true. Although Peesuk's heart disease cannot be treated, Peesuk is very happy since she enters into a relationship with Boriboon, the man who made the 'fake' clip.

PA HAPPY SHE TA YER is an example demonstrating that film can transmit a hidden message to the audience. As a comedy film, the notion that women will not be satisfied with their status unless they are in a relationship with a man is communicated to the audience implicitly by humor.

## 5. Representation of Over-Sensitive Women

In several of the films, women are devalued as the “irrational gender” because they are too sensitive. The films emphasize this idea by the portrayal of over-sensitive women, emphasized by using the over-sensitive characteristics of the characters in the name of the films: CRAZY CRYING LADY and PA HAPPY SHE TA YER.<sup>2</sup>

In order to attract the audience’s attention, these exaggerated characters are easy to remember. The notion that women are an irrational gender is accentuated by the favorite sentences of the two main characters: Ho: “I do not know why I cry; it is my feeling”; and Peesuk: “I am happy; this is good.” These are the answers of the main characters when they are asked why they are acting like a tearful or over-optimistic woman.

It can be noticed that the favorite sentences of the two main characters indicate that women are so irrational that they cannot even explain the reason for their behavior. Furthermore, showing this behavior as the main reason leading the main characters to be abandoned by their last partner highlights the power of man over woman. That is to say, men neither have the duty to understand over-sensitive women, nor maintain a relationship with an over-sensitive woman.

## 6. Representation of Women Who Would Be an Ideal Housewife

According to traditional Thai beliefs, a “good woman” is expected to have the ability to prepare food and take care of the home. The woman who has such ability is classified as “an ideal housewife” and will be asked for marriage by a good man. In METROSEXUAL and FABULOUS 30, this belief is challenged by construction of characters, such as Paeng and Ja, who are good at cooking, but are deeply disappointed that their wedding plans are canceled.

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<sup>2</sup>The meaning of this title can be loosely translated as “crazy dancing auntie”.

As discussed above, FABULOUS 30 is the story of Ja who is abandoned by her boyfriend when she is thirty-years-old. The following dialogue happens at Ja's 31<sup>st</sup> birthday party in the form of a game of 'never/ever'. The rules of the game are that when the one says "I never...", the following person must say "I ever do the same thing ..." with the previous speaker.

**Pa:** [Ja' s friend who is pregnant]: I have been never abandoned.

**Ja:** How about me? Like me can we said that I have been abandoned?

**Cee,** [Ja' s friend]: Like you, it is called "just fade for a while".

**Pa:** It is the same meaning, "just fade for a while". Finally, someone is abandoned.

**Ja:** Pa is right. I have ever been abandoned. I wonder something, why he did not abandon me before I'm 30 years old. How can I look for a new boyfriend? How selfish he is.

The above dialogue reveals the inner feelings of both characters and the values of being single, as well as attitudes toward marriage. The phrases "never been abandoned" and "ever been abandoned", and the determination of the pregnant character to say this emphasizes the idea that being single is about worthlessness and infertility. It can be noticed that the concept regarding being thirty establishing a deadline for marriage is reproduced again. The rhetorical question "***How can I look for a new boyfriend?***" indicates that marriage is the main aim that every woman must achieve. Even though these women have the bitter experience of being broken hearted many time, they still have a single-minded determination to find someone to marry.

Ja is the representation of a perfect woman who has an attractive appearance and is good at work and performing domestic tasks. Even though she is the portrait of a perfect woman, the man still has more power to choose who he wants to marry. Despite having outstanding qualities, a woman's chance for marriage depends on the man's decision.

## 7. Representation of Women Who Have a Younger Partner

In a Thai traditional social context, it is unusual for a woman to have a serious relationship with a much younger man; moreover, such a relationship is disdained by society that it comes to the sorrowful end of the women. *THE FIRST KISS* and *FABULOUS 30* narrate the story of a working woman who has a boyfriend who is seven years younger.

It is noticed that the plot of *THE FIRST KISS* and *FABULOUS 30* is somewhat similar in that the female characters are disappointed about failed relationships with older boyfriends. After that, the female characters meet someone who is much younger, but that they are afraid to begin a relationship with them. In order to convince the female character that being in a relationship with a younger boyfriend is possible, the younger male characters verify that they are honest. Both films end with the happiness of the main characters, showing them as a loving couple.

It seems reasonable to conclude that both films convey a message that single women should not refuse to have a relationship with a younger man since it is a good opportunity to bring them happiness. It can be argued that this message throws the ideology of patriarchy into question as to whether only men have the chance to be in a relationship with a younger partner. Furthermore, have an ending that is happy encourages the female members of the audience to hope that they could meet their soulmate someday. On the other hand, such endings highlight the notion that being married is the only way to reach the aim of life for a female who cannot be happy without a male partner.



**Figure 2:** Ending of *THE FIRST KISS*

Figure 2 illustrates the ending of THE FIRST KISS, a love story between a female worker, Sa, and a male student, Base. The necktie in Base's hand can be interpreted in many dimensions. On the surface, this necktie is Base's promise that he wants to marry and symbolizes his maturity. A deeper meaning is that Sa ties her life with the duty of a wife devotedly waiting for her husband.

As can be seen above, a “set of signs” in films, such as dialogue, the narrator’s voice, film posters, plot, characters, metaphors, as well as action, are important factors in the creation of representation. It is noticed that representations of single women are portrayed in negative aspects more than positive ones. This emphasizes the negative aspects indicates that such representations of single women are not the refection of reality, but are social constructions, which will be discussed next.

### **The Relationship Between Representation of Single Women in Thai Films and Ideology in Thai Society.**

In term of media, film not only entertains audiences, but also communicates some ideas or ideology. Turner (2006) proposes some relationship between film and ideology:

More than any others, ideological considerations allow us to begin to understand the relationship between film texts and their cultural contexts. Importantly, ideological approaches reject the view of the film text as ‘unitary’ in meaning; that is, as making only one kind of sense, without contradictions, exceptions, or variations in the interpretations made by different members of the audience. Rather, the text is a kind of battleground for competing and often contradictory positions. Of course, this competition usually results in a victory for the culture’s dominant positions, but not without leaving cracks or divisions through which we can see the consensualizing work of ideology exposed.

The above quotation indicates that film can be interpreted as a 'battleground' owing to the existence and interaction of both main and sub-ideologies. '*A victory for the culture's dominant positions*' explains the negative aspects of representations of single women that are portrayed more than the positive aspects. Therefore, representations of single women can be seen to be closely related to dominant ideologies in Thai society, such as patriarchy, seniority and Buddhism.

### **Representation of Single Women and the Ideology of Patriarchy**

By nature, women have been assigned the role of 'wife' and 'mother'; therefore, home is regarded as female space for nurturing children. Cranny Francis (2003) suggests the key role of women:

Women have come to be seen naturally nurturing, sensitive, emotional, deferring. The fact that women have a womb is linked to these characteristics. Women are seen to be natural mother, in the sense that by having a womb they also are possessed with patience, a natural predisposition toward children, a nurturing affectionate nature and so on.

The notion that every woman has a duty to nurture a child has been profoundly embedded in Thai society for a long time; furthermore, this is used as an indicator to evaluate who is a good or a bad woman. In the selected films, this notion is highlighted by construction of representation of single women who struggle to marry.

CRAZY CRYING LADY is an excellent example demonstrating the representation and impact of mainstream ideologies. The portrayal of the main character, Ho, who has a determined intention to marry and to be a mother, clearly represents the idea of patriarchy in Thai society. Additionally, the social value regarding virginity is highlighted by Ho's insistence on being a virgin bride. Her background, in which she lost her mother and was raised by an insane father, contributes to her abnormal personality in that she often cries crazily without reason. This personality not only stresses the importance of being a mother who is expected to nurture their child, but also satirizes female characteristics as discussed above regarding over-sensitive women. Owing to

her strange personality, Ho is abandoned by her boyfriend. This conveys the film's message that men do not want to have a relationship with irrational women. It seems reasonable to conclude that *CRAZY CRYING LADY* yields both to and repeats the mainstream ideology – a woman being single is dependent on being chosen by a man and is not a woman's decision.

In addition, defining the age of thirty as the deadline for marriage represents the ideology of patriarchy since it relates to the socially constructed prescribed time for a pregnancy. This is evident in many films when the female characters explain the reason why they want to marry before they are thirty-years old. An example is a conversation between Ja and Nop in *FABULOUS 30*: *"If we marry on June, two months later, we will have a child, I want to have a child before I cannot have it."*

This dialogue implies that the ultimate goal for women is not only being married, but also being a mother. In other words, for single women, marriage is the first success leading to the second success, which is having a baby. It should also be noted that women are generally expected to have a baby "after" marriage, otherwise they are considered "bad women".

Apart from being a mother, the role of a housewife is accentuated in some of the films, even though the female characters may earn more income than their partner. *ATM ERRUK-ERROR* narrates the story of Suea and Jib, bank officers who are in a relationship, albeit secretly owing to the bank's regulation that officers are not allowed to be in a relationship with other bank officers. Suea asks Jib to marry, but they cannot decide who will resign from the bank. The couple makes a deal that the one who cannot solve the problem of an error on the ATM system must resign from the bank.

*ATM ERRUK-ERROR* ends with Jib's resignation, despite the fact that Jib has a higher position and salary than Suea, and even though Jib can also find the way to solve the bank's problem. In this romantic comedy, the ideology of patriarchy is implicitly delivered through amusing dialogue between Suea and Jib:

I am a man, if I let you earn me living, I will be blamed.

Don't lose you time in this competition, you should prepare to be my housewife.

I am just kidding, if I quit from work, who will earn our living.

This clearly reveals an ideology of patriarchy, that men are expected to be the leader of the family. Men have the responsibility for earning the family income, while women have the responsibility for taking care of the home, whereby women are assigned to nurture the children. It can be argued that the duty in a family is assigned by gender rather than capability.

It can be seen that Ja and Jib are not only the representation of women who struggle to marry, but also the representation of professional working women. The overlap of these representations infers that women are expected to shoulder the responsibility both outside and inside the home. The resignation of Jib symbolizes the surrender to patriarchy; that is to say, when women must choose only one role between outside and inside the home, she must choose the role inside the home, even if she is a better income earner.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the representation of women who struggle to marry, which overlaps with the representation of professional working women, not only reproduce, but also inculcates the audience with the ideology of patriarchy. Every romantic comedy ends with happiness for the couple. Such ending induces the audience into thinking marriage is the only approach to living a happy life. It should also be noticed that “the happy couples” in the films are ‘male-female’ couples, thus implying that a same-gender relationship is unacceptable. This notion is clearly shown in METROSEXUAL that narrates the story of Paeng, an ideal housewife who is deeply disappointed that her wedding plans are cancelled when it is discovered that her groom is gay.

### **Representation of Single Women and the Ideology of Buddhism**

Buddhism is a central part of Thai culture; moreover, Buddhism has a significant influence on the beliefs of Thai people. Apart from patriarchy, the representation of single women is also a reflection of religious ideology. That is to say, some of the selected films cite the Buddhist doctrine of karma as a reason why some women remain single.

As set forth above, the narrator’s voice in SINGLE LADY portrays the representation of smart working women; nevertheless, the film’s conflict enhances or changes the main character’s destiny. A fortune-teller has an

influence on the character's action by telling Bright that she is always disappointed with love because of her past deeds or karma in that she mistreated her ex-boyfriends. Unless she expiates her bad karma, she will have misfortune in trying to gain a career path and start a new relationship. By this conflict, it can be inferred that being single is constructed with negative aspects, namely sin and misfortune.

Citing karma as an explanation of why single women are unfortunate convinces one to accept the possibility of the story given that most Thai viewers would understand Buddhist ideology. However, the film inevitably reproduces the Buddhist idea that being female is a sinful gender because females are an obstacle for monks to maintain celibacy.

### **Representation of Single Women and the Ideology of Seniority**

Turner's (2006) analogy, "battleground for competing and often contradictory positions", connotes that films not only 'reproduce', but also 'review' the "meaning system of culture." That means films examine how beliefs, values, as well as ideologies, either exist or change; moreover, some acceptable ideology is challenged in the researched films – in this case, the ideology of seniority

There is no doubt that seniority is one of the core values in Thai society. In addition, the idea that young people should have respect for the elder generation, such as parents or grandparents, is implanted in young people at an early age. Furthermore, parents often play a significant role in partner selection of the younger generation. In order to question parental involvement in partner selection, some films present scenes of "blind dates" arranged by parents, as well as dialogue between grandparents and the male partner.

As discussed above, the plot of BANGKOK TRAFFIC LOVE STORY is somewhat similar to MY VALENTINE, with the noted similarity between the two films being the role of a grandparent in selecting the partner for the granddaughter.

MY VALENTINE is divided into three sub stories, narrating the story of Mild and three different styles of men. The important scene repeated in each story is the birthday party of Mild's grandfather. At the party, Mild must introduce her boyfriend to her grandfather, after that the grandfather and other

elder relatives examine the background of Mild's boyfriend, such as his family, job and salary. The ideology of seniority is challenged in the second sub story through the dialogue between Art and the grandfather:

**Grandfather:** Today is my birthday, why do you wear a black shirt?

**Art:** Do you like your shirt?

**Grandfather:** Yes, I like it, so I wear it.

**Art:** Like that, I wear a black shirt because I like it.

Grandfather let me teach you. Mild is already grown up, so she has the right to choose her own partner. If her partner is bad, she will break up. So her partner is not your business.

In order to make Mild's grandfather realize that one will be happy if one has the right to choose their own partner, Art draws an analogy between clothes and a partner. It can be noticed that the character of Art is a bad boy who is insensitive to other's feeling, so he strongly criticizes grandfather's behavior. By this manner, the message that parents or grandparents should not be involved in grandchildren's partner selection is conveyed to the audience. It can be inferred that the representation of women who struggle to marry challenges the ideology of seniority by raising the issue of whether single women really want to marry or their family forces them to marry.

The analysis of the relationship between the representation of single women in film and ideology in Thai society shows that the female characters in the films are neither reflections nor records of real women, but are constructed representations. Accordingly, social and cultural contexts play a dominant role in the construction of these representations.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This study examines representations of single women in romantic comedy films released between 2006 and 2017. The study reveals that representations of single women are constructed using seven characteristics: professional working women; women who struggle to marry; worthless women; unfortunate women; over-sensitive women; women who would be an ideal housewife; and women who have younger partners.

The seven representations of single women closely relate to mainstream ideologies, especially the ideology of patriarchy. That is to say, the seven representations not only accentuate, but also reproduce the ideology of patriarchy by defining marriage and being a mother as the ultimate goal of a female life. It is interesting to note that the reason why thirty is a deadline for marriage relates to the fact that the choice of men whom women can choose to be their husband declines. Moreover, the representation of unfortunate women conforms to the ideology of Buddhism. However, the ideology of seniority is challenged by the question of parental involvement in partner selection.

It can be seen that the ideology of patriarchy is questioned by some films that present the power of female characters in that they refuse to have a relationship with men who they do not like, or they can have a good relationship with a younger partner. However, almost all of the films end with the female character happy in a relationship with the male character primarily because of the particular film genre – romantic comedy – whereby the ideology of patriarchy is merely accentuated, rather than fully questioned. There is no doubt that these films were produced within the ideology of patriarchy, hence they play a prominent role in reinforcing the ideology of patriarchy. It can be argued that single women are portrayed as being unhappy, or they are unhappy since their marital status is prejudged as a defect.

As shown in the analysis of representation of over-sensitive women, such characteristics are used as a source of amusement. As well, the struggle of female characters who really want to marry is portrayed with a sense of humor. On the surface, this relates to the nature of romantic comedy films, however, a deeper analysis indicated that this not only satirizes females, but also induces female audience members to deride single status since it is used as a factor of humor. As well, this genre of films, romantic comedy, provides for the reproduction of the ideology of patriarchy.

It is important to note that the results of this study harmonize with the results of previous studies in that many forms of literature portray the representation of women in the role of wife and mother. This reflects the influence of the ideology of patriarchy with respect to the creation, consumption, as well as interpretation of literature in Thai society. It seems reasonable to conclude that literature is strong evidence to prove that the evaluation of women has depended on men for a long time.

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