

**NEW ECONOMY AND GENDER RELATIONS  
IN THAILAND  
THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE INTERNET**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Toward the end of the 1990s, a large number of people were drawn into work in the new economy. The use of information and communications technology (ICT) was said to promise a gender-neutral world of work. The Internet, transcending temporal and spatial divisions, is supposed to create new employment options. This thesis examines the ways in which both genders in Thailand use the Internet to make or further their career. It asks to what extent work on the Internet really opens up new career opportunities. It also explores the extent to which the Internet enables women and men to escape their gendered identity, allowing them different identities, in cyberspace and, at home, enabling the redefinition of gender arrangements in the domestic domain. In-depth interviews with 55 participants in Thailand reveal that work with ICTs has generated a new form of employment that is informal, flexible and more uncertain. In addition, Thai women can use the Internet to start their own online business, and this can enhance their economic independence and allow them to negotiate gendered relations from a stronger bargaining position. However, the findings also illustrate that women face a contradiction between economic independence and their roles as mothers and wives. Conforming to a hetero-normative ideology creates ambivalence about changing gender roles, and particular pressures for women combining paid and unpaid work. ICT has provided a new economic opportunity, accessible to both women and men, yet most women continue to prioritise care-giving responsibilities. This dilemma leads to greater conflicts, particularly for women, between careers and family.

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## **ACRONYMS**

<b>BOT</b>	Bank of Thailand
<b>CIA</b>	Computer Industry Almanac
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>HDR</b>	Human Development Report
<b>ICTs</b>	Information and Communication Technologies
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>KBE</b>	Knowledge-based economy
<b>KBS</b>	Knowledge-based society
<b>NECTEC</b>	National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre
<b>NESDB</b>	National Economic and Social Development Board
<b>NSO</b>	National Statistical Office
<b>SEA</b>	Southeast Asia
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme

## **NOTES ON THE LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS USED IN THE THESIS**

*Note on Citations:* Thai people address each other by their first names. All the Thai writers are referred to by their first names. In the bibliography, first and last names are shown. Non-Thai authors are identified by their last name.

*Note on Transliteration:* The principle of Romanization for Thai script by transcription method as proposed by the Royal Institute is used for transliteration from Thai to English. The Thai Romanization method is transcription whereby the sounds are noted by the system of signs of Roman alphabet, regardless of original spelling. All Thai terms and Thai names used in this thesis follow this principle. There are cases of exception with some Thai authors whose their original text is in English, but their Thai names are not in accordance with the Romanization transcription method for Thai script, for example, Darunee and Suntaree. This thesis will thus follow spellings in their original text.

*Note on research informants:* All the names of the research informants are made up to respect their anonymity.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

*“Without meaning people do not act, and without the action of these entrepreneurs, oriented by a specific set of values, there would be no new economy, and the Internet would have diffused at a much slower pace and with a different range of applications”.*

Castells (2000: 56)

Rapid growth of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)<sup>1</sup> has had profound effects on economy and society. They have increased the speed of communication and enabled closer interconnections between people and places, drawing many countries into a new global economy. The dot.com boom around the middle of the 1990s prompted a number of people around the world to venture into the Internet business. This is no exception. This thesis explores how Thai individuals decide to use the Internet as a new career option. I am particularly interested in the extent to which the middle class in urban Thailand adopt the Internet at work, and if they are following the ‘get rich quick’ lifestyle which appears to be widespread, due to the growth of the ICTs and the Internet. This new technology may enable individuals to escape from the traditional labour market, as the Internet opens up new career opportunities for both women and men. The popularity of the Internet has moved the world into a more globalised communication system, thus allowing new ways of conducting business (Castells, 1996).

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<sup>1</sup> Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) can be defined as a group of communication equipment which is increasingly used nowadays in daily life. The examples of ICTs are mobile phone, computer, the Internet, satellite phones, cable television network. In this research, Internet is the main focus of the empirical work.

The craze of the dot.com boom from the late 1990s coincided with the economic crisis in Thailand in 1997. This crisis caused unemployment, particularly among the urban middle class; it may have motivated a number of individuals to explore new employment opportunities beyond the traditional labour market. Witnessing a number of my personal contacts – who tend to belong to the urban middle class – trying to use the Internet to increase their income, I question if this will become a new occupational choice. I want to explore if the Internet is a real option for them, and if it will take these people off the ‘rat race’, away from the climb up the career ladder. For me, the boom of the Internet represents a new form of economic globalisation, which has merged the global and the local closely together, often instantaneously by one click of a mouse. However the seemingly closer connection may create social divisions among different people in different places. For this thesis, the interconnection between the global and local refers to the extent to which the local Internet users in Thailand can do business and communicate with their business counterparts in other countries closer and at a lower cost through the World Wide Web. It also means local Internet users from other countries can search and obtain business with Thai counterparts through cyberspace. This interconnection has transformed the extent to which users can operate their business and manage daily activities. Drawing upon the quote by Castells (2000: 56) at the opening of this chapter, I question the extent to which the Internet will encourage new entrepreneurial habits to support the growth of the new economy. The key research question is to ask whether women and men Internet entrepreneurs will benefit equally from the Internet.

The Internet is a central feature of this new economy, and it has grown exponentially since the late 1990s, and transformed employment, international businesses and daily life. It transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, and has generated novel working opportunities. This thesis is concerned with the gender implications of the new economy and explores how one group of people, “Internet professionals”<sup>2</sup> in Thailand, experience work and live in this new economy.

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<sup>2</sup> The term the “Internet Professionals” is a broad term used in this thesis to refer to dot.com/e-commerce entrepreneurs, self-employed individuals and full-time dot.com employees. These people rely mainly on the Internet and a computer at work. In this thesis, I will put the term in the quote to emphasise that it refers to participants in this research.

Thailand, formerly known as Siam, situated in South East Asia<sup>3</sup>, seems to be standing at a crossroads between 'modernisation' and 'tradition', between entering the new global economy and preserving traditional values. I locate Thailand at the crossroads of 'modernisation' and 'tradition' as a perspective in analysing the new economy from Thailand's perspective. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse 'modernity' and 'tradition' in detail. However, broadly, I understand 'modernisation' as Thailand's current context comprising, the integration of the country into the global economy, industrializing of the economy, expansion of the urban middle class, high consumption, the growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs), expansion of new media and traveling, participation of white collar workers in the labour market as well as the notion of career-orientated women. I have considered these 'economic development' a part of Thai modernity which is in many ways contradictory with attempt to preserve 'traditional' Thai values or *'kwam pen thai'* (Thainess) such as maintaining family values, preserving 'Thai culture', respecting the seniority system, and promoting homogeneity and unity among Thais. I also understand that Thai women tend to be subjected to preserving tradition by being the centre of the family, prioritising the domestic arena, and maintaining the harmony of the family. This high expectation from Thai women has created ambivalence in their life as on the one hand they need to improve their education, skills and knowledge in response to economic development or to be career-orientated. On the other hand they appear to be concerned with family values as their main responsibility. I do not mean men are not having problems under changing economic circumstance however women seem to be torn between being responsible for reproductive roles and economic roles at the same time. Gender power relations have played out in this ambivalence. The dilemmas of the intersection between 'modern' and 'tradition' will be examined through the lives of individual Internet professionals who are at the nexus of the global and the local. This case study of Thailand illuminates some of the wider implications of the use of the Internet, particularly its gender aspects. In this introductory chapter I sketch out the research synopsis and discuss the main research questions, before outlining the research trajectory and contents of the chapters to follow.

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<sup>3</sup> South East Asia (SEA) comprises ten countries: Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

## **Research Synopsis**

The exponential growth of the Internet has led to optimistic accounts of its great potential in transforming the way we live and work. The Internet is said to have given rise to greater efficiency and productivity (Greenspan 1999) and has promoted a network society (Castells 1996, 2000) allowing people to be more independent and more interconnected at the same time. This optimistic view of the Internet adventure is in some ways heightened and in others contradicted by the debate about reflexive modernisation (Giddens 1990, 1994; Beck 1992, 1994, 2002; Lash 1994) and individualisation (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). These debates are concerned with social transformations, and more significantly, from the perspective of this thesis emphasise that individuals can become active agents and construct the kind of life they want to live. At the same time they suggest that life has become increasingly complicated, plural and more uncertain.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis aims to consider whether these predominantly western debates have any resonance in Thailand and in particular how and in what ways the social transformations discussed above affect gender relations. Thailand has participated in the global economy actively since the industrialisation in the 1970s leading to a massive inroad of women into the labour market. Moreover the number of female Internet users in Thailand is outstanding when compared to men and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. While women's economic roles have changed to an extent that an increasing number of Thai women are in the labour force and have more economic power, the impact on gender relations is more complicated, and economic opportunity alone is not an indicator of gender equality especially when women are expected to prioritise the domestic domain. The Internet speeds up communications and generates new job opportunities; working on-line, including working from home has become increasingly popular. The main purpose of this thesis is to examine changes which may be associated with the new forms of work that have emerged with Internet businesses. In particular the thesis aims to explore their varied and contrasting characteristics which offer both new opportunities and constraints for 'entrepreneur' and workers. Some features, such as their lower capital requirements, temporal and spatial flexibility, potentially generate greater 'autonomy'; while others, such as contractual flexibility and short time working, may create new forms of precariousness.

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<sup>4</sup> For broader definition and explanation of the debates please see Chapter 3.

My research, based on 55 in-depth interviews with Internet professionals in Thailand, will elucidate the multi-layered nature of the work/life relations of these individuals. In particular, the thesis examines the extent to which “Internet professionals” may have more independence at work and the implications for gender relations of individual informants at work and their families.

## **Main Research Questions**

The main objective of this research is to examine the implications of the new economy in Thailand from a gendered perspective. In this thesis the new economy is taken to mean more than economic transformation but covering a new juncture of social and economic transformation in which the global and local are increasingly interconnected by the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Informants in this research are trying to locate themselves in this globalizing world by using the Internet as their main tool at work. I aim at examining the impact of new forms of work made possible by the Internet on gender relations. My central questions are:

1. How have gender relations in Thai society been changed by social and economic transformations led by the new economy?
2. To what extent has work in the new economy led to a re-negotiation of gender relations?
3. Do new job opportunities created in the new economy allow women and men more agency in their daily lives?

These questions are situated within a broader analysis of economic and social change in Thailand, an examination of contemporary social and gender theories and through empirical research based on in-depth interviews with individual informants who are dot.com/e-commerce entrepreneurs, self-employed or full-time dot.com employees.

## Trajectory of the Thesis

The thesis will begin with examining Thai gender relations from different perspectives in Chapter 2. It commences with the historical perspective in forming Thai gendered identity in the late nineteenth to twentieth century. The period is significant as it marked 'civilising and modernising' of the nation which consequently resulted in distinct gender differences and a new norm of gendered identities in Thailand. This creation of new gendered identities may be seen as the way Thais responded to the global discourse of western domination at that time. The gender identities issue may be significant among the Internet professionals as I will illuminate in Chapter 6. Additionally, the economic, social and cultural perspectives are also taken into account in analysing Thai gender relations. I will explore Thai women's economic role and their negotiation of gender relations. Thai women may be considered as having 'high status' because of their economic power but this perspective seems limited when examining contemporary urban familial relations. Thai women seem to have to negotiate between being career-orientated and maintaining the family harmony at the same time as which the gender ideology of being a 'good' woman seems to be influential. An ambivalent situation may occur when women informants want to be independent in their career, but feel highly responsible for reproductive roles. Although, it is common among middle class Thai families to hire domestic maids to do housework, this practice may not undermine or transform the gender ideology of a wife who takes care of home, while a husband works outside. Perhaps, the husband and the wife can be mutual 'ricewinners'<sup>5</sup> of the family. A majority of informants in this thesis are of Chinese descent, thus patriarchal gendered relations, which appear dominant among Chinese-Thai families, will be engaged in the analysis.

The meaning of the new economy is not fixed. The term can cover various perspectives and interpretations comprising technological, economic or social ones so I begin by identifying the specific understanding of the new economy developed in this thesis. I will describe how the Internet is the main focus in examining the new economy in this research in Chapter 3. I am particularly concerned with social change and so I also discuss the theory of individualisation (Beck 1992, 2002; Beck-Gernsheim 2002) in this chapter in relation to the ideas concerning reflexive

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<sup>5</sup> I apply the term 'ricewinner' following the same logic of a 'breadwinner'. Thais consume rice as their main food so I consider the term ricewinner is appropriate for the Thai context.

modernisation (Giddens 1990, 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Lash 1994). The debates that examine the extent to which social and economic transformations may give rise to more liberated agents and its consequences on gender are discussed. Gender is a crucial dimension, which is probed further as an extension of the debate. A number of feminist analyses on work in the new economy (Perrons 2003; Gill 2002), gender identity at work (Wajcman and Martin 2002) and gender in small enterprises (Baines and Wheelock 2000) is also drawn upon in an attempt to examine whether new forms of work have resulted in changes in gender relations. These feminist debates will pave the way for analysing the gender perspectives of the new economy in Thailand.

The particularity, the view from the local, appears significant in feminist epistemology. In Chapter 4, I discuss the extent to which partial knowledge from this empirical study may link with wider social and economic change in the international arena (Haraway 1991). The “Internet professionals” may be working from the ‘local’, – Thailand -, however their activities have engaged in the global context through the World Wide Web, communicating and delivering on-line products to foreign clients through cyberspace. Additionally, the methodology of this research will be discussed. I will illuminate how I recruited the different categories of participants, why I chose to use an in-depth, semi-structured interview method, and how I analysed the transcripts by using grounded theory and resulting in the three main analytical chapters. I have illuminated details of informants in different tables and categorised them by gender, age, and work situations.

The main body of the thesis is in Chapters 5 to 7. These chapters represent my attempt to come to grips with gendered implications in the new economy. I begin my analysis from a work perspective. In Chapter 5, I firstly examine aspirations of the dot.com and e-commerce entrepreneurs in joining the new economy. I particularly focus on entrepreneurs and their income strategies. The informants in this research have come from various backgrounds and the majority of them decided to be dot.com or e-commerce entrepreneurs and most of them appear to want to have more independence at work and more control in life. Earning more money may appear an attractive factor for the Internet professionals to join the sector. As the Internet allow users to work anytime and anywhere I question whether this new form of employment will bring about more flexible, precarious and uncertain forms

of work following the individualisation thesis (Beck 1992, 2002; Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

I move from employment to gender identity issues in Chapter 6. Cyberspace is the main arena that the Internet professionals use in daily communications such as in contact with customers or to send and receive work. The website is also a channel to promote their business. Individuals tend to communicate by words rather than seeing the physical appearance of one another. I attempt to examine the extent to which the combination between human beings and communication on the Internet is exemplary of the cyborg as suggested by Haraway (1991). The communication of human beings through technology may represent a kind of combination between human and machines following the cyborg concept. I will discuss whether communication on the Internet paves the way for women and men to have more flexible gendered identities and whether this leads to increasing agency particularly for women. One thing is puzzling: do individuals feel more empowered on-line? Will this feeling result in more contestation of gender in real life?

In Chapter 7, I examine the ways in which women and men “Internet professionals” have adapted in terms of working from home. This chapter will address whether working in this sector has really generated more autonomy for the professionals or whether it creates new constraints. Although the Internet has given rise to new work opportunities which workers feel they can combine between work and life, familial relations may be under more pressure. I discuss the extent to which women have negotiated their role at home and at work and the significance of domestic maids in alleviating gender tensions among middle class families. Family gendered politics will be sketched out; particularly patriarchal relations will be examined from Chinese-Thai informants. I address the extent to which women are expected to be the centre of the family; however they may try to negotiate differently to maintain the best of both worlds – work and family life.

Finally, Chapter 8 will highlight my main research findings, its limitations and possibilities. I will also try to engage my research findings with policy making. This may make a modest contribution in terms of gendered implications on IT policy in Thailand. The last section will consist of some recommendations for future research relevant to the area of globalisation, gender and ICTs.

## CHAPTER 2

### Gender in Contemporary Thailand

#### Introduction

This chapter explores the complexities of Thai gender relations from various perspectives. As discussed in the last chapter, the intersection between the global and the local seems to offer a useful approach for analysing gender relations, and particularly for understanding the extent to which women are able to exercise their agency.<sup>6</sup> Firstly, this chapter will briefly illuminate Thailand's background and then pave a way for considering the historical context of gender revolution in the country. Secondly, I will explore the extent to which this research will engage with gender as an essence for this thesis. Third, I will explore the period of late nineteenth to twentieth century of Thailand by engaging with the 'performative genders' theory developed by Jackson (2003). This seems to be a good place to begin examining the construction of markedly distinctive gendered identities in Thailand and the way they have become prevalent today. I will then examine polygamy which happens in the private domain but which entails gender inequality in Thailand. Consequently, the ideology of being a "good" and modern woman will be explored in relation to polygamy. As women are told to limit their sexuality to their husband, this subsequently results in making women conform to tradition. Next, I will set out the debate surrounding the analysis of Thai gender relations especially from the perspective of patriarchy and high status. On the one hand, Thai women are considered to have 'high status', but on the other hand patriarchy is considered a dominant feature of urban Thai society. Finally, I will explore this new identity of middle class Thai women and the extent to which there is a conflict between pursuing their careers and maintaining domestic responsibilities.

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<sup>6</sup> I do not mean the intersection between the global and the local has exclusively affected women only. However, I attempt to disentangle the complicated situation of women who on the one hand are enabled to have more economic agency because of the modern economy, but on the other hand are strongly expected to maintain the traditional notion of womanhood and maintain their traditional role. For women, the choice to develop a career along with having a family may be more disruptive than for men.

## **Thailand's Background**

Thailand (formerly Siam) is situated in Southeast Asia. Geographically, the country is north of Malaysia, east of Burma, west of Laos PDR and Cambodia and south of China. Thailand is known as a stable, homogenous, Buddhist constitutional monarchy. It was transformed by a coup in 1932 which ended the power of the absolute monarchy, the Lords of Life of the Chakri Dynasty. Today, the dynasty is represented by the King Bhumibol Adulyadej also referred to as King Rama IX.

Thailand has a population of approximately 64 million (UN 2005), the majority is ethnically Tai<sup>7</sup>, and 95 per cent of the Thai population is recognised as Theravada Buddhist. The country comprises four main regions each with its own unique history, dialects and traditions. The four regions consist of the northeast (called Isan in Thailand) in which the population speak Lao dialects; the central region, the richest with Bangkok as the centre; the north where Chiang Mai is the centre of ancient cities, and the south where Buddhist southern Thai and Malay-speaking Muslims reside.

Apart from the Muslim minority in the south, Thailand has other ethnic groups such as Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus, while around 10 per cent of the Thai population are of Chinese descent. Additionally, scattered hill tribe groups reside in the mountainous area in the north and northeast borders of the country. Thailand is consequently ethnically diverse given the different groups residing in the country. The country's cultural and ethnic varieties are often overlooked as Bangkok tends to dominate and is taken to represent Thailand and Thai culture as a whole. In this research, more than 50 per cent of informants are of Chinese origin.

Historically, it is said that the commencement of the imperial, or semi-colonial period, was marked by the signing of the treaty between Britain and Siam by Sir John Bowring in 1855. Although Thailand was not directly colonised by European powers, the country's internal affairs were influenced by external forces. The French organised the country's legal system. The country's treasury and army system was influenced by the British and the Germans respectively (Van Esterik 2000). In the nineteenth century, a number of commercial enterprises were operated by white

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<sup>7</sup> The word 'Tai' has similar pronunciation with 'Thai'. Tai connotes the family of Southeast Asian languages and ethnic groups which constitute of Thai in central region and Bangkok.

businessmen while the Thai rulers maintained independence by allowing colonial forces use of the resources of the nation. In 1932, a group of Thai civil servants and military officers organised a coup and forced King Rama VII to be the first constitutional monarch. Changes in internal politics and the impact of World War II consolidated attempts to construct a Thai national identity, but simultaneously the adoption of Western paths to modernity and progress. The late nineteenth to twentieth century is considered a 'modernising' period of the nation which marked a gender revolution and transformation of Thai gender identity (Jackson 2003) and the details will be illuminated later in this chapter.

In the more recent past Thailand was reconstructed from a subsistence agricultural economy to a market-oriented economy in the 1960s. Since the 1970s, the country has become an industrialising economy. The high rate of economic growth between 1985 and 1996 derived from the expansion of urban manufacturing, tourism and the service industry. The economic boom generated the 'new rich' and an increase in middle class Thais. However, the economic boom did not last for even a decade; the country faced an economic crisis in 1997, which had a profound impact on the middle class and many sectors of the Thai economy. This economic crisis is crucial for this thesis because it marked a turning point for a number of Thais who subsequently participated in the dot.com economy and generated new forms of work. The gender implications of the changing economy will be examined later in this chapter. I will now explore the significance of gender in shaping contemporary identities and relations between women and men.

## **Why Gender?**

Gender appears to be an entity we have taken for granted in everyday life and generally the gender distinction is believed to be 'natural' and closely related to the 'sexed body' in which men are masculine and women feminine. Feminists argue that the sexed body is not necessarily related to gendered identity, but that in fact gender is socially constructed and not a fixed state (Butler 1993, 1999, 2004; Connell 1987, 2002). Simone de Beauvoir, a leading French feminist coined a famous phrase: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'. This sentence has, in a way, implied that the situation of women and men may not be exactly similar, but parallel. Hence, one is not born masculine, but develops and acts out masculinity to become a man (Connell 2002). A main concern of a number of feminists is to analyse and eliminate

the core cause of women as a group being subordinate to men as a group. However, the question follows as to what extent sex has shaped gender.

Perhaps women are framed to be ideologically installed into a 'natural group' and thus result in bodies and minds being manipulated to conform to women's ideology (Wittig 1997). Thus, women are not destined to be 'feminine' but shaped by the society as a whole which produces this creature through biological, psychological and economic framing (ibid: 220). Likewise, gender is considered a tool by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place.

According to Butler, gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized. Following this logic, gender can be seen to deconstruct and denaturalize a normative construction of masculine and feminine (Butler 2004). From the discussion outlined above, feminists have moved to debate the extent to which the notion of 'women' is natural and given. Sex and gender may not be 'naturally' correlated. Within this perspective, there is no natural 'masculine' and 'feminine', instead, gender can be 'crossed', 'blended' or 'moved' beyond the 'naturalized' dichotomy.

It is not easy to manipulate or transform gender relations though as Bourdieu (2001) has argued using the concept of 'habitus' gender appears to be natural and enduring, thus perpetuating gender divisions in daily life. Gender inequalities and differences arise from the symbolic values attached to gender. This value is shown through the gender division of labour, tasks, roles and social status of women and men in social life (Moore 1999). Butler (1999) has pointed out that gender is the consequence of a set of established practices, a process Butler names gender performativity:

"In this sense, *gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence."

(Butler 1999: 33)

For Butler, gender lies in the process of evolving and becoming, through repeated performances of which people are largely unaware or un-reflexive. So although gender and gender divisions are established through repeated practices it does not mean that the regulatory practices of being a man or a woman are completely open

for transformation precisely because these performances are largely naturalised, internalised and taken for granted.

In this research, informants communicate with suppliers and customers online in cyberspace. E-mails tend to be the tool of communication. In a way, the 'sexed body' has disappeared from cyberspace. Thus one of the questions I ask is whether this opportunity will be advantageous for informants. There are various structural inequalities particularly with respect to family ideologies. The traditional values appear strongly correlate with Asian society including Thai women and in many ways lead to inequalities between genders. For this thesis, tradition refers to the extent to which women are expected to maintain their roles as mother and care provider for the family. Additionally, tradition refers to maintaining male dominance in the household and public life, though they typically make a contribution to sustaining the family economically but this may go unrecognised.

Economic development especially from the 1970s means middle class Thai women have enjoyed more opportunity and have been exposed to a modern path such as being career-orientated, having improved status and financial independence. It seems on the one hand they are pushed to be modern, on the other hand, told to preserve tradition. This juncture appears ambivalent especially for women who need to choose between career and maintaining the family. Men, on the other hand, are told to be the ricewinner of the family, which has more symbolic recognition. As Thai women's economic role is in practice important for family survival, women who do paid work, rather than men, experience difficulty in conforming to traditional family ideology. Additionally, and importantly, Thai women are expected to limit their sexuality to their husband while it is considered normal for men to have sex with more than one woman. The issue of polygamy, which is still dominant in today's Thai society will be explored later in this chapter. Taking gendered performativity and changing subjectivities into account, the next section engages with the construction of Thai gendered norms particularly during the 'civilising' stage of the country in the late nineteenth to twentieth century.

### **Historical Perspective of Thai Gender**

It is noted that gender relations have been overlooked in Thai historiography (Reynolds 1994, 2006). Additionally, Reynolds points out that there has been much research on Thai women but these have not really been concerned with analysing

relations between women and men. Although the analysis that has women as the main concern is crucial in countering male-dominant representations of Thai history, examining gender relations tend to linger at the margin of historical investigation. Reynolds emphasises that a gender perspective in Thai historiography will assist in understanding power relations in Thai social configurations. This perspective is in accordance with Joan Wallach Scott, a feminist historian, who argues “gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott 2004: 167).

This section examines power relations and the formation of Thai gender identity through a historical perspective. As Jackson (2003) has pointed out, the success of the gender revolution induced by the Thai state from the late nineteenth to twentieth centuries is still current. The term ‘gender revolution’ refers to the way that the Thai state introduced schemes to regulate gendered ‘appearance’ among urban Thais which in many ways markedly contrasts with similarities in appearance between women and men in previous eras. Additionally, the early twentieth century was a remarkable period in which Siam made efforts to ‘modernise’ the nation and made urban women aware of educational opportunities and increased the social recognition of women. Drawing upon the above discussion of the presumed connection between the sexed body and gendered identity, I will explore how Thai ‘bodies’ were governed and, in a way, regulated by the Thai state and resulted in reformulating the personal gender identity of urban women and men. To do this, I will consider Jackson’s 2003 work on performativity of gender to explore the extent to which the Thai state intervened in changing norms of masculinity and femininity. Although Jackson has mainly focused on the history of modern Thai gender/sex cultures and investigated the account of Thailand’s same sex cultures, his argument is productive for analysing the gendered formation and performativity of genders.

### *‘Civilising’ the Nation*

Above, I have outlined briefly that though Thailand was not directly colonised, the country was under the influence and control of European powers since the signing of the Bowring treaty in 1855. Siamese elites, in the nineteenth century, attempted to escape from direct intervention by European powers. One of the main solutions was to show to the West that the country was ‘civilised’. The perceived deficiencies in Siamese civilisation stemmed from three primary characteristics comprising: the

nakedness of the Siamese body; the sexual 'excesses' of polygamy and the similarity of the appearance of Siamese men and women (Jackson 2003: 10-13). First, Siamese children did not wear clothing until they were ten or twelve and women walked around the city showing their exposed breasts. Second, polygamy was apparent, for Western observers, indicating Thai men's sexual exploitation of women. Finally, the similarity in appearance of women and men, including the same designs and hairstyles, made it difficult to distinguish their gender.

Being aware of the criticisms of Western observers, the Thai state introduced a series of interventions to encourage gender distinction in the public sphere carried through several decades. It started from King Mongkut (1851-1868), and was carried on by King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) and King Vajiravudh (1910-1926). The most intense intervention was during the regime of Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram (first premiership 1938-1944; second premiership 1948-1957). The strategic plans of imposing gender distinctions among Siamese men and women were carried through intensely during Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram's period of rule. The country's leader was the one who decreed changing the country's name to Thailand in 1939. His purpose was to mark a new phase of the country's cultural history and to show that 'Thailand' was no longer 'barbarous' but had been transformed to mirror the civilised West (Jackson 2003). There were concrete measures to seek control of people during Phibun's government. For example, bureaucrats were encouraged to kiss their wives before leaving home for work in the morning, while wives were told to take a walk with their husbands. To counter the claim that Siam lacked civilisation, the country's political elites strategically planned state intervention through legal and institutional forms of power in order to represent marked difference in gendered identities as civilised; to fully 'clothe' the population and visually differentiate the genders (Jackson 2003). Various strategies such as dress codes, daily manners, new names and the use of language which marked gender distinctions were systematically enforced on the Thai public during the late nineteenth to twentieth century.

### *Dress reform*

During Phibun's government, Thais were advised, educated and forced through a series of edicts to cover their upper and lower bodies and particularly wear gender-differentiated clothes. These are part of cultural dictates in transforming the

country's gender culture. Men, rather than wearing the traditional *pamuang* (a cloth wound around the body and hitched up between the legs) or Chinese silk trousers, were to wear hats, shoes, socks, jackets and trousers; and women, who sometimes wore only a sarong with a simple cloth wrapped around the upper part of the body, and who could even be topless at home, were admonished to don a hat, skirt, shoes and a blouse that covered the shoulders (Jeffrey 2002: 18). The clear gendered code means unisex fashion came to an end in Phibun's regime. Jackson (2003) argues that these measures were introduced more to erase Western negative comments than to establish Western norms in Thailand.

### *Language*

Along with appropriate gender distinction in dress, Phibun sought to enforce other proper gender identities. Phibun took offence at the ambiguous gender of some women's names and insisted that men's and women's names be distinct (Jeffrey 2002). The scheme was to assign a fixed masculine and feminine meaning to real names. Before World War II, Thai names did not really connote a gender. Phibun regarded the lack of gender specificity of Thai names as an indicator of Thailand's lacking civilisation. He set up a committee made up of language and culture experts to gather a list of names and assign a masculine or feminine trait to each. The names were later encouraged on Thai newborn infants.

Perhaps the clearest gender revolution of changing gendered subjectivity derived from studies of the Thai language. There are various ways to address first person pronoun "I" in Thai. The varieties of choices in addressing one's self connote social hierarchy related to the person(s) spoken to. The Thai first person pronoun, which marked the gender of the speaker, was first decreed in the late nineteenth century (Voravudhi and Diller 1999). Beforehand, the first pronoun denoted the relative age and status, but not gender, of the speaker. The first person pronouns, which connote gender, have been used in modern Thai. For example, male speakers use *phom* while female *dichan*. Furthermore, *krap* for men and *kha* for women are markers of gendered politeness, which have come into use. The way first person pronoun reveals gender in Thai language cannot be seen in English written language. In Chapter 6, I have explored the extent to which informants, particularly women, benefit from not using Thai first person pronoun in e-mail communications in English and this has paved the way to disguise gendered identities.

### *The Discursive Construction of Gender*

The discursive construction of gender identity in urban Thailand from the end of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century can be considered a result of the Thai gender revolution (Jackson 2003: 26). As a result, Thais seem more aware of the construction of gender distinction through dress codes, use of language and the first person pronoun. These acts of gendered distinction are shown in the public sphere. However, it seems the private sphere was not really transformed or closely monitored by state intervention (Jackson 2003), thus there may be the possibility that private practice can deviate from the norm. Linking to my research, informants use and produce the content of the Internet in the private sphere at home or in the office where their gender identity will not be monitored.

The construction of the new norms of masculinity and femininity nevertheless did not only derive solely from the state. From the mid twentieth century onward, especially after the World War II, urban Thailand was influenced by the spread of mass media like cinema, radio, and television and Thailand was exposed to foreign, especially Western culture (Barmé 2002). Additionally, the internationalisation of capitalism and the globalisation of communications and travel gave rise to multiple destabilisations of traditional cultures and implanted new ideas and subjectivities around the world. The transformation of Thai gender identity, in a way, reflects the nexus between the global and the local. It has shown the extent to which local Thai responds in its own way to global influences.

From the 1960s, Thailand has been through major transformations which have resulted in changing Thai identities such as a growing Thai labour force, marketisation and the urbanisation of Bangkok. Thailand has integrated with globalisation very quickly since then and this may have resulted in the extent to which Western discourse has impinged on gender culture in the country. Thailand also has its own local context, history and culture which has influenced changes in gendered identities. The construction of new norms of masculinity and femininity by Thai state interventions has shown how change has occurred in the public sphere (Jackson 2003); however the control is not exercised in the private domain and not perceived contradictory. The private sphere has not really been monitored and there are fewer suggestions addressed by state policy. This may happen because Thais learn to vary one's behaviour according to norms guided by each time and place:

*Kalathesa* (Van Esterik 2000). One area of private practice, polygamy, was rarely intervened by the Thai state but which greatly affect gender relations in Thailand until today.

## **Polygamy**

The issue of polygamy and Thai men having more than one wife appeared to concern Western visitors as I have outlined above. The Three Seals Law Code was ratified in 1805 in the reign of King Rama I. The law was considered the most important document about the social history of the early Bangkok period. One section of the family law emphasised that a man was the head of the family and held superior power over other members, including his wives and children. Women, subsequently, were supposed to be subordinate to the male head of the family, and they were expected to be primarily responsible for reproductive roles (Suwadee 2004). This pattern resulted in sexual division of labour, especially among the ruling class. Men tended to do administrative work, while women stayed at home and were responsible for domestic roles such as rearing children, doing housework and satisfying men's sexual desires (Suwadee 2004: 42). Additionally, according to the law, a woman was not a free agent and had to be under someone's protection. If single, no matter how old, she was under her parents' control. Once she was married, parental control was transferred into conjugal power of her husband. A woman was considered to be an item among a man's assets, which included land, domestic animals, slaves, servants, children and the elderly.

Furthermore, the law implied a sexual double standard between men and women. The law legalised polygamous marriage; despite the fact that it signified that "a woman should not let more than one man gain access to her body" (Suwadee 2004: 48). This law included a severe punishment to a wife who committed adultery. If caught in the act of adultery, the husband was permitted to kill his adulterous wife and her lover to maintain his dignity (Suwadee 2004: 8). Clearly, the law granted men more than one wife but women were strictly limited to one husband. Thus while male sexual license was legally validated through the institution of polygamy, autonomous female sexuality, with the exception of those women who were prostitutes, was tightly circumscribed (Barmé 2002: 20).

The old family law classified wives into three categories, according to the way they become wives: the major wife (*mia klang mueang* or *mia luang*), the minor wife

(*mia klang nok* or *mia noi*), and the slave wife (*mia klang that*). These polygamy practices were relatively widespread among noblemen. This particular aspect raised concern among Western visitors, as they saw it as a sign of the backwardness of Siam. In order to transform the country into 'civilisation', the questions relating to marriage practices and the position of women began to be discussed and debated among the elite. King Mongkut moved to amend a number of regulations affecting women. Perhaps, the king's most significant intervention in this regard came in 1867 when he decreed that a woman could not be sold to another party without her formal consent (Barmé 1999, 2002). Overall, however, men from nobility resisted such calls to end the custom of polygamy and even a modernising, English educated monarch as King Vajiravudh (1910-1926) argued that polygamy was a key feature of Siamese culture that should not be abandoned (Barmé 2002).

During the 1920s, the issue of polygamy was debated intensely in relation to equality between the sexes (Barmé 2002). In addition to the discussion of equal access to education and paid employment which were the main concern of middle class women at that time, the topic of polygamy upset women of various classes. Apart from being a sign of the backwardness of the country, polygamy was seen as uncivilised, and the cause of multiple social problems and contributed to a double standard and inequality between women and men. Polygamy played a part in women's subordination to men in terms of sexuality and in social roles. The debate on equality between the sexes began to unravel in the 1920s when questions regarding the idea of equality in marriage and one man-one wife were raised. The agitation for equality for women and men parallels the call for the establishment of a more egalitarian representative political system in place of royal absolutism (Barmé 2002: 175). The government's failure in dealing with polygamy in combination with the political and economic situation paved the way for the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in June 1932.

The adoption of monogamy into Thai family law was on October 1, 1935. However polygamy still exists. It is argued that men have never been monogamous and thus monogamy is a myth in Thai society (Chalidaporn 2004). Although both the Thai state and society have formally supported monogamy, many Thai men from every walk of life have had more than one wife. On the other hand, monogamy has been applied to and followed strictly by women. Sukanya (1988) has pointed out that getting married is another form of representing the inferior situation of women to

men. She has argued that marriage refers to transferring the control over women from the custody of her father to that of her husband. The Law of the Three Seals still has persistent and long-lasting effects on Thai women, right up to the present day. Sukanya has emphasised the part of the law that stated that a good woman should preserve their body for only one man is still influential, and has consequently become the benchmark for middle class women. The practice of monogamy appears a double standard of sexuality in Thai society as promiscuity in various forms among men is expected and tolerated (Chalidaporn 2004).

The continued practice of polygamy has led to women being subordinated to men through law, social beliefs and sexuality and to structural gender inequalities in Thailand. Women are expected and required to take the primary role of care and reproductive work in the households while their sexuality is limited to one husband otherwise they will be punished severely by law and social pressure. The situation is different for men as they have autonomous control of their wives while at the same time being recognised as the head of the household and allowed to have more than one wife. Thus the practice of polygamy is not confined to private relationships but has a wider implication. The top-down approach of state institutions which recognizes men as the 'head' of the households implies that urban middle class Thais face gender relations which are based on a gender unequal structure (Whittaker 1999).

### *'Good' and 'Modern' Women of Thailand*

In contrast to Thai men, the limitation of female sexuality within monogamy and marriage emphasises the common representation of Thai cultural division between 'good' and 'bad' women (Harrison 1997, 1999, 2001). Very often, the local media perpetuates this widely held belief in Thai society by labelling women having sex outside marriage as prostitute or 'bad' (Harrison 2001). Familial relations appear crucial in defining female identity in contemporary urban Thailand. I understand being 'good' means loyalty to family ideology. Thus women are expected to conform to the ideology of a faithful wife, a giving mother, a dutiful daughter and especially to limit their sexuality to only their husband. In terms of sexuality, Thai women need to conform to a female familial ideology in which their sexual expression cannot move beyond the boundaries of monogamy, otherwise they are considered promiscuous (Mills 1995; Harrison 1999). 'Good' Thai middle class women are associated with the role of being a good mother, who may not deviate from the traditional expectations. Interestingly, it is noted that 'modern' women in Thailand image are associated with "youthful, outgoing, gregarious, fun-loving and often rather 'girlishly' cute, yet avoids any suggestion of her sexual agency or availability" (Harrison 2001: 139). This expression of modern women's image in the local media seems contradictory on its own. On the one hand, it retains 'good' image of women by equating with women's ability to limit their sexuality. On the other hand however, women's image is often shown as 'modern'. Looking deeply, the construction of 'modern' Thai womanhood in fact represents an older tradition of the feminine, with the significance of grace, beauty, neatness and good manners (ibid: 139). This position of female identity in relation to suppressive sexual desire may further reinforce the traditional code of conduct, which requires women to be aware of their sexuality (Harrison 1999).

Single women informants in this thesis appear to be caught between 'modern' and 'good' image. Being modern career-orientated women, especially in the IT sector, seems to offer a very modern image. Although a number of female informants cohabit with their male partners before getting married, other single women informants describe in the interview that she will not have sex with any men before getting married. A single female informant, in her early 30s, emphasises that seeing her parents divorced she has to be careful not to lose virginity to any men because it equates with virtue of women. She understands that her idea is conservative and said "I am *boran* (old-fashioned). I love cleaning my house, I love cooking and I head home right away after work. People may think of me as a very modern woman, but I am not. I know." In contrast, other single women informants may not follow traditional ideology of being 'good' and decide to cohabit with their male partner before getting married. Cohabiting does not mean freeing from monitoring as the couples tend to live with parents of their partner. A female informant, who moves in to live with her male partner in his mother's house, faces ambivalence between tradition and modernity. On the one hand she wants to be very career-orientated by working long hours, on the other hand she feels torn in maintaining the good order of the house in which her soon-to-be-mother-in-law keeps monitoring her daily behaviour. The dichotomy of good/bad women may strongly affect the gender relations of urban Thai women, who are expected to maintain the order of the household as their priority. According to a study of Thai wives, Tippavan (2001) has indicated that employed women strongly identify their value with household responsibility. Her study is in line with Suntaree (1990) who argues that Thai wives value family happiness as a priority.

This rise in economic opportunities for women has created a tension between the existing gender order and new roles. Women are driven to be more conscious about asserting their own aspirations (Roces and Edwards 2000). Rapid economic growth enhances women's opportunities in challenging the pattern of gender relations within which women are recognised only as wives, mothers, and bearers of children, conforming to the 'tradition'. Modern economic transition has paved the way for urban women to become career-orientated. Thai women's roles have shifted away from being purely care providers, to supplementary income earners, or in some cases, mutual rice-winners for the family. It is noted that having an additional role in employment may create more tensions in terms of family harmony, because men tend not to share housework with women (Sunanta and Orose 1994). This corresponds with women's lives as 'being there for others' (Beck-Gernsheim 2002), which will be discussed in Chapter 3, and is contradictory to economic modernisation. Additionally, Mathana (1996) has pointed out that Thai women working in urban areas often face increasing conflicts and tensions in daily life, because of economic activities happening outside the home. The distinction between work and home, in parallel with public/private, is increasingly significant in economic modernisation, as women need to balance their roles outside and inside the house. However, as a number of Internet professionals can relocate work from outside to the home, this may lead to new forms of gender negotiation. A number of married informants in this research have hired live-in domestic maids to alleviate household responsibilities. Indeed as the research demonstrates these domestic servants play a crucial role in maintaining family harmony among urban middle class Thais. However while facilitating domestic harmony the availability of maids allows traditional gender roles within the family to continue, with women combining paid work with assisted housework and child care while men in general focus only on paid work. Even so the married female informants still had to negotiate gender relations with their husbands to maintain their roles as a career woman, a wife and a mother. Although women and men seem to conform to family ideology, the normative context may not always be fixed. The capacity of women to have their own careers may enable them to assert more independence, and lead to different gender negotiations with their partner. It may imply that in some ways men have to adapt their own identity in relation to women's greater independence.

## **Analysing Contemporary Thai Gender**

Analysing gender in Thailand is not easy. There are various perspectives involved in gender and gender relations such as historical, anthropological, socio-economic and cultural. It is too limited to rely on one viewpoint in analysing gender especially when both women and men are adapting to the changing socio-economic environment linked to technological change and Thailand's increasing integration into the world economy. In general, gender is not fixed, but relationally situated and varying by spatial and temporal factors depending on context (Yos 2006). Thai gender relations have been frequently seen from women having high status when compared with women in other parts of the world and especially with respect to countries in South and East Asia (Karim 1995; Van Esterik 1982, 1995, 2000). This high status assumption comes from the systems of bilateral kinship, matrilocality and inheritance (Karim 1995; Amara 1997). On the other hand, Thai women are also seen in a subordinate position when compared with men from the Buddhist perspective (Kirsch 1975, 1982; Darunee 1998; Darunee and Pandey 1991). Additionally, the subordination of women by men is seen to be highly influenced by Confucian tradition which permeates local cultures and results in patriarchal practices prevalent in Southeast Asian society (Amara 1997) and has resulted in patriarchal relations in family gendered politics among Chinese-Thais (Bao 2005). As a number of informants in this research are from Chinese descent, it is important to outline patriarchal understandings and perspectives in analysing gender relations in Thailand. However, I also ask whether the concept of patriarchy alone provides a sufficient understanding of gender relations in Thailand.

### *Patriarchal Thailand?*

In Thailand, patriarchy has often been adopted to explain gender relations. Similar to Yos (2006), I argue that it is not possible to understand gender from a patriarchal perspective alone and neither is it possible to consider gender relations as fixed with Thai men superior to women in every circumstance. How then is it possible to use and contextualise patriarchy but in a nuanced way? Rowbotham (1983) has argued that patriarchy implies universal patterns of oppression, based on biological difference. This implication only recognises biological difference; it ignores the different social forms and different gender arrangements and practices that arise in practice.

“Patriarchy implies a structure which is fixed, rather than the kaleidoscope of forms within which women and men have encountered one another. It does not carry any notion of how women might act to transform their situation as a sex. Nor does it even convey a sense of how women have resolutely manoeuvred for a better position within the general context of subordination.”

(Rowbotham 1983: 209)<sup>8</sup>

In a similar vein, Butler (1999) has argued that rather than thinking of patriarchy as the beginning and end of women’s oppression there can be other kinds of inquiry that seek to understand gender.

“The very notion of “patriarchy” has threatened to become a universalising concept that overrides or reduces distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts. As feminism has sought to become integrally related to struggles against racial and colonialist oppression, it has become increasingly important to resist the colonising epistemological strategy that would subordinate different configurations of domination under the rubric of a transcultural notion of patriarchy.”

(Butler 1999: 45-46)

The argument of universalism of patriarchy strengthens the concept that women as a group are subordinated to men as a group (Fitzsimons, 2002; Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon, 2002; De Lauretis 1987). This kind of sex binary system of considering gender from a patriarchal perspective does not represent the whole system, but part of it (Connell 1987). Thus, biological differences alone appear not enough to formulate a gender analysis. Even Sylvia Walby (1990), who identified different forms and degrees of patriarchy, contesting the idea that patriarchy was an inherently universalising concept, refers to the more complex and differentiated concept of gender regimes in more recent work (Walby 1997).

Interestingly, Amara (1997) has noted that feminists and traditionalists tend to claim that Thailand is a patriarchal society. According to Amara, the way different scholars use the same ‘word’ to explain the social situation in Thailand is striking in itself. Rather, she advocates seeking local nuances and alternative interpretations of Thai gender relations. In a way, it is not possible either to exclude patriarchy from

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<sup>8</sup> From the essay *Trouble with ‘Patriarchy’* originally printed in *New Statesman*, 21-28 December, 1979 and reprinted in *Dreams and Dilemmas* (Rowbotham 1983:209).

analysing gender, but the concept needs to be specifically situated in relation to Thailand.

Patriarchal theory has been applied by various Thai feminists, who argue that it plays a crucial role in analysing a social structure that subordinates women (Suchila 1997; Kanchana, 1982, 2000; Sukanya 1988; Thiranat 1999). Family and household is seen as an oppressive place for women. According to Suchila (1997), Thai women are expected to be the centre of the household so they tend to be overloaded with household responsibilities, but the significance of this role is rarely acknowledged. As in other countries, Thai women's opportunities are held back by household responsibilities. In contrast to men, Thai women tend not to be working outside the home. In 2004, more than 600,000 Thai women were not employed because they were doing housework (UNDP 2006). Thai society has imposed a clear division between the public and private spheres, between the household and politics; women are told they belong to the domestic sphere, while men are encouraged to pay attention to political matters (Suchila 1997). Although Thai women have participated as members of the parliament (MPs), the proportion of women MPs were accounted to only 10.4 per cent in February 2005 (UNDP 2006).

Kanchana (1982) emphasised that the glorification of motherhood exists alongside a patriarchal Thai society: being a complete woman is strongly associated with being a mother. Further, gender distinctive roles are reinforced by the media, which tends to present stereotypes of women as passive while men are portrayed as being more active in the political and public arena. Furthermore, the labour market is considered a place where patriarchal relations are reinforced through gender segregation, which places women in lower job positions (Thiranat 1999). Further within this perspective Thai women are seen as submissive and victimised. Engaging with patriarchy can offer one dimension in analysing gender relations. Nevertheless other aspects should be considered.

### *'High Status' Assumption*

Another side of the debate on gender relations in Thailand and Southeast Asia is that women are considered to have a relatively high status especially when compared with their counterparts in South Asia where women are noted for not being able to enjoy geographical mobility, visibility and economic power (Ward 1963). Karim (1995) has argued for the term 'bilateralism' to describe the social system of

Southeast Asia. According to Karim, an important feature of Southeast Asian bilateralism is the status of women vis-à-vis men. She notes that “studies of Southeast Asian kinship systems directly and indirectly suggest that the fluid interlocking social networks developing from consanguinal and affinal relationships encourage a diffusion of status concepts relating to gender” (Karim 1995: 39). With the loose structure of society in Southeast Asia, gender relations are described as complementary but non-hierarchical. Van Esterik (1982) has pointed out several indicators which support women having high value in Southeast Asia society such as pioneering land development; expanded labour inputs in agriculture and farming; wet rice production and domination over farm-management systems, distance between patriarchal state and local culture; bilateral kinship and substantial matrilineal residence; land inheritance by women and control over money and household finances. From the ‘high status’ perspective, women in traditional society and rural areas appear to have certain autonomy in the indigenous context. This high status tends to be associated with village community and rural area, which notes for ‘centrality’ of women in family, neighbourhood and friendship relations (Karim 1995). Women are seen to play out a crucial role in interfamilial relationships, food production, ritual festivity, market strategies and peer-group socialisation, which result in networking, sharing and exchange. This central role of women in the household is seen to disappear when they migrate to work in urban area. The research on rural women of Thailand who came to work in Bangkok shows that it implied they would have to become prostitutes, as other options for low-skilled work was not available (Pasuk 1982). In contrast, it is argued that women from rural areas have gained new kinds of financial independence and freedom from traditional expectations when they seek industrial employment in Bangkok, though the freedom may be temporary (Mills 1999). Economic factor, new jobs in towns and cities appear playing an important role in identifying and leading to change in gender relations and bilateralism between genders into hierarchy (Karim 1995). High status assumption has offered another perspective in analysing Thai gender relations; however women informants in this research are urban middle class who have been in the cities and have been enjoying career opportunities to an extent. The fact that in this research women who pursue business are from middle class families and still highly influenced by traditional family ideology may reflect that patriarchal relations and Confucianism are strongly influential among Chinese-descent respondents. Thus the high status assumption may have a certain limitation, however it is not possible to ignore changes which happen in the transformation of

the global and local economy which may thus lead to more choices for women even though they are still influenced by traditional ideology. Another factor which should be taken into account in explaining gender in Thailand is religion.

### *Buddhism*

While economic, historic and socio-cultural factors are important in analysing Thai gender relations, examining from religion perspective can also give rise to unraveling gender inequality in Thailand. There is a debate about the impact of Buddhism on gender relation in Thailand. Some writers (Kirsch 1975, 1982; Darunee 1998; Sukanya 1988; Mills 1995; Harrison 1997) argue that it has a negative effect as women are not allowed to become monks and their roles are restricted to more material, bodily oriented activities, for example providing the monks with sustenance, reflecting the traditional gender binaries between culture and nature, mind and body, manual and cerebral. Other writers (Keyes 1984; Karim 1995, John Van Esterik 1996) take the opposite view and point to the fact that women are allowed to become teachers of Buddhism and some such women have male as well as female followers. As women playing a great role in supporting food, festivities and necessity for the monks it means women are influential in preserving Buddhism.

Kirsch (1975, 1982) has argued that the fact that only Thai men can become monks means that only men can become teachers and preservers of Buddhism. Kirsch's analysis derives from an occupational pattern which follows a sexual division of labour in Thailand where women tend to focus on 'economic' type activities and seem more associated with the 'body' while men are in bureaucratic or 'political' type activities which are more associated with the 'mind'. Following this logic, Kirsch (1982) has interpreted that women are supposed to be involved in worldly attachments while men are believed to be more ready to abandon those attachments. In a similar vein, Darunee (1998) considers Buddhism has had negative consequences on Thai women. In traditional society, education was allowed only in the temple, so women could not have equal opportunities, and this limited women's choices. Thai women may have been disadvantaged because of Buddhism, which glorifies the motherhood role, hence constraining women to be in the household as their main responsibility (Darunee 1998; Darunee and Pandey 1991).

In contrast, some scholars have argued that Buddhism has actually supported and allowed women to have a strong position but this is still confined to the domestic sphere (Karim 1995). Women's nurturing role in offering daily food to monks is seen as reflecting women's diligence and active role to supporting religion as well as family (Keyes 1984). Keyes has argued that if in fact women play a great role in supporting the sustenance of Buddhism this indicates that women preserve Buddhism. Additionally, a study of women meditation teachers in Thailand by John Van Esterik (1996) has stated that the notion that women are inferior to men because of Buddhism is a cliché. He notes that this conclusion may be due to the fact that women cannot become monks. However, his study found that some women in Thailand have become religious leaders and interpreters of Buddhist lessons. These female meditation teachers have men as well as women followers. This role does not necessarily mean women can be liberated from religious constraints but it does show that women can be regarded as having a high status (to a certain extent) in Thai society.

### **Economic overview and women's participation in labour force**

From 55 informants, 31 mention they are from Chinese descent families. Thai citizens who have Chinese ancestry are people whose behaviour and values and structural position within Thai society remain quite distinct. Chinese descent people are reputed to be skilful in doing business and successful entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, not all Chinese Thais are rich and successful, and can also be working class poor (Bao 2005), small merchants and working in service occupations in the public sector (Szanton 1990). To analyse family gendered politics among Chinese-Thai informants, patriarchy appears influential particularly among female informants who are daughters from Chinese descent families. For example, a Chinese-Thai daughter who has married to a Chinese-Thai husband is expected to be an 'inside assistant' of her husband to help the family business (Bao 2005) while the husband can benefit from his wife's cheap and reliable labour.

The post-1932 period was seen as a crucial point in exercising power relations between women and men in the country. The women's movement also emerged, and women were given the right to vote for the first time. The movement did not function on its own but as part of a general democratic campaign (Amara 1997). It

was regarded as élite-women led but nonetheless crucial in raising awareness of women's role in Thai society (Varunee 2002). As social and economic transformation has enabled women to participate more actively in paid work, have gender relations remained unchanged? Do women continue to be submissive to men in most cases? Darunee (1998) has argued that analysing gender relations from a patriarchal perspective may not always be applicable to Thai society. Darunee argues that gender relations should be considered as a process, and Asian women should not be considered as a universal group who are being suppressed by the social system and economic development. In this respect I aim to contribute to the debates by considering how and in what ways gender relations in one particular group, the Thai urban middle class, have been influenced by the recent technological changes in the organisation of work and Thailand's increasing integration into the global economy.

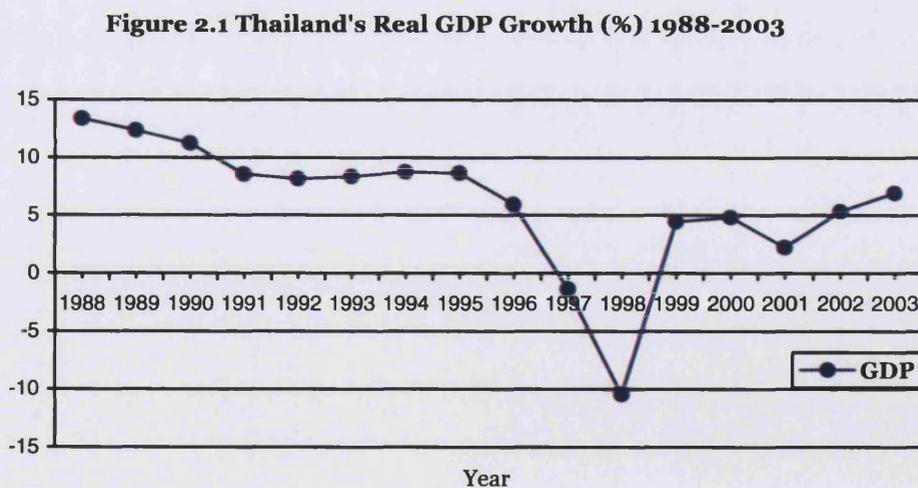
The launch of the first five year Social and Economic Plan in 1961 could be said to mark the turning from subsistence economy to industrialisation in Thailand. Outward economic growth or export-oriented policy created robust economic growth in the next two decades, with annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth higher than 10 per cent in the late 1980s, but then decreasing in the early 1990s (Pasuk and Baker 1995; Warr 1993). From a high point of 13.3 per cent in 1988 the figure decreased to single digits in early 1990s, becoming negative during the crisis of the mid 1990s (see Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1).

**Table 2.1 Thailand's real GDP growth (per cent) 1988-2003**

Year	GDP Growth (%)	Year	GDP Growth (%)
1988	13.3	1996	5.9
1989	12.3	1997	-1.4
1990	11.2	1998	-10.5
1991	8.5	1999	4.4
1992	8.1	2000	4.8
1993	8.3	2001	2.2
1994	8.7	2002	5.3
1995	8.6	2003	6.9

Source: National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and Bank of Thailand (BOT)

**Figure 2-1 Thailand's Real GDP Growth**



Source: National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and Bank of Thailand (BOT)

Economic growth continued to be relatively strong until 1995. At its peak, Thailand was considered the fifth newly industrialising country after the success of the 'four tigers': Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan (Pasuk and Baker 1998; Warr 2000). Indeed, the World Bank (1993) named their success as 'East Asian Economic Miracles'. Thailand is said to have successfully penetrated international markets during the boom (Nabi and Shivakumar 2001). Thailand was an attractive country for foreign investment. Foreign investors tried to save costs by adopting the policy of sub-contracting lower-skilled labour intensive activities to local companies (Busakorn and Resurreccion 2003). Thus, Thailand's economic growth relied on export-oriented industrialisation, which was dependent on the country's comparative advantage in terms of cheap, labour intensive manufacturing. Nevertheless, the boom did not last for even a decade. In 1997, Thailand's dramatic economic growth collapsed abruptly. The economic crisis in 1997 resulted in a sharp fall in GDP with a record low of -10.5 in 1998. The National Economic and Social Development Board reports that the number of poor people increased from 11.8 per cent, to 13 per cent of the population, in the first quarter of 1996 (NESDB 1999). The GDP has gradually increased after 1998, as a consequence of increased investment leading to the growth of employment in manufacturing construction and health care but growth remains uneven and has not yet returned to the levels of the early 1990s (NESDB 1999). The interviews for this thesis took place in 2002 when the recovery slowly took off.

Thai women contributed significantly in manufacturing and in the service sector, as white collar workers, during the economic boom, leading to a high female labour force participation rate (Pasuk and Baker 1998).<sup>9</sup> It is not uncommon to see Thai women working in high executive positions in modern sectors such as finance and hotels. Thai women have been visible in high status positions in the public sphere for some time, leading foreign observers to conclude that Thai women have high status in society more generally (Darunee and Pandey 1997): this aspect will be discussed later in this chapter. Nevertheless, it is crucial to examine whether economic opportunities really bring about more negotiation power for women in the

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<sup>9</sup> Mills (1999) did an ethnographic research of Thai women in rural provinces who migrated to work in manufacturing sector in Bangkok before the economic crisis occurred. Mills research is significant in elaborating the extent to which the social structure in Thailand is dramatically affected by manufacturing employment. Migration of Thai male labour to work in Bangkok has always been important, but at some point, female migration overtook rate of men. This labour migration affects not only migrants themselves but families and the elderly who need to take care of young children contributing to rising tensions in Thai society.

family, particularly as women are expected to maintain traditional roles in the household and family.

Although Thai women's economic role can be traced back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Darunee and Pandey 1991; Mathana 1996) when they were left to take care of family farms while their husbands were away working for the crown, their role in the public sphere really expanded with industrialisation. During the 1980s to 2000, the female labour force participation rate in Thailand increased to nearly half of the total country's labour force as indicated in table 2.2.

**Table 2.2 Labour Force Participation Rate (LPR) 1980-2000**

Year	Total Labour Force (Millions)	Female Labour Force Participation Rate (% of total labour force)
1980	24	47
1990	32	47
1995	35	46
2000	37	46

*Source: Gender Statistics, the World Bank Group (2002)*

What this table shows is a noticeable increase in the overall size of the labour force, and that women maintained their proportionate share. In terms of economic participation, Thai women are relatively more active than women in South Asia. According to the World Employment Report (2004), countries in East Asia have the highest female labour rates when compared to the world. The report has also stated that in Thailand, more than 40 per cent of businesses are owned or operated by women, the highest proportion worldwide.

Thai women have contributed significantly to the growth of export earnings of the country. However, according to the study of changing women's economic roles, Mathana (1996) points out those woman workers are found mainly in labour intensive industry such as textiles and apparel which are regarded as being low-skill

and which pay low wages. During the period of economic growth increasing numbers of women migrated from rural areas to work in the industrial sector which provided more opportunities for self-autonomy and financial independence, albeit temporarily (Mills 1999). However, the migration of female labour is seen as having hidden costs to Thai society, because it makes women who remain in rural areas more marginalised, and family life can become more fragmented (Narong 1995; Lund and Panda 2000). Their migration to work in cities left the elderly to take care of their children, and women who cannot participate in manufacturing work feel left behind. On one hand, manufacturing jobs have temporarily created greater opportunity and freedom for rural women. On the other, it can create greater divisions between urban and rural areas. More job opportunities generate greater complexities for women in urban areas as well. With rising demands on white-collar professionals during the economic boom, Thai urban women made inroads into the labour market (Mathana 1996) thus expanding their opportunities. However, opportunities for women and men were not equal, as these highly educated women tended to participate only at middle-level management in corporations (Sunanta and Orose 1994). Increasing female participation in the labour force is not necessarily associated with the true socio-economic empowerment of women (ILO 2004). Economic opportunity may appear to increase resources and agency for women, but cultural and social factors need to be considered as well, to assess whether women are empowered or not (Kabeer 1999). In a study in 1996, Mathana argued that social norms in Thailand still require women to be the main care providers in households, reinforcing women's self-perception that their priority is in the domestic domain, where they can fulfil their roles as wives, mothers and homemakers. When the economic crisis came in 1997 men and women were affected differently. Women were affected in both a monetary and non-monetary way. During the crisis, the increasing price of food and commodities automatically meant people's wages were in relative decline and this resulted in great difficulties in maintaining household living standards for which women were primarily responsible (Busakorn and Resurreccion 2003). At the same time, men were disproportionately affected by unemployment, while women continued to work in the service and informal sectors. Thus – overall – the double burden on women intensified.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored different perspectives in analysing gender relations in Thailand. As gender relations are contested terrain, it has been discursively constructed in relation to the historical and socio-economic context of the country. I have traced from a historical perspective particularly during the 'civilising' and 'modernising' of the nation the extent to which Thai gendered identities were constructed. I demonstrated how the local context responded to the dominating western discourse of colonialism. The construction of distinctive gendered identities reflects how the script of gender was perpetuated on Thai women and men. In a way, gendered identities have been internalised among men and women and resulted in people controlling their identities and actions to conform to the normative expectations

Thai gender relations can be analysed from different perspectives. The main debates tend to rest on either patriarchal or high status of women. Perhaps it is hard to pin down from either perspective in analysing gender relations as the socio-economic context has also continually changed. I would argue for seeing gender from a situated context. In this research nevertheless the fact is that a majority of informants are ethnic-Chinese urban middle class in which family gendered politics are influenced by Confucianism. The resulting patriarchal relations are inevitably one of the dominant features of analysing gender.

Urban middle class Thai women have enjoyed increasing opportunities to have active agency in employment with the advent of 'modern' and 'career-orientated' identities. However, the image of modern womanhood can appear contradictory to the traditional ideology of the "good" woman. Polygamy, marriage, reproduction responsibilities, and domesticity are viewed as factors limiting women's choices in daily lives. Also these factors tend to be internalised within understandings of the 'good' woman. In contrast, Thai men are not encouraged to limit their sexuality and thus the double standard of sexuality between genders still prevails.

With socio-economic transformation derived from integration with the world economy and the wider spread of mass media since the 1960s, new gendered identities emerged. Economic opportunity may pave a way for gender re- negotiation and for women to assert agency. However, such choices are not freely exercised as an unequal gender structure persists in Thai society, especially in the area of

domestic responsibility, which is highly expected from women. The extent to which changing economy may give rise to new job opportunities for Thai women and men will be explored in the next chapter, especially from the new economy perspective which is the main focus of this research.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Analysing the New Economy – Thailand’s Perspective**

*“As traditional social identities gradually fade, the antagonisms between men and women over gender roles emerge in the very heart of the private sphere.”*

(Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995:2)

#### **Introduction**

In the last chapter, I set out various perspectives in analysing Thai gender relations. I have considered socio-economic changes in Thailand and the extent to which urban Thai women have gained economic opportunities from the country’s integration with the world economy. One of the social implications is the increased employment of women, together with normative changes in gender relations and in women’s expectations.

This chapter first discusses various conceptualisations of the new economy. Second, I introduce the definition of the new economy as used in this research. Third, I explore theories of individualisation and reflexive modernisation from feminist perspectives. I aim to consider the usefulness of these concepts developed by Western scholars, for understanding the new more flexible and feminised form of employment and changing gender relations in Thailand. Then, drawing upon findings from feminist empirical work, I will examine the impact of Internet based work on gender identities. Next, I examine gendered identities in the virtual world of cyberspace and ask whether gender will be challenged when the physical body disappears from the Internet. Finally, this chapter elaborates the ways in which Thailand has experienced the new economy, and outlines the implications for women’s economic role. The chapter aims to address individual opportunities as well as tensions when global processes intersect with local situations (Collier and Ong 2005) and to show how these interconnections and interactions have an uneven outcome on women and men’s lives.

### *Conceptualising the New Economy*

The new economy is a relatively new idea in the social sciences. A number of academics, futurists and journalists have developed different conceptualisations of the new economy, and the debate remains open. Some link together globalisation, the new economy, and ICTs, as ICTs foster increasing interconnections in the global economy. Various terms, for example, 'Information society', 'Network Society' (Castells 1996), 'Weightless Economy' (Quah 2003), 'New Economy' (Greenspan 1999; Carnoy 2000; Castells 2001) are related to this globalised phenomenon. The term new economy is *Setthakit Mai* in Thai and which refers to new innovation in the economic system which comprises a knowledge based economy, Information Technology (IT) and Bio-Technology (Department of Trade Negotiations 2001).

Generally, the new economy describes a new stage of capitalist development focused on high productivity sectors, based on new technologies. Alan Greenspan — the former chairman of the US Federal Reserve — has suggested that the new phase of the economy is characterised by high profit margins, increasing labour productivity yet a low rise of unit labour costs and low inflation (Greenspan 1999). Greenspan bases his interpretation on the fast pace of growth in the US between 1992 and 1999. He hypothesises that the combination of microprocessors, lasers, fibre optics and satellite technologies have supported growth in the US. Crucially, according to Greenspan, this combination has enhanced the potential rate of return, not only of new telecommunications investment, but also of many kinds of equipment utilising newer technologies. In terms of work and business, he notes that the accessibility of real time information, such as the use of the Internet, has allowed business to operate with low inventories. Greenspan's view reflects optimistic comments on the new economy; however pessimists voice concern about the precarious forms of new employment (Beck 2002; Sennett 1998) and their consequences for communities and everyday life (Carnoy 2000). Beck has indeed noted that the new forms of work will be 'feminised' (2000: 64) and consist of combinations of part-time work, casual contracts, unpaid work and voluntary activity for the public good in addition to a reduced number of more standard careers (ibid.:92). One of the main characters of the new economy is the expansion of a range of flexible forms of work, one illustration being the owners of and workers in dotcom businesses and other forms of web based work such as graphic designers who frequently work independently and are not regulated by traditional working hours or by long-term contracts. Data

from informants in this research presented in Chapter 5, suggests that these more flexible forms of work are both liberating and constraining

Castells (2001) emphasises the influential role of the Internet and the emergence of the new economy. He suggests that the swift development and expansion of economic transactions via the Internet has encouraged a much faster flow of business than the traditional system. Castells notes that using the Internet as a primary tool for communication and for processing information assists firms to adopt a 'network' form of organisation. Additionally the capacity of new communication technology to transcend time and place enables work to become more mobile and feasible at a greater variety of times and places. With these changes, he has suggested the creation of flexible employment practices in the networking business model in which work is no longer dependent upon specific location but expands over time and space. It is predicted that in the near future organisation men will be 'out' while flexible women will be 'in' the labour market because of the development of these more flexible forms of work (Castells 2001:95). As the new forms of work in the new economy tend to be self-employed and unregulated by the traditional labour market, workers are likely to be working in a flexible way. Female labour may be more attracted to this new form of work as it may enable paid work to be combined with household responsibility. These changes pave the way for unprecedented levels of female employment and gender neutral forms of work that may lead to an end of patriarchy (Castells 1997).<sup>10</sup> On the one hand I agree with Castells that the new Information Technology, particularly the Internet will lead to more flexible forms of work and that will give rise to more women's inroad into paid employment. The growing labour market flexibility has motivated higher female labour force participation and employment; however Standing (1999) cautions that this will result in diverse forms of insecurity such as lower paid and subcontract work.

On the other hand, I question Castells' hypothesis from a Southeast Asian perspective, where women have actively participated in the labour market

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<sup>10</sup> Castells (1997) has argued that the massive inroad of women in paid work, particularly in the industrialised countries has resulted in the transformation of women's work and the transformation of women's consciousness. The growth of the international economy, informational economy including changes in reproduction technologies have supported women's economic participation in the labour market and thus increase their bargaining power with men and thus decreasing men's domination as providers of the family. Castells has noted that the process of these transformations, though will not be achieved easily, but in the end will lead to the undoing of the patriarchal family (Castells 1997: 135-136).

throughout the 1960s, and during export-oriented industrialisation in the 1970s and 1980s (Ng 2004). I consider whether the new and more flexible forms of work that characterise the new economy are gender neutral and likely to contribute to the end of patriarchy as Castells suggested (1997). I question if ICTs can really empower<sup>11</sup> women, from a developing country perspective, particularly in a situation where social expectations place women in a submissive role and where women still have overwhelming responsibility for caring and homemaking. It is often assumed that participation in paid employment, especially in the non-agricultural sector is an indicator of women's empowerment, as for example in the Millennium Development Goals (UNDP 2003). Thai women have actively participated in paid employment and Thai female economic activity rate is 73.1 per cent or 85 per cent of male rate. However, the active participation in the labour force has not really transformed gender relations.

In relation to the advent of the new economy, Castells (2001) nevertheless is not completely positive, he is much less optimistic than Greenspan. He has pointed out the widening divisions in the new economy:

**“The differentiation between Internet-haves and have-nots adds a fundamental cleavage to existing sources of inequality and social exclusion in complex interaction that appears to increase the gap between the promise of the Information Age and its bleak reality for many people around the world.”**

(Castells 2001: 247).

His analysis implies that the Internet may not actually lead to more equality. In fact, it can lead to greater differences, a larger digital divide (Quah 1996; Loader 1998). Similarly, Quah (1996 2003) highlights the way the new economy, based on the expansion of knowledge or weightless goods, generates widening social and spatial divisions. A 'Gender divide', which refers to inequality of access to the Internet and the pattern of use of new technology between women and men, is another aspect that has been noted amidst the growth of the new economy (Kenney, Wellman and Klement 2003).

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<sup>11</sup> Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as the ability to exercise choice which is considered in three related aspects: resources (pre-conditions), agency (process), and achievement (outcomes). Resources refer to material resources as well as social relationships such as family, market and community. Agency means the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Resources and agency can contribute to capacity for people to make choices about their lives. The definition of empowerment is however still debatable and flexible. In policy discourse the definition is left unclear but Kabeer (1999) suggests that the three factors comprising resources, agency and achievements are indivisible in empowerment.

Firstly, I will consider Perrons' (2004) definition of the new economy. According to Perrons, the new economy refers to the global economy in the contemporary era which is greatly influenced by the exponential growth of the new ICTs resulting in closer connections between countries. She has also noted that the increasing integration of the world economy is associated with unequal gender relations and tends to reinforce spatial and social divisions. In parallel with Perrons, I understand the new economy as in the current era in which global capitalism has driven the interconnection among different countries in the world at a faster pace. The development of ICTs and especially the Internet are the main driving force behind this interconnection and thus paved the way for each local country to integrate closer with the global. Workers in the new economy will not only refer to the ICTs users, Internet users, IT professionals and or technology experts, but also individuals from different backgrounds such as domestic servants who take care of the domestic life of the workers. These people help in maintaining and generating activities in the new economy. They also include family members and partners of new economy workers. My focus in this research however is with the Internet professionals and their social relations within work and in the family.

I aim at examining the new economy from socio-economic perspective and exploring experiences of individuals who participate in the new economy. Categories of informants in this thesis can be classified into two main groups comprising: full-time employees and self-employed individuals. Self-employed refers to individuals who do not earn a fixed salary and who can be divided into two sub-groups: entrepreneurs and freelancers. As the term 'entrepreneur' signifies wide and diverse meanings depending on the context of its uses, I will illuminate the definition of the term for this thesis in Chapter 4. Generally, for the Thai context, entrepreneurship has long been a main engine of Thai economic growth. The closest term to entrepreneur is *phu prakob kan* in Thai which means business starters or business owners. This Thai term has included owners of small and medium-sized enterprise, which make up of 80 per cent of Thailand's economy, and includes mainly shopkeepers, hairdressers and small manufacturers. As the informants in this thesis are full-time employees or dotcom/e-commerce owners, I will group the latter as 'entrepreneur' or '*phu prakob kan*'. The two terms will be interchangeable in this thesis. To categorise informants clearly into separate and distinct groups is difficult, as some full-time employee informants may also be dotcom entrepreneurs. To solve this problem, I decided to group informants who have a fixed income into full-time employees, and then note their extra income. The details of all informants are shown

in Table 4.6 in Chapter 4. Notably, the Thai commercial class is mostly made up of Thais of Chinese Thai origin and a majority of informants were from Chinese-Thai families. The Confucian belief system has been influential in their drive for business and also in gender relations, which I have discussed in Chapter 2.

This research examines the gender implications of the new economy – specifically the use of the Internet in paid work – from a developing country perspective. Although Thailand's context differs from the West in terms of economic modernisation and social processes, as the new economy has expanded at the global scale, I will examine the extent to which these changes resonate in the Thai context. In some respects this study responds to the suggestion that it would be interesting to analyse ideas about the second modernity and reflexive modernisation from a non-Western context:

“Naturally this European constellation must be enlarged and reassessed by studying the effects of second modernity on non-European constellations, where the dynamic of reflexive modernisation displays its effects not on first modern societies but rather on the distorted constellations of post-colonialism. Different non-European routes to and through second modernity still have to be described, discovered, compared and analysed.”

(Beck, Bonss and Lau 2003: 7)

The case of the new economy and its socio-economic aspect from Thailand can be a modest contribution to the insight of 'epochal' change proposed by Beck (1992) by integrating with reflexive modernisation and second modernity theories. Meanwhile, the theory of individualisation (Beck 2002) has suggested that as individuals are set free from industrial society and the strict form of Fordist labour processes, women and men will be able to choose about their own living or become biographers of their own lives. I ask whether the emphasis of free social agents suggested by the individualisation thesis will happen and what will be implications for gender relations in Thailand's case? Before moving on to the analysis of gender relations, I will explore the theories of reflexive modernisation and individualisation as developed by western writers.

## **Theoretical Perspectives in analysing the New Economy**

Broadly speaking, reflexive modernisation is a term for the transformation of industrial society, through which people are freed from traditional social structures, and become able to construct their own biographies reflexively. This reflexive modernisation corresponds to the 'risk society' in which Beck (1992) describes how individuals may have more choices but not necessarily more agency. Beck has noted that although individuals tend to have greater personal autonomy, corresponding to social transformations, this may also lead to more constraints. In fact individuals may not have the freedom to choose. Thus, this research analyses the new economy in Thailand, and considers if any of the western ideas relating to the new economy – reflexive modernisation and individualisation – are relevant to the Thai context. The specific focus is on employees and entrepreneurs working with the Internet as an illustration of a contemporary form of employment, and explores their social relations within work and the home and in particular the gender aspects of these relations.

There have also been important changes in the social relations of everyday life, which are encapsulated by the concept of individualisation. This term was developed by Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), but Giddens (1994) has developed parallel ideas. The individualisation thesis has been developed primarily in western contexts, and the main argument is that an increasing numbers of individuals are pressured to reshape their lifestyle choices. These social theorists argue that in contemporary times global and local contexts have been transformed, individuals have been unleashed from the constraints of tradition. They refer to this situation as reflexive modernisation. But this loss of tradition results in more uncertainties in terms of self and the private sphere of life. Clearly, there are parallels with the new economy literature already discussed, in terms of new forms of work. This section reviews these ideas and considers the extent to which they apply to the Internet professionals in Thailand, particularly the ways in which they organise their daily lives and especially their gender relations.

According to Beck (1992, 2002), individualisation is 'epochal' in bringing about transformation at the global level. From the western point of view, individualised society means that it is necessary to *seek biographical solutions to systematic contradictions* (Beck 2002: xxii). In referring to gender, Beck has argued that traditional society and modern society relied heavily on inequality in the family.

With reflexive modernisation or the second modernity however, men and women need to constantly renegotiate gender relations in their daily lives thus leading to tension and ambivalent situations. Employment has given rise to opportunities for women to work against the old kind of dependence thus increasing their ability to assert their rights and demands (Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Does 'individualisation' mean women and men will be equal in the labour market and enjoy gender equality?

Beck has strongly emphasised that "individuals become actors, builders, jugglers, stage managers of their own biographies and identities and also of their social links and networks" (Beck 2002:23). Daughters are currently leading different patterns of life from their parents, especially from their mothers. *"This gap between the generations requires young women to make their own projects and actions, to work out their own ideas about the future, with little support from any model or tradition."* (Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 59). In some respects, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's argument may also carry weight in the Thai case, in which daughters are pursuing different life trajectories than their mothers, but to what extent this leads to a more fundamental change in gender relations is questionable. In Thailand's case, women have been economically active in the labour market for some time, but with the changing forms of work with the ICTs and the Internet, women are able to work more independently and so it is important to consider this has led to changing gender relations in the household. New job opportunities can offer a break away from family traditions especially among Chinese-Thai families. Female and male informants in this research from Chinese-Thai families appear to enjoy being dotcom entrepreneurs and they emphasise that it offers a new job opportunity in case they do not want to inherit their parents' business. From this aspect, the advent of the new economy has opened up another option in terms of work and enables informants opportunities to construct their own working lives. The accounts in Chapter 7 will emphasise the extent to which the current generation of women and men in Thailand have encountered different life choices in parallel with Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's ideas and the extent to which new opportunities and risks coexist in contemporary societies. These different trajectories between generations may highlight the social perspectives of the new economy especially its gender relations.

## *Gender Perspective and the New Economy*

The contemporary global economic transformation has resulted in more women in paid work and flexible forms of work, and it is necessary to examine the extent to which the increased employment of women affect gender relations and women's expectations. As Thailand has now integrated with the new economy and Thai women have been economically active, I will draw upon Western feminists critical studies of the contemporary global capitalism and examine in relation to the Thai context.

According to a number of Anglo-American feminists, Beck (1992, 2002)'s arguments reflect changes in terms of less-structured lifestyles comprising both new employment forms, and new types of personal relationships that are less constrained by tradition. However these assumptions may not automatically lead to a dismantling of gender. Crompton (2002) has argued that while it is true that the West in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is characterised by the increasing employment of women, changes in gender relations and in women's expectations, women's participation in the labour market remains clustered in lower paid occupations. Moreover, women continue to be expected to be responsible for the domestic and caring work. According to Crompton, employment of married women is held accountable for the instability of the family, which is indicated by higher rates of divorce and single parenthood, as well as decreasing fertility. These ideas also apply in Thailand, and the findings of Chapter 7 indicate that despite women enjoying more opportunities by working independently, this has not necessarily led to a transformation in gender relations. Women may be able to exploit new opportunities and a flexible schedule between supporting their families and maintaining their own paid work; they may not necessarily have more 'personal time' for themselves.

However, Crompton notices that the pattern of women's continuing caring responsibilities is not static. A cross-country research project in Britain, Norway and France has shown that male managers can also be responsible for caring, but if they do their careers will be affected (Crompton 2001). The key aspect of this study by Crompton is that occupational differences are more significant than national difference. She finds that for managers – the bankers in her study – caring responsibilities carried out by men or women had a more negative effect on their careers than it did for professional workers, specifically doctors. This finding has

implications for this research in that the Internet does allow people to organise their work more flexibly, and so maintain a career even with caring responsibilities. The material in Chapter 7 also highlights the role of domestic servants in alleviating tension in gender relations among urban middle class. This finding in my research has echoed Muttarak (2004) that domestic workers ease female employers' responsibility between the public and private arenas. The domestic servants do not only alleviate the burden in dual earning households, they have also facilitated a middle class lifestyle for their employers. Muttarak has argued that this pattern of middle class families hiring domestic servants mean the employers are free from a reproductive burden, thus having free time for leisure activities and reinforcing the class parity. In this extent, I would argue that the availability of domestic servants help shoulder some burden from female informants, but married women still feel responsible for the domestic domain and thus they do not really free themselves from the domestic role, which is associated with female identity. Female employers may not need to do reproductive tasks by themselves but they still do feel obliged to monitor the harmony of the household.

A number of aspects of reflexive modernisation can be found in smaller scale businesses, accentuating the ways in which women can enjoy a greater degree of freedom through paid work, but the traditional gender division of labour is still reproduced. In a study of micro-businesses in the Northeast of England, Baines and Wheelock (2000) witnessed different layers of masculinity and femininity among family members in the businesses. In the case of 'sharing' the division of labour between husbands and wives who own the business jointly, though men share some 'female' tasks, it does not mean the sharing will be equal. The research has shown that both women and men enjoy a greater level of personal freedom and opportunities compared to formal employment. According to Baines and Wheelock, a number of entrepreneurs feel more freedom to construct their own lives, which corresponds with ideas about reflexive modernity. For example, business owners feel that they have more 'options' than their parents' generation by working independently thus reflecting the character of 'reflexivity' proposed by both Beck and Giddens. The ability to choose to have their own careers is regarded as an achievement. During the difficult economic situation in the Northeast of England, people learned to build up their own businesses, rather than work in formal employment. This option clearly offers more flexibility for women according to Baines and Wheelock (2000), but the tensions still remain: women are expected to maintain their traditional housework role.

In Australian society, reproductive responsibilities appear a challenge for dual income families. Australian men face constraints in terms of contributing to housework, because they are socially expected to put more priority on careers. According to a study of Australian managers and their aspirations at work, Wajcman and Martin (2002) have argued that though men say they want to do more caring responsibilities, their careers are in effect supported by their wives who take care of the domestic domain. In contrast, women managers tend not to have partners who take responsibility for domestic arrangements, and this limits their careers. Women working full time in organisations may find time management more difficult than those owning small businesses. Wajcman and Martin (ibid) have suggested that men's decisions to work hard for now reflect their life choice and a legitimate trade-off, which in their view also contributes to fatherhood. The point is that for men to be a good father is more to provide a high income for the family, rather than spending time with their children. According to their research, men can combine the 'private' sphere of family and work quite comfortably within their career path. They do not seem to experience any sense of guilt as a consequence of not being able to spend time with their children, or to have time for the family. They rely on their dependent 'wives at home' to take care of the domestic responsibilities. Men's careers continue to be underpinned by their wives support in the domestic domain. The data in my research suggests that married men understand that their main role is to generate income and be the family ricewinner. Spending time with the children during the weekend appears as the only activity they can think of when I asked male informants whether they have contributed domestically at all. Among young cohabiting couples, the male participant seems aware of their contribution to the domestic role, and seems determined to do it when the family does not hire any domestic servants. Notably, for this research, men's contribution in domestic work happens when the couples work at home and their work schedule is not fixed while their work demand is relatively flexible.

In Australia, the situation for women with careers or even ordinary jobs is much more complex. Combining paid work with the roles of wife, mother and domestic worker is rarely harmonious. Women often feel torn between their roles, never having time to do any one as thoroughly as they would like, resulting in guilt and also some ambivalence in terms of their identity. Wajcman and Martin (2002) find that, for women, combining housework and caring responsibilities can be fulfilling in terms of meeting motherhood demands. These satisfactions have indicated that caring remains intrinsic to female gender identity, which suggests that

individualisation may be experienced differently by women and men (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Although career aspirations of women and men are quite similar, gender seems not to be neutral in the world of work. Despite new forms and patterns of employment, the private sphere may be highly gendered and have consequences in the public sphere in terms of choosing careers (Wajcman and Martin 2002).

The weakening of social structures has liberated women and men in terms of their choices of careers. In the private sphere, however, the traditional gender division of labour is still highly persistent, though less rigid. Crompton (2002) however points out that changing gender roles and attitudes regarding gender may bring about social transformation at the workplace, as well as within the family. Additionally, attitudes of both genders should be taken into consideration, rather than assuming that they are fixed. The above discussion reflects the ways in which changing global capitalism has affected the gender division of labour and makes individuals life more complicated but interconnected in the West. This ambivalent situation for women in the West may be similar in Thailand particularly as the world of work is following trends in economic globalisation in which work is more flexible.

The findings from empirical work by Anglo-American feminists (Baines and Wheelock 2000; Crompton 2001, 2002; Gill 2002; Wajcman and Martin 2002; Perrons 2003) have all shed new light on another aspect of the new economy and flexible work. This viewpoint is rather different from that of Castells (1996, 1997, 2001), who suggested that new technology and new forms of work would lead to a social transformation in gender relations. Feminist research on gender identity and the gender division of labour appears to counter the claim of the more liberated self put forward by the reflexive modernisation thesis. These contradictions are important in examining globalisation in the local context. My research echoes concerns about gender identities, which appear to become both more contradictory and more ambivalent as modernity and tradition mingle.

#### *New Forms of Work and its Gendered Implications:*

Global capitalism has been seen as an outcome of neo-liberal free market policy. Beck (2000) has argued that the transformation of the world economy by rapid technological changes and the neo-liberal free market system results in a transition in the world of work from a work society to a knowledge society. In parallel, other

scholars also note the common character of work in the global economy: flexibility (Castells 2001; Carnoy 2000). The ICTs and the Internet have created an opportunity for individuals and firms to work online, and consequently which has lifted temporal and spatial constraints of working time leading to a flexible pattern of employment by time. They also suggest other forms of flexibility for example by contract. In particular employment the idea of 'job for life' (Beck 2000: 2), a predictable career pattern and working full-time for a given employer in the private or public sector is vanishing (Castells 2001: 95). Rather, new forms of work emerge in different patterns, such as self-employed, part-time work, temporary work, subcontracting and consulting, are growing especially in more developed economies (Carnoy 2000). For this thesis, I understand a new form of work created by the new economy is flexibility. The ability to initiate one's own dotcom business and being self-employed appears an attractive character of the new economy for informants in this research. Also, the ability to work online and not have a separate office is also appealing to the informants. These are some reasons stated by informants when they decided to leave their full-time job. However, being self-employed means uncertain income and in this respect is different from participating in formal employment. Overall, online work in the new economy seems to generate new employment opportunities, but to what extent has it influenced gender relations?

Working with ICTs and the Internet can extend working opportunities and transcend the conventional temporal and spatial boundaries of work, increasing the number of paid work opportunities. Perrons (2003) examines working patterns from a gender perspective in an empirical research project focusing on new media in Brighton and Hove in England. She found that although work in this sector increased opportunities for women, traditional gender divisions persist. Perrons found that in terms of hours at work, women and men tend to work long flexible hours, however domestic responsibilities predominantly belong to women. The uncertain nature and flow of work, the need to update knowledge and skills together with the intrinsic satisfaction derived from the work itself also contribute to long working hours. One of the reasons people moved into this sector, especially entrepreneurial activity, was to have greater control over work and life.

New technology has permitted greater flexibility in terms of working hours and locations, thus allowing workers with caring responsibilities to have access to paid work by working from home. This may be a crucial beginning to redress gender inequality. Despite this, the traditional constraints of time arise from the uneven

division of domestic work and caring that remain. This reproduction of gender divisions is shown again in a research project on new media and gender across six countries in Europe, conducted by Gill (2002). The new media sector is still characterised by a number of traditional aspects and stereotypical patterns of gender inequality, even though it is often believed to provide informality, autonomy and flexibility. Moreover, new forms of gender inequality emerge. The informality of jobs in this sector generated problems for women, resulting in new gendered forms of inequality such as inappropriate sexualised interaction and sexist assumptions. Gill's study has found that the absence of clear guidelines in evaluating work in this sector make the process of securing contracts informal, and work was distributed according to personal connections. This way of getting jobs by 'who you know, not what you know' causes problems for both women and men, but women tend to experience it as a form of gendered exclusion, representing the 'old boys network' (ibid:82). My research has shown that networking is very important for informants to get a job. A network can include colleagues from their previous office. Word of mouth appears an efficient strategy to get a job for informants. Women informants tend to feel subordinate to men counterparts when they need to compete to get a project and this has affected their income strategies, which will be illustrated in Chapter 5. According to Gill's research, when both genders participate in the labour market, inequality remains, and women tend to gain fewer jobs than men. Additionally, women tend to earn less than men in this sector. More importantly, women are more likely to work from home, despite having as strong a preference as their male peers for working from a rented studio or workspace.

The discussion of feminist empirical work in the West above has shown that traditional gender divisions of labour persist, despite changing forms of work. I will examine the implications of the Internet and interconnection between global and local by drawing on my empirical work in Thailand. Given that the ICTs are moving the global and local closer together, the context could be similar, but with differences. The traditional concepts of motherhood and dutiful daughters persist in parallel with the pressure to be more individualised and independent.

Furthermore, feminist empirical studies on the new economy, new media, and small businesses in the West show that work in this sector is not gender neutral. The new economy could have positive effects for individual women, even if – in general – they occupy more subordinate positions (Perrons 2003; Gill 2002; Baines and Wheelock 2000; Wajcman and Martin 2002; Crompton and Brockmann 2003;

Walby 2002). In Asia, research on the use of the Internet by Japanese women has found that married women can have more financial independence through jobs they have created on the Internet (Onosaka 2003). This financial opportunity is seen as a weapon for women to improve their status and situations. However, in South Korea, women often work with computers at home, and the impact is less clear, because the work can be carried out alongside and in addition to domestic work, for which they retain primary responsibility. Nevertheless, using the Internet for work at home has created a sort of independence for South Korean women (Na 2001). Using the Internet at work can permit workers to experience communications in the virtual world of cyberspace, which is thus different from the real world. Genders are displayed obviously in the offline world of work; on the other hand identities of users can be hidden or disguised in cyberspace. The next section considers how gender disguise can be used as a strategy to counter perceived gender prejudices.

### *Virtual World and 'Cyborg'*

The Internet is considered a potential tool to bring about a new gender neutral form of communication (Barlow 1996), and so widen opportunities for women (Harcourt 1999; Escobar and Harcourt 2003). Communications in cyberspace are virtual, not bound by physical characteristics, but rather they construct new and multiple identities. This means that 'everyone may be anyone' because cyberspace bypasses the here and now. People who send e-mails or communicate in chat rooms can understand one another without face-to-face communications. This is considered one of the great advantages of the Internet, because women users, who tend to face more constraints in the real world, may use it to open up new opportunities.

In '*A Manifesto for Cyborgs*', Haraway (1985) has argued that the hybridity of machine and organism have led to cyborgs. She notes "*cyborg writing is about power to survive not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalised identities.*" (Haraway 1985:217). The above argument suggests that the combination between machine and human organisms enables users to tell their own stories and create the power to survive amidst changes in global capitalism. Individuals can overcome the dualisms deeply embedded in social relations –for example, self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, and male/female. In the case of

women, Haraway has emphasised that the ability to communicate, enables them to assert their own identities in the capitalist system, which is male dominant. Haraway makes these remarks in her 1985 article that predated the explosion of the Internet by ten years – perhaps the Internet is the ultimate cyborg.

If the hybridism of human and machine enables users to have more communication power, and enables them to write their own stories, as Haraway maintains, will the Internet be the ultimate illustration of this? The Internet may represent a transformative spatiality where gender identities can be more fluid (Consalvo and Paasonen 2002). To what extent do people's real physical identity influence their cyber identity, and – conversely – how the identity that people construct in and through cyberspace affects their real identity.

### *Internet and Gendered Identities*

How, and in what way, does gender matter on the Internet? Consalvo and Paasonen (2002) have asked if gender is of any great importance in cyberspace. This question derives from the fact that the Internet represents an alternative realm of communication that potentially may be more gender neutral and distinctive from the real world. According to *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* by Barlow (1996), cyberspace is a new home of mind, hence allowing all to communicate freely. He stated that

“...Cyberspace consists of transactions, relationships, and thought itself, arrayed like a standing wave in the web of our communications. Ours is a world that is both everywhere and nowhere, but it is not where bodies live. We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity...”

[Barlow (1996)]

If the Internet is not a place where bodies live, does this mean gender (and race, class, nationality, age, status) is irrelevant when it comes to the Internet communications? Barlow argues that there is a free flow of thought in cyberspace, with few 'real world' constraints. He also suggests that cyberspace has facilitated user's multiple identities, so that online identities are distinctive from off-line embodied power.

Has the Internet allowed people to be free from the real world? If so, can gender neutrality be attained in cyberspace? Barlow's statement has been criticised as neo-liberal (Eisenstein 1998; Paasonen 2002). They have argued that cyber discourse is connected to American neo-liberalism, which prioritises freedom over equality. For Eisenstein (1998), cyber discourse, on the one hand deals with the possibility of eliminating time and space limitations, or embodiment. On the other hand cyber discourse is very much dependent upon the reproduction and enforcement of economic and political power which reinforce existing structures and privilege. She asserts that cyber freedom increases economic inequality. Eisenstein believes that it is an illusion of 'cyberfantasy' to assume that power relations are absent from the Internet. She emphasises that *"because cyberspace is already colonised by corporatist interests, pre-existing racial, sexual, and gender inequalities are complexly rewired."* (Eisenstein 1998: 70). Though cyber discourse seems to provide new freedom, in reality large corporations with control over financial transactions and global production dominate the world order; cyber discourse has not yet become the centre of power. In addition, the engagement of those powers with cyberspace will even make social relations at global and local levels more complicated. Thus, while cyberspace represents a new location of escape, promise and benefits, many people are still excluded from cyberspace, and do not gain any benefit. In a similar vein, Paasonen (2002) has argued that identities still matter in text-based communications in cyberspace even though bodies may be invisible. She has argued that social, economic or power relations still appear in cyberspace, although the emphasis on freedom and possibility in some writings understates their significance. No Internet users are entirely free from gender, race and class (Paasonen 2002).

These views have represented two aspects of the Internet in relation to social relations and gender identities. Communications in cyberspace are expected or believed to offer a new land of freedom free of gender that hides who you actually are (Barlow 1996). It allows users, particularly women, to rewrite their lives (Haraway 1985), and contest the boundary of gendered identities (Harcourt 1999). On the other hand, Eisenstein (1998) and Paasonen (2002) foresee the recreation and reproduction of existing social relations in cyberspace, making it even more complex. Though cyberspace communication does not really need a body, your identity outside cyber discourse still has an influence on your identity online. Embodiment is essential for identity; the embodiment is located and expressed socially and culturally (Butler 1999).

On the positive side, the Internet enables users to communicate beyond their own gender boundaries. 'Real' and 'virtual' worlds can still be interconnected. Turkle (1995: 9) has argued that cyberspace is now part of our daily lives: *"when we read our electronic mail or send postings to an electronic bulletin board or make an airline reservation over a computer network, we are in cyberspace"*. With these activities going on everyday, people (who have access to the Internet) have their own virtual communities, have access to new contacts with people around the world, and with whom they may feel emotionally close but may have never seen physically before. She has also noted that cyberspace has made us reconsider the nature of our sexuality, the formation of communities and our own identities. The Internet allows invention and re-invention of one's self as one travels in cyberspace. It generates 'floating' identities; identities independent from their 'root' identity – that based on the conventional self (Stone 1995: 2-3). She has noted that 'floating' identities are fluid and changeable, far beyond the 'root' or the 'real' identity of individuals. The computer network has rendered multiple personalities possible, which may be the opposite of the established self. In this case, the multiple personality is an Internet communicator, which is irrelevant to the character of a single body. The body may sit at a computer screen somewhere, but the environment of socialisation occurs in cyberspace, which can have no links to that body (Stone 1995:43).

The above arguments, of Turkle (1995) and Stone (1995), suggest that cyberspace is a new environment which allows flexible identities, in which anyone can become another irrespective of their physical bodies. This may suggest that frequently in online communications users hide their gender and identity from one another. Therefore, in cyberspace, being men or women may not be important anymore. Both scholars have asserted that cyberspace enables fluidity of the self, and envisages increasing multiplicity of identity. Additionally, the Internet is considered a tool that can potentially provide direct communications between like minds. This enables those people to bypass male-dominated media and allows them to talk without gatekeeper's interruptions (Hawthorne and Klein 1999). These scholars have argued that the Internet allows like minds to meet across cultures, and between people of different social backgrounds, because they first meet as minds. Later, they can begin to disclose the different characters of their identities (age, sex, country, culture, religion, race, sexuality and ability, etc).

Stone (1995) and Turkle (1995) note that both genders may be able to swap or transform their identities regardless of their physical bodies. Turkle (1995) has also

called one of her chapters '*Tinysex and Gender Trouble*'. This corresponds with the gender performativity theory in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1999). Butler has argued that gender is a performance, it is not actually who we are universally. Nevertheless, it does not mean we can express identities freely because gender performativity is not a singular act, but derived from continual and repetitive actions sustained over time.<sup>12</sup> Butler has noted that what we take to be an internal character of ourselves is the same thing as what we expect and show through certain bodily acts. She has also emphasised that it would be a mistake if the 'internality' of the psyche of an individual were taken for granted. Butler argues for the importance of how one projects oneself, and that projection is conveyed through gestures and actions.

Women may feel subordinate or less competent than their male counterparts, and cyberspace may allow more room for multiple identities, where women can change their characters according to who they are dealing with. To what extent does the projection of self affect identity on the Internet? If gender performativity is dependent upon certain situations or environments, does this indicate that cyberspace is a land without gender boundaries because there is no physical contact between users on the Internet? They can appear to be anyone at any particular time. To consider if this is possible and if gender neutrality can be achieved in cyberspace, the cultural context of users should be taken into account. With exponential growth of the Internet, I will examine implications of its use from global perspective and link with the Thai context.

## **Dividing and Gendering the Internet Uses**

The growth of ICTs is seen as closely interlinked with globalisation as stated in the Human Development Report 2001 "*Today's technological transformation are intertwined with another transformation – globalisation – and together they are*

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<sup>12</sup> Butler footnotes in *Gender Trouble* (1999, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition) that this notion of ritual dimension of performativity is allied with the notion of the *habitus* in Pierre Bourdieu's work. This is what she only realises after she wrote the text in the first edition. I have discussed this point in Chapter 2 by drawing upon gender performativity and *habitus* concept by Bourdieu (1992, 2001). *Habitus* has emphasised that an agent cannot act freely but living under structure which is done systematically. In this case, *habitus* refers to social construction of differences between sexes which tend to allow men to have symbolic value over women.

*creating a new paradigm: the network age*" (UNDP 2001: 27). This assumption by UNDP seems in correspondence with Castells' suggestion of the growth of the 'network society' (1996).

The World Employment Report 2001 by the ILO has suggested that the emerging communications revolution has the potential to transform the world of work, yet with uncertain outcomes. The report suggests that ICTs provide more accessible opportunities to start up firms because of their greater transparency and efficiency, which results in lower transaction costs. Furthermore, it indicates that Internet-based outsourcing and the search for alternative suppliers save enterprises in business-to-business (B2B) trade between 10 per cent and 25 per cent of their process costs, depending upon the industry and location. Thus digital flow of information is replacing transactions that were previously time-consuming and more expensive. For example, in the US, media and advertising can save 10-15 per cent and health care can save 5 per cent. However, the removal of certain entry barriers does not necessarily guarantee the success of start up firms. According to the ILO (2001) the number of start-up businesses in the US grew tremendously in 1998-1999, but only 600 from thousands of Internet-based firms made the transition to public ownership or became a well-established firm. However, one of the characteristics of the new economy and the Internet is that it is possible to be a small firm and continue to exist as a small firm.

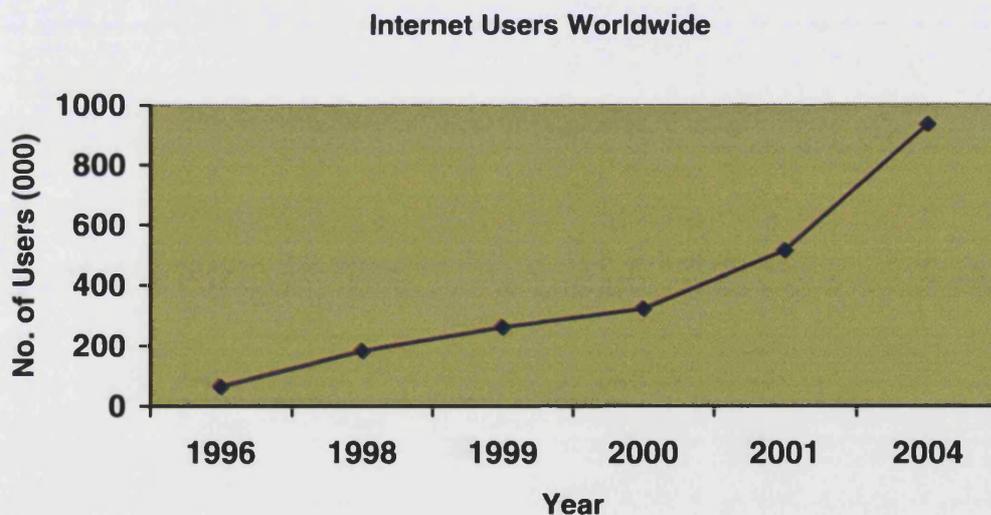
The growth of the Internet together with economic globalisation makes people in different parts of the world increasingly share the same experiences, understanding and practices (Pearson 2000). As indicated in Table 3.1, users of the Internet over the world have grown 8.4 times during 1996 to 2001. In 2000, there were over 200 countries connected to the Internet. However, expansion has been uneven. According to a 10-year study of the Internet gaps, leading Internet users are in USA, UK, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, China and Mexico. These countries represent 68 per cent of the global Internet population, while only 10 per cent of the world's population is connected to the Internet (CIA 2003).

**Table 3.1: Internet Users Worldwide**

Year	Millions
1996	61
1998	180
1999	259
2000	320
2001	513
2004*	934

Source: Computer Industry Almanac Inc (CIA) \*=expected

**Figure 3-1: Internet Users Worldwide**



Source: Computer Industry Almanac Inc (2003)

Though globalisation has created new job opportunities in the so-called less-developed world, ICTs and the Internet have generated more complexities for day-to-day life. According to HDR 2003, gender issues in relation to globalisation should not be overlooked when other issues such as improving poverty, health and education, basic infrastructure, disease control and health, are addressed. The

report notes that the development of the ICTs may lead to changes in gender relations. The use of the Internet may help pave the way for political exchange among women thus allowing women to make their voices heard in cyberspace which may lead to more negotiating power in the real/physical world (Escobar and Harcourt 2003).

Comparable international statistics on Internet use are difficult to attain and always based on estimates. The available statistics consistently indicate dramatic worldwide increases in Internet use. For Asian countries, between 1995 and 2000, the share of GDP contributed by ICTs increased. For example, in Japan, the figure rose from 5.3 per cent to 9.6 per cent in 2000, while in China, the figure increased from 2.9 per cent to 5.7 per cent during the similar period (ITU 2000).

### **Thailand Experiencing the New Economy**

In Thailand, the number of the Internet users increased from 23,000 in 1994 to 6 million in 2003 (NECTEC 2003) and to 7.57 million in 2004 (CIA 2003) which is more than 10 per cent of the entire country's population. The figure may not be phenomenal when compared with other countries such as the US and China which has 185 million and 99 million users respectively in 2004 (CIA 2003). However, when comparing in proportional terms the Thai figure is higher than the Chinese but lower than the US. The proportion of male and female users in Thailand indicates that Thai women have been active users of the Internet.

**Table 3.2: Internet User Profile of Thailand, by Gender**

□Year	□Male (percent)	□Female (percent)
□1999	□65.1	□34.9
□2000	□50.8	□49.2
□2001	□48.8	□51.2
□2002	□46.6	□53.4
□2003	□44.3	□55.1

*Source: NECTEC 2003*

According to Table 3.2, in 1999, Thai female users were around half the number of male users, but the female proportion increased every year. Between 2001 to 2003 the percentage of female users overtook the number of men. However, the higher number of female users needs to be probed further in terms of the patterns of their use, particularly the survey reports that in most cases users use the Internet from home. As discussed earlier, Internet professionals tend to use the Internet for work at home, and thus it is questionable whether the use of the Internet at home will bring about greater social integration, or more isolation. In particular, it is crucial to examine the ways in which women and men Internet professionals use the Internet to combine paid work with their home lives and if this will affect gender relations. The location of work is crucial because it may influence who has control over time at home and who will be responsible for caring for others in the family. These domestic responsibilities have gendered implications. In the US, data suggests that men spend longer on the Internet than women as they have more leisure time (Clickz Stat 2002). This thesis is not so much concerned with the use of the Internet in general but aims to research how the Internet has widened employment opportunities for women, and if the new forms of work generate any changes in gender relations.

Thailand is known as a country with an active female labour force and a high labour force participation rate, which has contributed to the country's strong economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s. Bell (1997) has argued that Thailand's economic growth has been built on the backs of women, a foundation of capitalist patriarchy. According to Walby (1990), exploitation of female labour is the main basis of tension between capitalism and patriarchy. On the one hand, capitalists are interested in using and exploiting female labour, which is cheaper than men because of patriarchal structures. On the other hand, the resistance to this happens in the household where patriarchy also seeks to exploit women. Walby has argued that the patriarchal structure has allowed women into paid employment, but segregated them from men, and paid them less. Industrial economic growth from the 1970s has created more opportunities for women to participate in the labour market. The economic boom from the end of the 1980s to the early 1990s in particular has driven a large number of middle class women to work for foreign companies in Bangkok. This economic opportunity has helped women gain income earning capacity, but did not necessarily lead to any renegotiation of the gender division of labour at home, where women are still expected to maintain the household as a primary responsibility. So these job opportunities accentuated the double burden for women, as their responsibility for domestic work continued. Greater job opportunities for

women during the economic boom showed how economic globalisation offers interconnections between local people and the global economy, for example working in foreign companies. The changing economic situation has caused transition in the world of employment and as I have discussed earlier, the advent of the Internet has created jobs online and other economic related activities in the new economy, the next section will examine the implications of the Internet and new job opportunities in Thailand

### **Internet and ‘new’ occupations**

The Internet growth towards the end of the 1990s occurred alongside the aftermath of the economic crisis in Thailand. Though working in dotcom business may not be the only option left, work made possible by the Internet was appealing to a certain group of people, many of whom are participants of this research. Working in ‘new’ occupations, particularly those related to ICTs (ILO 2003)<sup>13</sup>, has presented women with new opportunities because they are less rigid, less-structured and less dependent on physical strength. A significant number of women have more opportunities in this ‘new’ career.

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<sup>13</sup> According to ILO (2003) the ‘new’ occupations relate to ICTs. These new jobs were seen as bringing about equal opportunities for women since they require fewer of traditionally recognised male attributes, physical strength, for example, than the established occupations where men have fared better than women. Two examples of new occupations are those of computer programmer and system analyst. These are rapidly growing and well-paid professional occupations. The share of women in these occupations varies widely across countries. However, the little evidence available shows that occupational segregation persists in these new areas of work.

**Table 3.3: Women programmers and system analysts, 1999-2001**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Latest Year</b>	<b>Percentage of women in 'new' occupations (latest year)</b>
<b>Belarus</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>50.9</b>
<b>Germany</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>18.0</b>
<b>Hong Kong, China</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>23.8</b>
<b>Thailand</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>47.7</b>
<b>United States</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>28.5</b>

*Source: Time for Equality at Work, ILO (2003)*

In

Table 3.3 Table 3.3, , Thai women have a comparatively high percentage of computer programmers and system analysts, regarded as 'new' occupations, particularly when compared with other leading economic countries such as the US, Hong Kong and China. The aftermath of the 1997 economic crisis could be a push factor which contributed to women (and men) searching for new career skills – such as commercial cooking, computers and electronics where women and men are said to participate more equally (Busakorn and Resurreccion 2003). This situation implies that Thai women may have enjoyed a new kind of career opportunity. Thailand has engaged actively with the global economy by industrialising since the 1970s and following the economic crisis of the mid 1990s it has increasingly conformed to the neo-liberal policies of the World Bank. This integration, together with the new ICTs and more flexible forms of employment potentially brings about new opportunities for both women and men to negotiate gender relations.

The new opening of opportunities may challenge customary traditional values in Thai society such as family values, motherhood, and women's traditional caring roles. This change may also result in (re)thinking the value of marriage, ideas about masculinity and femininity and may lead to increasing challenges to traditions such as cohabitation, which is considered 'modern' in Thai society. It is crucial to examine the extent to which this changing form of work affects gender relations and how this alteration generates more complexity for individuals to negotiate. These tensions might be expected to be particularly intense for Internet professionals who are working with new technologies and new forms of work. These people are generally highly integrated into the global economy while simultaneously rooted in Thai culture, and for those who work at home in traditional domestic settings with traditional social relations. At the same time this exposure to global ideas may enhance the ability to challenge and change these traditional arrangements.

## **Conclusion**

Globalisation means that forms of work are in some ways becoming similar across the world, for example, there may be many parallels between the work of Internet professionals participating in this research and those in the West, but the cultural context is very different. This is where the local and the global meet. Thus my research follows the line of Beck, Bons and Lau (2003) who pointed out that it would be a good idea to explore if aspects of reflexive modernisation have any validity

elsewhere. My research concentrates on investigating the contribution of new forms of work in this respect.

From western empirical work, it seems flexible forms of work created in the new economy enable both genders to experience more independence. Women may feel that they have more freedom and opportunities to have 'one's life'. However, the new opportunity may also come up with 'precariousness' of choices. On the one hand, work based on the ICTs seems to increase opportunities in terms of employment. On the other hand, however, the use of the new technology, no matter if it is assumed to be gender neutral, seems to be highly associated with traditional social relations, gender identity and gender relations. Thus increasing economic opportunity alone may not automatically bring about a transformation of gender relations. Gendered identities appear an appealing character of the use of the Internet at work. As the workers may not need to be too concerned with their body expression thus women and men may create their own identities in cyberspace. It is nevertheless not clear whether this possibility of a gender disguise will bring about transformation in gender relations.

One implication of the Internet – and more generally of globalisation – is that individuals are increasingly interconnected on a global scale and can simultaneously exist within local and global spheres. Local people may be able to find work in the global economy by developing independent online businesses, and in this case, the Internet offers new opportunities. Nevertheless, social divisions can also increase within the new economy, as people who are not connected become excluded from the benefit of the World Wide Web. Additionally, and somewhat paradoxically, people can be simultaneously more engaged with the global economy and yet more individualised or independent from the labour market as the Internet has enabled them to work alone at home. This interconnection between the global and the local may have direct consequences on both women and men in their daily life: the impact on women may be more intense because of potential tensions between being modern in work while maintaining traditional values in other aspects of their lives, especially in relation to their family.

In the case of Thailand, particularly, women have been economically active. However the normative context of Thai society may appear gendered, making it increasingly contradictory for Thai women to participate in the labour force and maintain traditional roles at the same time. Having discussed the development of

the new economy in Thailand, and women's increasing involvement in work associated with IT, I will unravel the gendered form of the new economy and its implications for gender relations in analytical chapters, while the research design and its methodologies will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Dilemmas in Feminist Research – Epistemology & Methodology**

*“We do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular.”*

Haraway (1991: 196)

In this chapter, I first elaborate the feminist epistemology underlying this thesis, arguing that it is crucial to analyse from a position of “particularity”. The research may be more meaningful if it enables links to be established between the global and the local, thus analysing the extent to which the locality is shaped, though not determined, by its relations to the global. In my research, “Internet professionals” work in the local space of Thailand, but are connected on a daily basis with the global, through their business activities and personal contacts in cyberspace. Their existence is not really confined to the local environment: it intersects with the global.

The fieldwork explores the intersection of the global with the local, and its impact on gender through the life of “Internet professionals”. This research has concentrated on individuals who work in the new economy, not their households. So the analysis is based on individual experience. At the same time, it establishes links with wider gender implications through the individual’s relations with their partners and family members who live with them.

Second, I also discuss my position as a feminist researcher in Thailand. Feminist research relies on the subjectivity of the researcher, and thus self-reflexivity is crucial in interpreting the data. I examine my position as a feminist researcher researching mixed gender settings in Thailand, and reflect on what I experienced during the research process. In Chapter 2, I have explored the traditional gendered expectation in middle class Thai society. I attempt to point out in this chapter that for me, as a feminist who happens to be middle class, doing research on the middle class is equivalent to questioning my own position, the situation in which I have grown up. In many cases, my questions on gender roles in the family can be

perceived as “foreign” or “western” to the research participants. This experience illustrates that the researcher’s subjectivity cannot be ignored in the research process; I have my own background, and I have been informed by western feminist theory, and this will inevitably be reflected throughout the research process.

Third, I outline my research plan and the main research questions. The methodology is also discussed. Finally, I sketch out details of the research participants in this fieldwork: a table showing their occupations, working hours and income. This data is the point of departure for the analytical chapters that follow.

### **Situated ‘Knowledges’ – the Global Intersects the Local**

During the UN Decade of development for women (1975-1985), there was extensive research into the lives of Thai women. However, the gender aspect is under-theorised. Rather, research on women in Thailand generally focused on women, and their role in development, but not on men, or relations between men and women. This research tries to create a wider picture of the social implications of the new economy, by exploring the experiences of both genders in this sector.

Feminists who are concerned with epistemology have focused on the questions of the type “who knows what, about whom and how is this knowledge legitimised (Maynard 1994). The scientific research method is considered as “pure science” and claims to be value-free, neutral, and objective (Alcoff and Potter 1993, Code 1993; Harding 1991; Haraway 1991). In contrast, feminists highlight the significance of contextual factors and maintain that the positivist argument for distance, objectivity and the elimination of research bias is impossible to achieve, because our perspective influences the subjects of our research. As a feminist researcher, I have my own personal history, my family and educational background, which I have carried with me through the research process. In addition, I have also been informed by feminist theories in a Western university. In practice, in social science it is hard for a researcher to be completely objective and thus the research is influenced by the positionality and the viewpoint of the researcher.

Epistemologically, this research follows the particular vision proposed as ‘situated knowledge’ by Haraway (1991). According to Haraway, there is no “god-trick” view, but the production of knowledge is partial, and reflects ‘situated ‘knowledges’”

viewed from the particularity of places and positions, rather than an illusory infinite perspective (ibid.: 1991:189). It is also influenced by Mohanty (1991 and 2003), who highlights the need for local specificity *and* an awareness of the global context.

With reference to her 1991 article “Under Western Eyes Revisited”, Mohanty (2003) has pointed out that “I did not argue against all forms of generalisation, nor was I privileging the local over the systemic, difference over commonalities, or the discursive over the material.” (ibid: 224). She emphasised a firm belief in the significance of the particular in relation to the universal, in which the local can specify and illustrate wider trends. Mohanty (2003) modifies this position by calling for an analysis of particularity in relation to larger, even global, economic and political frameworks.

This research explores experiences of the “locality” – of Thai “Internet professionals” – and how they are interlinked and implicated at the “global level”, and vice versa. Additionally, the research takes a gendered perspective on the new economy; it aims to investigate the extent to which work in this sector may result in changing gendered social relations in Thai society. The Thai economy, though not the centre of the global economy, revealed its connection with the global level in the externally triggered financial crisis of 1997, which also had repercussions for other countries in the region. This crisis coincided with the dotcom boom in the US and the combination of circumstances led a number of Thais to decide to take part in dotcom industry, as discussed in Chapter 2. Clearly, there were close connections between the growth of “dotcom professionals” in Thailand and the US. These interconnections need a global and local perspective to develop any in-depth understanding of the periphery (Haraway 1991). My exposition stays consistent with the vision of situated and embedded “knowledges”, but it is contextualised within global processes, and in this way it aims to provide a “faithful account(s) of the real world” (ibid: 187).

This research attempts to offer a critical and reflexive view of the ways in which women and men work in the new economy. On the one hand, participants in this research may be viewed as a privileged and exclusive group, able to earn income by using the new technology. However, their situation is contradictory, as the dotcom industry exists in a post-industrial society characterised by precarious work and personal life (Beck 1992) as discussed in Chapter 3. This research will show the extent to which “Internet professionals” from Thailand, often regarded as “Third

World”, experience precarious subjectivities and gendered identities, and thus contribute to the development of ‘situated knowledge’. From this stance, I examine the experiences of women and men Internet professionals from the point of view of a feminist researcher in Thailand. I do not claim that their experiences are universal, but an account of their experiences may generate some insights into how economic change is affecting gender relations from the perspective of those living through the changes, that is how the world is seen from the situated location of the knower.

In line with Mohanty (2003), and Collier and Ong (2005), I examine how the local and the global intersect: how local lives are crystallised, but not determined, by global changes. In this case, this includes the way that the Thai economy has engaged with the global economy, first through a period of rapid industrialisation in the 1970s and 1980s, then a period of crisis in the late 1990s, and now a period of recovery. This latter period is influenced by the widespread adoption of ICTs, and especially the Internet. This research has taken particularity into account, in the analysis of Thailand, and identified connections or links with global implications, thus following Mohanty’s suggestion of examining connections between the local and the global.

Drawing upon the intersection of the global and the local, as well as experiences of research participants inside and outside cyberspace, the “real” life accounts of interviewees accord epistemologically with Braidotti’s 2002 nomadic approach. My research informants have parallels with Braidotti’s concept of nomads. They have multiple identities: locally situated, but working in cyberspace. This needs to be analysed through a non-linear and non-unitary account, which will be elaborated in Chapter 6. As “Internet professionals” working at home, on the one hand, female participants can be at the forefront of contemporary technologies and have some independence at home, but at the same time, they have to play the traditional role in their home lives as wives and daughters. Though this research has interviewed individuals about their work experiences, it also explored their ideas about the family and gender relations.

As this research seeks to analyse the extent to which work/life in the new economy is gendered, I have engaged with situated ‘knowledges’ and linked in ideas from Braidotti’s nomadic approach. These perspectives represent a “vision” of seeing things based upon the intersection between the global and local. However, feminists cannot avoid the politics of interpretation of the research data. Particularly because

feminist politics challenge and question the “norm” of gender relations, widely assumed to be natural, especially in Thailand. In the next section, I discuss my positionality and the dilemmas of being a feminist researcher by drawing upon the concepts of subjectivity and reflexivity.

### **Positionality – Subjectivity and Reflexivity of the researcher in the research process**

Feminist research calls for an acknowledgement of particularity in the context of theory (Alcoff and Potter 1993); feminist researchers are responsible for asking questions that challenge generic accounts, or accounts that ignore the social context and status of the knower. Code (1993) has argued that in feminist research it is crucial to address aspects of subjectivity, because no scientific research is value free or completely objective. In qualitative research the researcher is a central figure in the research process, and influences decisions about data collection, selection and interpretation. In the process of doing the research itself, the researcher’s behaviour and manners also affect participant’s responses, and influence the findings. Given this central role, it is crucial to examine the ways in which subjective and intersubjective elements influence the findings (Finlay 2002).

Feminist research is political. It is the aim of the feminist research to produce work that challenges patriarchal relations and that can lead to social transformation. I have questioned gender relations, gender roles, and the household division of labour since my childhood. I have seen how my mother is responsible for both paid work and housework. My father, regarded as “head of the household” or “family ricewinner”, does not need to do housework, while my mother – who is considered a “housewife” – needs to be responsible for housework as well as paid work. My parents could afford to hire a domestic servant to alleviate household responsibilities; however they did not want to because my mother considered it more convenient to do housework on our own. My mother has taught me from a young age to help with the housework. I have always questioned this household division of labour. This questioning has been exacerbated because my younger brother is seldom told by my mother to help with the housework. Even when she does, he does not have to take her words seriously. In sum, women in my family, my mother and me, are mainly responsible for the housework. Perhaps I would not have

questioned this arrangement so much if my mother had not been doing paid work at the same time. However, I can see how my mother does not have any private time and personal space in the family, and this leads a continual frustration with the gendered division of labour in our family. On the other hand I can see that I could not really blame my father because he never actually forced us to do housework; it was something we felt obliged to do. As this arrangement was reinforced by custom and practice, it was very difficult to challenge or transform it.

My family background constitutes a major component in the initial research process. I began from a mindset that gender relations in my family were defined as “natural” because women must take care of the family as their priority. Although, I have not been happy with the situation I have never raised “the issue” with my father directly. The best I could do was to discuss with my mother and tell her how exploitative I considered it. My mother never actually told me to follow the “good woman” pattern, but it has been left unsaid that a daughter needs to help a mother in every way possible. Having seen and been in these circumstances, I ask whether this gender relation is natural. Is this gender role fixed? What is the point of women earning income from paid work if housework has not been shared between men and women? What if women are financially independent, will that lead to a change in gender relations?

These questions arose from my growing up in Thai society. They occurred to me before I ever heard the word “feminist, or became informed by feminist theories from a university in the West. My initial assumption was that women have been oppressed and victimised in familial relations, and this is reflected in gender relations at home. However, when I talked with women in my fieldwork, I realised that this pattern is not universal: there can be subtle variations in gender relations. I decided to do this project a few years after the economic crisis in 1997. It was about the same time that a number of my personal contacts started dotcom businesses, and had begun using the computer and the Internet at work. This widespread use of the Internet caused me to ask if this new sector would really bring about new career opportunities for women and men, and if so, what the consequence would be for gender relations. Particularly because “dotcom professionals” can work from home, what will be the outcome for gender relations at home.

## **Qualitative Approach**

This research seeks to obtain knowledge about the lives and social relations of both women and men before and while working in this sector. In this case, I decided to explore “real” life experiences through in-depth interviews around a semi-structured questionnaire –not a straight biographical analysis – because I wanted the informants to focus on those particular aspects of their lives linked to my research questions.

Identifying women and men’s experience is necessary in order to discover the way in which both genders have been living their lives. It has been argued that analysing women’s experience can open up a way to improve women’s position in societies they are living in (Maynard 1994). It is true that understanding women’s experience is essential for an insight into the social processes of society. However, in this thesis I want to provide a broader analysis of the situation of both genders working in this sector. This research argues that social processes are crucial in shaping women and men’s lives in any society. In return, social processes affect the gendered division within a given society. Thus, experience of both genders is essential to understand gendered negotiation processes in a particular context, in this case, middle class “Internet professionals” in urban communities in Thailand.

## **Research Design**

The main aim of this research is to generate in-depth knowledge by asking people to discuss particular aspects of their lives such as their work life balance. At the outset, I planned to conduct this research in the form of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and to interview both men and women “Internet professionals” who have worked in the sector for a number of years. I had a list of the questions, but the interview was conducted spontaneously with the answers from the participants.

I formed my research design and questionnaire by beginning with literature on the new economy, ICTs and gender relations. At the outset, I followed the assumption that the development of ICTs such as mobile phones, computers, and the Internet will enhance women’s opportunities, thus work based on the Internet may significantly increase opportunities for Thai women to enjoy their work at home and spend more time with their family (Parichart 1998). However, the social

implications of the new technology can be complicated, especially as Thai women are expected to maintain the good order of the household; it is their primary responsibility. If the Internet allows women to carry out paid work from the family home, will this further marginalise women in the public sphere? Does the Internet really lead to increasing career opportunities for women?

## **Research Questions**

Three main areas are included in my interviews comprising work history, individual experiences on using the Internet, familial relations and prospects for the future. I consider how these three areas relate to one another. Work histories can provide information about how they decided to work in this sector. Family relations can provide an insight into the gendered negotiation process within the private sphere and the way in which it influences their roles in the public sphere and vice versa, including the views of their future careers and personal lives.

This research has focused on individuals' experiences, so it may not show a complete picture of gender relations in the household, but the analysis from an individual may establish a partial insight on gender relations in a family of an individual. Additionally, I decided to interview both women and men: their individual experiences can contribute in terms of a more in-depth understanding on how both genders use the Internet at work.

These issues were explored with the participants in order to address the main research questions of this thesis:

- In what way has the new economy opened up a new career option for women and men and how is the new economy gendered?
- To what extent does work in the new economy influence the negotiations or renegotiation of gender relations?

The fieldwork asked questions around these main questions. Nevertheless, new issues emerged during the interviewing, and these opened up new areas that were integrated into the research findings.

I prepared the following broad questions before meeting interviewees:

- Please explain how and why you decide to work in this sector.
- How do you use the Internet in your work, please explain?
- Please explain your work life pattern before and after working on the Internet.
- How do you adapt your work life balance in relation to family and friends?
- In your view, does being a woman or a man offer a drawback or an advantage in using the Internet at work?

### **Searching for the “researched”**

Feminist research usually prioritises women’s experiences to establish a “feminist body of knowledge”. In this research I included women’s as well as men’s experiences to understand how both genders live and work in the new economy. I began my fieldwork by using search engines listed in Thailand. I started with introducing myself on the Internet, posting the purpose of my thesis, my real name and my contact number, asking for web developers or dotcom business owners who would be interested in contributing to this research project. I indicated clearly from the beginning that gender and ICT formed the focus of the research project. There were three replies on the web. They gave me their real names and contact numbers. However, later I was warned by one web developer that I should not have posted my real name and real telephone number online, because others could take advantage of my contact number. It seemed strange that he warned me publicly on the web, which meant anyone could have read the message and acted negatively toward me.

I contacted the three replies from the web. I found out subsequently that all three of them shared the same intention. They wanted to contribute their life story to benefit education. The first group of participants was cooperative, and they welcomed the opportunity to discuss their life experiences with me. In a way, they are resourceful and know what they want to talk about. After the first series of the interviews, I continued, using snowballing techniques. I realised that though it seemed easy to approach web developers whose websites exist on the Internet, in reality, they tend not to post their real names or contact numbers on the web. It would be unlikely that web developers would reply to my e-mails unless I addressed them directly by name. Generally, I did not know who they were. In most cases, I was able to talk to them on

the phone because I made personal contacts with a number of people who were involved in this industry and they kindly showed me the contact telephone numbers. I realised that approaching them from the web would not work because, first, they would think they did not have time to discuss their work and, second, they do not want to talk about it because they do not see any benefit. However, if I were able to discuss with them on the phone, it would be easier for me to convince them about the value of my research and that the interview would be confidential.

A woman web developer expressed surprise when I emailed her and asked for an interview, though her e-mail was shown on the website. She asked me in an unfriendly way how I had her e-mail. Although she showed her e-mail on the website, she did not seem to welcome any direct contact: as a female web developer she might be afraid to meet with strangers. When we met in person, she told me that she was previously threatened by visitors to her website because people know that she is a woman thus needs to be careful in meeting or communicating. This shows that though the Internet has allowed communication to happen more freely and quickly, it does not necessarily lead to open communication.

I had no expectation about how I could categorise interviewees. I had a tentative plan to interview both genders. While planning the thesis, I thought about people who are working mainly on the Internet. I envisaged that these people would include web developers, web designers, graphic designers, and computer programmers. These people generally work online, and the products of their work are on computer screens. When it came to fieldwork, I decided to include people who had expanded their offline business to include online operations. The way people expand their business, and the way they adapt themselves to working patterns in the new economy, are both worth discussion. I spent 6-months, February to July 2002, in Thailand for this fieldwork. As above, I relied on snowballing at the beginning, however I was careful initially to ensure that my participants did not come from a single social network, but reflected the diversity of contemporary web developers. I took particular care to ensure a gender balance. Initially the people I was introduced to by snowballing were men. In the later phases of my fieldwork I had to focus on searching for women. The fieldwork covered interviews with 55 people comprising 28 men and 27 women, their full details are presented in Tables 4.6.

## **In The Field**

As a feminist researcher, I have realised that emotional involvement is quite strong in all aspects of the research process: fieldwork, data analysis and writing up the thesis, all involve a questioning of the gendered social relations in daily life of Thailand where I grew up. The greater difficulty was interviewing male or female participants who did not really see the point of questioning everyday gender relations. To legitimise my research and avoid interrupting the flow of interviews, I felt it necessary to remain silent while listening to opinions. This is equivalent to self-censorship in the research process. As I have been informed by feminist theory, I have particular views, but I needed to develop rapport and “trust” through not arguing with my research participants during an interview. I was also influenced by hierarchical power relations; these did not necessarily stem from gender, but from seniority of the participants.

For example, when interviewing men, I did not feel comfortable in probing details about their privacy, particularly on gender aspects. It was more difficult and challenging to develop “trust” between myself, as a researcher, and the research participants in this case. Particularly if the male participants were more senior, and highly accomplished at work, I felt more nervous talking to those about any gender aspect. When reviewing my own feelings, I may have been nervous because I knew that questions about gender are considered a ‘sensitive’ issue in Thai families. The situation was less intense when interviewing younger male participants, who tended to be more open and more attentive in answering my questions, and thus made me feel more at ease, able to interact more naturally and spontaneously with them. Seniority and power relations appear a drawback in interviewing with women as well. I had a more challenging time discussing the gender aspects with some senior and highly accomplished women at work.

Reactions were quite varied. For example, some participants appeared to be hostile to the term “gender” or “feminism”, which made me vulnerable if I wanted to confront them on this issue; I was aware of negative connotations of the term. Asking questions on gender sometimes created tensions. There was a case that happened early in my fieldwork: a male participant told me in the middle of an interview, “I do not really see the point of academics trying to explore the gender division of labour. It is very natural.” I wanted to continue my questions, so I did not really respond to his point; I did not want him to think that I opposed his view.

Thus, I kept listening to him. At that moment, I did not want him to think of me as a “feminist”, but as an impartial “researcher” who was not involved in the debate. It could be the case that I regarded my participants as “informants” of my research, and that I did not want to engage in heated debates with them on gender issues, otherwise it might end the interviews. The expectation of heated arguments led me to self-censorship when exchanging views on gender.

This brings us to the extent of power relations between researcher and subjects. On my part, I did not want to impose my view on the participants, making them feel uncomfortable with their view. By not really responding or arguing with the participants, I regarded myself as instrumental in the research project, and as someone who “trusted” their views. Listening to the interviewees helped me gain information from them. I did not want my research subjects to feel that I had “power” over them: listening, nodding and smiling while they were speaking established a rapport with the participants. My remaining impartial was not consistent, because a feminist researcher is not free from subjectivity, and my view of gender relations and feminist theories has also evolved throughout the research process. I was defensive during the first phase of the interviews. Later I was more confident in approaching the participants, and in discussing the gender issue, which I left to the last stage of the interview due to its sensitivity.

There were a number of cases where male participants felt that they needed to say something to please me. For example, I asked a male participant if he thought being a man or a woman presents a drawback for work on the Internet. He looked at me and asked me whether I wanted him to say something that assures me that women will always have a negative experience when using the Internet. He thought that as I was a feminist researcher, I would want to hear something that confirmed my inferred theory that women are always in an inferior position. I had to tell him that I wanted to hear his thoughts, not what he thought I wanted to hear. This situation taught me to review my approach in asking questions; but not being too intrusive in my facial appearance or my tone of voice otherwise they would have thought that I am an “angry woman” who is trying to challenge what believed to be “natural”.

The interviews have made me realise that this research is produced through ‘situated ‘knowledges’” in which views are reflected through me as a researcher. Nevertheless, it does not always mean I am the only side who gains benefit from listening to the interviewees. On the one hand, I gained insight on experiences of the participants,

however the process also provided opportunities for them to “talk” about their life. For example, though a number of men interviewees were hesitant to discuss their personal life, they still found the interview useful. “What sort of the research you are doing? Is it relevant to “psychology” subject? This is the first time that I was asked this kind of questions. I feel good that it makes me explore my true self more.” (single man, 26). In addition to making participants feel good, they can be more aware of gender issue. “No one asks me this kind of questions before. I don’t even think about it. I never think about men and women’s roles. I just assume that it is natural to live our lives these ways,” (single man, 24).

On the other hand, women participants could be uncomfortable when they were asked to discuss the family. A female participant asked me “Is your ulterior motive in doing this research to destroy the family?” This was in the middle of asking her questions on gender and the household division of labour. Perhaps at the time I was not experienced enough, and terrified of being seen as challenging the “natural” order of social practices among the middle class, to which I belonged. The female participant might have thought I was alien to her “type” of women.

In another case, after nearly three hours of interview with a married woman with two daughters, she told me – when I signed off the interview – that: “I don’t agree with Western feminists who are calling for equality. Women are bound to take care of children and I don’t see any point to challenge that notion. It is good for women to take care of the household and to be the primary care provider of childcare.” (a married woman with two daughters, 36). Her comments, in many ways, appeared critical of my stance. I told her from the beginning – and on the phone when arranging the interview – that I am doing this research for a PhD degree from a Western university; though she was not openly critical of me as a researcher, her comments were probably aimed at me and my research. Clearly she did not agree with my feminist research. When, initially, I got this kind of feedback from the women I researched, it rocked my belief in feminism. It caused self-doubt, as I felt directly attacked by these comments from women participants. However, when reading the script and thinking through the issue, it revealed to me that those women have been used to this “natural” pattern of gender relations, in which woman are told to be care providers, while man is a family “rice-winner.” As feminist research aims to undermine patriarchal relations and transform social relations in many ways, participating in this research might cause my research participants to question gender relations in some ways. When compared with the cases of single

men who appreciated the interviews, it shows that – in some cases – my research did lead people to question traditional gender roles for the first time, and on other occasions it led them to entrench or justify traditional positions. I have also learned that women have their own agency, and need not be subject to patriarchal relations in all circumstances. Questions during the interviews that probed gender relations in the family might appear challenging, and too “western”, for both women and men participants. I have also learned different perspectives from each participant. Doing research is a subjective and iterative process, and this affects the interpretation of the data.

### Research Participants

I have mentioned earlier in this chapter that this research covers 55 participants, 28 men and 27 women. I have summarised overall details of all the research participants in the following tables.

**Table 4.1: Research Participants by Gender**

Men	Women
28	27

**Table 4.2: Research Participants by Age**

Men			Women		
20s	30s	40s and over	20s	30s	40s and over
9	14	5	10	15	2

**Table 4.3: Research Participants by Status**

Men		Women	
Married <sup>14</sup>	Single	Married	Single

<sup>14</sup> Married status covers participants who cohabit with their partner.

15	13	8	19
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**Table 4.4: Employee Status**

	Employees		Self- Employed	
			Dotcom/E-Commerce entrepreneurs	Freelancers
Men	7		17	4
Women	11		16	

**Table 4.5: Names of Participants by Work Situation**

	Employees		Dotcom/e-commerce entrepreneurs		Freelancers
Men	Wutthichai Panya Amnuai Thanaphon Khamnuan Rangsan Prasoet		Thana Phongsak Sumet Phakdi Ronakon Chatri Amphon Anek Wachira Narit	Wiset Sunthon Thawi Kon Wanchai Phichai Phairot	Somphop Chuchat Surachai Chumphon
Women	Chutima Monthira Nuanprang Parichat Monthani Kloichai Naiyana	Niranat Sansani Wanthani Kittiya	Anongnat Aphinya Wanida Nittaya Khanuengnit Sunisa Kamala Phenphon	Kannika Chanchira Phatthra Naritsara Phatson Nanthana Naphaphon Chintana	

Table 4.1 presents overall details of the research participants by gender, of which 28 are men and 27 women. Table 4.2 groups the participants by age. The majority of the participants are in their 30s while participants in their 20s are the second largest group though there are also "Internet professionals" who are in their 40s and over. This shows that all of my research participants are of working age. Table 4.3 indicates that the majority of male participants in this research are married whilst

the female participants are mainly single. Overall, the majority of the participants were single.

Table 4.4 shows categories of participants by their work situation. It is quite unclear how to draw the line between different categories, as an individual who is a full time employee can also initiate a dotcom business or work as a freelancer at the same time. For this study, I decided to put participants who earn a fixed salary from a multimedia firm, a dotcom firm or other types of firm in the full-time employee category. At times, these individuals may have earned extra income but their main and regular source of income stems from a salary. There are 7 men and 11 women full time employees in this study.

The second group is self-employed individuals. At the most general level, 'self-employed' in this thesis means people who are not salaried. These self-employed individuals are divided into two groups comprising dotcom /e-commerce entrepreneurs and freelancers. To define 'entrepreneur' is a challenging exercise in itself because the term has little specific or fixed definition either in common usage or in academic research. Its meaning is largely dependent on the perspective and academic background of the researcher (Bennett and Dann 2000). The term entrepreneur is used variably depending on area of study and has been claimed by a number of different disciplines such as psychology and economics (ibid). The Oxford English Dictionary defines an entrepreneur as 'one who owns and manages a business'. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English definition of an entrepreneur is 'someone who starts a company, arranges business deals, and takes risks in order to make a profit'. Oughton, Wheelock and Baines (2003) define a classic entrepreneur as a person who pursues opportunities regardless of the resource s/he currently commands.

From an economics perspective, conducive economic conditions are seen to be necessary for the entrepreneur to develop their potential for an increase in monetary gains or the growth of their business. Campbell (1992) argues that entrepreneurship is an outcome of a decision that happens when the expected return from entrepreneurship is compared to the cost-risk evaluation and return from potential wage labour. While economists acknowledge the role that psychological, sociological and cultural factors play, the major factors of the economic model *per se* dominate this entrepreneurial definition.

Psychologists put much less emphasis on economic factors and rational decision making processes and a lot more on a definition of personality traits. From the psychological perspective, entrepreneurial success is explained by the unique attitudes and values of the entrepreneur (Bennett and Dann 2000). Generally, the three personal characteristics required by entrepreneurs are internal locus of control, independence and a need for achievement and risk taking.

I have taken the Thai context into account when defining 'entrepreneurs'. I have defined a group of participants in the dotcom and e-commerce industries as entrepreneurs because drawing upon some aspects from the above definitions, they have started up a new business venture, and they aspire to take risks to pursue their business. In the Thai context, these entrepreneurs use their own source of personal funding to initiate their businesses, and to differentiate it from other businesses. As I have referred in Chapter 3, in Thai, these participants label themselves '*Phu Prakop Kan*' (a person who owns a small business enterprise) and the closest English term to it is 'entrepreneur'. Although, the term may not be exactly with the same as an economic definition of entrepreneurship, these dotcom/e-commerce entrepreneurs consider themselves liberated in terms of taking risk to pursue 'their own business' and plan to do it as long as their funds last. They hope that taking the risk will bring great achievement with which full-time work cannot compete. This study does not romanticize 'entrepreneurship', but I will discuss the implications of being dotcom and e-commerce entrepreneurs in the Thai context in the following analytical chapters 5-7.

In this study, dotcom and e-commerce entrepreneurs are the second group of research participants. This group comprises 17 men and 16 women and is the largest group. Dotcom entrepreneurs are running their dotcom firm providing web hosting, web developing or graphic designing. Income is made from selling banner advertisements on their portal website. E-commerce entrepreneurs are participants who are running an online retail business or who expand their offline business to an online system. E-commerce entrepreneurs in this research are running a business in, for example tourism, retail, delivery services and marketing

The last group is freelancers and there are four men freelancing in this research. By freelancing, this research refers to an individual who does not have a registered firm, but obtains work through a project or a few projects each time. They have no fixed income, but rely on project work. They offer their skills in web developing and

graphic design. They can be considered to be the outsourcing for larger firms. They tend to work from their own computer at home. In most cases, they have experience of full-time work in companies, before deciding to become a freelancer. They have developed personal connections with people in this industry to get orders. They work for other firms without a long-term contract with any particular firm. Their freelancing income is not regular.

Most interviews took place face to face mainly in the interviewees' home and lasted about 1.30-2 hours, a small number took considerably longer because the interviewees explained their experiences in detail and allowed me to spend a long time with them. I followed a semi-structured, in-depth interview approach and recorded the interview using a minidisk recorder. The letters requesting an interview stated the purpose of the research and the research topics to be included in the interviews. So they had some initial ideas as to the kind of questions I was going to ask.

However, I did not follow the order of questions provided in the list. Normally I spent 10-15 minutes at the beginning on 'breaking the ice'. At an early stage, I would ask general questions, such as the way they used the Internet and computers in their work, and about their work life schedule. General questions were based on work, and the way they used the Internet. At this point, I tried to introduce questions about gender issues and work: for example, if being a man or a woman affects their working capacity, or their work, in the new economy. The reason for doing this was to make participants feel more at ease, before turning to those potentially more challenging questions relating to gender issues.

The following table presents details of 55 research participants. I have categorized them by: Gender; Date of Birth; Marital Status, Chinese or Thai descent; education, hours of work on the Internet each week; location of work; income; and previous job. I have arranged the research participants by age, so the participant who is most senior shown first.

**Table 4.6: Details of the Research Participants**

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
1	Thana	M	1948	Married with two sons	T	BSc Engineering	e-commerce entrepreneur, import/export to South Asia	45 hours	Home office (no staff)	714 (from e-commerce)	Worked in an export-import firm for 25 years, now work full time for e-commerce
2	Anongnat	F	1948	Married with five daughters	C	BA Law	e-commerce entrepreneur	<70 hours	Office	<1,428 (family income from property business), uncertain from e-commerce	She was an owner of a property business for more than 20 years. Since the economic crisis, she has turned attention to e-commerce and let her husband maintain the property business.
3	Sumet	M	1955	Married with three	C	High School	e-commerce	60 hours	Office	428-714	He has inherited his parents' business in

<sup>15</sup> G=Gender, YOB = Year of Birth

<sup>16</sup> Eth = Ethnicity, Thai (T) or Chinese (C)

<sup>17</sup> This is the number of hours spent doing business via the Internet or e-commerce

<sup>18</sup> The income is converted from Thai Baht into Pound Sterling by using the rate Baht 70 = 1 pound

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
				sons			entrepreneur, selling agricultural products	(offline business 40 hrs, e-commerce 20 hrs)		(20 per cent of income is from e-commerce)	agricultural sector for 10 years. He has started integrating with e-commerce in the last 2 years.
4	Ronakon	M	1957	Married with two children	C	BSc Marketing	e-commerce entrepreneur	50 hours	Office (has 8-9 staff)	< 857 (only from e-commerce)	Owner of maintenance service for elevator, for ten years before shifting to e-commerce
5	Wanida	F	1957	Married with three children	T	BA Fine Arts	e-commerce entrepreneur and retail business owner	50 hours (40 hours in retail business offline 10 hours online)	Home Office (8 staff)	<1,142 (from retail business) 10 % income from e-commerce	Her husband and Wanida have a retail business for more than ten years. They have started e-commerce for 2 years as an addition to their existing business.
6	Amphon	M	1960	Married with two children	C	PhD Computer Science	Dotcom entrepreneur, provider of web hosting, web design, web creation and run automated computer programme, entrepreneur	50 hours	Office (6 staff)	714 (from dotcom)	He worked in an International organisation in the US for 10 years before moving to Thailand. Now owns dotcom firm.
7	Wachira	M	1962	Single	T	MBA	Dotcom entrepreneur, a web developer,	50 hours	Office	<714	He was a computer teacher for 7 years. He is

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
							consulting business in e-commerce		(3 staff)	(from his e-commerce training company)	among the first in Thailand who integrates computer with e-commerce training.
8	Wiset	M	1963	Married	T	BSc Engineering	Dotcom entrepreneur, portal website developer	40 hours	Office (15 staff)	314 (from dotcom)	He worked in a privatised firm for 10 years. Now working full time in dotcom business. His only income is from dotcom firm
9	Wutthichai	M	1964	Married with two children	C	BA Arts	Full time employee at management level of a new media firm	60 hours	Office	857 (salary) <714 (from his furniture business which his wife is in charge)	He was an owner of a furniture shop for 5 years. Now he is working full time in a multimedia company at management level.
10	Panya	M	1964	Married	C	MBA	Full time employee, management level	45 hours	Office (in charge of 15 staff)	<714	He had worked in a bank in computer system department. Now he is at the management level for e-commerce in the same

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
											bank.
11	Khanueng nit	F	1964	Single	C	PhD Computer Management	Dotcom entrepreneur ,co-owenrowner of multimedia firm, now helping her father's business	45 hours	Office	<714	She was one of the leading women in computer management in Thailand. Currently, she has left the IT sector to help her father's commodity business.
12	Amnuai	M	1966	Cohabit with girlfriend	T	MSc Project Management	Full time employee in public sector, have dotcom business as sideline	40 hours in public sector 20 hours in e-commerce	Office	357	He has been working in the public sector for 7 years. He has started his dotcom business 3 years ago, as his sideline.
13	Kamala	F	1966	Married with two daughters	C	BA Mass Communications	e-commerce entrepreneur	30 hours	Home Office	285 (income from husband's business) No income yet from e-commerce	Before getting married, she helps her parents' business. When married, she helps her husband as a main job and now setting up an e-commerce to work independently.
14	Kannika	F	1967	Single	C	MA International Communication	e-commerce entrepreneur , expand	45 hours	Office	571 (from parents'	She worked full time in a media firm for 5 years.

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
							from her parents' business			business) 10,000 from e-commerce	Now she has inherited her parents' business and integrated with e-commerce.
15	Phatthra	F	1968	Married	T	MBA Marketing	Dotcom entrepreneur, develop a community website with business partners	45 hours	Office (4 staff)	571	She worked full time for five years with a retail company. Now, she has initiated a community website and earns income from web design.
16	Chutima	F	1968	Single	C	MSc Anthropology	Full time employee, web content editor	50 hours	Office (in charge of 20 staff)	428	She was a computer consultant with a media firm for 3 years. Now, she is working full time as a web content editor of a multimedia firm
17	Phongsak	M	1969	Married With one child	T	BSc Industrial Engineering	Successful dotcom entrepreneur. Sell website to global multi-medial firm. Now initiating personal finance business  Dotcom business was	40 hours	Home Office (has 8 staff when working from home)	<714 Independent income from his holding company business. High income	Computer teacher for 3 years and web developer for 2 years, now working for his holding company with his friend.

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
							lost but have other business to support, entrepreneur				
18	Phakdi	M	1969	Married	CT	BSc Architecture	Dotcom entrepreneur	40 hours	Home Office (no staff)	428 (from his mother's business)	He was an architect for a few years before taking time off for the dotcom. Now earning income from his mother's property business
19	Chatri	M	1969	Married	C	BSc Computer Science MSc in MIS	e-commerce owner in jewellery business	45 hours	Office (5 staff)	<714 (from e-commerce and jewellery business)	He has inherited his parent's business for 5 years. He has started this e-commerce for two years.
20	Thanaphon	M	1969	Married with one child	C	Medical Doctor	Full-time medical doctor, a web developer and a columnist as sideline	40 hours in full-time job 20 hours for Internet	Office	<857 (salary from being the medical doctor)	He has been a medical doctor since graduation. He has started his web developer business as a sideline for two years.
21	Aphinya	F	1969	Married (pregnant)	C	MBA	Dotcom entrepreneur, computer programmer	60 hours	Office (7 staff)	571	She worked full time with a computer company for 4 years. Now, she owns a computer system

No.	Name	Gender	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
											company. Earn income from web hosting and web design.
22	Nittaya	F	1969	Married with one child	C	MBA Management	Dotcom entrepreneur, computer training and consultant	50 hours	Office	<714	She was a full time reporter for radio and TV for 4 years. Now, she is an owner of a computer consultant firm.
23	Sunisa	F	1969	Single	T	BA Art	Owner of a computer consultant firm	55 hours	Office (15 staff)	714	She was an interior designer for 7 years. Currently, she is an owner of a web system consultant firm.
24	Somphop	M	1970	Single	T	BSc computer science	freelance web developer, and graphic designer	60 hours	Home Office	571 (salary as a computer teacher) 285 (web design)	He was a computer teacher for 7 years. He is now a self-employed in web design and graphic design, but also a part-time teacher.
25	Chuchat	M	1970	Single	C	BA Communications	freelance web designer, web columnist	40 hours	Home Office	185-214 (uncertain, tends to earn more from writing)	He was a reporter for a newspaper for 8 years. He is now a self-employed as a web developer and a

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Loen.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
										column)	columnist.
26	Nuan-prang	F	1970	Married with a child	C	BA Arts	Full time employee, e-commerce as sideline	40 hours in full time work 20 hours for e-commerce	Office, work at home night hours	714 (from full-time job)	She was a reporter for a magazine for a few years. Now, she is a full time employee with a Japanese firm and now initiates e-commerce as sideline.
27	Phenphon	F	1970	Single	T	BSc Architecture	Dotcom entrepreneur, content provider	40 hours	Home Office	285	She was a full time architect for 4 years. Currently, she is working at home full time on her community website.
28	Anek	M	1972	Married	T	BA Law	Dotcom entrepreneur, web design, web hosting, entrepreneur	40 hours	Office (4 staff)	<714 (from dotcom and radio programme)	He was a full time TV reporter for 3 years. Now he owns dotcom firm, but his income also comes from a radio programme which is his sideline.
29	Narit	M	1972	Single	C	MBA from the US	Dotcom entrepreneur, web developer and graphic designer	45 hours	Home Office/live with parents/hire	< 714 (35 pound from	He was a full time employee with a mobile phone company for 2 years. Now he works full

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Loen.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
									10 freelancers	the website)	time for this dotcom firm. Earn income from web developing, writing columns about IT.
30	Sunthon	M	1972	single	T	BA Graphic Design	Co-owner of a web design and graphic design firm	45 hours	Home Office	285 (from web design firm)	He was a full time employee as a graphic designer for 2 years. Currently, he is the co-owner of a web design company.
31	Khamnuan	M	1972	single	T	BSc Computer Science	Full time employee, computer programmer	50 hours	Office	571	He has been a full time employee as a computer programmer since graduation.
32	Monthani	F	1972	Single	C	BSc Computer Science	Full time employee, computer programmer	50 hours	Office	571	She has been a computer programmer for 6 years, since graduation
33	Naiyana	F	1972	single	T	BA Fine Art	Full time employee, web content editor	40 hours	Office	357	She was a full time TV reporter for 3 years. Now, she is a full time web content editor of a dotcom firm.
34	Chanchira	F	1972	single	C	MBA Marketing	Dotcom entrepreneur	50 hours	Office (have 10 staff)	714 (70% of income)	She is the owner of an e-commerce, but most income is from web

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
										is from web design)	developing and graphic design.
35	Naritsara	F	1972	single	T	BA Arts	Internet café owner	30 hours	Office	714	She was a full time flight attendant for 5 years. Now, she is the owner of the Internet café and a web designer.
36	Phatson	F	1972	single	T	BA Communication Arts	Dotcom entrepreneur, event organiser	60 hours	Office	428	She was a full time IT news reporter for 5 years. Currently, she is working full time on her dotcom business.
37	Niranart	F	1973	single	C	Secretary College	Full time employee, web content editor	60 hours	Office	428	She was a secretary for 3 years. Currently, she is a full time web content editor of a multimedia firm.
38	Sansani	F	1974	single	C	BA Applied Art	Full time employee, web content editor, web designer (employee)	40 hours	Office	371	She was a full time employee with an e-commerce company for 2 years. Now, she is working full time with a graphic design company.

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
39	Wanthani	F	1974	single	T	BA Fine Art	Full time employee, graphic designer	40 hours	Office	285	Currently, she is a full time graphic designer with a multimedia firm. She also works part time as a graphic designer.
40	Thawi	M	1975	Married with a baby	C	BSc computer science	Dotcom entrepreneur, owner of computer planning system firm.	70 hours	Office (5 staff)	<1,428 (from dotcom)	He was a full time computer training teacher for 1 year. Now working full time in his computer system firm.
41	Kon	M	1975	Single (cohabited with partner)	C	BA Hotel Management	dotcom entrepreneur, and earn fixed income from a company which he is working part time	50 hours	Home Office	<714 (main income from e-commerce)	He worked full time as a computer programmer in a radio broadcast firm for 2 years. Now he works full time for e-commerce and web design.
42	Rangsan	M	1975	single	C	BA Business Computer	Full time employee in dotcom firm, computer programmer	50 hours	Office	<714 (salary)	He was a full time computer programmer for 3 years. Currently, he is working full time with a multimedia firm as a web developer.
43	Wanchai	M	1975	single	C	BA Business Administration	Dotcom entrepreneur and web designer, web content editor	50 hours	Home Office	357 (from banners and	He could not find a job after graduation in which the economic

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
										advertisement on the web)	crisis occurred. So he started his dotcom firm and earned from the advertisement. As the income is uncertain, he will help his mother takes care of the family business.
44	Kittiya	F	1975	Single (about to marry)	C	BA Applied Art	Full time employee, and being self-employed in web design	50 hours	Office	428 (salary) 142-214 (from dotcom, but uncertain)	Currently, she is a full time employee with a leading retail firm and also has her own dotcom firm as a sideline.
45	Phichai	M	1976	Single	C	BA Architecture, MBA E-Commerce	Dotcom entrepreneur, and work full time with new media firm	50 hours	Office (5 staff)	428 (from e-commerce) 571 (from salary)	He worked full time as an architect for 2 years. Then work full time for his dotcom firm for 2 years. Now he is back to be a full time employee with a mobile phone company, but maintain dotcom firm at the same time.
46	Prasoet	M	1976	single	C	MSc Information Science	Full time employee with new media firm	40 hours	Office (in charge of	714	He has been working full time at a management

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Loen.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
									40 staff)		level for this dotcom firm for three years.
47	Naphaphon	F	1976	single	T	MBA	Dotcom entrepreneur, Working with her partner	40 hours	Office	428	She was a consultant from finance firm for 2 years. Now, she is a co-owner, with her partner, of a community website and e-commerce.
48	Monthira	F	1976	single	T	BA Art	Full time employee for a multimedia company	50 hours	Office	357	She is a full time web designer and graphic designer with a media firm.
49	Phairot	M	1977	single	T	BSc IT	Dotcom entrepreneur, Owner of a portal website, computer programmer, web consultant	60 hours	Home Office	<714 (from dotcom firm)	He worked full time in an IT firm for 1 year. He now works full time for his own portal website and earns income from web consulting and web developing.
50	Surachai	M	1977	single	T	BA Creative Arts	Freelancer, web page designer, graphic designer	60 hours	Home Office	571 (depend on the project)	He was a full time employee as a graphic designer for 2 years. Currently, he is self-employed by being a web developer and graphic designer.

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
51	Chumphon	M	1977	single	T	BA Applied Arts	Freelancer, web designer, graphic designer	35 hours	Home Office Live with his father	285 (uncertain)	He is a self-employed since graduation. He has earned income from web design and graphic design.
52	Parichat	F	1977	Cohabit with boyfriend	T	BA Fine Art	Graphic designer, employee (previously a freelancer)	60 hours	Office	357 (salary from an advertising company) (from sideline job)	She was a full time employee for 1 year before being self-employed for 6- month as a web designer. Now she has become a full time employee again as a web designer, but also has a graphic design job as sideline.
53	Nanthana	F	1977	single	C	BA Accounting	e-commerce entrepreneur with her partner web content editor	45 hours	Office	285	She was a full-time computer programmer in a retail firm for 1 year. Now, she is a co-owner of a community website.
54	Kloichai	F	1978	single	C	BA Fine Art	Full time employee, web designer, and graphic designer	40 hours	Office	257	Currently, she is a full time graphic designer with an e-commerce firm.
55	Chintana	F	1978	single	C	MSc Computer Information	Dotcom entrepreneur	70 hours	Home Office	428	She is an owner of a

No.	Name	G <sup>15</sup>	YOB	Status	Eth <sup>16</sup>	Edn.	Work Responsibility	Bus. Hrs (h/wk) <sup>17</sup>	Locn.	Income <sup>18</sup> (£pm)	Previous job
						System	with her partner				community website. Income is from banners

From table 4.6, categorising the research participants by demographic background – gender, age, marital status, and descent – is quite straightforward. Notably, for ethnicity, I arrange informants who mentioned that they are from Chinese family as Chinese otherwise I assume they are Thai. For work responsibility, I decided to categorise according to the above explanation of each group: employee, dotcom/e-commerce entrepreneurs and freelancers. This categorisation is not very straightforward, as their work situation could still vary and still quite unclear. For example, full time employees can also be self-employed at the same time. I solved the problem by grouping the participants who have a fixed income from a company as full-time employees. Income is also unclear. Generally, the participants did not want to reveal their exact income. They tended to say that it was irregular and earn project by project. The figure given derives from their average estimate of earnings each month. I have calculated their income into pound sterling by basing on the exchange rate of £1 per Bt70. Full time employees have a clearer idea how much they earn monthly. For e-commerce/dotcom entrepreneurs, income from the Internet activities is around 10-30 per cent of their total monthly income, the rest of their income can stem from selling products off-line. Dotcom entrepreneurs tend to earn main income from the Internet and computer related activities, Wiset and Thawi are examples in this group.

**Table 4.7: Women's Monthly Income According to Status and Work**

	Single		Married	
	Employees	Entrepreneurs	Employees	Entrepreneurs
< £300	Kloichai			
£300-500	Wanthani Naiyana Monthira Sansani Niranat Chutima Kittiya	Phenphon Phatson Nanthana Chintana Naphaphon	Parichat	Kamala
> £500		Khanuengnit Naritsara Sunisa Kannika Chanchira	Nuanprang	Anongnat Aphinya Nittaya Phatthra, Wanida
<b>Total:</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>

**Table 4.8 Women's Working Hours by Status and Work**

	Single		Married	
	Employees	Entrepreneurs	Employees	Entrepreneurs
< 40 hours/wk		Naritsara		
40-50 hours/wk	Wanthani Naiyana Monthira Kloichai Sansani Chutima Monthani Kittiya	Phenphon Naphaphon Sunisa Nanthana Khanuengnit  Chanchira Kannika		Phatthra Wanida Kamala
> 50 hours/wk	Niranat	Chintana	Parichat Nuanprang	Nittaya Aphinya Anongnat
Total people	9	10	2	6

In table 4.7, dotcom and e-commerce entrepreneurs earn more than women participants who are employees. Working longer hours can be one of the reasons that Nittaya and Anongnat, as shown in table 4.8, earn more; they are in the group earning more than £500 and who work more than 50 hours a week. However, there are a number of cases where women dotcom entrepreneurs, such as Chintana and Prani, work longer but do not earn as much as £500, working on and off the Internet. Nuangprang is a married woman who is a full time employee and works on e-commerce as sideline. Her responsibility includes childcare and work at night for the new business.

On average, office hours in Thailand are 8 hours, for example, 9 am to 5 pm in private sector and 8.30 am to 4.30 pm in public sector. For the research participants in this thesis, full time employees are likely to explain that their office hours are 8 hours, however their actual working hours tend to be longer dependent on deadlines. Overall, e-commerce/dotcom entrepreneurs, both women and men work longer than full-time employees. Participants who work extremely long hours, more than 80 hours a week, can be both women and men and in this research comprises Thawi and Anongnat. When comparing both, Thawi has his wife taking care of his

baby while Anongnat is a married woman in her 50s who has no childcare responsibility. These two people are in high income earning group and are entrepreneurs. All freelancers in this research are men, only two of them: Surachai and Somphop are in the group of working long hours, however none of them earn high income in correlation with long working hours. In contrast, Chuchat, a self employed, is in low-income group and while working on average 40-50 hours. His case can be a case of exception as he explained that he considers this dotcom period as a 'break' of his career so he voluntarily does not want to work too hard.

**Table 4.9 Men's Monthly income according to Status and Work**

	Single			Married	
	Employees	Entrepreneurs	Freelancers	Employees	Entrepreneurs
>£300			Chuchat		
£300-500	Kamnuan Prasoet	Sunthon Phichai Wanchai	Chumphol Somphop Surachai	Amnuai	Wiset Phakdi Thana Sumet Amphon
>£500	Rangsan	Pairoet Wachira Narit		Panya Thanaphon Wutthichai	Anek Phongsak Ronakon Thawi  Chatri Kon
Total	3	6	4	4	11

In table 4.9, it is clear, when compared with table 4.7, that there are more men earning higher than £500 a month than there are women in that category. Again, dotcom and e-commerce entrepreneurs tend to have higher income than employees and the freelancers. When compared with table 4.10, long working hours correlate with earning more income, but not in all cases.

**Table 4.10 Men's Working Hours by Status and Work**

	Single			Married		
	Employees	Entrepreneurs	Free-lancers	Employees	Entrepreneurs	Free-lancers
<40 hours/wk						
40-50 hours/wk	Kamnuan Prasoet Rangsan	Wachira Sunthon Narit Pichai Wanchai	Chumpon Chuchat	Panya Thanaphon	Anek Phongsak Wiset Phakdi Thana Ronakon Amphon  Chatri Kon	
>50 hours/wk		Pairoet	Somphop Surachai	Amnuai Wutthichai	Thawi Sumet	
Total	3	6	4	4	11	

Long working hours alone cannot be a sole indicator of earnings, especially for the self-employed group. Somphop and Surachai, in the freelancers category, do not earn more than £500, but they do work more than 50 hours a week. Working hours in the freelancing group fluctuate, as they work project by project.

When comparing women and men in terms of long working hours, it is clear that most married men who are dotcom and e-commerce entrepreneurs tend to work 40-50 hours, while only a small number of married women who are dotcom and e-commerce entrepreneurs fall in this group.

Overall the interviewees on which this research is based consist of approximately equal numbers of women and men, distributed across the age range, from 24-54 years. The majority were in their 30s, were single and without children, which is similar perhaps to the stereotypical image of an Internet professional. A number of different work types were defined: employees, dotcom/e-commerce entrepreneurs and freelancers and hours and earnings varied among these informants. With the exception of employees and to a lesser extent those working in e-commerce earnings fluctuated and were unpredictable owing to the uneven flow of work. In general both working hours and earnings were lower for women than men.

## **Data Analysis**

To analyse the data, I first transcribed the interviews from minidisk into texts. All transcribing was done in Thai, so that I would be able to understand the context of the participants more clearly. I followed a grounded theory approach in coding and categorizing the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The themes that I obtained from the main body of my research came out from re-reading the scripts repeatedly. I used a highlighter (coloured) pen to mark themes which different participants repeated. When themes were similar or related to one another, I constructed them into conceptual categories. Primarily because this research is from a gender perspective, I tended to be more sensitive and aware of gendered implications.

I followed the method of grounded theory suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), in which theories can be built in the field, or from categories of concepts arising from texts. In addition, they refer to theoretical sampling and advocate an iterative approach between theory and data. It helped me realise that the two are reciprocal during the process of analysis; I was influenced by theories that I read during the analysis. This construction of knowledge happens because of historical, cultural and socially embedded ideas, as well as new research.

## **Conclusion**

At the beginning, my focus was on the economic aspect of the new economy, and its implications for gendered dynamics. However, other themes have recurred in the analysis process, including cyberfeminism, cyborg, gendered identity, women's agency, and power relations concerning time and space and the use of the Internet. Hence, the data analysis was not fixed or one-way, but multi-dimensional, and open to (re)interpretation from different theoretical perspectives. Although the interpretation and analysis of the research remains open, it is not possible for other researchers to look at the entire scripts of the interviews, due to participant confidentiality requirements. So the account of this thesis is dependent on me as researcher, who has chosen to interpret the participants' experiences in the way I think "best".

This chapter has set out the research process, research design, methodology and the ways in which the process was conducted. The process was implemented based on a theoretical framework discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. It plays out to unravel the gendered implications of work in the new economy. This chapter is the point of

departure for using the theoretical framework to analyse participant's experiences, and highlight the gender implications for their daily lives. The different themes arising from the analysis interviews are discussed in the remaining chapters of the thesis, beginning with the more economic dimension.

## CHAPTER 5

### Living and Working in the New Economy

*"The strongest principle of growth lies in human choices"*

George Elliot

#### Introduction

In this thesis, the new economy is taken to mean more than just the coexistence of globalisation and new technologies that were discussed in Chapter 3. Following the ideas of Beck (1992, 2002) and Sennett (1998), it also refers to the way in which contemporary societies have become more open and fluid. Many traditional structures and institutions – for example, the family and trade unions – have waned as individuals take more freedom and responsibility in shaping their own biographies. Following the success of the dotcom boom in the US toward the end of the 1990s, a number of Thais have taken part in the new economy by using the Internet at work. The advent of the Internet is considered to bring new career opportunities and new job positions such as web developers, web designers, graphic designers and e-commerce entrepreneurs have emerged.

This thesis argues that the creation of new jobs represents a close entanglement of the global and the local. This was argued in the introductory chapter, and dealt with again in Chapter 3. However, working on the Internet does not necessarily mean success: a large number of dotcom start-ups were bankrupted by the fall of 2001 (Battelle 2006). However, it created an opportunity for many small firms to be created and survive. Aspirations to join the new economy vary, but a common thread among many informants was the desire to be the owner of a business or '*phu prakop kan*'. In contrast to Beck (1992, 2002) and Sennett (1998), who focus on the more negative aspects of changes to traditional forms of work, this chapter examines how the Internet facilitated the development of new and flexible forms of work in relation to the use of the Internet, in what is often considered to be a less developed country. One of the purposes of this is to examine if theories developed mainly in the West have any relevance to the situation of Thailand. I first illustrate the motivation of informants, especially of entrepreneurs, to participate in the new economy. I want to

show that informants come from many different backgrounds but all share the same aspiration: to be their own boss. I focus on what they expect from the new job and how they perceive the new job opportunities afforded by the Internet.

Second, I explore the income strategies of those research informants who are entrepreneurs. The income strategies they adopt to survive in their Internet business are diverse. As they are no longer full-time employees, they need to initiate business ideas or projects, and then present them to prospective customers, who could be in Thailand or elsewhere. In this way the local can be said to intersect with the global. I discuss some of the different ways dotcom entrepreneurs can earn income. Finally, I also examine the cases of those e-commerce entrepreneurs who integrated traditional businesses with their on-line business. This illustrates how the Internet has become an integral part of business operation and the possibilities for the future.

## **An Attractive Sector**

Around the mid 1990s, people who had an interest in Information Technology (IT) and computers had heard of amazon.com, ebay.com or yahoo.com. These websites appeared as promising dotcom firms, and inspired others to follow. Their success motivated a group of Thais to become dotcom entrepreneurs. A participant in this fieldwork argued that the Internet was not just an option, but the *only* option for Thais during the economic crisis of 1997. Although this might be an overstatement, it was strongly felt. At the beginning of the period of rapid expansion of dotcoms in Thailand, *sanook.com*<sup>19</sup> appeared as a classic example of a successful website that the new wave of dotcom entrepreneurs aspired to follow. In common with – and clearly related to – the desire to be self-employed, participants also seemed to share the hope of a more promising future by escaping from the regulations and routine of the large office. Both women and men have reflected this view at different ages and

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<sup>19</sup> Sanook.com was a very well known website in Thailand, particularly famous during the dotcom boom. The owner of the website was approached by an international multi media firm who wanted to acquire the website. The exact value of the acquisition was never disclosed, but it was claimed to be an amount of millions of baht, and this inspired other dotcom entrepreneurs to pursue their dotcom dream. However, a number of entrepreneurs in this fieldwork commented that the acquisition was designed or calculated to make the sector look more attractive than was really justified at the time. Among my participants was a web owner whose real name could not be revealed. He also admitted that during the dotcom boom in 1999, the sector was meant to show rates of growth much greater than were really justified. So the subsequent 'bust' was in his view merely the restoration of reality.

statuses. The research participants refer to a capacity to be able to organise their time, work for themselves, and not to be governed by their boss. Nevertheless, taking part in this sector may not offer rosy prospects for all the e-commerce/dotcom entrepreneurs. I begin this section by examining these aspirations.

In doing so, I engage with the theory of reflexive modernisation, and its concomitant concept of the 'corrosion of character' (Beck 1994, 2002; Sennett 1998). I will also examine whether the use of the new technology, which in theory reduces the physical barriers between genders at work, does, in reality, lead to the convergence of work and gendered identities and consequent changes in the aspirations of men and women at work.

### *One's Own Boss*

Of course, part of the motivation for self employment can be income related as much as it is about escaping regulations and hierarchical relationships at work. The idea 'get rich quick' also attracted a group of people to become dotcom entrepreneurs. Informants in this research come from various backgrounds as far as age and status are concerned, as I have illustrated in table 4.6 in Chapter 4. For example, recently graduated informants such as Chintana, Phairot, Nanthana, Wanchai and Phichai believed that working as dotcom entrepreneurs would offer them a shortcut to owning a business. Engineers such as Amphon and senior managers such as Wiset decided to resign from leading firms to start up dotcom businesses. A number of dotcom entrepreneurs, such as Phatson, Anek and Thawi, were each funded by venture capital firms<sup>20</sup>. In this section, I highlight the case of participants who previously earned a fixed employee salary. Their aspirations in joining the dotcom are examined through the cases of Phatson and Wiset.

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<sup>20</sup> Venture capital in Thailand was initiated by the US Aid programme in 1988. The purpose of venture capital is to provide financial resources for people who want to start a shop or a business. During the dotcom boom, the number of venture capitalists grew rapidly and sought to provide funds for what were perceived to be the most talented and creative dotcom entrepreneurs in order to share in the anticipated high profits. Before, people would have had to turn to their parents, relatives or friends for financial support.

**“During the economic crisis in 1997, I came to realise that no job was secure. Even employment in the public sector is uncertain. I realised that I could not leave all my future on a particular job. I want to have something of my own. We need to dare to fail. Even what I am doing now, it will need some changes in the future. Nothing is certain; everything needs to be changed all the time. We need to run, we need to change. Having said that, I am satisfied with what I am doing now. I am learning new things. I am happy.”**

**[Phatson, 29, single woman, dotcom entrepreneur]**

**“If I still work with the company, I can see where I will be when I am retired. It is an unbearable thought for me. Is that life all about? Is that the destination of my life? I decided to resign from the company to try something new. I did not want to wonder if my business would survive or not. I deliberately ignore any uncertain prospects. Actually, I came to the point that I did not need to ask myself anymore. Indeed, it was not appropriate to say that I resigned to set up my own business. Actually, I came out to live...more than just working in the office.”**

**[Wiset, 40, married man, dotcom entrepreneur]**

The two quotes above demonstrate the aspirations of two dotcom entrepreneurs. Though their comments are not exactly similar, they reflect the ways in which the two ex-employees were determined to change their job through using the Internet to set up their own businesses. Their expressions reveal a disappointment with working full-time ‘for others’. Are their decisions simply the outcome of an economic crisis? Has the availability of the Internet accelerated their decisions? Without the advent of the Internet, would they still have decided to leave their full-time job? In the case of Phatson, 29, a single woman dotcom entrepreneur shows how she was driven out of her career as a reporter because of economic uncertainty. At that time, many media companies needed to lay off their staff to go through the crisis. On the other hand, Wiset, 40, had a strong urge to ask himself what he ‘really’ wanted to do with his life. The company which Wiset worked for – full time for ten years – was a very well-established firm, and well-known for its lucrative scheme of compensation. To leave the company was a critical decision for Wiset, because it meant abandoning his pension – he was only eligible if he continued working until retirement. Phatson and Wiset decided to join the new economy through different motives, but they both wanted to run their own business.

Owning a business offers a new opportunity to earn income independently. However income prospects fluctuate – they are always uncertain. To decide to leave a full time job means a transformation of one’s career and comes with attached risk. Why do

people who have a secure job decide to leave a full time job and become a dotcom entrepreneur? When compared with off-line retail businesses, using the Internet offered lower barriers to entry and required low investment. Wiset nevertheless voiced his concern that “The Internet helps people to invest easily in a business, but the rate of failure is also higher than before.”

Phatson was a telecom reporter for a Thai newspaper for seven years before deciding to join the dotcom bandwagon. With her initial knowledge of IT news and some familiarity with venture capital, Phatson later presented her business model to a small number of venture capitalists before making a deal with a firm. She then resigned from her full time job. At a personal level, her decision was also driven by her aspiration to be a *Phu Prakop Kan*. A simple reason given by most of the research participants to want to be an entrepreneur was “I don’t want to be an employee for the rest of my life.” The age of the informants did not seem to be an obstacle, a proportion of dotcom entrepreneurs in this research started an on-line business in their 40s or 50s, as the in the cases of Wiset and Anongnat. Meanwhile, informants in their 30s formed the largest group in this thesis, and they tended to work full-time before joining the new economy.

As an online entrepreneur, Phatson felt more autonomous and able to make her own decisions (Beck 1992, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, Sennett, 1998). However, Phatson’s independence was and is still dependent upon venture capital, which enables her to have her ‘own’ business. She needs a continually strong business performance to survive in this environment. For Phatson, the new economy provides a new opportunity, something that may not be possible for everyone. Nevertheless, this shows that the fixed biography of ‘jobs for life’ or ‘long term employment’ with companies was changing (Beck 1992). People were looking for an opportunity to author their own lives.

Wiset’s decision to leave his 10-year full-time job echoes Phatson. After graduating with his first degree in engineering, Wiset worked full time as a computer system analyst with a leading firm in the industry. The Internet was just about to proliferate when Wiset left the company. After selling computer hardware for a while, Wiset decided to expand his business on-line. Wiset can be regarded as among the first adopters of the Internet in Thailand. When he started to develop his website, up to that point he had not seen any written in Thai at all. During the pioneering years Wiset had found that it was very difficult to find web sponsors, owing to a lack of

knowledge about the Internet. Wiset was devoted to building up the business from scratch. Soon after, the Internet began to boom.

Wiset has emphasised that he wanted to 'live' his life. Perhaps this shows that he needed to do something else to enhance his well-being. Wiset did not regret abandoning his career path, which would have provided a stepping stone to a professional career had he continued. This aspect appears to contradict Beck (1992) and Sennett (1998), who argued that uncertainties from working in large companies drove people to author their working lives. In the case of Wiset, he had worked with a privatised firm that was very well established, well known for its pension scheme, and offered a number of other benefits, all of which appeared very attractive to individuals. This may suggest that a firm career path with a fixed routine was not always the preferred choice.

The case of Phatson and Wiset represented other informants in this research, especially ex-employees who left their full time jobs to set up ventures in the new economy. Becoming dotcom entrepreneurs appeared to offer a low-cost option in setting up a business. Table 4.3 in Chapter 4 illustrates that dotcom/e-commerce entrepreneurs form the majority of participants in this research, comprising 17 men and 16 women. Men and women in this group are both single and married, and both genders tend to work longer hours than full-time employees and earn at higher levels. Perhaps these entrepreneurs have lost faith with established institutions and long for something that they can claim to be their own. In particular, they wanted 'ownership' of their own life. These sentiments also may reflect the demise of those grand institutions that were always considered as the sole career option for previous generations, along the lines of the reflexive modernisation thesis discussed in Chapter 3. This is a theory that developed in the West, but which can also apply to these entrepreneurs in Thailand. Of course, it is also important to recognize that some people have always preferred to work for themselves. Being the author of one's own life and breaking away from traditional employment, can lead to much more fragmented careers and life-paths. For example, dotcom/e-commerce entrepreneurs must create income strategies to enable their businesses to survive financially and this may lead them into multiple jobs and sources of income, and thus multiple identities.

## **Income Strategies**

In the new economy, individuals need to be more responsible in making decisions about what jobs they want to do. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argued that in countries that have opened to Western ways of life, such as China and Russia, people are caught up in the dramatic 'plunge into modernity' (2002:2), just as much as those in the West. Their ideas cannot be applied directly to Thai society – for example, trade unions do not exist in many private firms in the country – but in this respect people were already individualised and realised their future was dependent upon their own management, and that they needed to establish their own potential in the labour market. Work in the new economy reflects the extent to which informants seek new opportunities in terms of careers. This can accentuate the ideas of Beck (1992) and Sennett (1998) that the transformation of the labour market will generate a more flexible pattern of work while individuals still need to be more responsible for the authorship of their own lives. I begin with a discussion of the income strategies of dotcom entrepreneurs, following the definition established in Chapter 4.

### *Project Initiation and Presentation*

The key point about Internet entrepreneurs is that they make money out of ideas (Castells 2001: 56), so entrepreneurial innovation becomes the driving force of the Internet economy, rather than the returns on large amounts of capital. With the low cost of entry into the Internet business, these entrepreneurs do not risk very much. They need to generate income from their ideas and innovation. The Dotcom entrepreneurs represented in this research could not wait for jobs to arrive. They needed to create different ideas and projects, to earn incomes to survive in their business. They may have had diverse backgrounds, such as architecture, engineering, graphic designer, business administration, but once they started the dotcom they had to rely on their ideas to initiate new projects and create demand for their products and services. In this regard, informants such as Sunisa, Kannika, Sunthon, Phichai, Chanchira, and Phatson needed to create new ideas when approaching their Thai customers. Additionally, dotcom entrepreneurs used e-mail communication when introducing their products to foreign customers. This strategy reveals the extent to which local and the global intersect closely via the Internet.

Sunisa, 34, a female interior designer who became a software training consultant in 1999, saw an opportunity for computer graphic, 3-d animation, web design and

programming. She then initiated a training course for customers interested in these programmes. At that time, she felt it was the right moment to stop working for others, as she had always dreamed of becoming an entrepreneur since her first degree in 1992. From the beginning of her new career as the owner of a computer-training firm, Sunisa cooperated with lecturers from a leading university to help her design details of the programme. Her initial strategy was to combine her professional experience in interior design with graphic training, forming a company that specialised in interior design and computer training and relying on the expertise of the lecturers advanced programming skills.

Sunisa explains that she needed to 'walk-in' to many firms to introduce the services provided by her company, which was a relatively new concept for business-people in Thailand in 1999.

"I need to present projects and profiles of my company to the potential customers. Especially, now we are specialised in designing software thus we aim at selling the whole package to a large firm. Then we need to learn to customise the software according to what the customers want. Each project is quite large and may last for 3-6 months. Each year, we can acquire work for 3-4 projects and it will last for the whole year."

[Sunisa, 34, a single woman entrepreneur]

Sunisa's company income is quite irregular, so hard to estimate, but the amount must clearly cover the company's monthly expenses, and so despite not revealing this income specifically, she did give a clue through outlining her company's monthly expenses.

"My firm has only 20 staff but each month expense is nearly or above 1 million baht (£14,300). That was what the situation I got into during my first year of running my own firm. The most expense came from renting the office and parking space for the staff. It costs a lot and it was incredible that we had to pay that high amount. I did not have experience in personnel management and business management at all, so I needed to learn from scratch. Now I know that I need to be careful with capital management so I have moved the office to a cheaper location. That helps a lot."

[Sunisa]

In addition to finding new work by walking in and approaching each customer, Sunisa also placed advertisements in IT magazines, and distributed brochures to a target group. As the Internet business was relatively new, it was quite difficult for IT

firms to convince customers about the necessity of the Internet. Meeting and presenting a work project required a source of income that had to last for several months. The income that she was earning had to be enough for 20 staff each month. Eventually she found herself working 7-days a week or even spending some nights over at the office to manage the workload. Additionally, Sunisa was managing an export and retail business with her siblings. She planned to synthesise the three main businesses under one roof by using her expertise in interior design as the main focus. Sunisa regarded the Internet business as her main source of income. From the start, Sunisa used her savings and also the additional income from previous freelance work, done before resigning from the company where she worked full-time. Though working quite long hours Sunisa explained that *“I still enjoy it very much because I am following my dream of being an entrepreneur.”* At 34, Sunisa had not married. She said that she was not dating anyone because a relationship would distract her from work, and she still wanted to achieve a lot more in her career.

Phichai, 27, a male architect, also decided to become a dotcom entrepreneur. Like Sunisa, he was once a full time employee, in his case in an architectural firm after finishing his first degree. Later, he made up his mind to abandon his career in architecture and spend more time as an entrepreneur. His Internet website became widely recognised by the media. During the first few years, it grew very rapidly. Phichai noted that the Internet generated possibilities he might never have realised.

“If there was no Internet, I would not have come this far. As I said, the Internet is really a brand new thing. As it is a very new thing, it helps people who never had an opportunity realise a true opportunity. Hence they can just jump in to build up opportunities for themselves. If you need to build an opportunity from a career which has already existed, you will need to make much more effort and invest much more money [...] I have decided not to work in real estate because of the economic bust. In addition, architecture in Thailand is highly governed by the seniority system.”

[Phichai, 27, single man entrepreneur and web developer]

Phichai came to the interview with his laptop. He appeared relaxed when discussing his work, and when I asked him about his work strategy he did not hesitate to show his power point presentation, something prepared for approaching customers. Phichai was inspired by how young people in the US started dotcom firms and became successful. He asked himself *‘why not me?’* The key point of the new economy was for entrepreneurs to create money out of ideas. Success in the dotcom

sector for Phichai was earning a high income through selling his ideas. His firm started a retail business using a website that sold second-hand products. He planned to earn income through banner advertisements, but also by establishing a network with other retailers, using his website as a medium of communication (portal). Phichai tried to arrange to meet a few retailers or business owners each day to try to obtain their banner advertisements for his website. This was the main source of income for his business.

Phichai was running a dotcom business in which selling information about second hand products was completely different to being an architect. This echoes Sennett (1998), who argues that lifetime employment is being corroded, as is trust and loyalty. Life is no longer a linear narrative. The current generation encountered forces beyond their control in the labour market. In Thailand, changes in employment had resulted from an economic crisis, technological development and a new capitalism. All of these seemed to have both enabled and compelled people into more flexibility regarding their careers, hopes and aspirations. This paved the way for both genders to explore new opportunities reflexively.

Apart from jumping into presented opportunities, it might as well be considered that Phichai had sought out an opportunity for himself. This shows that a start-up entrepreneur needs to be willing to venture beyond boundaries, and to take risks in an unknown area. The case of Phichai also reflected the way that men and women of the younger generation could escape established bureaucracy in larger institutions that remained patriarchal and dominated by senior men in gender terms. Young men also faced this hierarchical system, but by becoming a dotcom entrepreneur Phichai was able to avoid this situation to a certain extent. However, the old structure may have provided a more certain path, with a linear progression in the work experience of individuals. Phichai's decision seemed to reflect a contemporary situation, one in which individuals were looking for new forms of freedom, and the novel opportunities that seemed available in the new economy. Modern societies can turn other certainties, for example work, employment and welfare support, into precarious freedoms too (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). In this case, Phichai had the personal autonomy to decide what he really wanted to do with his own career.

However, it needs to be considered to what extent the new economy can provide a 'short cut' for individuals who want to be successful more quickly in their employment and whether the Internet is only a temporary form of work or if it can

sustain long term career choices. Novel available opportunity from dotcom boom seems to encourage individuals to venture in this sector; however this may come with new uncertainties.

For Phichai, being a dotcom entrepreneur was not enough, he felt a strong urge to develop networking with people working in IT sector. In so doing, he returned to work full time with a multimedia firm, while maintaining his dotcom business as well. He organised a team of his friends to operate the dotcom. He considered that the two jobs complemented each other. Phichai drew upon a new social network from the IT firm where he was working full time. He said that he had needed to keep abreast of the new technology, thus working in multimedia and having colleagues there helped. This choice came at a price, because he could not devote 100 per cent of his time to his own dotcom firm. Phichai nevertheless admitted that he does not think that he can pursue the dotcom business for the rest of his life. One reason is the sector is still quite volatile. On top of the fluctuating nature of the dotcom firm, Phichai explains that as the eldest son of a Chinese-Thai family, he will have to take up his parents' business, the material in Chapter 7 will further highlight gendered politics of Chinese family in Thailand. Working for his dotcom firm represents a temporary stage of Phichai's life in which he could escape from the traditional structure of patriarchy and traditional business of his family.

### *Show Me the Money*

Three informants in this thesis were funded by venture capitalists. The three informants: Thawi, Anek and Phatson, were in their mid 30s, married and worked full-time before deciding to join the dotcom sector. Working full-time appeared a driving force for them to venture into this dotcom sector as they wanted to create new opportunities in their career. As explained above, venture capitalists invest in start up firms and take a share of the profits. Venture capital will not manage the firm in which they hold their investment directly, allowing the 'owner' to operate on their own, but the venture capital firm obtains income from the funded company once they are operating and making profits. The venture capitalists and entrepreneurs may not like each other, but they need to work together (Castells 2001). The three cases I present in this section show the extent to which the three participants get financial investment from venture capitalists and how they have managed their business to achieve the set goals for their firms. Thawi, 26, a married man with a baby, is now an owner and a managing director of a dotcom – software

consultant firm. Thawi holds half of the shares in his firm, while the venture capitalist gains 50 per cent of the firm's income. Thawi does not want to specify exactly how much his company earns each month, but he states:

**"I am a Managing Director who holds some shares of the company. Some MD may not hold any shares at all. I am an MD who has both salary and shares and I also get dividends according to company's profits. I, in fact, do not care much about salary, but I must make profits for the firm."**

**[Thawi, 26, a dotcom entrepreneur, married with a baby]**

Thawi is now a network engineer who is in charge of 5-6 computer programmers and system analysts. From his description, Thawi regards himself as an owner of the business not a shareholder. With the investment by the venture capitalist, Thawi's company must follow agreed business conditions and he is obliged to meet income target each month. Approximately, Thawi explains that his own income is not more than Bt100,000 (£1,428) each month, which is considered high for a person at his age. Nevertheless, earning high income comes with the price of working very long hours. Thawi works 7 days a week for his dotcom firm.

**"I work more than 12 hours a day these days. I start each day at 9 am and finish at midnight. [...] I have to be highly responsible for the company. If the deadline is approaching and I could not have finished yet, I must carry on though it means I may not be able to go home at times."**

**[Thawi]**

On top of being a computer expert for his firm, Thawi needs to concentrate on management as well. He has to learn to exercise multi-skills in maintaining his business. Anek, another entrepreneur, who is supported by venture capital also manages and works in his company, which is the usual situation for small business owners. In 2000, Anek resigned from his full time job as an IT reporter because he was full of conviction about the new economy and wanted to start up his firm. Then, he proposed a plan to a venture capitalist. He explains his ideas for dotcom.

“I had some ideas in mind so I proposed the plan to a venture capital with whom I have some connection. I was confident that any idea about dotcom at that time would interest investors. [...] Finally, a venture capitalist I know gave me an initial investment, it was the turning point for me to change from a full-time employee to an entrepreneur. It is a brand new life which means I need to learn everything from scratch.”

[Anek, 30, a married man, dotcom entrepreneur]

Anek had formed a dotcom firm with four staff. The company planned to provide a computer consultant and website developing service. In the first year of his operation though, Anek had realised that his company could not solely rely on the computer and website service, and that he needed to earn extra income from his own expertise – his job in the media. Seventy per cent of the company’s income came from Anek’s job as a radio anchorman, and thirty per cent from the website consulting service. So far his company had not made any profits. Anek explained the stress of earning income.

“I can’t stop. I am very tired everyday and I am quite bored because the main income to feed my company is from my work as a radio presenter. I really need to earn income, more and more income...more customers...take care of existing customers...manage my staff...initiate new projects...and all.”

[Anek]

Anek’s earned income was about Bt20,000-30,000 (£285-428) a month, which was about the same as when he had been a full time reporter. He admitted that he felt more financially secure as a full time employee. However, it would never be possible to get rich. He explained his aim, “*I want to get rich, and I want to be richer. I want to overcome the financial difficulties in my life.*” Anek understood that the venture capital investment in his firm revealed that the investor must be very confident in his business.

“Thinking of it, I am so proud that a respectable investor gave me a large amount of money, no wonder how I want to work like crazy to achieve the goal. It is true that the investor will share my company’s profit, but I will also get some from this arrangement too.”

[Anek]

As Anek described it above, once he had decided to be an entrepreneur, he could not stop. The agreement with venture capital was a driving force for him to continue working and to initiate new projects to maintain his business.

Phatson, another dotcom entrepreneur, whom I discussed earlier, relied on venture capital, and earned a fixed amount of income from venture capital each month. However, she also needed to create new projects to generate income, as part of the agreement with the venture capitalist. Phatson explained that her venture capital provided some training in web development, and a fixed salary for her. She also needed to generate income to meet the target settled between her and the venture capitalist, and the venture capitalist would share the profit from her dotcom. The fixed income she earned from the venture capital firm is Bt 15,000 (£215) a month. During the first two years of doing her business in 2000 and 2001, Phatson could not generate any income from her dotcom, and she simply relied on a monthly income from the venture capitalist. Finally, she came up with an idea of being an event organiser and public relations advisor using an online system. These new ideas helped Phatson raise her income from her website on its own to around Bt 100,000 (£1,430). However, she needed to share that income with the venture capitalist, and she could not disclose the details of the deal.

I have described three cases of Thawi, Anek and Phatson, all dotcom entrepreneurs who work with venture capital firms. These informants identify themselves as having independence and authorship as business owners. They used to be full-time employees and they shared the same dream of becoming the owner of a business. Now they had achieved this dream. However, they were also working under the constraints and pressure that derived from the conditions set by venture capitalists. These conditions were the driving force for them in running the business and shaping their business plan and management.

As a contrary case, Narit tried to avoid any funding by a venture capital firm. Narit, 30, a male entrepreneur, was a full time employee with a computer firm for two years. During that time, he was also developing a retail website and then launched it in 2000. Then, he managed his routine by spending evenings after office hours to build up his website. Soon after the launch, Narit's website became famous. Later, Narit decided to resign from his full time job to pursue web developing and e-commerce.

Nattha: Why did you then decide to quit the full time job?

Narit: For one thing, I was bored with my work. I want to let the future lead the course of my life. I could then see lots of potential from an online business. There were many venture capitalists who approached me to buy my website. They were both foreign and Thai investors. So, I decided to resign to develop my own business plan. I gave salary for myself of Bt 2,500 a month. Before resignation, I earned a salary of Bt 20,000 from the company, but I still made a decision to live on Bt 2,500 a month.

[Narit, 30, single, man entrepreneur]

Narit had a clear aim in mind when he resigned from the company: that his firm would attract venture capitalists. And it did. Narit was contacted by a number of venture capitalists in 2001. After a series of meetings with a venture capitalist, he nearly sold his website, but decided in the end not to do so.

“VC (venture capital) is like an investor, when they invest in your business they expect to get profit immediately. Let’s say, they want to be sure how much you will earn each quarter. It is like you have borrowed money from them and your website is a collateral asset. [...] They would want to hold more than 50 per cent in my business. I even actually signed an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with them, but I later dropped it because I cannot make up my mind about the deal. In the beginning, I told myself that it was necessary to sell my baby (website) for its growth. But, I could not make up my mind so I turned down the offer.”

[Narit]

The new economy needed finance to nurture its businesses, and venture capital firms could be crucial in uncovering new talents, and allowing those with new ideas to begin to develop businesses in the new economy. The role of venture capital was to supervise the management of the dotcom start ups, which meant both sides needed to work together, whether they liked each other or not, as long as they thought the investment was promising (Castells 2001). Narit did not want to release ownership of his business to the venture capital. The fact that he resigned from his full time job did not help in this situation. Nevertheless, Narit accepted this risk, and set himself a business plan to pursue his business. He set himself a fixed salary of Bt 2,500 (£36). This was not a realistic amount to live on and it was so much less than his previous salary with the firm, which was Bt25,000 (£360)<sup>21</sup>. Narit said that he

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<sup>21</sup> On average, Thais who have just completed their first degree earn a salary of around Bt 10,000 (c.£145) in the private sector.

felt secure because he had his own saving which he could live on for quite some time. He wanted to live at a basic level, so that he could work for what he really wanted to do in life. It should also be taken into account that Narit lived with his parents, and he did not need to be too concerned with his financial situation.

The main motivation for Narit to work as a full-time dotcom entrepreneur was because he did not want to be an employee for the rest of his life. Narit later realised that income from his online retail business alone was not enough to cover his expenses. As he was working full time for his dotcom firm, he needed to manage his time to free some to do an extra job as a freelance writer for magazines and newspapers, to earn more income. Miscellaneous jobs helped his dotcom firm survive financially. Despite realising that his income was not very high, Narit felt proud that his website still belonged to him, and was relieved that he had finally become an entrepreneur, which meant he was working for himself. However, he did not believe that work based on the Internet would be sustainable over the long term.

“In my eyes, the Internet is quite a fake business. It does not really generate substantial income. The atmosphere is more or less the same for Thai or foreign dotcom people. Being a big dotcom firm may be more difficult to survive, unlike a small entrepreneur like me. There is no physical location on the Internet. The big firm may invest up to Bt20 million while my investment may cost only Bt 50,000 but the website can look more or less the same. It is all about the brand image.”

[Narit]

The way the Internet functioned on-line seemed to enable opportunities for individuals to set up their firms. This new opportunity seemed to drive people to work more independently, despite the risk. At least the opportunity was available, though it is not yet clear whether this can be a permanent option. This new trend seemed to echo that of the individualisation thesis, which argues that people have to be 'biographers of their own lives' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

## **E-commerce Entrepreneurs**

Those participants who I have grouped under e-commerce entrepreneurs had all evolved off-line product sales into online systems. These people sold, for example, jewellery, handicrafts, and agricultural products, in traditional ways, before then

combining that method with an on-line system. The owners of flower delivery systems, and businesses exporting candles, all launched e-commerce operations from their existing businesses. This group comprises both women and men entrepreneurs. There were eight e-commerce entrepreneurs among the participants in this research, and all of them were married. They comprised four married women, and four married men, aged between 32 to 54 years old. In terms of this age range, the average e-commerce entrepreneur was older than a dotcom entrepreneur, as some dotcom entrepreneurs were in their early 20s, having just finished their first degree. The dotcom entrepreneurs in this thesis were both single and married, in contrast to the group of e-commerce entrepreneurs.

Anongnat, 54, a married woman, was the most senior participant among e-commerce entrepreneurs, and worked the longest hours. From an income perspective, Anongnat was grouped among married women business owners, earning more than £500 a month, and through working more than 50 hours a day. Anongnat was the owner of a leading property firm. Previously, Anongnat and her husband had divided their responsibility in managing their property business. When the economic crisis happened in 1997, Anongnat felt compelled to search for another business, which could generate cash very quickly. The Internet appeared to be an option. Nevertheless, she took a little time before venturing into online retailing with foreign firms and deciding to launch her own e-commerce business network. Her self-belief came from reading successful stories of dotcom people in the West, and she believed that sooner or later Thais would have to follow the same path of generating wealth through the Internet and on-line systems. When I met her, Anongnat had set up a training course on e-commerce in her own office. Her purpose was to educate prospective retailers or people who were keen on e-commerce or the Internet. She arranged a course every Saturday herself as a trainer. She aimed to persuade retailers to join her e-commerce network. Her purpose was to strengthen e-commerce retailers in Thailand to sell their products by employing her firm's system. She planned to generate income from the membership fees and sales volume of each company. Her company provided expertise in setting up a website, and then in delivery management. Her e-commerce network could be thought of as an on-line shopping mall which comprised various retailers on her website.

Anongnat viewed the Internet as a valuable resource. Though her initial intention in using the Internet to generate great wealth was upbeat, she admitted that her e-commerce project had not really produced much income. However, she still kept

working and motivating her e-commerce entrepreneurs' network. In this thesis, I had interviewed three informants who each joined Anongnat's network. Wanida, Kamala and Chatri lived in Chiang Mai, the second largest city in Thailand, which is well known for its handicraft and hand-made products. I met the three informants separately in Chiang Mai for the interviews. These three participants undertook different retail businesses, but the idea of combining e-commerce to their business was appealing for them.

"I actually want to try the e-commerce market because....as we are already in the business we want to grow...If there are new available options, how can we not try it?"

[Wanida, 44, a married woman entrepreneur]

"I was looking for something which I can do on my own. I don't like to control anyone and I don't want anyone to control me...that's why I need to do it by myself. It (e-commerce) is sort of surprising that I can run it on my own.

[Kamala, 36, a married woman entrepreneur]

"I need to do something more on top of my parents' generation. My parents are not used to a computer, but now it is my turn to continue the business and I want to shape it into e-commerce."

[Chatri, 33, a married man entrepreneur]

All these three retailers decided to invest in e-commerce because they considered it was the right timing, given the expansion of the Internet, and the growth of e-commerce. Wanida, 44, a mother of a daughter and two sons, was selling handicrafts at a local market in Chiang Mai. Wanida and her husband had been helping each other to manage their retail business. As they had recently invested in e-commerce, they also needed help from their sons and daughter to work on a computer, the Internet and a digital camera. Wanida explained that she did not even think of whether or not to start up e-commerce, she considered it a 'must'. For nearly two years she had integrated the family's retail business with e-commerce. She explained that her family worked as a team. Wanida was still responsible for producing and selling the handicraft products off-line, while her husband and sons developed and maintained the website. Her husband tended to spend night time doing the website and checking orders from e-mails. Though working assiduously to use and create e-

commerce, Wanida admitted that she had not actually earned any income from it. All her income stemmed from the family's retail business.

The cases of Chatri and Kamala were quite similar with Wanida's, in not earning any income from e-commerce yet. Chatri had inherited his parents' retail business, and thought it was the right time to integrate with e-commerce. He worked with Anongnat's team, as discussed above. After a year of preparation for e-commerce, Chatri explained that he had not earned income from selling through the online system. Most of his shop's income was still from local and foreign customers who had already known his shop. The case of Kamala was not very different. She also earned no income from e-commerce. Kamala planned to do e-commerce as an additional job away from the family's business. Kamala wanted to do something on her own, to pursue financial independence from her husband. Her case and familial relations are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. Kamala planned her e-commerce business by preparing the website and searching for products to be sold on-line. However, her e-commerce had not really generated any income, while her main source of income was from the family's business. She helped her husband by taking care of the company's account and personnel management.

The three entrepreneurs, Wanida, Chatri and Kamala, were working with Anongnat, yet were facing difficulty in surviving, as their e-commerce operations had not generated any income. Though Anongnat was still confident about it, the others were less certain. Wanida explained during the interview that she thought of that moment as a trial period; if it had not worked after two years, she planned to stop the e-commerce project. In fact, this was what she did. Later on, in response to my follow up enquiry one year later, she told me by e-mail that she had decided to stop the e-commerce project as part of Anongnat's network. However, she still wanted to do business online with her family. Kamala and Chatri could not be reached via e-mail. Their websites no longer existed after one year, and I could not contact them by any means. The Internet is like a place you can 'meet anyone but no one' because most websites have a 'contact us' column for visitors to the site, but there are no guarantees that the web owners in question will reply. It is difficult to find web-owners when their websites have disappeared.

## **Banner Ads**

Banner ads were another common way for dotcom/e-commerce entrepreneurs to finance their businesses. Web-owners would obtain sponsors for their website, and then show their banner advert on their web site, which linked to the sponsor's website. The web owners were to be paid according to a contract, which could be monthly or bi-monthly, and depended on the number of sales made through people clicking on the link contained in the banner ad. This agreement assured the entrepreneurs a regular income from the web. The more banners the web owners had, the more income for that website. Most entrepreneurs in this research needed to rely on banners for the survival of their websites. I illustrate a few cases where the dotcom entrepreneurs approached the sponsors. Strategies to get banner ads were varied. For example, Kittiya was approached by potential sponsors directly, while Wiset set up a barter deal with the Internet server, thus saving costs in operating his dotcom business.

Kittiya, 27, a full-time employee, was developing an online magazine website as her sideline. Though she saw herself as a full-time employee, she also called herself an 'entrepreneur' because of this online magazine. She was responsible for website development and graphic design in a department of a leading retail firm. Her office hours were Monday to Friday from 7.30 am to 16.00 pm, so she could spend evening hours to manage her online magazine, and do some extra jobs. She was frequently approached to do graphic design and web design, from which she earned additional income on top of her Bt 18,000 (c.£260) salary. This sideline income was forecast to rise to Bt 30,000 (c.£430) which exceeded her salary. The online magazine also generated extra income for her from banner ads. The income came in monthly, sometimes annually.

"From each banner, I can earn up around Bt6,000-8,000 (£85-£115) a year. Income from only one banner is more than enough to sustain my online magazine website as I have to pay hosting cost for Bt5,000 (£70) a year. [...] Overall, I am satisfied with the amount of income I have earned though I am still far from being a millionaire."

[Kittiya, 27, single woman, a full time employee and entrepreneur]

If her website became more popular, Kittiya stood to earn more from the banner ads. Kittiya earned a relatively high income when compared with those full time employees with similar qualifications but without any sideline. However, the

amount of her total income was uncertain, as the sideline income varied. Kittiya explained that given that her full-time workload was also demanding, the more time she spent on her sideline, the less time she could take for herself and she does not think it is worth her health.

“At least, I am okay about it (the workload) at the moment, but I may not be able to do so in the near future as I am about to marry and I want to prioritise my family.”

[Kittiya]

Kittiya explained how she might not be able to sustain this long hours workload for too long into the future.

Being an entrepreneur did not always mean working long hours. Wiset, an entrepreneur whom I discussed above, had set a schedule of working five days a week. Wiset was now setting his own salary at Bt 20,000 (£300) a month, which he considered low when compared with the average salary of a young graduate working in the non-IT private sector<sup>22</sup>. Wiset explained that his strategy for survival in business was quite conservative. His company ran a barter system with an Internet server to save the cost of renting or buying the Internet server. Wiset saved costs by linking the icon of the Internet Service Provider (ISP) on his web site in a way that visitors to Wiset’s website could also click on the ISP’s web link if they wanted to. Wiset’s web community could get this kind of bargain because his site was one of the leading web exchanges in Thailand, and the ISP considered it useful for them to have this system, as it would advertise their services on Wiset’s website.

In a way, this web link had become a form of ‘banner advertisement’ for Wiset. Wiset would not get any ‘income’ from the banners, but he would not need to pay for the Internet server.

Another strategy available to web owners in order to get more visitors was to have banner links with a counterpart. For example, Phichai and Narit, the entrepreneurs I have already discussed above, were friends, and they agreed to have mutual links between their websites. If customers were interested in products that Narit’s website was selling they could click the banner of Phichai’s website to get to Narit’s website. The banner links enabled entrepreneurs to build up networks, and obtain increased

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<sup>22</sup> Although it was above the average for a young graduate in the IT sector, as mentioned previously.

visitors to their websites. This helped them build up alliances in business, because each website could have the same product lines, and posting their website on each others could help promote the name of the websites.

### **Across the globe**

Additionally, to maximize the capacity of the Internet, a number of informants had expanded their network and market to other countries by developing networks with foreign clients, keeping in contact via e-mail. In this way the Internet created 'nomad' individuals who wandered in cyberspace, sometimes from their home-based offices (Stanworth 2000). E-commerce entrepreneurs such as Thana, Sumet, and Ranakorn used the power of the Internet to transcend space and expand their retail business by selling to foreign clients while Aphinya attempted to strengthen her company's contact with foreign customers.

Sumet, 61, was the manager of an export-import firm mainly to South Asia for 25 years. He had retired from full-time work, and was thus trying to establish an import-export business with his family members. Sumet explained that he had more time to work independently for his firm since his retirement. The Internet had helped him by letting him work early in the morning and late at night. With his experience of working in an import-export business, he was using the Internet to maintain and expand networks with local firms in Bangladesh, his familiar market. In the past, Sumet needed to travel to the country to meet his business counterparts when trying to settle deals. He explained that the advent of the Internet had shortened this communication process, as they were able to e-mail each other, and deals could be done much more easily. The Internet had helped him save travelling costs, while at the same time it allowed him to search for new contacts, more easily than before. Sumet was in the group working more than 50 hours a week, and in the high income earning group. Thanks to the Internet, Sumet could sustain himself financially after retirement. He did not want to stop working and expanding the network, as he wanted to be able to support his two adult sons.

Aphinya, 34, was another example of a dotcom entrepreneur who used the Internet for her company's networking. Aphinya operated a software house firm in which she hired computer programmers to develop computer programmes for a retailing system. Her main clients were retailers in Latin America. Fortunately, she had

known the customers from her foreign contacts who introduced her to the firm. The Internet made communications possible between the computer programmers and the retailers in Latin America, as they were able to work and consult each other quite closely via e-mails. Although the nature of the work could be done via the Internet system, Aphinya could not rely solely on her computer programmers. She had to ensure that all the programs were checked before being released to customers, owing to the highly competitive nature of the market. Indeed she highlighted how easier access to world markets also meant more intense competition among global producers. Aphinya had to exploit both local and global markets. Her firm also provided web-hosting and web-developing services, to expand the range of work and reduce dependence on foreign customers.

## **Conclusion**

The Internet had become the latest development in IT that seemed to open up new career opportunities for people. Dotcom entrepreneurs emerged particularly in the late 1990s, and became considerably popular among professionals, who wanted to create more money through the use of the Internet. Less experienced graduate students were also fascinated by the capacity of the Internet to let them get rich quickly. With its capacity to transcend temporal and spatial divisions, it had become a tool which helped individuals operate at the local level to engage more actively with the global economy. In particular, Thailand had the economic crisis in 1997. It was coincident with the boom of the dotcom business in the West. The collapse of the economy became an external driving force to encourage people to find a new career solution. Additionally, Thai workers are also seeking a new working atmosphere that enables them to have a life of their own and allows them some escape from the formal hierarchy of work. Hence the Internet, which allows entrepreneurs to work in physical isolation, appears as a timely appropriate solution.

Working in the new economy had also created a culture of entrepreneurship, a culture of money, and a culture of workaholism (Castells 2001). Income strategies for dotcom and e-commerce entrepreneurs were varied. They had adopted different ways to earn income, such as those that were entirely independent, those who depended on venture capital and those who operated through e-commerce.

Few of these entrepreneurs really profited from the dotcom business: this applied to all of the e-commerce group, but some of the independent ones were supported by having an additional salaried job. In this chapter, I described how they initiated projects, negotiated with venture capital, used banner ads, and how e-commerce entrepreneurs clustered together to expand their markets.

Like other businesses, the new economy presented both threats and opportunities for dotcom and e-commerce entrepreneurs. Not all of them were successful financially. As the dotcom sector originated from a 'get rich quick' attitude, the '*phu prakop kan*' or entrepreneurs all knew that they needed to be flexible and work long hours to sustain their businesses. Having ideas alone was not enough. Business success was also dependent upon networking, organisation, and good management. Their income was irregular and dependent upon an inherently unpredictable flow of orders. A number of entrepreneurs in this thesis needed to return to full time employment while maintaining their dotcom business at the same time. This solution helped them feel secure financially and yet still have something of their own at the same time.

According to the informants in this thesis, both women and men had participated as dotcom and e-commerce entrepreneurs. It included both single and married people and the age range varied widely from early twenties to late forties. The entrepreneurs were found in the long working hours group, and earned more income than full-time employees, however their greater opportunities came with greater risks, due to high competition and the comparatively low start-up costs in this sector. At first glance, gender did not seem to be a significant issue when entering the Internet business, as both women and men could participate quite easily. However, in the next chapter, I examine in more detail how gender really affects the experiences and opportunities of those informants who work in the Internet business sector.

## CHAPTER 6

### Does Gender Matter in Cyberspace?

#### Identities On (Off) line

*"The body says what words cannot."*

(Martha Graham)

#### Introduction

This chapter moves from the income generating aspect of working in the new economy to the gender identity of informants. I have outlined in Chapter 2 the evolution of Thai modern gender identity in 'civilising' the nation from the late nineteenth to twentieth century. This chapter aims at exploring the gender identity of informants through online and offline communications. A number of participants in this research believe that online communication will pave a way for more equal opportunities between women and men as the 'sexed body' disappears from the Internet thus assuming a male body can 'talk' in *feminine* expression, and a female body in *masculine*. I will examine whether respondents have any opportunity to vary their gender identity. In so doing, the Internet may represent a transformative spatiality where gender identities can be more fluid (Consalvo and Paasonen 2002). I will ask to what extent their physical identity influences informant's identity in cyberspace, and – conversely – how this identity influences their 'real' (offline) identity.

The chapter first focuses on female informants who believe they can realise more opportunities through virtual communication. For informants who have frequently had to work in the public sphere, working by not showing 'physical appearance' can generate a liberating opportunity, free from any kind of gendered identity. I explore whether cyberspace communication enables female informants to be more active agents in the real world, or whether the opportunities that exist are only virtual. Communication via e-mails is done through written language, and in many cases informants may not need to disclose their gender, and to what extent this situation has benefited them will be discussed. Second, I analyse this 'written' aspect in case

of communications in Thai because gender specificity is maintained in the Thai first person pronoun. To what extent can respondents benefit from gender disguise in written language?

In addition to written language and working in the private sphere, the type of the business itself may not correlate with the gender identity of the entrepreneur or *phu prakop kan*. For example, a presumably masculine business may be done by a female respondent and vice versa. Third, this chapter asks to what extent have the entrepreneurs benefited from ignoring their gender if it does not correlate with the type of business. It may be the case that the Internet enables both women and men to enjoy fluid identities online.

Finally, I will move away from online to explore gender identity in the real world or offline communications. Though working online, it is inevitable for *phu prakop kan* to show up in the public at some point. The gender identity of female and male informants will be explored in relation to their experiences of working in the dotcom business and dealing in the 'real' world.

### **Gender Identity and Virtual 'Talk'**

'Virtual' communication or 'talking' in cyberspace permits Internet users to talk without 'seeing' each other's physical appearance. This character of the Internet may enable multiple identities to emerge in cyberspace, where a woman and a man may change their character according with whom they are dealing. Following gender performativity theory, gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, or a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a 'doing' instead of a 'being'. (Butler 1999). If gender is something we do rather than what we actually are to what extent does the projection of self affect identity on the Internet? If gender performativity is dependent upon certain situations or environments, does this indicate that cyberspace is a land without gender boundaries because there is no physical contact between users on the Internet? Does it mean the Internet users can appear to be anyone at any particular time? To consider if this is possible and if gender neutrality can be achieved in cyberspace, the cultural context of users should be taken into account. I will explore the ways in which informants use the Internet for work, communication and other leisure-related activities and ask the extent to which these practices are gendered and how they are entwined into the structures of everyday lives, and how informants make use of them. I consider first of all the

question of whether gender identities can be suspended in cyberspace where bodily identity is not immediately apparent.

It is crucial to examine whether embodiment makes sense in cyberspace, and ask if the meanings of bodies are associated with time and space in cyberspace. It may be the case that Thai women feel more liberated by not being 'visible' in their work, so they can be more active and escape from gendered-hierarchical structures. The Internet allows communication to happen in the 'here and now'; this indicates that a body can appear in different places (in cyberspace) in that 'here and now', enabling one body to 'perform' different identities in a single moment. In terms of language, Thai speakers have different ways of addressing 'I', which is the first person reference; this is different from English and other Western languages (Voravudhi and Diller 1999). Various choices of self-reference of 'I' in Thai marked the forms of gendered subjectivity, which is an outcome of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century of 'civilising' Thailand as discussed in Chapter 2. There was a profound change during the period which marked gendered identity distinctive between women and men and as I referred earlier the shift in self-reference shows that patterns of personal identity has been changed as a result of the Thai gender revolution (Jackson 2003).

The main emphasis in this chapter is on how it is possible to disguise physical appearance in virtual communication. In Thailand this possibility however is complicated by the structure of the Thai language, which does reveal gender in the first person pronoun. In Thai, the first person reference 'I' can vary with gender, social status, intimacy, formality, seniority and other relevant factors (Voravudhi and Diller 1999:114) as discussed earlier in Chapter 2. The different forms of Thai first person pronoun which is various between male and female speakers can indicate a crucial resource of managing, if not defining, personal relationships. For example, Thai women use *dichan* for first person reference while men using *phom*. Thai urban men can use *phom* for self-reference in many general urban daily life situations, but women cannot use *dichan* in every circumstances. It is more complex for female speakers. *Dichan* connotes a high degree of formality and distance between speakers and the addressees. Instead of using *dichan* in every situation, urban Thai women adopt various self-references, for instance epithets such as *nu*, or *phi* as elder sibling or the speaker's own nickname, or *rao* as 'we' or the reflexive pronoun *tua-eng* 'myself'. These are different forms of *dichan*, which are used for Thai women self-reference. This various ways of addressing self-reference mean urban Thai women are shaped by Thai linguistic sensibilities more than men. This

has resulted in women need to find a proper way to refer to themselves. This process of selecting their ways of self-referencing is called *'kan-wang-tua'*, literally 'the placing of self', which refers to a set of specific speaker-listener relationships in a way not much felt by men (Voravudhi and Diller 1999: 117). The shift in the general character of performative rituals is associated by a related shift in the forms of gendered subjectivity.

### *Living in a Comfort Zone*

As suggested in Chapter 3, if Internet communications allow the possibility of multiple identities (Barlow 1996; Haraway 1985; Plant 2000), we need to consider if cyberspace is free from embodiment. If that is the case, we need to examine whether Internet users can ignore their physical identities. How do they make sense of themselves in cyberspace? Does a female or a male user feel more comfortable with being just anyone? I will firstly illustrate the case of Anongnat, an e-commerce owner, who spends most of her time on the Internet. Anongnat, 54, a married woman who turned to e-commerce a few years ago, is now trying to learn business strategy and networking through e-commerce. Anongnat was an owner of a property business before turning to e-commerce. In doing the property business, Anongnat was driven to appear in the public quite often to discuss the success of her business and also invited to social events to exchange her experience as a mother. Anongnat has five grown up daughters; she is considered a very successful mother because her daughters are good looking, highly accomplished in education and well behaved, - following Thai norm. Anongnat explains that in fact she was not comfortable with those social events and public speaking, but felt obliged to do so as it is a part of her profession. With the availability of the Internet, Anongnat has discovered a new world from e-mail communications because she does not have to be too concerned with appearing in the public. She has called it a 'comfort zone'.

“Normally, if we stay in a place we like, we can’t make money. Everyone needs to make money outside his or her own comfort zone. This does not mean sales representatives really like their jobs, but they have to work outside their own comfort zone. Everyone has his/her own comfort zone, because we prefer a warm and safe place for individuals. We all want to stay at home, be close to the one we love. In real life, however, we have to meet many people we don’t like, so we need to be patient. But, the Internet allows us to talk to anyone from our comfort zone. We can also earn money in it. This is a real great advantage of the Internet. It has opened up more opportunities for people to work and make money.”

[Anongnat, 54, married woman, e-commerce entrepreneur]

Anongnat has found a new opportunity working in a ‘virtual’ world. Cyberspace, in this case, provides the power of being ‘invisible’ for Anongnat. She has acquired a certain degree of comfort beyond her embodiment in the ‘real’ world. Her sense of comfort comes from working from home, working from anywhere, not to have to dress up, not to have to wear cosmetics. She is free from activities that she had to ‘perform’ throughout her previous career as a businesswoman. Anongnat appreciates the opportunity to generate income by using the Internet for e-commerce transactions. As detailed in Table 4.6 - Chapter 4, Anongnat is among the female participants who are married, work longer than 50 hours a week and earn more than £500 a month<sup>23</sup>. She is at the higher end of the high-income group among the informants of this research.

For a person in the public gaze for a long time, Anongnat has realised that she did not enjoy ‘performing’. In fact, she has found cyberspace more relaxing. Paradoxically, the way Anongnat feels, not having to perform when working online is also the flip side of gender performance. This accentuates the significance of gender performativity (Butler 1999), because it can be suspended in cyberspace where gender can be more flexible hence paving the way for gender to be contested. Anongnat has been following routines and schedules expected in public space for a few decades, and it is liberating for her to be able to work from home and remain in her ‘ideal’ place. Her e-commerce business, and work on the Internet, seems to provide her freedom to choose to organise her life to a certain extent.

In cyberspace, Anongnat has also been aware that writing is very important for her. It allows her to communicate from various perspectives and with different identities.

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<sup>23</sup> Anongnat does not earn all her £500 per month from her Internet business.

At one moment, she can represent herself as a Thai lady who is 54 years old. However, on the Internet, her identity need not be limited. She can become 'others', without concern how others will 'see' her.

"When we go out to meet others, somehow 'eye contact' makes us win or lose in negotiation. In a way, we may feel like we are in a subordinate position when looking in someone's eyes. With the Internet, only words count. It is such a great advantage. I can think of anything (to say in an e-mail). More importantly, I don't need to care about my appearance. If I don't want to do anything, I just don't do it. I just sit here in front of the computer, while others can also 'see' me. When I send 'smart' messages, people will assume that I am 'smart'."

[Anongnat]

Anongnat has emphasised her ability to be more expressive through 'words'. In this case, in the immediate environment of face-to-face communication, women may be quite aware of their 'presence' in front of others' eyes. Does this mean that women feel they are an object in the 'male gaze'? The ability to avoid using the first person pronoun in Thai, which is gender specific, may help Anongnat feel more comfortable with expression through words. In particular, Anongnat writes to her foreign contacts, who do not know the gender code in Thai names, and she can avoid being judged by her gender. By avoiding the 'eye contact' necessary in face-to-face communication, Anongnat feels able to communicate more freely on the Internet. This corresponds to the cyborg, in providing new opportunities for women to challenge the patriarchy, which strongly exists in the capitalistic world (Haraway 1985; Plant, 2000). Referring to the discussion in Chapter 3, Haraway (1985) has noted that cyborg women has developed an identity which deviates from the biological body by extending communication of self through the sexless machine of the computer and modem.

Additionally, access to computer networks and cyberspace enhances 'choices' for women (Montgomery 1999). Anongnat appears to eliminate the importance of 'bodies' in cyberspace communication. In this case, when 'bodies' disappear from 'real' communications, Anongnat feels empowered, because she needs not worry with her appearance or her gestures. This has given rise to 'more freedom' of expression in realising one's potential to communicate.

Communications in cyberspace provide opportunities for 'multiple' identities. At one and the same time, Anongnat can be a mother, a wife and a businesswoman in the same location. While communicating online does Anongnat project her internal self

and 'manage' her 'identity' in online communication? The day I met her, she said she was chatting with a computer programmer who was 20 years younger than herself. She 'makes' herself a 20 year old woman who is interested in the computer programme. They have chatted online regularly for quite some time. Now a man she met online wants to visit Thailand to meet her face to face. She notes "*I don't know what I should do. I am quite concerned because I told him I am much younger than I actually am.*"

In this case, how can Anongnat be certain that the young man is a 'real young man'? He may be doing the same thing. She said he has shown his picture on the computer and she is convinced that he is a young man. Does the Internet have the capacity to make us believe what we 'see' or 'read' rather than what we actually 'encounter' in real life? In another case, she performs as a grandmother to chat with an 8 year old girl who lives in another country. Again, how can Anongnat be certain that the young girl is really a young girl? This disguised identity seems to reflect the power of 'rewriting' one's stories following the cyborg (Haraway 1985). Perhaps, cyberspace will lead to more liberation for women's expression, and make them realise more of their autonomy and agency. However, the freedom of working at home, which is supposed to be a comfort zone, can also be precarious. In chapter 7, I will illustrate experiences of working from home and the extent to which maintaining gender ideologies of 'good' and responsible daughters and daughter-in-law cause difficulty for female informants but on the other hand can give rise to more flexible gender division of labour at home.

### *Hidden Identities and Thai Gendered Self-Reference*

Online communication comes with written language. The case of Anongnat above shows how a person can construct different identities in cyberspace. With e-mails and online chatting communications, by words offer multiple identities, as the informant does not need to be too concerned with the physical appearance while chatting online. In this section, I will illustrate the cases of informants who can disguise their gender in 'talking' with foreign customers through e-mails. I have briefly outlined earlier in this chapter that to say 'I' in Thai language is a gender specific connotation. This is different from writing e-mails in English because the first person pronoun in Thai, which connotes gender can be avoided. A number of informants can benefit when using English in their e-mails.

Khanuengnit, one of the leading women entrepreneurs in the IT industry in Thailand, has noted that the Internet creates greater opportunities for women. Khanuengnit took part in the development of the Internet in Thailand from its infancy, her firm was among the first to establish the Internet network system in the country. She has to 'talk' to many foreign counterparts via e-mails. She recalls that in the beginning, the use of the Internet was very new, having male dotcom businessmen was rare, not to mention women in the sector. In most cases, foreign customers assume that 'she' is a 'man' in a man's world. She describes how she has enjoyed a new opportunity by disguising her gender.

"At least, the Internet has provided more opportunities for women at the initial stage. In my case, many customers still address me as Mr. But, I don't care to correct it. I just leave it that way. After communicating for a while, gender no longer matters. I never bothered to correct their assumption. When we meet in face-to-face communication, it is 'so what'. Gender is not crucial anymore. Unlike the past, there was a certain amount of bias before we can get to negotiate the business. Now, it is better. The Internet makes that unnecessary. It helps in modifying some attitudes (against women)."

[Khanuengnit, 37, single woman, dotcom entrepreneur]

The possibility of communicating freely with clients needs to be examined in relation to language and linguistic characters. Khanuengnit, in most cases, 'talks' via e-mails to her clients in English. She can refer to herself as 'I', while her foreign customers are 'You'. With 'I' and 'You' as the first person reference, the gender of that person will not be known. Thus, individuals who are involved in communications may not need to be concerned with their gendered identities. Khanuengnit does not need to worry about how she should express her self-reference in e-mails written in English. On the other hand, if she needs to communicate in Thai with Thai clients, this supposed gender neutrality may disappear.

For Khanuengnit, gendered identities ascribed through the Thai language are avoided. In face-to-face meetings with her foreign clients, some are surprised to learn that she is a woman. By then, gender is no longer an issue as customers are convinced that she is able to handle the business. However, it should also be noted that before arriving at this stage, Khanuengnit communicated with her clients in a gender neutral tone, by which she did not mention her gender, and deliberately did not clarify any erroneous assumptions. She has found that this gender cover does not disrupt their business communications. Multiple identities appear to help women communicate more effectively in cyberspace and result in feelings of

empowerment. Embodiment appears less important in cyberspace hence online communications can open up a new world of opportunity for women in terms of self-empowerment (Harcourt 1999; Youngs 1999).

Women entrepreneurs may be able to expand their opportunities by showing their ideas and creativity through contacts via e-mails, and are judged by their skills as shown on their websites. In this case, it means customers will not be able to judge performance by identity or gender.<sup>24</sup> It is also an advantage because once customers are satisfied with the products they may no longer care about the gender of the producers or entrepreneurs. Furthermore, physical attraction between men and women, often central in communications, does not become an issue (Harcourt 1999). In cyberspace, men and women do not know the gender or the physical appearance of the people they have been communicating with, hence physical attraction would not have any relevance. The only tool in this phase of communication is mainly based on (English) written language. This can also enable women entrepreneurs to feel more confident in their business and negotiating skills. Following the idea of the cyborg, the combination of the Internet and human language skills appear to be liberating for women and allow them to be more active agents in communications (Haraway 1985; Plant 2000). This is in parallel with the above case of Anongnat who can be a successful sales representative online. Her work is based mainly on written communication by e-mails. Physical presence has disappeared.

In a similar vein, Kannika, 36, a woman online entrepreneur, is also concerned with her gendered identity while communicating online with foreign customers. Kannika now owns an online tourist agency. Her company's target groups are European customers who want to visit Thailand. Kannika explains that as a woman she is quite comfortable with the tourism business because she considers it 'soft' and 'feminine' which is deemed suitable for a female businesswoman. She however runs a second business exporting a traditional Thai vehicle *Tuk Tuk*<sup>25</sup> to foreign customers and she

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<sup>24</sup> According to the literature on work and embodiment, there is recognition that contemporary work involves much more physical interaction between people and so embodied performances at work have become more important (Hochschild 1983, McDowell 1997). Work in cyberspace however is an exception.

<sup>25</sup> *Tuk Tuk* is a traditional Thai taxi version of seats 3 passengers which is also used elsewhere in Southeast Asia. The vehicle is also known as auto rickshaw or cabin cycle. In Bangkok, it is widely used for urban transport.

considers this business 'masculine'. She does not want to disclose her gender in running this business. Kannika registers the two businesses under different names so customers of the tourism business may not know that she is the same owner of the *Tuk Tuk* and vice versa. She explains her experiences in talking online with her foreign customers in selling *Tuk Tuk*.

"Mostly, in online communications with foreign customers, they tend to automatically assume that I am a man. Perhaps, this shows that they assume that a business owner needs to be a man. [...] Using English, we only address each other as you and I, so I can avoid referring to myself as a woman. [...] In this case, I think revealing my gender does not do me any good, so I just remain silent. I don't need to tell them that I am a woman because it may give negative outcome rather than a positive one. Some customers may consider a small Asian woman cannot be a business owner selling machines. It is a waste time to build up my credit. The Internet enables me to cut that procedure.

[Kannika, 36, woman, online entrepreneur]

Thus identities may be moving more freely and in different directions in cyberspace. This is different from face-to-face communication in which bodies and facial expressions can add more influence in the meaning of the messages. It seems inspiring for women entrepreneurs to eliminate gendered bias in online communications. The freedom of expression that Kannika, Khanuengnit and Anongnat feel may converge with the concept of cyborg women.

Kannika may be concerned with the image of Thai women in the international arena, in which Western observers tend to look at the country and women in association with sexual images (Cook and Jackson 1999: 2). She may be concerned that the typical Thai women's identity may prove negative for her as a Thai woman doing business, and considers it safer not to reveal her gender to foreign customers. In this case, cyberspace has allowed her to escape that image, at least temporarily, and virtually. Online communications also make Kannika more confident in expressing her thoughts. The absence of embodiment from communication is not always positive for women however and at times, face-to-face meetings appear to be helpful for working women.

### *Feminine Charm and Real Meetings*

For a meeting in persons, it is not possible to hide gender identity. In this respect Kannika's and Aphinya's discussed in more detail below were echoed by many

others such as Nuanprang who feels that being a woman is in fact an advantage to work in dotcom business, while Naiyana a woman web content editor feels that her strength is in writing in a feminine tone to communicate with readers. Kannika finds that being a woman can help in a meeting with Thai people. She has found that using her 'femininity' helps her keep communications flowing smoothly.

"Being a woman is advantageous because of 'softness' associated with feminine. For example, when I talk to Thai men suppliers, I noticed that they tend to negotiate with me in a softer way. Let's say, they would not raise their voices to me because they may think of me as a young and innocent girl. Hence, they tend to keep things smooth. At the beginning, I thought being a woman would have made my life so difficult, but I realise it makes my life much easier."

[Kannika, 36, e-commerce entrepreneur]

To operate her tourism business, Kannika has to meet with smaller agencies, which are all run by Thai men. In contrast to her experience in selling *Tuk Tuk*, she finds being a woman can actually help her in negotiating with Thai business partners. As most of them are men and tend to be senior to her, Kannika feels acting as a young woman who does not know much about the business can pave a way for her in discussions with the suppliers. Kannika considers the tourism business feminine thus she has to use her femininity to its advantage, unlike selling the *Tuk Tuk*, which she considers masculine. The way Kannika has performed her gender identity in different ways indicates how the identity is not static but rather performed and performed differently in different cases to fit gendered expectations (Butler, 1999). Nevertheless, cyberspace appears as a sphere, which has allowed users to 'manage' their gender more flexibly to fit into expectations at the particular time of communication. For a hierarchical society like Thailand, communications are also dependent upon *Kalatesa* in which time and space matter. *Kalatesa* is related to providing order to appropriate social interaction in different contexts. This is dependent upon social positions of actors and their individual characteristics (Van Esterik 2000: 40). Currently, *Kalatesa* is playing an influential role in the urban middle class as an expression of orderly behaviours and manners. Van Esterik (2000) has noted that *Kalatesa*, discussed in Chapter 2, exists to govern male and female behaviour. However, it is more relevant to females – but this does not necessarily mean the subordination of women. For example, when Kannika is present with her Thai suppliers, she uses her skills, knowledge and femininity to her advantage to fit in *Kalatesa* at that moment. In response, male suppliers realise that they should treat her politely following masculine code of conduct in the public.

Additionally, Kannika has also mentioned that she is much junior to her male suppliers thus in this case age and femininity can help her in public negotiation. It is clear that Kannika is aware of power relations existing between men and women, the older and the younger, however with the subtle knowledge of *Kalatesa* she knows that she can use femininity in this circumstance to benefit her. This has shown that gender is a process that varies with time and place, and strongly associated with power relations in Thai society (Van Esterik 2000).

Aphinya, a female computer programmer and an owner of a dotcom firm, has experienced how femininity has given her some advantages in meeting in person. Aphinya, 34, is now in charge of all male staff including computer programmers, graphic designers and content developers. While working in the office, Aphinya explains that she needs to be strong and try not to be too much involved emotionally in her management and this toughness has become her usual character. Aphinya feels quite independent in dealing with her employees and is not too concerned to appear feminine while in the office. She explains that she has to be decisive in managing the company and she cannot allow her staff to see her as a weak person. However, she does not maintain a masculine trait at all times. As a member of a web developers association, Aphinya needs to meet with other web developers occasionally, and in most cases she is the only woman in the meeting. In the presence of male developers, she is happy to be treated positively as a woman.

“Personally, being a woman (in this industry) is good for me. Mostly, people assume that women don’t know much about computers. When I ask them any questions, they (mostly men) tend to be willing to explain in more details to me in particular (because they assume that I don’t know much). I just listen to them attentively and I have much knowledge and information by not arguing with them. This is a great advantage of being a woman in this sector.”

[Aphinya, 34, a married woman, owner of a web hosting company]

Aphinya has drawn upon the negative stereotype toward woman in the IT industry in a positive way. In the ‘formal’ meetings among web developers, the belief that women cannot be as good as men in this sector appears very prevalent and men developers may have the intrinsic attitude that women cannot be as good as them. Aphinya does not want to contest these norms of gender in the meetings, so follows traditional expectations. Perhaps her decision not to demonstrate her insight and knowledge of computer programming will reproduce gender segregation in this sector in the public sphere. However her own active agency seems to be endorsed

among her own staff, and that can be regarded as a more private sphere. In Aphinya's case, her gender performativity in private is different from public sphere.

The processes of gender vary in the public meetings, offices and in cyberspace. Aphinya's agency is more active at her own office because she feels more empowered through commanding her employees and communicating with her customers online. However, in public meetings with computer programmers her agency is not necessarily diminished. In contrast, femininity appears an advantage for her. This can represent gender stereotypes associated with women and men in the public/private domain. In this case, the public meeting with men computer programmers implies that men are expected to be more active, while women (the minority in the room) are supposed to be more subordinate. This gendered performativity has shown that there is no universal gender, and gender is something we 'do' according to different contexts, but not freely (Butler 1993). Aphinya's case has shown that masculinity and femininity are not static. Women learn to negotiate these relations to expand their agency. Meanwhile, cyberspace and the real world may not be exclusive of each other – individuals may learn to extend their opportunities between the two spheres.

Nuanprang, 29, a mother with a daughter, is now working in e-commerce as a sideline, in addition to full time employment. Nuanprang needs to contact foreign customers regularly to promote her products. Occasionally, she has to attend trade exhibition shows, so she is unable to avoid meeting face-to-face with clients. However, she feels quite comfortable or even more at an advantage being a woman doing the business.

"I think women have an advantage in terms of communication. Women will always be women. What do people call this skill?: feminine charm. Women can use their charms in communication. I think women are more charming while talking. In particular, I have more male customers than female. Most of them are foreign customers who come to Thailand. I think this is even an advantage for us (women). [...] Sometimes at the trade show, when men see me carrying heavy stuff, it is quite easy for me to get help from them. They seem to be willing to help women."

[Nuanprang, 29, married woman with childcare, e-commerce entrepreneur]

It should be noted that from the cases of Anongnat, Kanuengnit, Kannika, Aphinya and Nuanprang, they appear to feel comfortable with communications in cyberspace, in which they are, to some extent, able to avoid gendered expectations.

They can express their thoughts relatively freely in business and personal communications. Perhaps this means they are not concerned with the ways in which others think of them on the Internet. However, they are aware that face-to-face communication in meetings with Thai men may contain a certain level of *Kalatesa*, which is widespread in Thai society. Women (and men) perform gender according to social expectations when meeting in person. In e-mail communications, women informants appear more relaxed with their gender identity. In Nuanprang's case, meeting with foreign customers may allow her to escape from gendered expectations in Thailand. However, she can also perform gender to make the most of what she perceives to be feminine charms in physical communications. This has shown a more relaxed attitude to gender roles expectations between Thai women and foreign men. The ways in which female entrepreneurs discussed here are not too concerned with *Kalatesa* with male clients because communication with foreigners is considered a different discourse and the Thai code of conduct can disappear. In communication among Thais, both genders may be more aware of gendered expectations because of their knowledge of *Kalatesa*. Consequently, gender is regulated by a norm in which *Kalatesa* is the code of manners.

Additionally, 'gender performativity' is dependent upon social status, class and job position between women and men, and this also needs to be addressed. A junior worker will have to pay respect to more senior female staff working in the same company. This code of conduct tends to be related very much with power relations rather than associated with gender alone.<sup>26</sup> According to Van Esterik (2002), *Kalatesa* itself is not gendered, but the code of conducts tends to be applied to women more than men. Gender identity seems to have to be largely dependent upon the norm as *Kalatesa* associates with traditional expectations, thus women may be expected to follow the code more than men. Communication in the virtual world seems to offer space for gender to be more flexible.

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<sup>26</sup> I had an opportunity to talk to a senior woman working in the public sector who was recently promoted as the head of a commission. She is the first woman in that position. She explained that during the beginning of the new job, whenever there were meetings, the maid would serve water to men in the meeting room before her. Following the seniority system, she should have been served first. After a few meetings, she asked the maid why it was like that. The maid replied "you are not a man". This situation has somehow reflected a view of a maid who has been used to the system in which men are the leaders of the organisation, and was aware what she should do as correct social conduct in this case.

## Gender Swap

It is not only women web developers who can escape their real gendered identities; male developers too can enjoy different experiences by disguising gender on their websites. As I have discussed earlier, a meeting in person between middle class Thai men and women will follow *Kalatesa*. While women are expected to show feminine side, men on the other hand have to be masculine. What will happen to men web developers who want to gain benefit from cyberspace communications? In so doing, disguising as a woman or applying a feminine 'tone' on the website may also benefit a man. Wanchai, a male web developer, has created a website for mothers. Wanchai is the only son of three children. He is very close to his mother and his sisters and would like to share information from his mother and siblings to other women. Wanchai started to develop the website because he could not get a full time job after graduation. At the beginning, he thought of it as a hobby, but it later generated income for him.

"I have got some extra web design jobs when people visit my web page. When people see my work and then meet me in person, they would be very surprised that I am the designer of the web as you can see how I look like. Anyway, I don't care it is my style to use sweet and soft colour tones. I just like designing it this way."

[Wanchai, 26, single man, web designer]

As the target group of his website is mostly women, Wanchai has created a site with a feminine character. It is not only the design of the site, which is considered feminine because of softer colours, but the content represents a caring woman who wants to nurture and make visitors to the site feel at home. The content is about cooking, childcare, love and reading. The website talks to readers by referring to itself as *phi*, and tends to end most conversations with *kha*, but *krab* is also used occasionally.<sup>27</sup> As I met with Wanchai in person, I would not have imagined that he is the web designer because his appearance is stereotypically masculine. In this case, Wanchai's body does not present itself in cyberspace. The website has allowed space for Wanchai to be more flexible with his gender. This does not mean he deliberately

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<sup>27</sup> In Thai language, '*Phi*' can be used as a self-reference by both women and men. *Phi* contains a gender neutral tone. However, Voravudh and Diller (1999:116) have noted that *kha* and *krab* are used to show politeness in communications. The terms connote being male or female. Women end sentences with *kha*, while men use *krab*.

wants to disguise his gender, but cyberspace has permitted him to do what he really wants to do, irrespective of his gender. As a son who is very close to his mother, Wanchai is happy that the web can be a link for Thai mothers in different countries to communicate, though the content is only written in Thai.

In this case, cyberspace appears to allow opportunities for reversing gendered role expectations of Thai sons and daughters. Wanchai is able to imagine his ideas moving beyond the limitations of face-to-face communications, allowing him to express multiple gendered identities on the web. Dualism in physical communication appears to be challenged in cyberspace, thus paving the way for a greater pluralism of gender in cybernetics. The website has allowed Wanchai to offer different images and expectations to the people surrounding him. However, at the same time, it seems the Internet may emphasise dichotomy of 'men' and 'women' further because soft colours tend to be reserved for women's images, while the more assertive tone of expression, which is considered more masculine, tends to be reserved for men's images. Nevertheless, to a certain extent images in cyberspace may escape from the embodiment of gender expression in face-to-face communications.

The logo of the product which is associated with the website appears as gendered fluidity, enabling a male web owner to expand their market to the limits. Ronnakon has recently started up an e-commerce for flower delivery. Ronnakon deliberately adopted a woman's name for his website, which sells flowers. In this case, his website represents an image of a woman who is young, good looking, modern, confident and caring.

"I give this name (a flower) to the website and add 'Ms' in front of it to establish the identity of the web. This is to present brand and personality for our web. I want to emphasise the identity of the web as a woman who understands flowers."

[Ronnakon, 40, married man e-commerce entrepreneur]

For Ronnakon, the Internet has helped him expand his business horizons into e-commerce. In this case, he has seen the advantage of managing gendered identities. It is clear that femininity is associated with the flower business, thus it is better to adopt a feminine name for the website. As a businessman, this is a brand new start for Ronnakon. The character of this current e-commerce is in contrast with his previous business which was a maintenance service business, mostly related to the

technical and mechanical side. For this delivery flower business, Ronnakon does not attach his masculine identity to the web. Although the website shows his name as the owner he can present the business from a woman's point of view. In fact, customers may not actually care who the owner of the web is as long as they are satisfied with the delivery. When compared with his previous business, Ronnakon's name is attached to the identity of the firm.

However, the use of women's image in association with flowers may further emphasise the distinction between masculine and feminine characters. For example, there are photos of women wearing wedding dresses, and a smiling woman holding a bunch of flowers on the website. This has emphasised traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity in cyberspace in which women are linked with flowers while men should give flowers to women. From this case, the Internet has provided room for flexibility of gendered identity: women and men web developers can expand their opportunities beyond gendered expectations. However, this does not mean cyberspace is completely gender neutral. In the real world, the distinction of gendered identities is persistent.

## **Reality Bites**

In reality, working in the new economy may not necessarily be gender neutral. I have shown that women informants are aware that being seen as a woman is not beneficial for doing business, thus disguising their gender identity can offer a better option. Sunisa, 34, a female informant, nevertheless, has experienced being in a subordinate position when presenting her business to clients but she has not considered disguising her gender identity. Sunisa has recently set up a network consulting company a few years ago. Her company advises training consultants on computer systems. Sunisa had wanted to run her own business since her student days. In online communication, she makes no attempt to deny that she is a woman. She finishes her e-mail with her online signature including the Ms title. She assumes it is not a disadvantage to her that customers know her gender. However, she realises that, as a businesswoman, it is rather difficult when she needs to meet the customers in person.

**“In this sector, it is hard for women to be the owner of a business. In men’s eyes, women have never been smart enough. I feel male customers put me in a subordinate position. Hence, I need to work hard to prove that I can do it. Let’s say when a man and a woman walk into the same room at the same time to present a project; the customer is ready to believe that a man has more potential than a woman. Thus, a woman needs to work harder and to be much more careful in every detail of the project. I need to fight harder to prove myself and to gain confidence among customers. It is just like they hate you from the beginning, so they will refrain from listening to you. This is a general situation that I have been dealing in my business.”**

**[Sunisa, 34, woman entrepreneur]**

Sunisa’s case is in contrast with the cases of Aphinya and Kannika, discussed above, because they feel feminine charm can benefit for a meeting in person. Sunisa has had different experience. Sunisa is the leader of her own company which hires 15 staff, both men and women. Sunisa explains that when she comes to the office, she is not too concerned with dressing up if she does not have any appointment with visitors. However when she has to meet with potential clients to present a project, she has to look professional to earn credibility from the beginning. This dressing up aspect is also a part of ‘detail’ mentioned in the quote above. Her explanation shows the extent to which a woman business owner feels subordinate when compared with male competitors. This does not mean that businessmen necessarily have an easier time in running their businesses. However, it shows this awareness persists in the IT world, commonly understood as a male sphere. This may reflect perceptions about Thai women in management positions in general. Mostly, senior executives appear to doubt women’s ability to combine the roles of wife, mother and executive. In most cases, they consider women weak, indecisive, emotional, dependent and less productive than men; so women are said to focus on domestic roles (Sununta and Orose 1994:167). In Sunisa’s case, her knowledge of IT system management has paved a new opportunity to be an entrepreneur. These findings seem to be cross cultural and not particularly linked with Thailand. According to comparative literature from the West (Baines and Wheelock 2000), the traditional expectation of women and men’s roles in the household appear persistent among micro-firms.

Sunisa assumes that social values disadvantageous to women in management still exist, and she needs to show competency when competing with men. At a working level, it seems women and men can enjoy fairly equal opportunities. However women appear to face more constraints from outside institutions. Financial support from banks is another drawback for women entrepreneurs.

Phatthra, 34, is another case. She was a full time employee for five years in a marketing company when the Internet began to grow. Its advent revived her dream of becoming an entrepreneur and running her own business. Phatthra is from a Chinese-Thai family and she has dreamed from young age to be an owner of a business. The details of Chinese-Thai family gender politics will be discussed in Chapter 7. After having a few years as a full-time employee, Phatthra decided to leave her employer to attend a short course on e-commerce, to prepare her for running an online business. On the course, she met with three female friends who later became her business partners. They agreed to set up a tourism portal website which aims at providing information about Thailand. The four of them do not specialise in computer skills, but they are creative and have ideas about how to organise the web's content. Phatthra's initial desire to run her own business grew more than she could have imagined. Her working style with friends reflects that the new economy has encouraged cooperation and teamwork at the same level and has resulted in flat hierarchy firms (Castells 2001). Phatthra and her three partners allocate their responsibilities to correspond with their specialised skills. The company does not have trouble with gendered roles and responsibilities, because the four of them can run different tasks according to their expertise. However, when they need to contact other institutions such as banks for loans, they have realised that their company needs what is perceived to be a more reliable name to increase its credibility. They decided to invite a few male consultants who are already well-known to join the company simply to add their names. In practice, the senior men do not run the daily activities of the business with Phatthra and her team. This situation has shown that outside cyberspace, traditional institutions remain, where the advantage of genderless communications may be decreased. So the extent to which cyberspace is gender neutral is limited in communications in the real world.

### **Cyborg: Goddess or Evil in the House**

Chintana is a content editor of community website which provides information on current affairs and local and international news. She is single, and lives with her parents, sisters and relatives. She converted a space in the house into a home office, and works with her boyfriend and a graphic designer. As the team is small (three people), and workload is heavy, Chintana tends to work long hours. She is responsible for meeting with clients as well as editing the content of the web.

Chintana may spend whole days working at home for a few days and meeting with customers for days. The schedule will not be fixed in advance and Chintana needs to manage the company's errands on her own. Although she spends long hours working at home, she cannot socialise much because she feels she needs to work on the computer most of the time, but she feels relatively guilty.

"Working with technology too much, human feelings seem disappear. I have noticed that after working with a computer for sometime regularly, I have overlooked many things. Normally, women are supposed to think of small details. After a few years, my habit has changed. It is not as if I have become like a man, but it seems I am not paying attention to details. For example, if I was embarrassed from somewhere, I will maintain that feeling while working in front of the computer. This does not mean I have become an aggressive person, but I just feel indifferent. For instance, when my mother comes to my working area to hug me and ask how I am today. If I was busy at that moment I would think...um...um...I don't get annoyed or anything, I just feel nothing. I should have cared much more to hug her back, but I didn't.

[Chintana, 24, female, web content developer]

At home, Chintana has found that there is a clash between her identity as a professional and as a daughter. As discussed earlier, Thai women appear to have a central role in the family which may be regarded as informal, but crucial for the social hierarchy. Her guilty feelings arise from her awareness of the expectations about daughters, in particular that they should contribute to domestic responsibilities. She has also expressed that after working on a computer for a long time she feels that has lost her emotional side of life. She implies that technology is masculine with no feeling which is in contrast with the feminine character. As she has now become the opposite of 'feminine', she feels somewhat strange about herself and guilty at the same time. Chintana feels responsible to interact with her mother as a 'good' daughter. This frustration, perhaps, shows that daughters feel obliged to follow family expectations, in providing care and nurture for the family and relatives. Nonetheless, Chintana does not have to do housework as it is common for urban middle class Thai families to hire domestic maids to handle housework; this point will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

Chintana and her boyfriend are so driven because of the success of the website. Their web is one of the leading information providers in Thailand. Chintana feels under pressure to work hard to prove that their team can manage the workload and organise the website smoothly. As dotcom was still at its infancy when she started she is aware that it is rare for women to work on the website. Chintana has tried to

maintain a high standard at work. She has explained that being a woman in this sector may jeopardise her position thus she wants to minimize meetings in person. I have shown how female informants feel they may encounter prejudice in working in this sector, and this is partly why I found searching for women informants more difficult than men which I have discussed in Chapter 4. It was not easy to contact Chintana for an interview, although she had posted her nickname on the website helping Thai speakers to know that it is a female name. The website also showed the staff's e-mail address so I e-mailed Chintana to ask for an interview. She did not reply my e-mail but I managed to get the telephone number of her firm through my contact. Chintana's voice was unfriendly at first and she wondered how I knew her nickname. It was obvious that her name appeared on the website and I told her that I particularly wanted to talk to a woman informant. So, finally, she agreed to meet me in person. She apologised when we first met and explained that she has to be careful in giving comment or meeting anyone in person. She has learned the hard way as a woman web developer. In the past, there was a problem on her website because some users posted pornographic images on the web during the night. It was, of course, considered inappropriate for any website. Unfortunately, Chintana and her team did not know about it until many hours later when they could delete the images. Chintana explains that she was severely criticised in a meeting among web developers community.

“In the meeting, the web developers gossiping about what had shown on my web that night. I overheard them said that it was because my web has a female web content editor that's why solving the problem was so slow. They commented that had it been a man, the mistake could have been solved quicker. It made me feel bad to show myself in the public as the editor of my website. It was such an unfair judgement. It makes me feel being subordinate in this sector as a woman.”

[Chintana]

Chintana's experience of working in the new economy has echoed Sunisa's view discussed earlier. My difficulty in searching for female informants can be partially explained by this sector's relative male-domination. Nevertheless, I have shown that both women and men informants can take advantage from disguising their gender identity to a certain extent and women in particular can use communication in cyberspace to avoid bias against women in the IT sector.

## Conclusion

Cyberspace has provided space for women and men informants to 'play' with their gender identity. Without the 'sexed body' in communications, informants can be free from the conventional gender identity of men being masculine and women feminine. The gender distinction can, to a certain extent, become blurred because a woman informant can communicate with masculine 'voice' and a man informant with feminine. From this research, nevertheless, it appears that women informants can enjoy a great benefit by not following normative gendered code of conduct and liberate themselves by not associating their female identity with their messages in cyberspace. Their gender performativity in cyberspace does not need to accord with their sexed body. This advantage of gender disguise can happen if written communications are in English as the language does not reveal the sexed body of the speakers.

Unlike English, first person pronoun specifies gender identity of the speakers in the Thai language. Thus the addressees who are Thai can read from the name of the speakers whether they are a man or a woman. So, the informants who are working with Thai business counterparts will not directly gain benefit from disguising their gender identity in the messages even in the online world. However, the gender identity does not have to be associated with the sexed body in the cyberworld. Male informants can 'perform' as women and women informants as men. Living beyond gendered identities in cyberspace may generate more freedom – 'thinking' and 'performing'. This capacity appears to challenge the existence of the here and now, because both genders can think of anytime and anywhere instead. This greater freedom echoes the 'cyborg' suggested by Haraway (1985), in which the combination of human and machine allows anyone, particularly women (in this case), to rewrite their stories and ignore their gendered identities. It seems possible that women professionals can gain by being 'invisible' in cyberspace, allowing them a new comfort zone of living and working. Both genders can learn to 'manage' their multiple identities in cyberspace, and this may allow them to expand their activities beyond the expectations of the outside world. It may be possible for both genders to have greater flexibility in communication and create a new domain, which can escape conventional gendered relations in the future.

In the real world, gender still matters in Thailand's hierarchical social structure. Although the existence of *Kalatesa*, which regulates how individuals should behave in relation to time and place, can be avoided in cyberspace it continues to be a

matter of concern in the real world. In cyberspace, e-mails written in English, web graphic images and choices of words help both genders to be more flexible with their identities and they do not need to be concerned with *Kalatesa*. However in face-to-face communications, men are expected to be more professional and expert in the IT industry, while women professionals may be expected to know less. Although, *Kalatesa* may not directly associate with the IT world, its implications on gender appears highly prevalent, thus guiding the way women and men should behave according to the norm. Work in the new economy has enabled another sphere of gender contestation which has permitted both genders to behave differently from traditional expectations and not to conform to the seniority system. Embodiment still matters in the real world. However, women informants realise that this can be advantageous because there are less expectations of them in this industry. Thus, they can learn to establish networks and make stronger connections with other professionals in this sector.

The communication in cyberspace is an aspect of work in the new economy. This chapter has illuminated individual experiences of informants who manage to use e-mails beyond the limit of their gender identity. Yet, the gender boundary remains intact in the real world. To what extent has worked in the new economy influence gender politics in the family? The next chapter will attempt to explore individual informants and the extent to which they negotiate their work and leisure with family members to demonstrate the gendering of home in the new economy.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Home, Gender and Familial Relations**

#### **Introduction**

In the two previous chapters, I have analysed the experiences of the “Internet professionals” by discussing their income strategies in Chapter 5, their communication via the Internet and implications of gender identity in Chapter 6. This chapter aims at drawing upon gender relations and household space of the new economy workers undertaken from perspective of individuals. Just over half the informants in this research are of Chinese descent, as I have outlined in Chapter 4. The analysis of the use of home and gender relations among Internet professionals will be based on their family relationships while the ‘Chinese’ aspect will also be taken into consideration for individuals who are Chinese-Thai. To a certain extent, Chinese-Thais remain distinct from Thais in general, so in this chapter I focus on gender relations and family politics among these Chinese-Thai informants.

My purpose in using a qualitative methodology was to identify the processes giving rise to the observed patterns of gender differentiation. In this Chapter I focus especially on the Sino-Thai group as, in offering, a more marked form of gender differentiation, as discussed in Chapter 2, they should provide a clearer indication of the processes I am seeking to explore.

First, I explore the way in which married individual participants negotiate the gender division of labour in their family. Female informants are self-motivated to be modern career women. However, they view being career-orientated with ambivalence, as it opposes the stereotype of ‘good woman’, which is associated with shouldering responsibility for the domestic arena. I will present the case of those married participants who were trying to balance career and family, often with the assistance of live-in domestic maids. The live-in maids appear crucial for the urban middle class to sustain the well-being of the family.

Second, I present the case of young cohabiting couples who have started a dotcom business, but who still live with the parents of either partner. This can bring a new insight into the extent to which younger generation may have a different trajectory

of life from their parents, which has involved the transformation of both work and private life.

Third, the case of individual husbands will be examined as to the extent that they affect gender division of labour on a daily basis. The notion of rice-winner appears strongly correlated with a husband and correspondingly wives are taken to be the caregiver. I examine the extent to which male workers in the new economy shape gender arrangements at home. The last section discusses how family relationships can be managed in a flexible way. I present a case of a Chinese married woman who tries to balance her career and young child, with pressure from her parents and extended family at the same time. Having a flexible family seems the solution for her to be able to achieve this.

## **Gendering Home Space**

The term 'gendering' is increasingly used to describe gender as a process instead of a static condition and thus can be understood at various levels (Morgan 1999). Gender can be identified as a process because it is connected with 'doing gender' rather than basically having a gender. Morgan has noted that to explore gender as a process needs a more active understanding. This understanding rests in turn on the activity of a knowing agent, one that does gender within constraints derived from various situations or structures that are historically formed.

Many informants in this research are Chinese (see Table 4.6) in Chapter 4. Being Chinese in Thailand is seen as being part of a rich and successful middle class <sup>28</sup> (Bao 2005). According to Bao's research on the ethnic Chinese in Thai society, Chinese families have a clear division of femininity and masculinity, in which the former is associated with being 'the mother of the house' while the latter is connected with the earning power of a man. Bao has noted that the construction of masculinity and femininity of contemporary Chinese families can lead to more understanding of gender relations in the family; however class and sexuality cannot be ignored. This section analyses the gender relations of the Chinese families of my research participants through individual experiences. I try to sketch out the way these

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<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, this stereotype of Chineseness overlooks working class ethnic Chinese in Thai society.

individuals construct their masculine and feminine character and how those traits relate to gender division of labour, gender relations and gendering of the home.

Bao's research has pointed out that Chinese-Thai men link their role strongly with income producing activity and being 'rice-winner' of the family, while women, though being economically active, will project themselves as 'inside assistant' to their husbands and the family businesses. Inside assistant, according to Bao, means a wife can be very reliable and cheap support for their husband's business.

Domestic responsibility is considered feminine and thus women are most likely to be responsible for this domain. For all Thai middle class families, it is common to hire domestic live-in maids to alleviate housework responsibility. Several married informants in this research hire domestic servants.

To illustrate, I present three contrasting cases of Chinese-Thai married dotcom entrepreneurs who rely on domestic maids for doing housework. Nittaya, Anongnat and Nuanprang are married women who are pursuing their IT business. Nittaya has a separate office from her house while Anongnat works at home; Nuangprang, a daughter of a Chinese family, is married to a Thai. I will show that live-in domestic help plays a crucial role in their family and this in many ways preserves the traditional gender division of labour. However, domestic help can be a significant factor in paving the way for married women to do-it-all: having a career and a family.

### *'Career Woman'/'Caring Mother'*

For middle class Thai women, taking care of the household appears a major responsibility. This is in accordance with maintaining the ideology of 'good' women as discussed earlier in Chapter 2. For married female informants in this research, their situation echoes the ideology. Although they seem to want to be career-orientated, they also prioritise the good order of the household. Fortunately, the availability of domestic servants helps married women maintain career and the household. Nevertheless, it should be noted that their husbands are not highly expected to contribute to the domesticity. Regarding this, I will illustrate the case of Nittaya, Anongnat and Nuanprang to highlight Chinese-Thai married informants and to examine the extent to which they maintain harmony between career and family.

Caring for a family is very significant for married women. Their roles of being wives, mothers and daughters intertwine and this has consequences for their time management. Working in the new economy potentially provides a new landscape for working more flexibly, either at home or at the office, but it may result in more conflict between work and caring responsibilities. Nittaya, 33, a married woman from Chinese family, is now pursuing her own IT business. Her husband, Suthi, an executive of a leading insurance firm and from a Chinese family, is the major income earner in the family. They now have a 2-year old baby and hire two live-in domestic servants. When asked about the gender division of labour in her family, Nittaya emphasised many times that she knows Suthi grew up in a patriarchal atmosphere in which his mother was responsible for domestic arena. Hence, according to Nittaya, Suthi has high expectation that she will manage the good order of the house. However, Nittaya would want Suthi to be aware of the household responsibility and ask him to share some childcare to a certain extent, especially when she gave birth to the baby two years ago. Nittaya recalled her experience at that time:

“If I ask him (Suthi) to do (childcare) too much he would think why he needs to do it at all. Still, the ‘concept’ in his mind is domestic chores belong to women. However, in reality, it does not work that way...because I am a kind of a woman you know [...] when I was completely at home (after giving birth), I took care of the good order of the house I then considered he was an only income earner, I was a caregiver and a child-rearer. Why not? [...] Now, I do paid work outside, we need to divide the responsibilities between us. He acknowledges that I am also tired from work so he would help by reading books with our son, though he still has that ‘concept’.

[Nittaya, 33, married woman with childcare and a maid at home]

The ‘concept’ which she mentioned above refers to ‘patriarchy’ in which she describes that her husband understands that as a man, a husband, and a family rice-winner, he does not have to do ‘feminine’ jobs: - cleaning, housekeeping and childcare. This division between masculine and feminine jobs correlates with Bao’s research (2005) which describes that Chinese men consider themselves responsible for the income-producing activity role associated with being rice-winner of the family, while women are in charge of domestic labour and the good order of the family.

Nittaya needed to adjust her household responsibility when she started working full-time again. Thanks to domestic help from her live-in maid, and financial support from her husband, Nittaya can manage to do-it-all. However, her power to ‘choose’

does not come without conflict. She has to work longer and more flexible hours at home and at work. As she is the owner of her IT firm, Nittaya can manage to arrive at her office later than office hours, which is 8.30 am to 4.30 pm<sup>29</sup>. Her driver can take her to her son's school in the afternoon to pick him up and then she can return to her office later in the afternoon. The case of Nittaya reflects an ambivalent situation, she has more autonomy as a consequence of full-time work but is still responsible for domestic tasks, for being the centre of the family, which in many ways is to maintain 'traditional' identity for women and mothers.

The gender division of labour in her family may not always be unequal but expectations that Nittaya should be the centre of the family still prevail. In this case, domestic help in Nittaya's family demonstrates the way ethnic women or women from the periphery come to work in a big city to earn cash income for their families in rural areas. In parallel, these domestic maids are responsible for sending remittances to their families in rural villages. Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003) have noted that one way in which some high earning career women in the West manage to do- it- all, that is having a full-time career, caring for their children, being a good spouse and running a well-maintained home is by hiring migrants from 'Third World' to do the domestic work and childcare. So in comparison, career women in Asia may be better off than the first world career women as Asian women can hire domestic help more easily and it is a common practice in the region (Brooks 2006).

Anongnat, another e-commerce entrepreneur who is from a Chinese family, launched her website when she was 50. When the economic crisis occurred in 1997, Anongnat decided to turn to e-commerce as she considered it the only way to get-rich-quick to repay the debt from her property business enterprise. Anongnat inherited the property business from her Chinese-Thai parents. As the property business was severely affected by the crisis, Anongnat has to initiate a new business for the company's survival and ask her husband to manage the property enterprise. She explains at that very moment, "everyone was so frightened (because of the crisis). Nobody could really sustain the situation; they lost all their spirit (for work). But, I have to gather myself because it is a critical juncture. We could not afford to feel sorry for ourselves." Anongnat was 54 when we met for an interview. Though

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<sup>29</sup> Normally, office hours in Thailand vary. It can be 9 am to 5 pm, or 8.30 am to 4.30 pm. Public sector can also start from 7.30 am and finishes at 3.30 pm. So, it is dependent upon each office's policy. Mostly, office hours tend to be 8 hours a day.

being aware that it is considered relatively an old age to start a new business, Anongnat had to make a decision quickly in terms of business direction. In 1999, she decided to turn to e-commerce because of its speed. Anongnat is proud of herself when discussing her new commence in e-commerce. Before, she did not even know how to turn on the radio or television, let alone a computer. Now, she explains that she is very dedicated to this new business.

“Now, I live with the Internet...I breathe, eat and rest with it. My husband and my children have begun to wonder what is going on with me. Fortunately, my husband understands my nature so well. He is really good because he understands my priority. I can't find anyone better than my husband in this life. Though, I have been through tough times with my business, having all my children and my husband around I know this is more than enough in my life. I can survive this crisis because of them.”

[Anongnat, 54, married female entrepreneur]

Clearly, Anongnat appreciates moral support from her husband and her daughters to go through tough times. On the one hand she feels guilty that she cannot spend time with her family due to devotion to e-commerce. Particularly, she feels bad that she cannot be a “good” mother and a “good” wife during this difficult time. She considers herself irresponsible for the family.

“In the past, I used to be a very good mother and a good housewife. Normally, I cooked and never ignored the well being of the entire family. Now, I work nearly 24 hours, I work all the time but I know I will not work this way for the rest of my life. I told all my daughters to choose between having me around now, or not having my company that much temporarily. I promise them to work very hard for the next three years only. I told them to tolerate my (workaholic) behaviour for how.”

[Anongnat]

Anongnat feels responsible for caring for the family, even though she is a full-time career woman. She admits that her hard-working habit at the moment is not healthy for the family, and in a way she seeks forgiveness from her family members. Before the economic crisis, Anongnat took care of five grown up daughters and her husband by cooking supper for them every evening. However, she now allows her maids to take all the domestic responsibility while she concentrates on the e-commerce. Anongnat has income producing activities that are crucial for the family, in the same way as her husband. However, she considers that assuming the ‘caring responsibility’ herself is crucial in being the ‘mother of the house’, something that is

associated strongly with feminine characteristics. She believes that being a complete mother and wife means one should have time for, and provide care for, all the family members. Her leisure, private, and work life are not distinct. The Internet has allowed her to work constantly at home, and she finds especial comfort from communicating in cyberspace, as discussed in Chapter 6.

As Anongnat prioritises financial independence, she has aspirations to be a successful career woman. So does Nittaya. They also know that as a wife, they need to 'manage' the order of the household as part of the feminine character and part of 'traditional' character expected from women. On the one hand, they are modern career women who can handle paid work and family smoothly. Instead of negotiating with their husbands to take care of the family and childcare, Nittaya and Anongnat are also rice-winners for the family. Notably, masculinity is not threatened in this case as their husbands do not feel responsible for childcare or housework – but they could feel threatened if their role of rice-winner was undermined. Anongnat nevertheless has managed to focus intensely on work after the crisis and it may prove to a certain extent that this new circumstance create conditions in which it leads to change in traditional gendered expectations.

Unlike the two cases above, Nuanprang, 29, a working mother of Chinese descent, considers household responsibilities her priority and significant for 'female identity' and she insists that she has to do it without any help from her husband. Nuangprang is now working full-time at an international publishing company. At the office, she is responsible for 30 staff comprising both women and men. At home, she is responsible for childcare and some housework, though she hires a domestic maid. She considers domestic tasks are the essence of womanhood.

“My husband does not do any housework (laughing). He is a real typical Thai man. He is the only son of his family. In fact, he can do everything. Perhaps, he assumes that he is married to a Chinese daughter hence he does not need to do any domestic chores. In a way, I have told him that he does not have to do any housework. I don't think men should do any domestic work. My parents have told me all my life that I need to take care of the household. My brothers don't need to bother. It has always been a responsibility of daughters. Actually, I learn this lesson from my mother. My parents-in-law cannot blame me regarding the housework because I am confident I can handle it well. Perhaps, I am conservative, but I have been taught that women need to do domestic labour.”

[Nuanprang, 29, married with a daughter]

Nuanprang's case shows an ambivalent situation. Her aspiration to become a 'modern career' woman contrasts with her intention to remain the care provider of the family. Nuanprang takes domestic labour seriously, and considers it an essential part of her female identity, particularly when demonstrating to her in-laws her ability to manage domestic chores. Often, Nuanprang will let a domestic maid take care of housework for her, but she considers childcare too important to delegate it to her maid, and draws on assistance from her own parents.

"I know the domestic servant won't do the job as well as I do, but at least I can let go with some housework, but I will never let go of childcare." She said "My husband likes me being a working woman, but at the same time he wants me to take care of the housework. He is convinced that childcare and housework won't be affected, hence no trouble for me taking both roles at the same time."

[Nuanprang]

Nuanprang must have felt that she was being monitored by her in-law, who would have considered 'caring responsibility' to be an indicator of being a "good" wife. Many times during the interview, she would refer to herself as a 'conservative' person but happy to organise her life this way. In Thailand, women have played a significant role in the domestic sphere. On average Thai women spend 3.3 hours per day as committed time for the household, while men spend 1.6 hours per day (NSO, 2002). The figures indicate that women spend twice the amount of time spent by men for the household work. The study by NSO also suggests that most of women's tasks are focused on housework such as cleaning, and cooking, while men tend to be responsible for household maintenance. Although the above three cases show that they can hire domestic servants, they consider domestic domain part of their 'good' woman identity. Nevertheless, the urban lifestyle and the global economy probably accentuate women's stronger ambivalence between career and family.

In addition to working full-time for the company, Nuanprang has recently set up a retail online firm, which aims to export local Thai products to foreign markets. She spends evenings working on this new project. Interestingly, Nuanprang is the boss at work, but at home her career is secondary: housework and childcare are her primary responsibilities. In the beginning Nuanprang did all the housework on her own. After giving birth to her daughter, she decided to hire a domestic servant to help her with the chores.

Unlike Nittaya, Nuanprang's husband cannot support her financially while she interrupts her career to undertake childcare. Nuanprang herself does not want to disrupt her career either. She considers being a career woman very important for her self-image and self-development. At the same time, motherhood is equally important in sustaining her self-esteem. In this case, Nuanprang and her husband are following heteronormativity, within which they may not be aware of social construction of the gender division of labour in the household. The individualisation thesis notwithstanding, some social constraints clearly remain (in this case the traditional expectations about gender roles in the home), despite changes in working patterns.

Nuanprang's financial situation seems a factor influencing her decision to be a career-oriented woman. However, her case has indicated that husband is not likely to feel guilt in not taking any household responsibility. In this case although Nuanprang can afford to hire a domestic servant, she is still responsible for childcare. She does not want to leave her child with the housemaid, and thus decided to live with her parents who provide the childcare during weekdays. Nuanprang and her husband therefore live separately during the week. Nuanprang's husband needs to stay in their own home because it is nearer to his workplace, while Nuanprang stays with her parents who provide childcare while she goes to work. This pattern of living 'separately together' is also a character of individualisation and has also been noted in the West (Hardill 2003). In this respect Nuanprang provides an interesting illustration of how new more individualised living patterns can be used to allow a traditional division of labour to remain within a couple, but in this case, only by drawing on an even more traditional pattern of the extended family. The grandparents play a significant role in childcare, and this reflects traditional Thai extended family.

Both men and women may have assumed that the clear gendered division of labour is 'natural' and 'right' for familial relations, however not many families can follow the 'ideal practice'. According to Connell (1987), we *do* rather than *have* gender. In fact, we are living under a 'gender construction' in a given environment. When the environment changes, (as for example in the financial crisis), or when the social relations are different, the gendered relations of the couple may become more flexible. Living in Thailand, Thai husbands and wives are embedded within the social norms and expectations of their parents, relatives, and friends. The couple may have to bend to the prevailing and expected gendered division of labour. The

situation can be different when they move to another country. In the new location, the gendered division of labour may be compromised or negotiated more flexibly.

### *'Caring Father' and 'Helpful Husband'*

Among married male informants who are from Chinese-Thai family, childcare appears a main responsibility when they mention their contribution to domesticity. For example, Wutthichai, a Chinese- descent father, notes that he may not have much time for his daughter due to workload, but once he has it he calls it 'high quality' time. Thanaphon, a Chinese-descent father, thinks of himself a considerate husband because he helps his wife preparing milk for his baby. He does not think other men in general can do as much as him. Ronakon, a father from a Chinese family, also sees himself as a responsible father as his wife will leave his son in his office during a school break. In contrast, doing housework was rarely mentioned by husbands in their contribution. Amphon is the only case where he refers to his domestic role.

Amphon, 44, Chinese-Thai, has been married to his wife for more than 15 years. They did their second degree in the US and lived there for many years after graduation. Amphon and his wife worked full-time in the US and did not hire any domestic servant at that time.

"While there, I shared housework with my wife. Hired help is not affordable. In fact, nobody has done that. We were living on our own and did not have any relatives; hence we really needed to help each other to take care of the house."

[Amphon, 44, an IT firm owner, married with children]

Modern technology, such as washing machines, dishwashers, and microwaves enabled them to share housework more easily. His wife gave birth to two daughters in the US. Amphon explains that during the daytime, they had to leave the babies with the day care centre while both of them were working outside. Living away from Thai social expectations had enabled Amphon and his wife to handle family life differently. This can be the reverse for foreign women who are married to Thai men: they may be expected to comply with Thai family expectation (Humphrey-Smith 1997). For one thing, Amphon and his wife could not afford a domestic servant, making both of them responsible for domestic arrangements. Their case has shown the extent to which gender is shaped and reshaped by the 'site' of living. It also

shows how family members can contest traditional gendered ideologies. However, when Amphon and his wife returned to Thailand, he described that they need to set a new pattern for daily life.

“Back to Thailand, things have changed. It is normal to hire a domestic servant, and we can afford it. It is common here. Everyone does the same, don't they? However, I still help my wife take care of my children. I like taking them to play sport. In fact, I am responsible for childcare more than my wife.”

[Amphon]

Amphon has launched a dotcom business and used his home as an office. In Bangkok, domestic help appears important for Amphon as his wife does paid work outside. For Amphon, it seems natural to hire a domestic maid in Thailand thus there is no need for him to share the responsibility. When asked whether he contributes in the domestic domain he describes that at times he takes the children out during the weekend for swimming or playing golf. Research in the UK found men do more of the public (and possibly the pleasant side of childcare), such as taking children to leisure activities, while women are more likely to do the day to day caring in private, so although the division of labour changes it remains gendered (Gregson and Lowe 1994). Household responsibilities are fluid in correspondence with social expectations and the norms of different countries. Although domestic work appears strongly linked to female identity in Thailand, the expectations could be more flexible when living away from Thai culture, but they also depend on negotiation between the husband and wife. Gender relations are socially constructed and can be negotiated as a process of doing gender (Connell 1987; Dunne 1999; Morgan 1999; Butler 1993), and in the Thai case the form of the relations are influenced by the availability of domestic helpers which allow a modification of gendered roles within the household but do not challenge the social gendering of domestic work and childcare as being primarily female responsibilities.

The above cases have shown how domestic servants are playing a crucial role in alleviating tension of gender relations in Thai families. Especially, as the wives want/have to be career-oriented, they need extra help to maintain the good order of the house. Nevertheless, a wife still feels strongly responsible for domestic arena and is attached to the traditional feminine identity of being a 'good' wife and a 'good' mother. Home has become a 'site' of doing gender. This gendering of home does not occur only among married participants, gender relations can also be played out

among single workers or cohabiting couples who reside with parents of their partner.

### **(Home) Space Invader**

In this fieldwork, a number of participants work at home by designating an area of their home as office space. Although family members acknowledge the working area of workers, the boundary between work and home is often unclear. Generally, it has been assumed and claimed that workers in the new economy can work independently with flexible hours and lead liberal lifestyles (Leadbeater and Oakley 1999; Flores and Gray 2000). In this research, I find that though workers are able to choose their working hours to fit their schedules, in practice they tend to work long hours to meet deadlines. For example, in any particular period, they may have to work longer than 13 hours a day to finish projects and meet deadlines. Though regular, this does not necessarily mean working long hours takes place everyday. Nevertheless, this account is based on the hours that workers claim to work, and there is no independent monitoring of their working hours. This section aims at showing three cases of individuals who work at home and how they have negotiated their time for work with their families. The first case, Chintana will show how a single woman dotcom entrepreneur, who is from a Chinese family, feels ambivalent about her time at work and leisure and how this is gendered. The following two cases of Kon, a Chinese-descent dot.com entrepreneur and Parichat, a Thai woman graphic designer, will illustrate how these individuals negotiate the gender division of labour when residing with the parents of their cohabited partner.

Chintana, 24, is from a family of Chinese descent. Her father owns a furniture business and her mother helps him in terms of management and accounting. After finishing her first degree, Chintana was a full-time graphic designer for 8-months. Now, she is creating a website which generates income from banner ads. Chintana and her boyfriend work together in her parents' house. Although they are not yet cohabiting, they spend most working time together in the home office. Chintana's father lent an initial amount of investment for the couple and they aim at returning the borrowed money to her parents as soon as possible. Working at her parents home saves the cost of investing in terms of buying or renting an office and paying for electricity, water supply and telephone connections. Besides, Chintana feels safer and more comfortable at home by having family members around her. Chintana will spend at least 12 hours working in front of the computer and she complains that she

sometimes feels like a machine, especially as she does not have time to respond socially to her mother, according to customary expectations. Moreover, she has also found it difficult to manage intimate feelings or relations with her boyfriend while working with him everyday.

“We rarely have problems with work because we don’t argue much. We may have different opinions at times, but we can compromise. However, working together as we are boyfriend – girlfriend can cause trouble in terms of time. Both of us now only work. We meet each other every day, but we don’t talk that much anymore. Perhaps, in the past, we talked more than now though we did not work together. Now, each of us just works and works. We meet everyday, but distance exists. I don’t know what that distance is...perhaps boredom (laughing). We don’t miss each other anymore; we have become more like friends. We work together...everyday.”

[Chintana, 24, single female entrepreneur]

For Chintana, there are four dimensions of time intertwined in one location: professional time, emotional time for the family, emotional time for her boyfriend and personal time. Within a given period of time these dimensions overlap. On the one hand, working at home can mean the continuity of professional, personal and intimate time. On the other hand, when these feelings all occur in one location, it can be difficult for her to have clear distinctions between family, boyfriend and her own leisure. Nevertheless, working at home can make Chintana feels safer and more relaxed at the same time.

“My only schedule is something to do with if I will have to meet customers. Actually, these days I feel like living in a cave with the computer all the time. [...] Work and play are crossed at the same moment. Sometimes, I can just relax by surfing the Internet. The disadvantage of working with this dotcom business is losing time for myself. This is different from working in the office for 8 hours a day. [...] With this work, it has taken me nearly a whole day. I do not have any specific working hours. For example, I may start working from morning until evening, then I will take a break by watching TV for 2-3 hours and I will be online again.”

[Chintana, 24, single female entrepreneur]

The above quote has illustrated the point that the Internet workers may work late, but may not have worked intensively during the day. There is no clear boundary between work, home and leisure for Chintana. She can work, relax and socialise in front of the computer and at home, but this also means her interaction with her boyfriend and her mother can be diminished. For emotional time with her mother,

Chintana has realised that her role of being a daughter and a worker is mixed. This unclear boundary has created guilt for Chintana: she is not able to communicate with her mother as much as she can at home because she wants to maintain being professional. However, her parents acknowledge and recognise her as an active agent and an independent self-employed person.

“Since I have started working on my website and earned substantial income, my parents consider I may do this job as a long term career. They see it is possible for the future. I have also appreciated it because it is better for me to be doing what I am doing now rather than being a full-time employee. My parents think of me having a comfortable life because I just work by sitting in front of a computer.”

[Chintana]

Her parents appreciate that Chintana can work from home as a dotcom entrepreneur. Chintana considers work essential for her self-definition as a career woman. Nevertheless, this has also shown up a contradiction within which on the one hand she has removed herself from traditional expectations about a daughter's role within the home, while on the other hand she has maintained a central position in the house by having economic independence. Her parents recognise not only Chintana's individuality and independence arising from her work, but that it may become a long term career. In contrast to her mother, who has always helped in her father's business, Chintana's active role as an entrepreneur generates a more equal role in the business with her partner. Chintana and her boyfriend started the business from scratch together and she seems an essential part of the business rather than an inside assistant of her boyfriend.

The situation can be reversed when a woman worker cohabits with her partner at his mother's house. Parichat, 25, was once a freelance graphic designer who is from a Thai family. During her freelance years, she cohabited with her boyfriend who lives with his mother. His family does not hire a domestic servant, so it is assumed that his mother is responsible for the day to day housework. Her boyfriend, Thawatchai, had arranged a corner of his house for her to work on the computer. During the daytime, Parichat would be in the house with Mayuri, Thawatchai's mother, while he works outside the home at his office. Parichat experienced tensions with Mayuri while she was in her home.

“Normally, I did not have time because of working too much. His mother (Mayuri) would show that she was frustrated with me as I did not help her with housework. Later when I found out that she was not happy about this, I would wake up earlier to clean the house and then I would start working. ”

[Parichat, 25, a woman full-time employee and was once a freelancer]

Parichat compares her situation between living with her parents and her mother-in-law.

“While at my parents’ home, I am normally responsible for clothes washing, ironing, and house cleaning. I usually help my mother. However, if I do not have time, my mother will help because she knows how I work very hard. Living with my boyfriend actually produces more housework for me. My parents understand me very well, unlike the mother of my boyfriend. [...] This is like a normal conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.”

[Parichat]

These illustrations highlight the ambiguous situation of ‘modern’ young Thai women, who seek greater autonomy in working life, but are expected to follow the ‘good woman’ social model, itself strongly associated with maintaining the home. Housework is not the work in itself, but a constituent part of female identity. Parichat was working in a modern sector of the new media. She has liberated herself by cohabiting with Thawatchai, however, Mayuri – who is in her 60s – may not feel this is socially acceptable. The conflict between Mayuri and Parichat can be seen as a monitoring process which has reinforced habitus as discussed in Chapter 2 (Bourdieu 1992, 2001), but it can be noted that previous generations (both women and men) can play a significant part in reinforcing gender structure. In another vein, Parichat has taken it for granted by not contributing to housework because she was not yet a ‘formal’ member of her boyfriend’s family. Parichat’s initial failure to help Mayuri has led to larger conflicts with her ‘in-law’. Notably, Nuanprang who is well aware of potential problem between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law has prevented the problem from the beginning by being responsible for housework within her own house but also by securing help from her own mother by living at her house during the week. Femininity is linked with household responsibilities and when women fail to act this way it will be noticed very quickly.

Masculinity is not strongly linked with doing housework so when men contribute to housework it can be appreciated. Kon, 28, a dotcom entrepreneur from a Chinese family has recently moved to live with his Chinese-Thai partner, Oraphan, in her

parents' house. Kon explains that cohabiting is essential as they are helping each other to set up a web design company. Lacking finance, Oraphan's parents allow them to use a room in their house as a home office. Thus, Kon lives and works with his girlfriend in her house. This may not have been a problem for Kon's parents because Thai society tends to allow boys to be more physically mobile (Mills 1999; Juree 1997). In a way, men are even encouraged to have more sexual experiences before getting married (Nimfa and Sirinan, 1997). By contrast, Thai parents are more concerned about their daughter's virginity, regarded as an attribute of being a 'good' woman in Thai society (Harrison 1997; Sukanya 1988; Jeffrey 2002). This is a breakaway from tradition and can be considered a 'big step' for Oraphan's parent. However, this may have been attenuated by the fact that her parents can still monitor their relations while living in the same house. This seems to resonate with the strong matrilineal relations in the social structure in Thailand in which women remain attached with their parents after marriage (Amara 1997). In a way this arrangement can maintain the 'centrality' of women in the household, and not being completely cut off from a woman's family network. In Kon's case, they are unmarried, but he needs to adapt to living in Oraphan's parents' household. According to Kon, he plans to marry Oraphan in two years when they are more financially independent. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee of the wedding even though cohabitation before getting married reflects the mutual interest of both partners. Living together in Oraphan's family home, Kon is more aware of his domestic role.

"My life has changed since I moved in my girlfriend parents' house. I do not want to disrupt them (her family) in anyway. I tend to be very conscious when I walk to anywhere in the house and try to be quiet. However, I try to help them with cleaning and washing the dishes. It is very normal as we have meal together. I try not to intervene in the affairs of her family. I tend to concentrate on my work."

[Kon, 28, cohabiting with his girlfriend]

Kon is not yet an official member of Oraphan's family. The fact that he is Oraphan's boyfriend indicates he is the 'guest' cum soon-to-be son-in-law. The prospect is nevertheless uncertain. In fact, it is like 'trial and error' period for Kon, Oraphan and her parents. Kon has acknowledged the situation and he is aware that he should try to assimilate with Oraphan's family as much as he can. Helping them by washing dishes or carrying out other domestic responsibilities shows he is considerate. In particular, Oraphan's parents can also be assured that Kon is 'good enough' for their

daughter. In terms of online work, Kon is the boss, while Oraphan manages administration and contact with customers.

The above three cases have shown that family relationships are important in Chinese-Thai families when 'doing gender'. A daughter like Chintana can prove to her parents that she is economically responsible for herself by operating a dotcom business. Also, she let them see that she and her partner could work together. Family appears as a 'cushion' for either side of the cohabiting couples. For example, Parichat needs to adjust to her boyfriend's family, while Kon must adjust to his girlfriend's. Living with one's own family can provide support and more bargaining power for negotiating gender relations: Kon was aware of this stated need to adjust to his girlfriend's family. Parichat's case shows that a daughter-in-law can have a tough time if she cannot get along with the mother-in-law. Daughters and care responsibilities are inextricably interlinked for women in Thailand (Cook 1999) generally, and for Chinese-Thais in particular. This implies a measurement of the 'good' woman in Thai society.<sup>30</sup> Access to economic opportunities appears to be available, but cultural constraints and social expectations of both Thai and Chinese society coalesce, resulting in a very male dominated society, particularly in the public sphere. These expectations influence gender relations in the home, and women are expected to make major contributions in the domestic domain. This can be attributed to tradition, social expectations and culture, in this case the reinforcement of certain Thai cultural norms by Chinese culture. These expectations could be seen clearly during the economic crisis: women needed to be able to sustain the well being of the family, despite changes in the outside world (Busakorn and Resurreccion 2003; Jones 1997).

### **'Family Man' vs. 'Rice-winner'**

The notion of men being family rice-winners is associated closely with masculinity especially in the Chinese family as I have outlined above. Though in reality a wife has also played a rice-winner role, their effort is overlooked or not equally

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<sup>30</sup> This does not mean sons are not expected to be responsible to take care of their parents. However, this can be attributed by the belief that men can return merit to their parents by ordaining as a monk for a certain period of time. However, in general, daughters are more expected to take care of their parents when compared with sons. Additionally, the expectation can be more heightened among daughters who are single.

acknowledged when compare with their man. This perception affects gender relations and gender division of labour in the family. The idea of having wife as 'inside assistant' to the husband's business seems persistent among married male informants. In this respect, for example, Sumet, a married man from a Chinese family has a Thai wife who supports the business he inherited from his parents. In the interview, Sumet mentioned that his wife has been supporting the retail business but did not really acknowledge her significance financially. I will illustrate the case of married men from Chinese-Thai family and the extent to which they have relied on help from their mother or wife.

### *Mae Lae Mia (Mother and Wife)*

In this section, I will present the case of Phakdi, a Chinese man who inherited a property business from his mother. This apartment project has generated regular income for Phakdi and his wife every month. They can actually live on this project financially and not have to seek a new job. Phakdi appreciates this fact and said that he is thankful for his mother and his wife in taking care of him.

Phaki, 29, was an architect for a few years before deciding to work independently. While being unemployed, he was addicted to chatting online. He is aware that the Internet is powerful in expanding his social network. For him, it is a tool which can convince others to follow his ideas. Therefore, he thinks, it should not be too difficult to do marketing online or to set up a dotcom business. So, Phakdi teamed up with a few friends to initiate a dotcom business which provides information on tourism. After six months though, the team decided to give up the website before it launched. Phakdi's dotcom is an unsuccessful case; nevertheless his experience on gender division of labour is interesting.

Nattha: Who is taking care of the household chores?

Phakdi: She (my wife)...does everything. I like to work. Once, I work, I don't pay attention to anything else.

Nattha: What is your wife doing?

Phakdi: *She does not do anything* (my emphasis)...she is taking care of our business (the apartment). She cooks. She does household chores. She just likes doing it. We have money to pay for a domestic servant, but she does not want one. She is happy with ironing, washing, and cooking for us. She is happy.

[Phakdi, male, 30, married with no child]

For Phakdi, housework, family business and paid work is distinctively divided. For him, work is what he does for income, but without paid work, he can survive financially because his mother's business can cover their expenses. He does not consider it necessary for his wife to do any paid work outside the family. Meanwhile, he assumes what she does at home is not work. In his case, the term family rice-winner does not seem to apply directly. Noticeably, Phakdi is aware of his wife's contribution to the good order of the household. However, he is still assumed to be the head of the household. Currently, as the apartment project belongs to Phakdi's mother, this implies ownership of the house by Phakdi while his wife is equal to an inhabitant. Phakdi's wife is like an inside assistant for his family's business. When referring to the apartment, Phakdi mentions that it belongs to his mother, while his wife is his helper. He does not mention that she 'shares' ownership with him, but instead 'helps' him. This expectation of a wife as a husband's assistant for his business is prevalent in Chinese-descent families (Bao 2005; Szanton 1990). On a daily basis, Phakdi relies on his wife's skills in taking care of the project, but at the end of the month Phakdi will collate all the bills from the tenants. He is in charge of finance of the apartment, which he considers crucial, while his wife put her labour into taking care of the apartment. This indicates that though Phakdi assumes a dominant role in the family as the head of the house, in reality he is to a great extent dependent on his mother and his wife in terms of providing care and all the economic needs.

At one point, Phakdi has said *"Looking around me, actually, women are taking care of me. I have survived because of my mother and my wife."* Phakdi recognises that the women in his life:-his mother and his wife, have been actively influential and helpful in both the private/inner domains and the outer ones. The situation that men are merely the symbolic head of the households while women actually run the house is seen as women having more power than men (Thawit 2001).<sup>31</sup> I do not consider being responsible for household management means that women have greater power over men, but rather it can be a form of male domination that makes women responsible for survival of the family.

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<sup>31</sup> Thawit (2001) has traced back to Thai history in the past 500 years or longer that Thai women have always been the head of the households, while Thai men were 'required' to serve the army, for example, hence being away from the households for a long period of time. Thus, women are automatically being the head of the households and to take care of children.

*A Husband: a Solo Income Earner*

Thawi, 26, a Chinese-descent father, has been married for one year. He is very well advanced in his career as an owner of an IT consulting firm at his age. In the past he worked full-time as a computer programmer at a software firm where he met his future wife. His wife was a full-time web content editor at that time. Thawi later resigned from the software company as he got a new job as a senior computer analyst and later became an owner of an IT firm. Thawi and his wife agreed upon marriage that Thawi would be a sole rice-winner for the family, while his wife handles domestic labour on her own. In a way, it makes sense when Thawi made a request to his wife to be a full-time mother because Thawi has generated high income from his own company. However, he also needs to work very long hours in return. They aimed to have a baby very soon and his wife was pregnant a few months after marriage. Now the baby is about a few months old. Thawi explains how his life has changed since getting married.

Thawi: Gosh! A lot more responsibilities. I would never have imagined how my life would have changed so much. If we did not have a baby, it would have been much easier. However, we wanted a child so much and it has made things so different.

Nattha: You work from 9 am to 9 pm, how do you divide your time at home...?

Thawi: (replied before I finished my question) Lots of problem. We have lots of problem. Lots of problem nowadays...

Nattha: What do you mean?

Thawi: Mostly, I don't have time for my wife and my baby. When I'm home, she is so annoyed that I am back so late. Normally, I start working at 9 am and finish at 9 pm. It is 12 hours exactly. I finish work at 9 pm and arrive home at 10 pm. My wife then will cook for me. After the dinner, I just go to bed right away because I am so tired. She said that I am like a robot. She feels like living with a robot. When I wake up in the morning, I just leave the bed, take a shower and then go off again (laughing and talking at the same time).

[Thawi, 26, male, married with one child]

Thawi has to work as hard as he can as a family rice-winner and the owner of a business. As the only income earner, he has been facing the stress of working long hours, making it difficult to make time for the 'family'. Thawi may perhaps assume that this is right for the family, because he is working at the office. He does not indulge in nightlife or entertainment outside, and so assumes that his lifestyle is

acceptable for his wife. He said *“My wife may feel frustrated at times, but finally she would be okay because she knows that I really do my work.”* Sometimes, he needs to work during the weekend.

“Officially, my holiday is at the weekend, but I hardly stop working (laughs). Very rare. Mostly, I will take only a day off, but it is not a family day. Family day, for me, is in late afternoon on Sunday. Normally, I need to have a meeting on Saturday afternoon. I may have some of my own time on Saturday morning. I will wake up late. Saturday is the day that I really want to sleep till late. I won't wake up until nearly noon. Then, I will have a meeting at 1.00 pm on Saturday. Sunday is the day I work for my consultancy job, but I will have some free hours in the afternoon.”

[Thawi]

Thawi's case reflects the individualisation thesis in which he is trying to be the biographer of this life through his career. However, his case does not reflect gender equality as he relies so much on his wife in terms of care providing for him and helping him feel emotionally secure with having the family. Career men still need support from women, but when women are more career-orientated they cannot rely on men's caring support. This gender arrangement does not mean that women and men can be equally individualised. Strangely, his family can afford to hire a domestic servant, but his wife does not want to do so. Thawi explains that his wife likes to do it by herself, which is similar with the above case of Phakdi.

Thawi cannot avoid late night seminars or weekend meetings. His career is developing rapidly but he does not have much time for his family. Thawi's wife is the centre of the family. This practice, in a way, has caused tensions, because Thawi has asked his wife to terminate her paid employment, to concentrate on the household, while he is determined to establish his career and be the only income earner in the family. Although Thawi has clearly stated that they decided to have children right after they were married, he does not have much time to spend with his baby. Meanwhile, his wife is responsible for the well-being of Thawi and the baby. This reflects his perception that his wife has gained an economic advantage in being financially dependent on Thawi. However, this case has also shown Thawi's aspirations for a good career, and to be financially secure following contemporary urban life compelling Thawi to face 'time poverty' (Hochschild 1989), and thus creating tense relations between his wife and him.

The model of 'time' between men and women may be different, contributing to conflict within the family. The way a family member uses their time, which is a limited resource, affects others. In Thawi's case, he and his wife are mutually dependent on each other, rather than individualised, although it seems that this relationship is not an equal one, as Thawi seems to be the one making the decisions. While Thawi is spending more time at his office, his wife works longer hours with childcare and domestic responsibilities. Particularly, the extra time he has gained does not become family time. Yet, integrating work time to family time, as recommended by 'family practices' (Morgan 1999) is rather difficult for Thawi.

### **A Lone Wife and Family Support**

For a case like Aphinya, 32, a married dotcom entrepreneur, household responsibility and feeling responsible for her husband on a daily basis is not too much trouble for her. Aphinya has been married to a Chinese-Malaysian businessman. Because of the business, he could not live in Thailand with her, and they manage to meet a few times a year. Aphinya currently lives with her parents and relatives in her parents' house. They are of Chinese-descent. After finishing her first degree in accounting, Aphinya was an accountant for nearly a year. She explained that the company's management system was too slow so she decided to resign. Aphinya has set up a dotcom web hosting business for four years when we met. She is very driven at work and works at a fast pace. Aphinya is aware of her character of being assertive as she likes to make her own decisions. Now, Aphinya is in charge of 7 computer programmers and graphic designers, all are men.

Aphinya seems to separate her career from her parents and relatives as she has arranged to have an office at a nearby building not far from her parent's house. In a way, Aphinya is a very career-orientated person and she likes to spend long hours at work as possible, perhaps to compensate not having her husband around. She is aware that the absence of her husband helps her to accomplish her career because she does not need to be too concerned about his well-being.

"I am quite used to not having my husband around in the house. So when we meet in person, I actually feel quite stressed. When my husband is at home, he would ask me to work for only four hours a day."

[Aphinya, 32, married woman, entrepreneur]

As she is from a Chinese family, nevertheless, Aphinya explains that she was under strong pressure to get pregnant since she got married at aged 24. Her family sees motherhood is essential for being a complete woman. Aphinya explains that she had tried to resist their request for a long time and will leave it until she is in her 30s.

“So far, people surrounding me put pressure on me to get pregnant. They thought it was my own mistake not to be pregnant earlier because they are afraid that my baby will not grow up soon enough for me while I am still young. They think as a woman I need to have a baby...well you know, it is essential for being a woman, isn't it? However, I need to admit that I am stressed with this pregnancy because I don't know who will take care of the baby. I am so afraid that my baby will be a big obstacle to my work. Now, I cannot devote all my time for my career 100 per cent as I did before.”

[Aphinya]

Her pregnancy was about 5-months when we met. Aphinya mentioned many times her concern about childcare when she gives birth. At the beginning, she did not want to have a baby, but she felt compelled by her parents and relatives to be pregnant. She is not sure whether she really wants to have a baby as she finds herself enjoying her career very much. This is a strongly ambivalent situation of Aphinya's in choosing between motherhood and career. Nevertheless, Aphinya consoles herself that as she is now an owner of the firm she can do what she wants at work. Aphinya plans to take her baby to work with her so she can do childcare and work at the same time in her office. She sees herself being in a better position than a friend of her who has just gave birth and need to leave her baby with her parents because it is impossible to take her baby to her office. Also, Aphinya considers herself lucky that she does not need to move to Malaysia to live with her husband's family. Aphinya once tried to do so but she realised it was impossible as she wants to be a modern career woman. She describes that her husband is also from a Chinese family in Malaysia. Her mother-in-law is the mother of the house and she likes to take control of the house. Her husband and Aphinya, while at his home in Malaysia, need to socialise with the mother-in-law, her sons, her daughters and the grandchildren, in total 18, everyday, during supper and watching television time. Aphinya could not endure the situation in Malaysia and decided to return to Thailand to live with her parents.

Aphinya's case reflects a form of flexible family in which the spouses are not in the same house, but they have to learn to sustain their relationship through distance. In this case, a career may be a new form of emotional security for Aphinya, while at the

same time her parents, siblings and relatives are her 'network of family' replacing her husband. This may represent another form of 'family practice' (Morgan 1999) when the two partners are trying to maintain their familial relations though being absent from each other. In Aphinya's case, her parents and siblings will act as her partner in terms of childcare and emotional support. The term flexible family would seem to fit the individualisation thesis quite well and seems to be the case for Aphinya. She is a rice-winner for the 'long distance family' while her parents and siblings who share the same physical space provide one another with support to maintain the familial ideals. This has shown that extended family support is crucial for Aphinya, but at the same time she needs to endure being under pressure and having tense relations with her parents and relatives.

## **Conclusion**

Individual informants in this research are at the intersection between the economic transformation of the new economy and traditional family relationship which inevitable involves gender relations. As each individual is career-orientated, people with partners, and especially women were rather ambivalent about the division of labour in the family. In this research, married and cohabited women are associated with being the 'mother of the house' and 'dutiful daughters' which are feminine characters, while men are linked with 'rice-winner' of the family, which is masculine. Respondents considered in this chapter were predominantly from Chinese-descent family and have shown various degrees of patriarchal gender relations.

Clearly, female identity of participants in this chapter is being contested between being 'modern career women' and being 'traditional good mother'. Women respondents have gained increasing economic opportunities in the new economy – for example, they can develop their own agency by being entrepreneurs and self-employed. However, these economic roles can also mean a conflict between combining paid work with family responsibilities, leading to working long hours. However, domestic help is crucial in alleviating gender division tensions in the family, but the availability of domestic servants also indicates that the gender division of labour at a societal level is not very contested. The economic independence has generated personal autonomy for female research participants but gender inequality has not yet been redressed. So far, in Thailand, there is little social

security and the welfare state is not significant, which means families remain the dominant location for care and support, and women remain at their centre.

The identity of female respondents has been transformed as they can become joint rice-winners through their paid work, men's roles have not changed at the same pace. Though there are signs of men becoming more aware of family support roles, they also remain head of the household, and symbolically the 'rice-winner'. Some married men may contribute to household responsibilities: their tasks tend to focus on selective childcare and household maintenance. Where men are the only income earner, their career determination and aspirations to create a modern lifestyle are likely to lead to longer hours, and their having less (or no) time for the family. Thus heteronormativity appears to remain intact with its distinctive traditional gendered division of labour in the family. It would be interesting to get wife's view of married male participants to examine the extent to which they think of the gender division of labour.

A career and income earning capacity appear to be positive factors, and more flexible domestic arrangements can reinforce women's agency at work and in the household. For young couples, particularly those who are cohabiting, the gender division of labour appears more negotiable and flexible. This may have happened because of more open attitudes. However the cohabited couples have not yet been living within the marriage institution and this may have enabled them to escape from 'traditional' social expectations.

Although Thai urban society has been influenced by the western way of life, the family is still a crucial and fundamental unit in society, and it seems married couples try to maintain the traditional ideology of the family. Economic opportunities are significant for families in urban society. As the gendered process is not static, there seems to be room to renegotiate more balanced gender roles, within which men and women can be 'career family people' rather than calling for women to be 'career woman' and men to be 'family man'. Open attitudes of both genders appear very crucial to make cultural constraints more flexible in individual families. Although both genders have career aspirations, it does not necessarily mean their lives are fragmented or individualised, as family support is still important and fundamental to Thai society.

## CHAPTER 8

### Feminist Visions of the New Economy

*“Yet, it is through solidarity and working with resistances that I see the future taking place.”*

Harcourt (2003: 179)

#### Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the gender implications of the new economy in urban Thailand. I have shown how work created by the Internet affects the ways in which women and men Internet professionals organise their daily life. I am concerned with the growing interconnection between the global and the local, and the extent to which the Internet is one of the driving forces of accelerating economic globalisation. This empirical work from Thailand has modestly contributed to a wider insight on the new economy. The Internet has generated greater opportunities for women and men Internet professionals, and a deeper ambivalence in their lives. In the new economy, women and men are able to enjoy more job options and novel forms of work, which results in an increasing agency, particularly for women. However, the traditional expectation of Thai women to maintain good order in the household along heteronormative lines persists. This persistence limits how much women and men negotiate gender in daily life. Contestation of gender is heightened when women are economically active and still stay the centre of the household. The ambivalence appears more intense when women are encouraged – and pressured – to be more modern. The individualised nature of work in the new economy also requires men to work long hours: however, the tension in male daily life is different from that of women. Analytical accounts in this thesis demonstrate the ways in

which the unequal gender structure has been negotiated and contested in the new economy.

In this concluding chapter, I will first highlight my research findings. The main body of this thesis – three empirical chapters – is discussed. I then contextualise the empirical findings within a theoretical perspective, to grasp the growing intersection between the global and the local. Second, I point out the limitations of my research, and outline those issues which I have not covered. Finally, I lay out the implications for social policy, and future research in this area.

## **Key Research Findings**

The new economy is a flexible concept, which can be viewed from various perspectives. Mainly, the new economy is seen to bring about higher productivity and economic growth, and equalise economic opportunities. Social and gender divisions may be widened both within and outside the new economy. This research has investigated the working experience and gender relations of IT professionals. It has examined Internet professionals and their use of the Internet at work, and the consequences of this new technology and new working patterns for their careers and daily life. In Chapter 2, I have drawn upon historical, social, economic and cultural perspectives to analyse the gender implications of the Internet in Thailand. From a historical perspective the so-called ‘civilising’ stage of Thailand appears to contribute to a gendered revolution in which a marked difference between masculine and feminine characters were promoted to counter against the view of Western visitors at that time. Thailand was considered ‘backward’ as men and women were very similar in their appearance. Thus to escape direct domination by the West, Thais established a new gendered norm which shows the extent to which the local responded to the global. This marked difference in gender has made women and men aware of their gendered identities. Meanwhile political and economic change has resulted in more active participation of women in the labour force. However from a sociological and cultural perspective unequal gender structures persist in Thai society. Polygamy, patriarchy and the high expectation of women to be ‘good’ have limited women’s bargaining power in sexuality and gender relations.

The Internet has grown significantly since the late 1990s, presenting 'new' career opportunities for both women and men. For Thailand, the exponential growth of the Internet and its popularity coincided with the economic crisis of 1997. This moment is crucial, as it created a group of educated middle class women and men who consider work on the Internet another viable option in their lives. Although work based on the Internet does not become permanent, its emergence during the economic collapse heightened interest in a tool bringing new work opportunities and a channel to 'get rich quick', to escape from the pattern of a 'job for life'.

New career options correspond with reflexive modernisation and individualisation, and suggest that increasingly flexible forms of work allow both genders to enjoy less-structured lives, as discussed in Chapter 3. I have questioned Castells' suggestion (1997) that the massive inroad of women into the labour market may finally bring an end to patriarchy. The Internet, with its capacity to transcend temporal and spatial divisions, has increased the mobility and flexibility of work. Castells (2001) has suggested that the new economy might grant women increasing employment opportunities, and help them to combine work and caring responsibility more flexibly. According to Castells, a growing amount of flexible work – facilitated by the computer and the Internet – could lead to decreasing numbers of men working full time in organisations, and could bring more women into the flexible labour market. I doubt that work in the new economy is gender neutral, and question if it allows women and men to enjoy new job opportunities equally. I also question if the flexible form of work enabled by the Internet has increased women's agency and helped with the negotiation of gender roles. In this research, Thai women and men have participated in the new economy and I have shown the details of the research informants in Chapter 4 that they have come from various backgrounds, different ages, and different statuses. The informants have envisaged the new economy as a promising new area of work and most importantly they want to be the 'author of their life'.

I have argued in Chapter 5 that work in the new economy has motivated informants to be dot.com and e-commerce entrepreneurs or full-time employees in this sector. The informants seem highly encouraged by 'quick successes' and 'financial reward' following the path from dot.com in the West. Nevertheless, the income of dot.com and e-commerce entrepreneurs is uncertain. Given the high competition of work in this sector, these informants are driven to work long and unusual hours. The

Internet has allowed work to happen across time and space, thus working hours for dot.com and e-commerce entrepreneurs are not fixed, while there is no guarantee of regular contracts or payment for work in this sector. The Internet business seems to work as an informal sector and thus allows small firms to exist as small firms.

On the positive side, computer and Internet skills have enabled a number of women to work independently, thus paving the way for them to be solo entrepreneurs. This aspect has turned their life towards different trajectories from their mothers because the current generation of women are able to rely on themselves financially more than their mothers were. Particularly as the Internet has permitted them to work independently, they have more opportunity to initiate their own business and think for themselves. This is an encouraging aspect of the Internet that promotes independence and more self-esteem and self-achievement for women. For example, a number of married women who have not had independent work before have realised their self-potential in using the Internet for their e-commerce business. This new business helps them to be more active agents for themselves, otherwise they would have focused solely on caring for others, most of the time.

I have discussed gender identity on-line and off-line in Chapter 6. Gender identity appears influential in governing the ways in which women and men perceive their roles. In cyberspace, individuals cannot see one another while communicating, thus written words are the only tools in e-mails. Gender has disappeared to a certain extent in e-mail. This disappearance may have generated positive and negative outcomes on gender structures. On the one hand, the invisibility of gender helps women enhance their agency. For example, a number of women informants feel more comfortable in communicating by e-mails with foreign clients because they do not have to show their gender. This gender invisibility has enabled women to do business more efficiently at the beginning. Once the deal is settled, they feel more confident in their ability and are not worried about disclosing their gender later. In this case, working through cyberspace has enabled women to be more flexible with gender identity thus paving the way for more business opportunity. Meanwhile, men can also own websites, which are characterised by femininity. They do not have to be concerned about compromising their real (physical) masculine identity on their website.

On the other hand, the power of gender invisibility in cyberspace may actually necessitate a binary division between masculinity and femininity in the real world, because women feel empowered when they act like men, while men can perform feminine characters online to make the website appealing for female customers. In cyberspace, women feel more empowered when their gender is hidden. This power of invisibility may not however lead to challenge gender relations in the real world. For example, a group of women who want to pursue their e-commerce business still need to rely on men to be the head of the company. This seems to accentuate the symbolic and very real power of men in Thai society. However, increasing women's agency through cyberspace may pave the way for more confidence in the real world, and greater negotiation of gender in daily life. In real life, individuals have encountered norms that limit as well as facilitate their agency. The ways in which individuals are more comfortable with disguising their gender shows that the heteronormative context in the 'real' world is not original or static. Gender identity may be flexible and more fluid in cyberspace. To what extent will this lead to the contestation of gender in real life?

Individual workers can feel ambivalent in working long hours with the Internet or working from home. In Chapter 7, I have illustrated that woman entrepreneurs may feel acutely aware that they are expected to be caring daughters for their parents, but want to maintain a degree of professionalism at the same time. This ambivalence tends to increase when working schedules are not routine. Internet professionals are often torn between socialising with their family members and partners, or concentrating on their work. However, working from home can make entrepreneurs feel emotionally secure, because of the familiar and nurturing atmosphere found at home. Married women, working for their own businesses from home, find this can cause feelings of guilt, because they are required to socialise with family members, but want to work at the same time. Particularly, married women in Chinese-descent families may have faced patriarchal relations in the family, quite strictly and have been highly expected to prioritise the domestic arena and, in some cases, being an 'inside assistant' for their husbands in doing business. In terms of doing housework, it is common among middle class Thai families to hire live-in domestic maids to help married women. This practice, on the one hand, has allowed married women informants to maintain their role in paid work as well as in the domestic domain; on the other hand, it does not lead to a transformation of gender relations. Men informants tend not to be aware of domestic responsibility.

The ways in which Thai women have enjoyed economic opportunity may accentuate the assumption that women in Southeast Asia have 'high status'. Economic opportunity alone may not be a mere indicator of gender equality. Thai women are regarded as the 'centre' of the family, hence having economic opportunity has not really resulted in lifting this burden from women. Rather double roles may in fact lead to more responsibility and more agency for women at the same time. On the one hand, it seems necessary for women to be more modern and career-orientated. On the other hand, it seems crucial to maintain traditional role. This intersection has resulted in contestation of gender in daily life.

Work in the new economy represents a site of ambivalence between modernity and tradition in which working women are highly enthusiastic and career-orientated, but at the same time encouraged to prioritise family which is considered good tradition of Thai society. Men and women are at the intersection between the global and the local, but women appear more driven to conform to existing gender relations. I would argue that higher education and more economic opportunity is crucial for women to increase their agency. Thai women may not have challenged the gender norms directly but the extent to which they attempt to gain more economic independence from work has enabled them to be more confident financially, psychologically and emotionally, which may result in increasing independence in the longer term.

From this research, it seems clear that women are economically active and prioritise harmony in the domestic domain, while men remain as the symbolic heads of the household. This fits in with Bourdieu's account of habitus, as men are unaware that their daily practices reinforce women's subordination, but regard the prevailing gender structure as natural, while women tend to view their household roles as a 'labour of love'. Choices may appear to be more available with modernisation, but in fact they are limited. Women may be able to assert more agency, by gaining more independence at work, but the wider gender structure has not really been challenged. The unequal gender structure is assimilated into multi-layered social relations. At a personal level, traditional relations are contested in daily life, as indicated by the lives of the Internet professionals discussed in this thesis.

I have argued that the heteronormative context is not static: the economic and social transformations help in challenging traditional gender relations. Men's identities

and roles are not static either: changes in women's roles will directly and indirectly contest men's positions in society. Men are more resistant to change – perhaps because their overall lives in terms of work and home life have changed to a lesser degree than women's. Women have experienced greater change thanks to the new forms of work and an increasing intersection between modernisation and tradition.

More specifically, this research has focused on the new form of work based on new technology, and its gender implications. The analysis has drawn upon the case of Thailand, and linked it with the global arena. This research has made a contribution by focusing on the Internet professionals – I have placed a different group of Thai people on the research agenda, and enriched the picture of women's lives in Thailand, going beyond the sex workers which tend to be commonly prominent in western research.

### **The Limitations of This Research**

ICTs and the Internet are being continually developed. This research has offered insights about professionals who use the Internet at work at one point in their life. Given that Internet technology is progressing, the ways in which Internet professionals have organised their work/life can change accordingly. A second interview may have revealed continuing forms of the ways the research participants have organised their life. Thus I wrote e-mails to most of them to request post-fieldwork comments.

Though I could reach a number of informants, the request for the second interview was not actively followed through. Had I been in Thailand in person, I might have obtained more information on the extent to which the research participants have progressed with their businesses. Nevertheless, I have integrated the answers from a few respondents who cared to reply by e-mail. The second time comments from respondents however have not changed the direction of the analysis in my empirical work. The materials that I acquired from the first interview appear sufficient to produce the main body of this thesis, as shown in the three empirical chapters.

I have been in touch with a number of research participants. Some of them have progressed well with their e-business. The ones that responded the second time are more likely to have been the successful ones. Their businesses have grown robust in this sector and it seems to them that they can grow more and expand their

businesses both off-line and on-line. Nevertheless, a number of participants needed to stop their Internet business soon after giving interviews. They have realised the uncertain nature of the business and it was impossible for them to pursue this work longer. Ironically, the Internet is the medium of their work, but I cannot track a number of them via the websites anymore. This seems a main drawback of the Internet. Communication by web and e-mail can be transitory or fleeting, making it difficult to keep in contact.

Another limitation has come from lacking any opportunity to interview the partners of research participants. This empirical work might have been able to proffer a more insightful understanding of the gender division of labour of individuals working in this sector. In a number of cases, the research participants mentioned the ways in which they make the gender division of labour and assume it as “natural”. The analysis could have been wider had I heard comments from their partners. Given that the nature of work in the new economy is informal, it is not always convenient for the researcher to meet with research participants at their homes. The visit could be too intrusive or too risky for me to travel to an unknown place. There were a number of cases where I had to conduct the interview at the home of the research participants. It was not very convenient in terms of probing on private questions particularly on gender issues because their family members were sometimes around during the interview. I was aware of their presence and was not able to probe too far in my questions.

I have set out this research with an aim to provide empirical work of the new economy from the perspective of a country which is often considered as ‘less developed’. I did not intend to accentuate more division between the West and the East. Examining the new economy from Thailand’s experience may show whether it has resonated with the new economy in the West. The findings of my research however has shown the increasing intersectionality and the new kind of divisions across the world with globalisation i.e. the old North/South divide is no longer so simple and has become more complex in parallel with Mohanty (2003) and Perrons (2004). The possibility of this social class, social positioning and forms of work may mean that lifestyles of similar groups on these dimensions are more similar between people across countries than they are between different social groups within countries. At the same time while being similar in some respects people are still influenced by their cultural backgrounds and prevailing levels of welfare and

development in the countries where they reside and so this will mean that their experiences are still locally situated.

### **The Implications for Social Policy**

The Thai government has launched 'IT2010 Policy Framework' (NECTEC 2002) with an aim to support growth in the Knowledge-Based economy. The vision of the plan states that *"Thailand is to have a strong and competitive economy and a knowledge-based society thereby allowing entrepreneurs and the public at large access to information."* In addition to promoting the country's competitiveness, the master plan has the main objectives of providing ICTs to all to ensure equality of access and increased quality of life for all. Mainly, the policy wants to encourage a larger number of Thais to become e-entrepreneurs and to gain more benefits from e-commerce. Apparently from this thesis, women are potential Internet professionals who want to develop small enterprises by using the Internet. As women entrepreneurs face barriers at work in the new economy, a policy that addresses gender issues is needed to promote more equality of access to the ICTs for both genders. The Internet may have paved the way for more job opportunities, but the sector cannot be characterised as gender neutral if hierarchical job segregation remains.

It seems clear that both women and men have gained benefits from working in the new economy – financially and psychologically. I have shown in Chapter 3 that Thai women have participated actively in the 'new' occupations, based on working with computers and ICTs. However, this does not mean that the gender structure has been dismantled by work in the new economy. The government can initiate a policy that aims to raise women's awareness of the need for competency in computer and ICTs skills. Additionally, this increasing awareness can help pave the way for organisations and companies to realise that women and men can perform multi-dimensional skills with computers and the Internet and this will lead to decreasing gender barriers of work in the new economy. As working with computers and the Internet seems to promote a less structured and rigid employment, it may also pave the way for a time when women and men can perform equally at work.

In addition to the IT2010 Policy framework discussed above, increasing awareness in computer knowledge can be achieved from a young age to support women and men to participate actively in this sector. Thus education for younger generations should aim to enhance computer skills for both male and female students to help them gain a longer learning curve in computer and technology skills. Currently, computer skills tend to be associated with masculinity; this may thus discourage women from developing their skills in this arena.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

I have focused on the urban middle class who use the Internet as their professional tool in this research. I have discussed that the research participants are highly educated and have competency in IT skills to a certain extent that they can develop their skills for independent occupations. It is interesting to see how experiences of the Thai middle class have resembled those of the middle class in the Western world as a consequence of economic globalisation and technological development. There can be new research on the ways in which villagers or people living in remote areas of Thailand use the Internet in daily life. Gendered implications can be examined further, in relation to the use of technology in urban and rural society. Specifically, drawing upon the IT2010 policy mentioned above, the Thai government has begun an Internet project to support a 'one village, one product' scheme to support local products in many provinces across Thailand. Research that focuses on gender perspectives could explore the implications of the Internet on gender from other social groups. Additionally, Thailand has aimed to enhance rural people's agency by introducing the computer and ICTs. The case of intersection between modernisation and tradition can be probed further in doing research on gender and ICTs among people in rural areas. The ICTs may encourage rural people to work from their villages. However, to what extent will this lead to enhancing their agency and negotiating gender?

I have not integrated the sexuality issue into this current research, even though I have mentioned the heteronormative context. It will also be important to examine deeper the gender identity implications of communication in cyberspace. Sexuality may help to gain insights into gender identity in the real world and on-line. Thailand tends to be known as a country that has high tolerance of homosexuality, though in

reality this may not really be the case. It will be interesting to see whether sexuality has been a negative aspect for homosexuals who use the Internet at work and the extent to which the Internet may enable them to have more freedom of expression. This may lead to an increasing agency for these people in the real world. I have discussed the extent to which heterosexual women tend to feel more empowered in disguising their gender identity on-line: it is crucial to study whether this is also the case for homosexual people.

Other comparative research should examine the new economy and its implications in other Asian countries. This would provide greater insights into the intersection between the global and the local, and modernity and tradition, from an Asian perspective. Asia is known for its traditional expectations, yet economic modernisation is also important for sustaining growth. The more countries aim to develop economically, the greater will be the collision between traditional expectations and familial relations. A comparative case study between Thailand, South Korea, Malaysia or Singapore would be a good start. Empirical work can investigate the use of the Internet in those countries, and then compare the gender dimension. This comparative research would further probe the growing intersection between the global and the local, and examine if work in the new economy will ever lessen the persistent inequalities in gender structures.

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# APPENDIX 1

## INTERVIEW OUTLINE

1. Background of the participants:
  - Gender
  - Age
  - Marital Status
  - Income
2. Questions regarding work and the Internet
  - When do you start using the Internet as the professional tool?
  - Why do you decide to become dotcom entrepreneurs?
  - Are you working full-time or part-time?
  - Are you working independently for your own business?
  - Where do you get funding?
  - How do you get the job order?
  - Is the Internet work your only job?
  - Is the job sustainable financially?
  - How do you experience generally in using the Internet at work?
  - Will you use the Internet at work in five years time?
3. Work/Life Balance
  - Do you have regular work hours?
  - How do you divide time between work and leisure?
  - Do you set holidays for yourself?
  - Where do you work?
  - Do you have your own office?
  - Do you have proper space at home while working?
4. Communications on/off the Internet
  - Do your customers know your gender?
  - How do you communicate with the customers?
  - Have you ever met with clients in person?
  - How do you meet them?
  - Is using e-mails enough in being in touch with customers?

**5. Gender aspect at work**

- **Do you think being a woman or a man affect your work on the Internet?**
- **How do you cooperate with computer programmers in case you are working full time with new media firm?**
- **Please explain your output on the computer screen.**

**6. Gender Division and household division aspect**

- **How do you think of doing housework?**
- **Do you do any housework?**
- **Does your family have any domestic maids?**
- **Do you live with parents?**
- **How do your parents manage the domestic work?**