

ต้นฉบับ หน้าขาดหาย

Douglas provided a clear explanation of the formation and function of taboos against women in Muay Thai. I found no one theory to clarify the capacity of gender roles in restricting women from participation in Muay Thai except a generalization by many authors that gender roles were ascribed by those in power, namely men, to maintain the status quo of male dominance.

The process of industrialization in the 1960's and 70's and the impact of globalization in the 1990's to the present have facilitated the involvement of women in the sport of Muay Thai and in many other public spheres of Thai society. Analysis of the impact of these forces on society gives an explanation as to why Thai women had previously not been interested or involved in Muay Thai and how the changes wrought by these processes enabled them to enter the ring competitively.

4.1.1 History of Women in Muay Thai

Most Thai people, male and female alike, have little knowledge of women in Muay Thai, in fact most people do not even know that female Muay Thai fighters exist. This is due to the low profile that women in the sport have nationally. Recently female boxers have been sought out due to the desire to field a Thai female boxing contingent in the Olympics and the recent Asian Women's boxing tournament held in Bangkok. Thai women have been in the ring for a much longer period of time than the most recent batch of women striking out for the gold.

Women Muay Thai fighters followed their boxing brethren in the rings of Lumpini Stadium forty years ago (Sawadee Magazine, 1998). Women's fights were held at Lumpini until the spectator turnout became too low to be profitable. The women's fights were cancelled and it wasn't until the late 1990's that women came back to the ring en masse. In the intervening years women's Muay Thai was still practiced but mainly in small local venues such as temple fairs.

Over the years superstition has developed around Muay Thai and the presence of women in or near the ring. Women are forbidden to enter the Muay Thai ring or function as coaches on the outer ring during a male fight. The reason for such restriction appears to be fear of contamination. Women's bodies are considered impure due to their monthly periods and it is thought that they could pollute the atmosphere of the ring. This explanation doesn't stand up to scrutiny, as

blood is likely to be spilt in the ring during the fight. I speculate that this rationale has been adopted to hide a deeper purpose, which is to secure the male dominance over women and defend male supremacy. This fallacious belief in the harmful effect of women in the ring has required two rings at any venue where women practice Muay Thai.

The international interest in Muay Thai led to an increased need for female fighters in the 1990's. Western women became interested in the sport of Muay Thai and were anxious to try their skills out in the home country of the sport. Foreign female fighters who came to Thailand had to be provided with worthy competitors as a matter of national pride. Young Thai women now entered the sport to compete internationally. From the late 1990's onward Thai females entered the Amateur Muay Thai World Championships.

To supply the upsurge in demand for female Muay Thai fighters, the Muay Thai Association in Rangsit opened a special woman's training camp. The camp was home to approximately 10 women fighters in the year 2000. They lived and trained at the camp many having left home villages throughout the kingdom to attend. The Rangsit stadium held women's Muay Thai fights two times a week surpassing the number of male fights they sponsored (Bangkok Post, 27/03/00) .

In 2001, a sex abuse scandal rocked the women's Muay Thai program at Rangsit Stadium. Some of the female fighters in residence there left the camp and found a new training camp at Sasiprapha Gymnasium, also in Bangkok. The defection of the fighters put an end to the promotional women's fights at Rangsit. The women's school is effectively defunct with few women remaining at the camp.

Later in 2001, ABAT (Amateur Boxing Association of Thailand) was looking for female boxers to compete in the Olympics and the Asian Women's Boxing Tournament held in August 2001 in Bangkok. Women who had a background in Muay Thai were actively recruited and sent to a training camp to hone their boxing skills. The tournament in August did not yield good results for the Thai competitors but in the future, with more time to develop, the odds will improve.

4.1.2 Challenges to Women's Muay Thai

Superstition about women in the ring creates many challenges for those women who want to participate in Muay Thai. There is an insufficient supply of Muay Thai venues for women. When women are scheduled to fight at any Muay Thai event two rings must be provided: one for each sex. Limited space and funds for a second ring may preclude any women's fight. The same conditions apply to training venues for women's Muay Thai. Furthermore, training venues are geared toward male use and rarely have separate facilities for women. The lack of female changing and bathroom facilities dissuades women from participating in the sport, hence reinforcing the exclusion of women.

Muay Thai coaches are generally men. Few women have the opportunity to become Muay Thai coaches. This phenomenon is typical throughout the female sporting world. Male coaches hold the power in the sport. Gender roles are reinforced by this situation due to the fact that even though women are training in a power sport they continue to be subordinate to the male coach.

Male coaching becomes a larger issue when the problem of sexual misconduct arises. The female fighters at Rangsit stadium were under the control of their male coach and benefactor. The coach/athlete relationship of subordination mirrors the Thai patron/client relationship, which reduces the ability of the client/athlete to refuse the patron/coach's commands. The female fighter, Salita Nakasem, at the Rangsit camp respected her coach/patron and was indebted to him for the life chances she received. In March of 2001 she left the Rangsit camp and accused the camp owner of sexual harassment. The charges of sexual harassment against the coach, Amnuay Keitbumroong, a respected figure in Muay Thai circles is likely to damage her own career more than his. The coach has made counter charges against Salita and the other fighters that left the camp with her, stating that they stole from the camp and took drugs. Her new coach, Chanai Pongsupah owner of Sasiprapah Gymnasium, said "Now that she has been selected for the national team she should grow up and stop sulking about little things", making light of the incident (Bangkok Post 25/03/01). This event illustrates how female Muay Thai fighters are disadvantaged in their relationships with their male coaches. Women may choose to

opt out of the sport instead of facing the possibility of being sexually exploited by their coaches.

Nationally, women's Muay Thai is virtually unknown. The profile of female Muay Thai fighters is very low and when they do get media exposure it is not taken seriously. The first coverage of women's Muay Thai I ever encountered was a photo in a local English language daily newspaper labeled "Chick Boxing". The media frequently reinforce gender stereotypes with the quantity and quality of women's sports coverage. Women's sport is given less airtime in the media and often only gender appropriate sports are covered. In the Thai sporting world the most famous and well-covered female athlete is the tennis star Tamarine Tanasugarn. Tennis is a sport that has long been accepted as a woman's game, while Muay Thai is not.

Media coverage of women in sport focuses on gender accepted roles and stereotypes. Female athletes are often described in terms of aesthetics such as graceful and artful. Women in sport are often characterize using terminology that has no reference to their athletic lives instead describing them in their roles as mothers and wives. Muay Thai is a sport that is described in terms of power, aggression, and competition; adjectives not in keeping with the accepted virtues of Thai women. In order to render this threat to traditional views less menacing they trivialize and degrade the female Muay Thai athlete by using language like Chick which alters the issue from one of sport to one of sexuality. Media coverage of female Muay Thai is skewed due the gender imbalance in the world of the media. In a newspaper report featuring a the female Muay Thai athlete Boopa Posen, the author, a woman named Yvonne Bohwongprasert, described the 16-year-old boxer as "lion-hearted" (Bangkok Post, 17/03/01). The article also described elements of the fight: "...fierce kicks...lethal elbow strikes...old fashioned uppercuts..." (Bangkok Post, 17/03/01). A male reporter in the Bangkok Post described female boxing in these terms: "...lacks action and grace...weaker physique...regarded as more genteel...not suitable" (Bangkok Post. 29/08/01).

The gender bias inherent in the different styles and components of reports is clearly displayed in the two previous examples. The female reporter does not disparage, trivialize or question the appropriateness of women in Muay Thai while the male reporter does just that. The media plays a major role in forming public

opinion therefore the acceptance of female Muay Thai athletes hinges on the creation of a bias free press.

Yet another challenge to women in Muay Thai is paucity of monetary rewards. Women's roles in society are diverse and they are often responsible for a variety of household and work related chores on a daily basis. The ability of women to partake in sport activities relates directly to her ability to perform all her roles and still have time to function as an athlete. Women in Thailand are significant wage earners and contribute to the family's economic welfare. Women who wish to pursue Muay Thai must benefit monetarily from the sport in order to sustain their interest. Currently female fighters receive much less money to fight in competition than men do. Accomplished female fighters receive between 3,000-20,000 baht per fight and their male counterparts several times that. Equal pay for equal work has long been the feminist mantra and applies to this situation especially as one fight is the result of hours of unpaid training.

Finally, women must overcome the lack of acceptance of female Muay Thai athletes. As I have already mentioned most people have never heard of female Muay Thai athletes, when they do they are often surprised and doubt that women can or should participate in what is acknowledged as a violent sport. As one report noted, "...female boxers seem not to have the physical strength or the skills needed for boxing. ...women are still widely regard as more genteel" (Bangkok Post, 29/08/01).

Strength and skills can both be attained through training and therefore not a genuine but frequent argument against women in the sport. Gender stereotypes frequently arise to challenge the participation of women in Muay Thai. Unless women in Muay Thai gain more unbiased media exposure, conquer decades of superstition and seize coaching opportunities; acceptance of the female component in the sport will be difficult to achieve.

4.1.3 Why Fight It?

With so many roadblocks, why do women persevere and continue to train in the sport of Muay Thai? The reasons why women participate may differ from case to case but generally they have one thing in common: their socio-economic situation.

Women in sport, particularly women in sports that are considered not appropriate to their gender, often have a background that does not subscribe to the status quo. Due to the fact that they already live outside accepted social boundaries, their sporting lives don't conflict with their existing social identity. Throughout the sporting world women who participate in activities that are considered consistent with male and not female attributes generally come from poor, uneducated backgrounds. Many women in Muay Thai fit this profile.

Most female boxers I interviewed were from rural farming families or self-employed urban workers in smaller centers such as Ubon Ratchathani and Khorat. All respondents had education up to grade 9 (M3) or were currently enrolled in school progressing toward this end. Many state their only occupation as Muay Thai but some had moved onto other jobs in the food service industry and given up Muay Thai as an economic activity. The above results support the economic hypothesis for participation in Muay Thai. Several informants were using Muay Thai to pursue and finance their education outside the ring indicating that Muay Thai was a means to an end not an end in itself.

Most interview subjects are physically large compared to the Thai norm (fight weight from 60-55 Kilos) and describe themselves as fat. I posit that they don't fit the physical description of the ideal Thai women and therefore can opt out Thai gender role expectations of female weakness and passivity. Furthermore their own life expectations often do not concur with their definition of an ideal woman which included mothers, good at house keeping, talented, modest and beautiful. Although, most of the younger informants, aged 16 and under, listed strength as a quality of the ideal woman indicating a change in gender role expectations.

4.2 History of Fighting Women

Changing time honored ideas and traditions is not easy, the best way to facilitate such a change is not to diverge radically from the past but to highlight examples from history that illustrate the current concern. Women in Muay Thai are not accepted in the traditional view of the quintessential Thai woman who is graceful, beautiful, and meek. Women who fight are not in accordance with the Thai ideal, or are they?

During the Sukhothai period there are several examples or legends of female warriors. The Queen mother and King Thammaracha III are said to have gone into battle together. Another northern woman gave birth while leading an army in the stead of her husband, who was battling on another front (National Identity Board, 1992, p.11).

In the Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya there is reference made of female soldiers. In the corvee system that operated at this time subjects of the king could be called upon to serve him as warriors, farmers, labourers etc. It is generally accepted that men would be called upon to perform military service but it appears so too were some women.

Beyond this mere mention of female soldiers there are several well-known legends of Thai women who fought against the kingdom's enemies. Most recently the legend of Queen Suriyothai has gained new popularity. This legendary Queen is remembered in a major motion picture production, popular song and a monumental statue. Suriyothai was the wife of the King of Ayutthaya in 1548 when the kingdom was under threat from the Burmese. Legend has it that she went out into battle with her husband and died while protecting the king from an oncoming attacker.

The island of Phuket in Southern Thailand is home to the legendary sisters Khunying Chand and Khun Mook. In 1785 they are said to have led Thai troops against Burmese troops attacking the island. The women fought disguised as men and repelled the Burmese forces. The king bestowed upon them the honorific titles of Toa Tep Ksatri and Tao Sri Suntorn in recognition of their valor.

A female of fighting fame is also the renowned heroine of the town of Khorat in Northeastern Thailand. Khunying Mo, later known by her honorific title given by King Rama III as Tao Suranaree, fought against Laotian forces in 1826. The Laos attacked Khorat and she was captured and taken prisoner but she escaped and went back to Khorat to lead the Thai forces. Tao Suranaree is portrayed in a monumental statue in the town of Khorat and is the subject of an upcoming feature film.

The women described above are the legendary instances of fighting Thai women. The resurrection and popularity of these stories could help redefine the role of women in Thailand. At the very least, they could serve to illustrate that women can fight as well as men and are not weak, defenseless flowers.

4.3 Female Warriors in Thai Literature

The story of *Phra Aphai Mani* written by Sunthon Phu in the early Rattanakosin Period provides examples of strong female characters in roles of leadership and consul. The work has been touted as an interesting commentary on the role and abilities of women in society. However, despite the forward looking attitude of casting women in the roles of soldier, ruler, military strategist and advisor the writer clearly shows that these are not socially accepted roles for the “good woman”. The following excerpts will elucidate this point.

The character Suwannamali offers to help in the war effort:

“ It is true that I am a woman, but I am quite well versed in war strategies.

.....

She then bound her breast and donned a suit of diamond armor to disguise herself as a man with a sword and a dagger attached to her belt...” (National Identity Board, 1992, p.123-124).

Later in the story Suwannamali once again finds it necessary to fight in order to save the kingdom and the man she loves, Phra Aphai Mani:

“ ...she assumed the guise of a man equipped with bow and arrows. Her five hundreds-odd maids, allwearing soldier-like turbans, highly skilled in the use of the crossbows, went to pay respects to their queen before setting off for battle” (National Identity Board, 1992, p.126).

Both of these instances the women must be disguised as men before performing their martial task strongly indicating that the practice of using female soldiers was not common. In another verse it becomes clear that female participation in physical warfare was not acceptable; “ The court officials told Wali not to volunteer because fighting was not a woman’s job” (National Identity Board, 1992, p. 128).

The character of Wali, further challenges the conventional wisdom of the value of women, chiefly that value ascribed to beauty, in her appeal to king:

“ I have not a bit of doubt about my ugly appearance, but knowledge, like an unblemished diamond, is my spiritual beauty. Among your host of beautiful concubines, you can never find as learned a one as I. The reason I am

humbling myself before you is that I want your fame to spread far and wide so that learned men in all disciplines would seek to come under your patronage. Should you take pleasure only in beauty and care not for the wise and learned, you would be going against traditions. I fear that the good men would never pay their allegiance to you. Pray ponder upon it if you were to be the pillar of three realms. A woman's beauty, however delectable, is only the fuel for the flames of passion and desires" (National Identity Board, 1992, p.128).

Although challenging, Wali still adheres to some of the well-worn cliches of traditional Thai women in that she offers her abilities for the use of the king rather than use them independently. She also appeals to the king's desire to be the leader of other learned and good men, not women, indicating the low esteem that women are held in intellectually and socially.

These fictional female characters do not depict equality between the sexes, but they do exhibit the ability of women to rise above their stereotypical roles all be it against the male dominated status quo. And this, the ability to challenge prevailing norms and attitudes, is the real contribution of this story to the empowerment of Thai women.

4.4 Pollution Taboos' Impact on Women in Muay Thai

The seminal work, *Purity and Danger: an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*, by Mary Douglas postulates that dirt is matter out of place. This dirt may be something as inconsequential as books on the floor or, rather more distressing, blood outside the body. The second form of dirt has proven to be the foundation of power, ritual and pollution.

The body is promulgated as a model of all other systems. Marginal aspects of the body such as bodily fluids and body parings may be construed to contain power due to their polluting quality inherent in the fact that they are of the body but no longer part of it. Many cultures have created taboos against such marginal substances and people as a means of danger avoidance. Women have typically been the focus of these taboos due to their monthly menstruation. Menstrual blood is deemed a dangerous polluting substance and since it is impossible for a man to know

when a woman is menstruating the solution is to restrict women from any arena where they might unconsciously create a threat. In the case of Muay Thai, women are exempt from male rings, as they are believed to negate the magical protective properties of the site and all other magic paraphernalia accompanying the male fighter.

4.5 The Socio-Economic Context

4.5.1 Industrialization

The process of industrialization that took place in Thailand in the 1960's was the impetus for great social change. Panit points out that major changes in job opportunities brought about by industrialization in the 1960's brought women out of their homes and farms and onto the factory floor to work as unskilled labour (1999, p.3). Female workers were cheaper than men and were in great demand. Formerly a woman's place had been at home. They were described as "... highly respected mothers. They were proficient in domestic arts and were expected to rear children, remain faithful to the husband and devoted to the care of the home" (Padilla, 1974, p.2).

By the mid-1970's Padilla observed that the "...impact of western civilization and education and economic opportunities has radically changed the social and economic situation in Bangkok and the commercialized regions of the country" (1974, p.3). As indicated here, the adoption of industrialization also meant the importation of western ideas. One of these ideas was women's liberation.

The 1970's saw the rise of the feminist movement in Thailand especially in the years of democracy from 1973-1976. Women's liberation movement in Thailand was directly influenced by the west as explicitly depicted by the reference to western feminist such as Simone de Beauvoir, Margaret Mead, and Betty Frieden in the 1976 publication, *Thai Women*, by the National Council of Women of Thailand. (Mattani, 1988, p.119) The poem, *I am a Human Being*, by Kanlaya in that publication expressed the view of some Thai women that the time for equality was come.

*I am a human being
 I am not a flower.
 I am a human being
 With senses,
 With a fighting spirit
 As strong as yours.*

*I am a human being
 Because I can see,
 I feel pain,
 I suffer,
 I have a soul.
 I am not a flower.
 Tell every one,
 do understand.*

*I will tell you
 When you fight, I fight.
 When you fall, I will lift you up.
 When you run, I will lead with the flag.*

*O, Future,
 You will prove that
 I am a leader
 Equal to you, walking shoulder to shoulder with you. (Mattani 1988: 119)*

The sportization of many folk games in Europe occurred with the rise of industrialization, and though it would be unwise to directly correlate the two events, it is of relevance to suggest that industrialization among other factors contributed to the phenomenon of sportization (Dunning, 1999). The push for industrialization in Thailand during the 1960's and 70's affected Muay Thai and those who sought to participate in the sport; namely women.

Women, due to modernization and industrialization, moved out of the home sphere and became more active in economic pursuits. Muay Thai, in its transformed state of sport was yet another opportunity for economic gain. Women were often forced to use their physical capital in the new materialism that gripped Thailand, to provide for their families in rural areas where cash was infrequently at hand and dependant upon the cyclical nature of agricultural life. Women were often sent by their families to work as prostitutes in the urban centers particularly Bangkok. Muay Thai could provide another means of using the body to obtain cash. In the words of one Muay Thai promoter in the 1970's, making an honourable living in the ring was preferable to becoming a prostitute (Stockmann, 1979, p.20). According to the short story, *The Fifth Train Trip*, previously discussed in the section on literature and socialization, many Thai women entered prostitution during this period knowingly to provide the material wealth their families expected in the new industrial era (Suvanna, 1992).

Not long after women entered the ring in the late 1960's, they disappeared again. During the period of democracy from 1973-1976, women's Muay Thai was a phenomena that was known to Thai society. A female fight was nationally televised in 1973 for the first time after a international fight between Ali and Norton (Stockmann, 1979, p.20). Millions of Thai viewers saw female Muay Thai practitioners in action. However as the democratic period came to an end, Thai society shifted to the right and this included a backlash against the west particularly the U.S.A. a continuing reaction to the involvement of U.S. troops in the Vietnam War since period prior to the democratic era. Thailand rejected what it saw as western values including the more extreme versions of feminism. Part and parcel of this was the strenghtening of the female physical body. The audience, which had included U.S. servicemen, and interest in female Muay Thai waned and women's Muay Thai continued on in small venues throughout the country unnoticed for several decades until the recent revival in the late 1990's.

4.5.2 Globalization

Since the 1990's, the phenomena of globalization, much maligned and ill defined, has received significant attention in the media, academia, and society(s) at

large. Globalization according to Horne, "...denotes a broad process in which markets, trade, labour relations and culture itself have attained global dimensions, that is, the forms of organizations that connect them have a global character" (1999, p.276). Said phenomena was blamed for both the economic crash in Thailand in 1997 and the following meltdown of the Asian tigers. A globalized economy, however, affects more than just the stock market of any given country. The integration of economies and participation in global markets and trade affects cultures in many areas; it's much more than the availability of CoCa Cola and other multi national name brands in local markets. Sage notes that, "Sporting practices that have long existed in national cultures and communities are no longer isolated from global changes. They, too, have become an integral part of the globalised economic and cultural world, and widening global interdependency is profoundly influencing traditional sports practices and values" (2002, p.226).

Muay Thai is a growing international sport. There are Muay Thai training facilities in over 100 countries. The number of web sites on the topic of Muay Thai is staggering, hosted from nations around the world but predominately from western countries such as Britain, America, Canada, Australia, and Finland (a country that has unprecedented success with its' female Muay Thai team). The WMTC's (World Muaythai Council), located in Bangkok, slogan is 'One World, One Muaythai'. The annual World Amateur Muay Thai Tournament hosted as many as 54 competing nations in 1997 ("MB Story" Available from <http://www.muaythai.fi/english/mbstory.htm>). In western countries, women participate in Muay Thai as they would in any other sport, a result of the women's liberation movement promoting equal access and opportunity in all areas of society.

The globalization of Muay Thai has brought new challenges to the local, home grown variety of the sport. Hargreaves explains that, "... the transformation of nation-based sport into globalised sport may help stimulate national sentiment and provide a rallying point around which it can be reinforced and reconstructed... however ... globalized sport...is de-territorialised, making it more problematic for people to identify with it as an expression of their nation" (2002, p.33-34). The Thai construction of female gender roles precludes the involvement of women in such an aggressive, physical sport such as Muay Thai. Due to the international involvement of western and also many Japanese women in competitive Muay Thai, it has become

a matter of honour to field Thai women in Muay Thai competitions. The desire to defend Thai supremacy in their national sport has transcended the taboos and cultural constructs which limit the opportunities of women in Muay Thai.

The impact of globalization on women's Muay Thai is supported by the information obtained in my research. Media reports that women are being recruited to contend with the increasing number of foreign females that come to Thailand to practice and learn the sport in its' homeland. Interview subjects had fought with foreign opponents and had traveled overseas to compete. I observed many mixed, Thai versus foreigner, female matches at the World Amateur Muay Thai Tournament in August of 2002. And a rule was promulgated at the time of that tournament that from then on, all World Amateur Muay Thai Tournaments would have a female contingent. The 2002 tournament was also the first to sponsor the use of female referees.

The increase in demand for female Muay Thai fighters has resulted in a break down of the taboos that have restricted womens' participation in the sport over the last 30 years. In my field work, all informants reported training with men and in the same ring. One informant even fought competitively with a man. This change in attitudes towards women in Muay Thai is not universal; the major stadiums in Bangkok and many Muay Thai training facilities continue to ban women from entering a ring used by men. Therefore it seems that the persistence of the taboo against women in the ring is a matter of preference in individual cases, institutions and camps.

4.6 Impacts on Women's' Muay Thai

Taboos restricting women seem only to be upheld by conservative elements, people who wish to retain the traditional aspects of Muay Thai which includes the exclusion of women from the ring, within Muay Thai. Taboos are ignored in international Muay Thai competitions an example being the recent World Amateur Muay Thai Competition held in Bangkok this past August 2002. During this event female fights were held in a ring which was later the venue for male competitors on the same day.

The taboos themselves are a historical relic of the early days of modernization in Thailand. Although the restriction of women in the Muay Thai ring is often cited as a traditional practice this is a fallacy as the ring itself has only been in use since the 1930's, therefore, if it is a tradition, it is a new one. According to the theory of Mary Douglas, I posit that the pollution taboo restricting women from the Muay Thai ring was a reaction to modernization, which created an attack on form that has been shown by Douglas as a source of pollution danger. The form being attacked is that of a male dominated and hierarchical social structure. Furthermore, women have been seen as a source of pollution danger in other Thai social arenas such as the Sangha (community of Buddhist monks) hence the concept of the polluting female was already an established paradigm before it was applied to the Muay Thai ring.

Women made forays into the ring in the late 1960's and early 1970's for the first time. The socio-economic context of this era lead women to pursue economic activities that they had previously been unable to participate in. Industrialization in Thailand created the need for a large unskilled work force that tapped into the female population. It soon became the norm for women to expand their interest beyond the home and into the cash economy. As industrialization spread in Thailand it was accompanied by other western ideas such as the womens' liberation movement. The empowerment of women, the call for gender equality, and the need for women to use their bodies as physical capital resulted in some women entering Muay Thai at this time. However, under the rule of military dictatorships in Thailand from 1976 onward, the profile and proliferation of womens' Muay Thai floundered and was removed from the public domain continuing only in small remote pockets until the recent resurgence beginning in the mid 1990's.

According to Hargreaves, " political elites in the constituent states of the new world order have, for some considerable time, tended to intervene in and to promote sport as an important instrument for the creation of a sense of national identity and as a way of enhancing their state-nation's prestige and influence internationally (2002, p.32). This can be applied to the sport of Muay Thai in Thailand which is often promoted as the only unbeatable martial art form. This claim is supported by matches commonly called 'Battle of the Styles' in which a practitioner of another form of martial art is pitted against a student of Muay Thai.

In the 1990's the globalization of Muay Thai brought about the need to find, train, and support female Muay Thai competitors in Thailand due to the many foreign women who were participating in the sport both internationally and within Thailand. The authorities promoting Muay Thai as an international sport eschewed the taboos and cultural traditions against women in Muay Thai in order to secure Thai prestige in this their national sport. The increase in the participation of Thai women in Muay Thai is clearly linked to the promotion of Muay Thai globally and the resulting necessity to field female opponents internationally.

Now that Muay Thai has become an option for women, the question their motivation for entering the sport had to be examined. According to my research, women enter Muay Thai mainly as an economic activity. This point is clearly illustrated by the fact that one informant left the sport after deciding she could make more money as a food vendor. In addition to this, the demands of Muay Thai training limit the possibility of pursuing any other occupation at the same time.

Finally, female fighters largely ignore Thai gender roles to the extent that one of the female fighters interviewed was a "Tom" in an openly lesbian relationship. Many informants also described themselves as fat and none of them included beauty in their physical self-description. Beauty and motherhood are both key factors of the Thai female gender stereotype. The informants did not include in their future plans marriage or children but instead the opening of their own Muay Thai gyms, bids for the Olympics, and international boxing fame.