# Attitude and Perceptions Towards Marriage and Singlehood Among Thai Women[1]

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## Rationale

In traditional societies, marriage was almost universal. Only women with serious physical and mental disabilities were likely to remain single (Jones 2010). This can be explained by the well-known sociological theory of marriage selection, where healthy women are more likely to get married than the unhealthy. Singlehood during that time also involved gender inequality. In many developing countries in Asia, such as Vietnam, it was more acceptable for men to remain single after the age of marriage, which society deemed as appropriate, while women would be stigmatized and isolated by society (Belanger and Hong 2002). There is, however, an exception. In Thailand, for example, the society placed value on women to look after their elderly parents, thus single women who carried out such a responsibility were less stigmatized (Jones 2010). In the contemporary society, in contrast, a growing body of evidence suggests that the theory of marriage selection may no longer hold, as many women themselves actually choose to remain single. This indicates that singlehood is not solely a fate; rather, it has become a choice for many women.

Why we are interested in single women? From a demographic perspective, one simple answer is the concern on these women's zero contribution to fertility (Wongboonsin and Wongboonsin, 2007). As discussed in Jones (2007), essentially no childbearing occurs outside marriage in Pacific and

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Asian countries. Therefore, marital status is considered to directly affect fertility. As a result of changes in marriage patterns in such Asian countries as Japan, Thailand, Myanmar and Singapore, 15 per cent of women or more may remain single at the end of their reproductive period (Jones, 2007).

Why women remain single? As discussed in The Economist's article entitled "The flight from marriage" (August 20, 2011), changing marriage patterns are partly the result of improvements in women's education and income, and the failure of women's status to keep pace. Having a job and an income increases a woman's autonomy. In many traditional marriage systems, however, the social norm is that women have little independence. From the economic perspective of cost and benefit, in many cases the cost of marriage (including loss of independence) for these women may exceed its expected benefit (such as financial security – which becomes less important now that women are earning their own income) to the level that women are willing to remain single. Moreover, other factors, such as changing social expectations and the notion of individualism in the era of risk societies, may also play a role in the increasing trend of non-marriage among women (Wongboonsin, 2011).

## Objectives

The objectives of this current study are:

1) To explore attitude and perception of never-married women towards marriage and singlehood.

2) To investigate lifestyle and life satisfaction of the never-married women, as well as their preparation for old-age in terms of health, social and financial aspects.

## Research design and method

The study adopts a sequential mixed method. The study first examines quantitatively the contemporary context of non-marriage situation in Thailand and the individual-level factors attributing to the likelihood of remaining single. This is followed by a qualitative study which explores the attitudes and perceptions of the never-married women towards singlehood.

The data for the quantitative study are drawn from the national survey of Nuptiality, and Attitude towards Marriage of Thai Females in the Modern Society, which was conducted in 2010. In light of the first objective of our study, two sub-questions were posed to guide the analysis:

1. What are the characteristics of the never-married women?
2. What factors constitute the likelihood of non-marriage?

Unlike the quantitative study in which secondary analysis is employed, the qualitative study is based on primary data collected by investigators. Using an in-depth interview, the key informants for the study are never-married (self-defined) women aged between 30 and 44 years old who reside in Bangkok Metropolitan. The women aged 30-44 years old are chosen because most women who remain single past their 40s are less like to get married, according to the worldwide statistics (for example, see Kreider and Ellis, 2011, for the case of the US and statistics from the 2009 Reproductive Health Survey for the case of Thailand). The study seeks the key informants through personal connection and snowballing technique. The interviews will be carried out in accordance with the interview guides to ensure that the discussion between the investigators and the key informants completely addresses all of the issues under investigation. The questions posed are predominantly open-ended and semi-structured, as we intended to gather a wide range of information, which could be used to analyze how marriage and singlehood are originally perceived without any bias.

**Quantitative Analysis**

The objective of this section is to investigate the perceptions of the women towards singlehood, gender equality, and fertility, and looks into the factors which are correlated with these perceptions.

To do so, the study uses data from the national survey of Nuptiality and Attitude towards Marriage of Thai Females in the Modern Society collected in 2010.  The survey collected information from 4,305 Thai women aged 18 to 60 who were working for the government, state enterprises, and private sector at the time of survey.  Multi-stage sampling method was employed, where first the provinces were chosen for each region.  The survey covers 12 provinces of Thailand (including Bangkok).  The provinces chosen are:

Table 1: Provinces covered under the survey

| Region: | Provinces chosen: |
|---|---|
| Bangkok | Bangkok |
| Surrounding area of Bangkok | Nakhonpathom |
| Central | Singhburi, Kanjanaburi, Rayong |
| North | Petchabun, Chiang Mai |
| Northeast | Nongkai, Khonkaen, Ubon Ratchatani |
| South | Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Songkhla |

For each province, organizations were chosen based on the list of organizations in each province to cover all three types of organizations – government, state enterprises, and private sector.  For each organization, the women were then chosen to answer the self-administered questionnaire.  Out of the 30 questionnaires sent to each organization, all women who were widowed or divorced/separated were asked to fill in the questionnaire.  The remaining questionnaires were then allocated approximately equally between those who were single and married.

Out of the 4,305 Thai women who answered the questionnaire, after dropping the observations with incomplete information, the analysis covers 3870 women aged between 18 and 60 years old.

Table 2: Marital status of women aged 18-60

| Marital status | Number of respondents | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Single (never married) | 1254 | 32.4% |
| Single (but lives with boyfriend) | 284 | 7.34% |
| Married | 1938 | 50.08% |
| Widowed | 97 | 2.51% |
| Divorced/separated | 297 | 7.67% |
| All | 3870 | 100% |

Out of 3870 women aged 18 to 60 covered in the analysis, half (50.08%) are currently married. Around one-third (32.4%) are single (never married), while 7.3% define themselves as single but currently lives with a boyfriend. Around 7.7% are divorced/ separated, and 2.5% are widowed.

Table 3: Most important reason for remaining single

| Most important reason the person still remains single | Number of respondents | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Has not met the right person | 227 | 18.1 |
| Thinks that marriage is not the most important life goal | 188 | 15 |
| Is not ready for the responsibility of raising a family and having children | 151 | 12 |
| Would like to focus on career advancement | 105 | 8.4 |
| Personal experience has led to negative attitude regarding | 98 | 7.8 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| marriage | | |
| Very attached to parents and family, does not want leave to have a separate household | 97 | 7.7 |
| Have a boyfriend, but either self or boyfriend is not ready to get married | 90 | 7.2 |
| Thinks will always remain single as does not want to have commitment with anybody | 58 | 4.6 |
| No opportunity to have a relationship with anybody due to work commitment | 50 | 4 |
| Family accepts that the respondent is single, and puts no pressure on getting married | 48 | 3.8 |
| Does not want to depend on anyone and does not want to be responsible for anyone | 45 | 3.6 |
| Has a boyfriend, but parents or family do not accept the person | 22 | 1.8 |
| No reply | 75 | 6 |
| Total | 1254 | 100 |

Table 3 presents the most important reason for remaining single for those who have never married. Table 3 shows that the most common reason these single women still remain single is that they have not met the right person. The second most common reason is that they think that marriage is not the most important life goal. This reflects that today marriage is not viewed as an ultimate life goal by many Thai women. The third most common reason is that they are not ready for the responsibility of raising a family and having children, while the fourth most common reason is that they would like to focus on career advancement. This suggests that a number of single working women in Thailand today place importance on career development.

Using questions regarding various attitudes, the authors group certain attitudes into (1) attitudes towards singlehood; (2) attitudes towards gender equality, and (3) attitudes towards fertility. For

each group of attitudes, indices were created to represent positive attitudes towards singlehood, gender equality, and fertility.

To create an index to represent positive attitudes towards singlehood, principal component analysis (PCA) was used to combine the following attitudes:

(1) Whether the respondent thinks that more single women will cause no problem (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(2) Whether the respondent thinks women today has no need to marry as they can rely on themselves (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(3) Whether the respondent thinks that today single women are accepted by society more than in the past (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(4) Whether the respondent thinks that it is not strange for women to stay single all their lives (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(5) If the respondent can choose, whether the respondent would choose to be single as they would have more freedom than those who are married (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

The index created ranges from 0 to 1.

Similarly, the following attitudes were combined using PCA to create an index, which ranges from 0 to 1, to represent positive attitudes towards gender equality:

(1) Whether the respondent thinks that women can be household head as well as men can (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(2) Whether the respondent thinks that women can ask for a divorce if there is too much disagreement (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(3) Whether the respondent thinks that women should think of work and education before marriage (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(4) Whether the respondent thinks that both husband and wife should take care of the children and share housework (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

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(5) Whether the respondent thinks that women should be active in public activities or politics as much as men (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

For an index to represent positive attitudes towards having children, the following attitudes were combined using PCA to create an index which ranges from 0 to 1:

(1) Whether the respondent thinks that having children does not mean too much burden for the parents (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(2) Whether the respondent thinks that having children does not mean an obstacle for mother's career (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(3) Whether the respondent thinks that newlyweds should not wait before having children (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(4) Whether the respondent thinks that having children today is not more difficult than in the past (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(5) Whether the respondent thinks that children today still respect their parents (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

(6) Whether the respondent thinks that having children has psychological value for parents (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise)

| Table 4: Attitudes of women aged 18-60 towards singlehood, gender equality, and having children | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
| | Positive attitude towards singlehood | Positive attitude towards gender equality | Positive attitude towards having children |
| age between 25 and 29 years old | 0.044 | 0.025 | 0.048 |
| | (2.98)*** | (1.96)** | (2.82)*** |
| age between 30 and 34 years old | 0.078 | 0.013 | 0.054 |
| | (4.93)*** | (0.98) | (3.00)*** |

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Table 4: Attitudes of women aged 18-60 towards singlehood, gender equality, and having children | | | |
| | Positive attitude towards singlehood | Positive attitude towards gender equality | Positive attitude towards having children |
| age between 35 and 39 years old | 0.069 | 0.016 | 0.038 |
| | (4.12)*** | (1.15) | (2.00)** |
| age between 40 and 44 years old | 0.051 | -0.009 | 0.062 |
| | (2.78)*** | (0.56) | (2.95)*** |
| age between 45 and 49 years old | 0.065 | 0.002 | 0.066 |
| | (3.27)*** | (0.12) | (2.93)*** |
| age between 50 and 54 years old | 0.074 | 0.016 | 0.073 |
| | (3.00)*** | (0.77) | (2.58)*** |
| age between 55 and 60 years old | 0.045 | -0.039 | 0.063 |
| | (1.17) | (1.20) | (1.43) |
| region: Central | 0.020 | 0.006 | 0.005 |
| | (1.45) | (0.47) | (0.33) |
| region: South | -0.059 | 0.005 | 0.036 |
| | (3.86)*** | (0.38) | (2.06)** |
| region: Northeast | -0.024 | -0.017 | 0.026 |
| | (1.70)* | (1.43) | (1.58) |
| region: North | 0.005 | -0.006 | -0.029 |
| | (0.33) | (0.46) | (1.72)* |
| individual is single (never married) | 0.072 | 0.022 | -0.081 |
| | (7.74)*** | (2.72)*** | (7.62)*** |
| individual is single but lives with boyfriend | 0.031 | -0.011 | -0.129 |
| | (1.97)** | (0.82) | (7.30)*** |

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Table 4: Attitudes of women aged 18-60 towards singlehood, gender equality, and having children | | | |
| | Positive attitude towards singlehood | Positive attitude towards gender equality | Positive attitude towards having children |
| individual is widowed | 0.043 | 0.024 | -0.038 |
| | (1.75)* | (1.13) | (1.33) |
| individual is divorced or separated | 0.057 | 0.028 | -0.040 |
| | (3.92)*** | (2.28)** | (2.37)** |
| individual is Buddhist | 0.074 | 0.013 | 0.011 |
| | (2.08)** | (0.43) | (0.27) |
| individual is Christian | 0.044 | -0.084 | -0.029 |
| | (0.90) | (2.00)** | (0.52) |
| has spent most time in Bangkok | 0.031 | -0.000 | -0.036 |
| | (2.20)** | (0.01) | (2.20)** |
| has spent most time in urban area | 0.017 | 0.002 | -0.015 |
| | (1.98)** | (0.23) | (1.62) |
| education level is bachelor's degree | 0.014 | 0.026 | -0.002 |
| | (1.47) | (3.15)*** | (0.15) |
| education level is master's degree or higher | 0.022 | 0.023 | -0.001 |
| | (1.38) | (1.71)* | (0.04) |
| is working in a government organization | 0.004 | -0.005 | -0.014 |
| | (0.48) | (0.64) | (1.43) |
| is working in a state-owned enterprise | 0.003 | -0.011 | -0.023 |
| | (0.27) | (1.02) | (1.52) |
| own income from salary and other sources | -0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| | (0.50) | (0.38) | (0.57) |

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Table 4: Attitudes of women aged 18-60 towards singlehood, gender equality, and having children | | | |
| | Positive attitude towards singlehood | Positive attitude towards gender equality | Positive attitude towards having children |
| income is enough but no savings | 0.012 | -0.004 | -0.037 |
| | (1.24) | (0.51) | (3.45)*** |
| income is not enough but no debt | 0.012 | 0.003 | -0.042 |
| | (0.82) | (0.24) | (2.39)** |
| income is not enough and is in debt | 0.022 | 0.019 | -0.034 |
| | (2.06)** | (2.16)** | (2.85)*** |
| father is alive | -0.002 | -0.013 | 0.018 |
| | (0.17) | (1.75)* | (1.80)* |
| mother is alive | 0.004 | 0.023 | -0.009 |
| | (0.34) | (2.44)** | (0.68) |
| very close to parents | 0.006 | 0.021 | 0.015 |
| | (0.73) | (2.91)*** | (1.49) |
| takes full responsibility for parents | 0.007 | 0.003 | 0.017 |
| | (0.88) | (0.42) | (1.70)* |
| number of siblings (not including self) | -0.003 | 0.001 | -0.004 |
| | (1.34) | (0.37) | (1.45) |
| is the first child in the family | -0.008 | -0.000 | 0.007 |
| | (0.90) | (0.04) | (0.63) |
| is the last child in the family | -0.013 | 0.006 | 0.007 |
| | (1.38) | (0.68) | (0.61) |
| very close to siblings | 0.012 | 0.003 | 0.038 |
| | (1.35) | (0.37) | (3.69)*** |
| Observations | 3870 | 3870 | 3870 |

| Table 4: Attitudes of women aged 18-60 towards singlehood, gender equality, and having children | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
| | Positive attitude towards singlehood | Positive attitude towards gender equality | Positive attitude towards having children |
| R-squared | 0.05 | 0.02 | 0.06 |
| Absolute value of t statistics in parentheses | | | |
| ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1% | | | |

Table 4 presents the factors which are correlated with attitudes towards singlehood, gender equality, and having children for women aged 18 to 60. Columns (1), (2), and (3) present attitudes towards singlehood, gender equality, and having children, respectively. For all women aged 18 to 60, results from Column (1) show that those who have spent most of their time in Bangkok or urban areas are more positive towards singlehood compared to those who have spent most of their time in the rural areas, controlling for other socio-economic factors. Compared to other regions, those living in the South are least positive about singlehood. One explanation could be because the South has the highest proportion of Muslims in Thailand, and this may affect the values regarding marriage and singlehood for those living in the area. Results regarding religion also show that Buddhists are more positive towards singlehood compared to Muslims. With regards to age, those aged between 25 and 55 appear more positive towards singlehood compared to those aged between 18 and 24, and those aged between 55 and 60. Compared to those who are married, the ones who are single (never married), single but lives with boyfriend, widowed, and divorced/separated are all more positive towards singlehood. Compared to those with enough income who have savings, those with insufficient income and are in debt are more positive towards singlehood.

Column (2) shows that, with regards to attitudes towards gender equality, compared to those who are married, single women and divorced women are more positive towards gender equality. Compared to those with an education below a bachelor's degree, those with a bachelor's degree or a higher level of education are more positive towards gender equality, as expected. Moreover, compared to women who reported that they have enough income and have savings, those with insufficient income and are in debt are in fact more positive towards gender equality. Those who report that they are very close to their parents are more positive towards gender equality. Those whose father is alive are less positive towards gender equality, while those whose mother is alive are more positive towards gender equality. This may reflect the role of parents in shaping the attitudes towards gender equality.

The results in column (3) show that, compared to those aged between 18 and 24, older women tend to have more positive attitudes towards having children. While the youngest are least positive about having children, the attitudes become more positive with age. This is in line with declining fertility in Thailand. Compared to those living in Bangkok or surrounding areas, those living in the South are more positive towards having children, while those living in the North are less positive towards having children. Compared to those who are married, the ones who are single (never married), single but living with boyfriend, and divorced/separated are less positive towards having children. With regards to income, those who reported that they have sufficient income and are able to save (baseline category) are more positive about having children compared to those who have sufficient income but no savings and those who have insufficient income, both with and without debt. This reflects that those who are able to "afford" having children tend to have more favorable attitudes towards having children. With regards to how the family may shape attitudes towards having children, those who take full responsibility for their parents and those who are very close to their siblings are more positive towards having children.

| Table 5: Attitudes of women aged 30-44 towards singlehood, gender equality, and having children | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) |

| | Positive attitude towards singlehood | Positive attitude towards gender equality | Positive attitude towards having children |
|---|---|---|---|
| age between 35 and 39 years old | -0.008 | 0.004 | -0.014 |
| | (0.60) | (0.41) | (0.93) |
| age between 40 and 44 years old | -0.025 | -0.019 | 0.016 |
| | (1.69)* | (1.52) | (0.94) |
| region: Central | 0.022 | 0.010 | 0.027 |
| | (1.18) | (0.63) | (1.23) |
| region: South | -0.068 | -0.005 | 0.032 |
| | (3.39)*** | (0.32) | (1.39) |
| region: Northeast | -0.020 | -0.008 | 0.034 |
| | (1.06) | (0.49) | (1.50) |
| region: North | -0.017 | -0.017 | -0.024 |
| | (0.84) | (0.97) | (1.04) |
| individual is single (never married) | 0.079 | 0.019 | -0.084 |
| | (6.18)*** | (1.75)* | (5.68)*** |
| individual is single but lives with boyfriend | 0.056 | -0.012 | -0.125 |
| | (2.15)** | (0.56) | (4.18)*** |
| individual is widowed | 0.050 | 0.016 | 0.025 |
| | (1.28) | (0.48) | (0.54) |
| individual is divorced or separated | 0.067 | 0.031 | -0.030 |
| | (3.62)*** | (1.95)* | (1.38) |
| individual is buddhist | 0.011 | 0.017 | 0.034 |
| | (0.22) | (0.40) | (0.59) |
| individual is christian | 0.016 | -0.117 | 0.062 |
| | (0.24) | (2.08)** | (0.80) |
| has spent most time in Bangkok | 0.036 | 0.010 | -0.020 |
| | (1.90)* | (0.65) | (0.91) |

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Positive attitude towards singlehood | Positive attitude towards gender equality | Positive attitude towards having children |
| has spent most time in urban area | 0.023 | 0.017 | -0.005 |
| | (1.96)** | (1.72)* | (0.36) |
| education level is bachelor's degree | 0.021 | 0.033 | -0.002 |
| | (1.55) | (2.88)*** | (0.14) |
| education level is master's degree or higher | 0.036 | 0.022 | -0.004 |
| | (1.72)* | (1.22) | (0.17) |
| is working in a government organization | -0.003 | -0.003 | -0.029 |
| | (0.22) | (0.30) | (2.10)** |
| is working in a state-owned enterprise | -0.014 | -0.014 | -0.030 |
| | (0.75) | (0.88) | (1.40) |
| own income from salary and other sources | -0.000 | 0.000 | -0.000 |
| | (0.82) | (0.13) | (0.44) |
| income is enough but no savings | 0.000 | -0.005 | -0.028 |
| | (0.02) | (0.44) | (1.86)* |
| income is not enough but no debt | -0.005 | 0.000 | -0.015 |
| | (0.22) | (0.00) | (0.57) |
| income is not enough and is in debt | 0.020 | 0.019 | -0.039 |
| | (1.42) | (1.56) | (2.36)** |
| father is alive | -0.010 | -0.010 | 0.023 |
| | (0.89) | (0.99) | (1.73)* |
| mother is alive | 0.001 | 0.027 | -0.008 |
| | (0.10) | (2.12)** | (0.46) |

Table 5: Attitudes of women aged 30-44 towards singlehood, gender equality, and having children

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Table 5: Attitudes of women aged 30-44 towards singlehood, gender equality, and having children | | | |
| | Positive attitude towards singlehood | Positive attitude towards gender equality | Positive attitude towards having children |
| very close to parents | 0.007 | 0.024 | 0.003 |
| | (0.60) | (2.31)** | (0.20) |
| takes full responsibility for parents | -0.006 | 0.001 | 0.014 |
| | (0.48) | (0.12) | (1.07) |
| number of siblings (not including self) | -0.002 | -0.003 | -0.004 |
| | (0.68) | (1.16) | (1.09) |
| is the first child in the family | -0.003 | -0.011 | 0.016 |
| | (0.24) | (1.00) | (1.05) |
| is the last child in the family | -0.013 | -0.000 | 0.018 |
| | (0.99) | (0.02) | (1.21) |
| very close to siblings | 0.017 | 0.017 | 0.049 |
| | (1.36) | (1.60) | (3.36)*** |
| Observations | 1937 | 1937 | 1937 |
| R-squared | 0.06 | 0.03 | 0.05 |
| Absolute value of t statistics in parentheses | | | |
| ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1% | | | |

Table 5 focuses on women aged 30 to 44 under the survey. This is to provide quantitative analysis of women who are in the same age group as those who took part in the in-depth interview for the qualitative part of the study. Several findings regarding the perceptions of women aged 30 to 44 are similar to the case of women aged 18 to 60. However, some differences emerged. For women aged 30 to 44, compared to those with an education below Bachelor's degree, those with a

Master degree or a higher level of education are more positive about singlehood. This is in line with statistics showing that in Thailand singlehood is particularly high for well educated women. Compared to those aged between 30 and 34, those between 40 and 44 are less positive towards singlehood. Similar to the case of all women under the survey, for women aged 30 to 44, those living in the South are least positive about singlehood.

With regards to perceptions towards gender equality, women aged 30 to 44 who are single (never married) and divorced/separated are more positive towards gender equality compared to those who are married. Women aged 30 to 44 who are Christians are less positive towards gender equality compared to Muslims. This result is quite unexpected. Those who have spent most of their time in the urban area are more positive towards gender equality compared to those who have spent most of their time in the rural area. Similar to the case for all women, women aged 30 to 44 whose mother is alive, as well as those who are very close to their parents, are more positive towards gender equality.

Colunm (3) shows that, with regards to perceptions towards having children, for women aged 30 to 44, those who are single (never married), and single but living with boyfriend, are less positive about having children compared to those who are married. Compared to those working in the private sector, those working for a government organization are less positive towards having children. Similar to the case for all women, those with sufficient income who are able to save are more positive towards having children compared to those who have sufficient income but are not able to save and those with insufficient income who are in debt. This highlights the importance of income in shaping the attitudes towards having children, which may reflect the situation that raising children in Thailand today involves considerable monetary cost. With regards to the role of the family, those whose father is alive, and those who are very close to their siblings, are more positive towards having children.

**Qualitative Analysis: The Notion of the Right Person**

Given the findings shown in Table 3 above that the most common reason for the currently never-married Thai women to have remained single is that they have not met the right person. This section purports to provide a qualitative analysis to come up with a better understanding of the prevailing right-person notion.

This is based on an in-depth interview, along interview guides, of female key informants who defines themselves as never-married between 30 and 44 years old residing in Bangkok Metropolitan, through personal connection and snowballing technique. The selected age group is based on the notion in previous literatures[2] and data in Thailand[3] of the unlikeliness of getting married for single women passing their 40s. The study relies upon interview guides, which are predominantly open-ended and semi-structured, so as to gather a wide range of information to allow an appropriate analysis how marriage and singlehood are originally perceived without any bias.

The women's socio-demographic characteristics are presented in Table 6. Slightly over half of the respondents are between 30 to 34 years old (53.3%). The average age is 34.4 years, with the standard deviation of 3.69 years. The majority have at least a Master's degree (70%). The average age when the respondents completed their education is 27.13 years, with the standard deviation of 3.43 years. With regards to living arrangement, over half are staying with their parents (5.7%), and are originally from Bangkok (56.7%). For marital status, the majority are single without a boyfriend (73.3%).

Table 6: Respondents' characteristics (N=30)

| Characteristics | Percent (%) |
|---|---|
| **Age** | |

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[2] See for example, Kreider and Ellis, 2011, for the case of the US.

[3] Statistics from the 2009 Reproductive Health Survey for the case of Thailand.

| | |
|---|---:|
| 30-34 years old | 53.3 |
| 35-39 years old | 40.0 |
| 40-44 years old | 6.7 |
| **Highest level of education obtained** | |
| Bachelor's degree | 30.0 |
| Master's degree | 50.0 |
| PhD | 20.0 |
| **Age when completed education** | |
| Below 23 years | 6.7 |
| 23-25 years | 33.3 |
| 26-28 years | 23.3 |
| 29-31 years | 26.7 |
| Over 32 years | 10.0 |
| **Area respondent is originally from** | |
| Bangkok | 56.7 |
| Other areas besides Bangkok | 43.3 |
| **Living arrangement** | |
| Living alone | 20.0 |
| Living with parents | 56.7 |
| Living with other relatives | 13.3 |
| Living with friends | 10.0 |

| Whether currently has a boyfriend | |
| --- | --- |
| No | 73.3 |
| Yes | 26.7 |

During the interviews, when asked why the respondents were still single, the sentence "I have not met the right man" was the most common reply. Although each respondent has a unique definition of "the right man", the views and attitudes towards "the right man" are usually related to demographic and social characteristics of the man, such as age, education, and economic status.

It is interesting that all respondents, regardless of their age (whether in their early 30s or already in their 40s), still view "the right man" as someone who should be older than the respondent. This is because older men tend to have a more stable career, be more responsible, have leadership qualities, and be economically better off than younger men in terms of ownership of assets, house, and car.

> *"…It would be good if the person is older, but what I*
> *really look for is a mature attitude."*
>   Aranya (31 years old, PhD, single with no boyfriend)

> *"…From my feeling, the woman should be younger*
> *than the man..."*
>   Thanaporn (43 years old, Master degree, single with
>                                    boyfriend)

> *"...It would be good if the man is slightly older.  The*
> *older the man is, the more dignified he looks..."*
>        Ratchayaporn (37 years old, Bachelor's degree,
>                                    single with no boyfriend)

With regards to the level of education, it is commonly known that people with the same or similar level of education are likely to have similar views or attitudes, which makes it easier for them to understand and communicate with each other.  This should in turn lead to a successful marriage. From the in-depth interviews, all respondents have the same view that "the right man" should at least have the same level of education as the respondent.

*"…The level of education and work should be such that he is able to take care of himself and is not a burden for other people.  For the level of education, I only consider those with at least the same level of education as myself."*

Rachanok (26 years old, Master degree, single with no boyfriend)

*"His level of education does not have to be higher than mine, but we should be able to communicate. Surely not someone who is not able to understand what I talk about."*

Mathurod (30 years old, Master degree, single with boyfriend)

With regards to economic status, when asked about the characteristics of "the right man", most respondents do not mention economic status.  But when specifically asked about the importance of economic status of "the right man", most respondents view economic status as a family background which can be improved upon.  "The right man" does not have to come from a wealthy family and does not have to be richer than the respondent, however, what is important is that the person would not be using the respondent's money.

*"...The person does not have to be rich, but I would*
*not want someone who has to depend on my money."*
Malee (35 years old, PhD, single with no boyfriend)

*"...I don't mind whether the person is rich or poor. We*
*can make ourselves rich or poor. If I look back to the*
*time when I was 22-23 years old, I might not have*
*answered this way though. At that time, I might say*
*the person had to have a good job and can take care*
*of me. But now I would say the person does not have*
*to be rich whatsoever..."*
Thanaporn (43 years old, Master degree, single with
boyfriend)

Thanaporn's conversation suggests that as women get older they tend to put less importance on the economic status of "the right man".

Even though the interviewee's definitions of "the right man" share certain characteristics as mentioned above, their definitions also differ based on individual preference (such as regarding looks), family background, and previous dating experience. For example, Veena's case shows that her previous heartbreak due to her ex-boyfriend's dishonesty changed her definition of "the right man".

*"From my point of view, he must be someone who can*
*take care of the family. I was cheated so many times*
*that I no longer want to have a boyfriend. I have had*
*enough; I don't want to go through such experience*
*again."*
Veena (33 years old, Bachelor's degree, single with
no boyfriend)

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Moreover, the interviewees place different weights on certain characteristics or qualities of "the right man". This is reflected in the fact that certain characteristics can replace some other missing characteristics.

> *"…Suppose he does not have a high level of education, then he would have to be really financially secured."*
>
> Vasinee (31 years old, Bachelor's degree, single with no boyfriend)

From the interviews, it was found that many factors support or deter the meeting with "the right man". These factors can be grouped into (1) internal factors such as working conditions and how free time is spent, and (2) external factors such as supply of "the right man" and the right timing. For internal factors, it was found that almost all interviewees work overtime, and usually spend free time alone or with family. Also, they usually don't participate in activities which may bring about opportunities to meet "the right man".

> *"Usually my free time is on Sunday. Sunday is family day for me. Mostly I go shopping with my mother and take her out for dinner, and then come home. I promised her that 5 days of the week are my working days, the 6$^{th}$ day I take on some extra work other than my usual office work, and Sunday is for my mother. But if I have urgent work I would also work on Sunday."*
>
> Chonnatee (35 years old, single with no boyfriend)

*"When I have free time, I stay home and sleep. I don't*
*go out. I don't like to go out."*
   Aranya (31 years old, PhD, single with no boyfriend)

*"What I do during my free time? I spend my free*
*time alone, using facebook."*
Maetinee (32 years old, Master degree, single with no
boyfriend)

Although working conditions and how free time is spent may be deter the meeting of "the right man", it was found that most interviewees are positive about women making the first move in a relationship. This reflects the change in values regarding gender equality. In the past, Thai society did not approve of women making the first move. Thai women were portrayed to be reserved in a relationship. From the interviews, it was found that most interviewees are of the opinion that if they meet "the right man", they are ready to show their interest and start a relationship.

*"I am fine with women making the first move. For me,*
*if they do, it must mean that there is something there.*
*Suppose I make the first move, it must mean that the*
*person is "the right man". Also, these days there are*
*fewer men and more women, so women have to be the*
*ones who choose."*
 Amornrat (36 years old, Master degree, single with no
boyfriend)

Dating agencies are another channel which creates opportunities to meet men. It was found that over half of the interviewees do not agree with the use of dating agencies, as they view marriage as destiny and think that they still have opportunities to meet "the right man".

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> *"At first I didn't like the idea of dating agencies. But then I have friends who found their partners from such agencies and things worked really well. So I started to wonder if maybe I should try using such agencies too. But then I still feel that maybe not. I feel that it would not be determined by destiny. I want to have a boyfriend whom I just walk into. Maybe this is just a daydream…"*
>
> Aranya (31 years old, PhD, single with no boyfriend)

However, the interviewees would not object if their friends or a person they know well would introduce someone.

> *"Actually I used to think of having a match-maker. I used to look for information, but in the end didn't go for it."*
>
> Lalita (33 years old, Master degree, single with
>
> boyfriend)

External factors which affect the chances of meeting "the right man" include the supply (or availability) of "the right men". Two interviewees gave an interesting view that the reason many women have not met "the right man" is because most of "the right men" are already married. As the women get older, meeting "the right man" becomes more difficult as their condition is that "the right man" must be of the same age or older than they are.

> *"Actually I think there are some... but they are probably all married by now… those perfect men, those men who love their family."*
>
> Napalai (32 years old, Master degree, single with
>
> boyfriend)

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*"Actually when I get older, there are fewer men available. As I am older, those men of the same age or older tend to be married, so there are fewer of the single ones around."*

Mathurod (30 years old, Master degree, single with boyfriend)

Besides the supply of "the right men", the right timing is also another important external factor. From the conversation with Napalai, it was found that even if the interviewee might have met "the right man", if the timing is not right this would not lead to marriage.

*"If the timing is right, and the person is right, then things would work out. There are many things that must be right. If I think he is the one for me, but he doesn't think I am the one for him, then things would not work out. If the timing is not right, things would not work out either."*

Napalai (32 years old, Master degree, single with boyfriend)

## Concluding Remarks

Located at the heart of Southeast Asia, Thailand, a developing country of 63.5 million in 2010, is project to experience a gradual population decline from 66.4 million in 2026 to 63.9 million in 2040. This is according to a recent project by the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2012) for the period spanning from 2010 to 2040, based on the data from the Population and Housing Census 2010 as the baseline for the population projection. Part of the explanation to the population trend is the challenge posed by a rapid decline of fertility from above six births per woman in the early 1960s to a below replacement level currently (See, Knodel et al. 1988; Prachuabmob and Mithranon 2003; Wongboonsin, et al. 2004). This is particularly in Bangkok, where the decline in the total fertility rate (TFR) is relatively fast, from 1.25 in 1990 to

1.17 in 2000. The TFR in Bangkok is expected to decline further in the years to come (Wongboonsin and Wongboonsin 2008). Meanwhile, Thailand is expected to experience what a previous study calls the "tsunami aging-population phenomenon" –that is, the extremely rapid aging of societies (Wongboonsin and Wongboonsin 2008).

Among others, the rapid fertility decline is attributable to a changing marriage pattern, which is evolving increasingly towards the single status (NESDB 2012). The notion reflects a changing lifestyle into the so-called "Single Income No Kid" (SINK) pattern with a shifting priority in men and women to give privilege to an attainment of individual, economic and social goals. (Wongboonsin and Wongboonsin 2008). According to the NESDB (2012), the proportion of women aged over 49 who never married has risen from 2.3 percent to 5.8 percent in 2000 and 7.6 in 2010 respectively; while the percentage of ever-married women in the reproductive age group ranging from 15-49 has decreased from 71 in 1960 to 68 in 2000 and further down to 67 in 2010.

Such an increasing proportion of the never-married women can be attributable partly to the trend in female empowerment, particularly in terms of higher education attainment and participation in the labor market towards their higher degree of autonomy to manipulate their personal environment against the cultural traits, which dictates differences in expectation and values between men and women in both intimate and public spheres (Wongboonsin and Wongboonsin 2008; Phananiramai 1997). Moreover, given inadequate income, inadequate savings and high consumption behavior, found among the majority of Thai population, Thai women in the working age tend to prioritize work over marriage and childbearing. This is particularly the case among women in urban areas, according to Wongboonsin and Wongboonsin (2008), while referring to the conceptual conflicts between work and family lives. In addition, one may note also that Thailand has had insufficient childcare facilities since the late 1980s (Wongboonsin and Entz, 1991, 1996).

The study argues that should one need to bear a burden, women tend to prefer taking care to their elderly parents to have a child. This is despite the fact that there are only 7.7% of the 1254 in the survey mentioning that there were "very attached to parents and family, does not want leave to have a separate household".

This study also argues that despite the current findings of trend towards preference for postponed marriage to permanent singlehood in most respondents under the quantitative and qualitative investigation, one may expect such a marriage postponement to finally turn into permanent singlehood if the prevailing notion of the right match remains to function and links with these notions: "marriage is not the most important life goal"; "not ready for the responsibility of raising a family and having children"; "would like to focus on career advancement; and family accepts that the respondent is single", and "puts no pressure on getting married".

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