

ชีวิตของหญิงโสเภณีในเมืองหาดใหญ่ก่อนยุคการท่องเที่ยวเติบโต
(ก่อน พ.ศ. 2520)¹

Lives of Prostitutes in Hat Yai before the Tourism Boom
(before 1977)¹

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¹ บทความนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของวิทยานิพนธ์เรื่อง “ความเปลี่ยนแปลงทางสังคมและวัฒนธรรมของโสเภณีในเมืองหาดใหญ่ ระหว่างปี พ.ศ. 2510–2560” หลักสูตรปรัชญาดุษฎีบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาประวัติศาสตร์ คณะมนุษยศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่

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¹ This article is part of a thesis, “Social and Cultural Changes of the ‘Prostitutes’ in Hat Yai City, 1967-2017” Doctor of Philosophy Program in History, Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University. (Thesis will be completed in 2021.)

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(Received: July 20, 2020.; Revised: October 22, 2020.; Accepted: November 6, 2020)

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ต้องการนำเสนอความหลากหลายและความเปลี่ยนแปลงของธุรกิจการค้าประเวณีในเมืองหาดใหญ่ก่อนยุคการท่องเที่ยวเติบโตใน พ.ศ.2520 และชีวิตของหญิงโสเภณีในเมืองหาดใหญ่ในช่วงเวลาดังกล่าว ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อชีวิตของหญิงโสเภณีมากที่สุด คือ รูปแบบการค้าประเวณีที่พวกเธอให้บริการ ซึ่งแบ่งตามความเปลี่ยนแปลงออกเป็น 2 ช่วง คือ (1) ก่อน พ.ศ.2500 หญิงโสเภณีส่วนใหญ่เป็นหญิงวัยกลางคนที่มีภูมิลำเนาในภาคใต้ ให้บริการแกชายนักเที่ยวในท้องถิ่นเป็นหลัก มีทั้งหญิงโสเภณีอิสระขายบริการอยู่ที่โรงแรมขนาดเล็กซึ่งเป็นกลุ่มที่มีจำนวนมากที่สุด หญิงโสเภณีสังกัดช่องปาไทรซึ่งเป็นกลุ่มที่มีค่าบริการถูกที่สุดและถูกกดขี่มากที่สุดเช่นกัน และหญิงโสเภณีสังกัดช่องแม่หริซึ่งเป็นหญิงโสเภณีชั้นสูงที่ได้รับการอบรมมารยาท การเดินรำและการแต่งตัวจึงมีค่าบริการแพงที่สุด (2) พ.ศ. 2500-2520 หญิงโสเภณีส่วนใหญ่เป็นหญิงสาววัยรุ่นจากภาคเหนือที่ถูกซื้อตัวมาผ่านระบบนายหน้า กฎหมายปรามการค้าประเวณี (พ.ศ.2503) ทำให้หญิงโสเภณีอิสระหายไป จำนวนชายนักเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติที่เพิ่มมากขึ้นในทศวรรษ 2510 เป็นปัจจัยสำคัญให้ช่องบ้านหญิงแบบช่องแม่หริมีมากขึ้นและแบ่งเป็นช่องบ้านหญิงเกรด 2 ช่องบ้านหญิงเกรด 3 และช่องบ้านหญิงยุคใหม่ ธุรกิจอาบอบนวดก็เริ่มดำเนินการในช่วงนี้ หญิงโสเภณีแต่ละกลุ่มมีวิธีการขายบริการ มีอิสระในการดำเนินชีวิต มีความสัมพันธ์กับเจ้าของกิจการและชายนักเที่ยวที่ต่างกันอย่างสิ้นเชิง

คำสำคัญ: โสเภณีหาดใหญ่ ชีวิตของโสเภณี เมืองหาดใหญ่ก่อนยุคการท่องเที่ยวเติบโต

Abstract

The article aims to present diversity and changes of the business of prostitution in Hat Yai and lives of prostitutes in Hat Yai before the tourism boom before 1977. The study found that factors affecting the prostitutes' lives most were the styles of services they rendered which could be divided, according to the changes, into the following two periods: before 1957 and from 1957 to 1977 : (1) Before 1957, most prostitutes were middle-aged women from South Thailand who mostly delivered services to local men. Most of them were freelance prostitutes servicing in small hotels. Others were prostitutes working in brothels with Pa Sai Brothels as the cheapest place and where prostitutes were most oppressed. However, prostitutes working at Mae Ri's Brothel were considered to be high-class and trained in terms of manners, dancing and dressing. Thus, their services were the most expensive., (2) From 1957 to 1977, most prostitutes were young girls from North Thailand bought through a broker system as a result of the Prostitution Act, 1960, which aimed at eliminating freelance prostitutes. The number of foreign men seeking sexual services increased in the decade starting from 1967, resulting in more brothels of the same style as Mae Ri's Brothel and being classified into Ban Ying (Women's house) Grade 2, Ban Ying Grade 3, and Ban Ying Yuk Mai (Modern women's house). Massage businesses also began in this period, leading to different groups of prostitutes with their own styles of services, and having freedom to live their lives. They were also different in terms of the relationships with the business owners and with the men who bought services from them.

Keywords: Hat Yai Prostitutes, Prostitutes' Lives, Hat Yai before the Tourism Boom

Introduction

Research related to “prostitutes” used to be very popular in Thailand during the decade 1977-1997 because it was the period when prostitution business flourished when the Thai economic growth increased. Generally, research topics were related to communicable diseases and health of prostitutes, prostitution laws, government policy and management regarding problems of prostitution, prostitution business, and identities and selves of prostitutes. There were also many documents related to women who were prostitutes. Regarding studies about lives of prostitutes, they were generally about each type of prostitutes such as those working in bath and massage parlors [1] and those working in beer bars [2], etc. However, research studies about lives of all types of prostitutes in a particular area such as Hat Yai has not been reported or found even though it is known as the capital of the Southern part [3]. Hat Yai has long been a center for trading, tourism and entertainment business with prostitution as an important driving mechanism for other service businesses including hotels, restaurants, food stalls, local transportation, vendors on footpaths and in streets of the downtown area. The businesses had grown as a result of the increasing number of tourists from Malaysia and Singapore from the middle of the decade starting from 1967. The number of tourists increased from 81,052 in 1972 to 130,281 in 1977 [4], especially the number of male tourists who usually came to Hat Yai for sex services as a main reason [5]. Thus, Hat Yai was second only to Bangkok as a city with the largest number of female prostitutes in the country [6].

This article puts an effort into showing that lives of prostitutes in Hat Yai were different from those in other areas and that their lives were different from mental images the general public have about them. Generally, people assumed that they had no freedom, were confined in a room, forced to provide sex services, always beaten by the pimp. Nevertheless, this study found that not all prostitutes in Hat Yai lived their lives that way. The fact that there were various types of sex services in Hat Yai made prostitutes’ lives different from each other and their relationships with brothel owners and sex buyers were complicated. One significant reason making prostitutes’ lives before the tourism boom in Hat Yai interesting to study was that in addition to the variety of prostitution business and changes, studies about prostitution during that time could serve as foundations of understanding of growth in prostitution business in Hat Yai after the tourism boom.

Objectives

There are two objectives of this study: (1) to illustrate the variety and changes of prostitution business in Hat Yai before the tourist boom in the decade 1977, and (2) to illustrate lives of prostitutes in Hat Yai reflected through the sources and the paths leading to prostitution business, work methods and relationships between prostitutes and prostitution business owners and prostitutes’ relationships with their clients.

Literature Review

Surveying literature for writing the proposal for the thesis on “Social and cultural changes of prostitutes in Hat Yai during 1967-2017, of which this article is part, it was found that during the past 60 years, over 300 studies about “prostitutes” were conducted by academics and students of various educational institutions countrywide. These research studies could be classified into thesis, minor thesis and special problems, 185 of the studies were for master’s degrees, three for doctoral degrees, and more than 120 studies were financially supported by various organizations in the government sector. Apart from these, there were many articles about prostitutes found during the survey. Thus, it could be said that “prostitutes” is one topic that has been most studied and researched in Thailand. However, only one study was found to be about the history dimension of prostitution which was on prostitution and policies of Thai governments from 1868 to 1960 by Dararat Mettairkanon [7], conducted in 1983. This study was about development of prostitution business, the process of becoming prostitutes, and conditions of female prostitutes. It also revealed the overall policies of governments in different periods on prostitution and prostitutes in Thailand. However, the study did not mention prostitution in other parts of the country which could probably be growing and could probably be mentioned in the 3rd period in the study, which was after World War II. Prostitution grew even more rapidly in the decade of B.E. 2500 (1957) when American military personnel were stationed in Thailand as the Vietnam War began. Moreover, as the study focused on government policies on prostitution, lives of prostitutes were not mentioned. Even though another study mentioning prostitutes in the past was found, prostitutes’ lives was only a small part of the study. This study was on Women in Thai jurisdiction from the reign of King Chulalongkorn to 1935: A study through lawsuits and petitions, conducted by Pavinee Bunnag [8] in 2011.

Regarding studies related to prostitution in Hat Yai, three studies were found. The first study was on lives and identities of women selling sex services in the Southern border area by Surapong Yimlamai [9]. The study emphasized prostitutes in the present age when many women thought that selling sex services was better than being unemployed. These women chose to sell sex services secretly along with other services. The study further revealed that selling sex services secretly as a sideline gave the women more bargaining power than selling sex services as their main job.

The second study was on old women and their business as prostitutes under the flyover by Phurin Phayakkhaphan [10]. He studied lives of three old women who used an area under a flyover over the railroads in Hat Yai as a place for selling sex services. In collecting the data, the researcher disguised himself as a motorcycle taxi driver so the data were

collected through informal interviews. He presented lives of these old women in various aspects, such as their backgrounds, how they entered the sex selling services, their relationships with people around them and opinions on themselves. However, even though the study was on a small group of marginal people whose lives had never been investigated, in-depth interviews with only one old woman and five people living in the same area seemed to be merely a presentation of one old woman's life who lived her life with activities that were different from other women of the same age group.

Last, the third study was on selves of transgenders in Hat Yai and their experiences in cross-national sex services by Sawitri Sanmueang [11]. The results of this study showed that nowadays the cause of or the reason for sex selling was not a lack of education or money, but it could be another form of self-presentation because selling sex enabled the transgenders to openly show their selves. It was believed that in other countries, transgenders, including men loving men, were popular and widely accepted. In reviewing literature related to prostitution, no in-depth studies on lives of prostitutes in Hat Yai were found, especially those in the period before 1977 which could be regarded as historical studies. Moreover, no research reports were found to be about lives of prostitutes in any area of Thailand.

Research Methodology

This qualitative research employed a historical research methodology focusing on lives of prostitutes who had been part of Thai society for a long time but their legal and moral statuses had kept them concealed and away from being mentioned or recorded in official documents and even in newspapers until the middle of the decade B.E. 2520 (1977). Hence, there is not enough written evidence for conducting in-depth studies about prostitutes' lives in Hat Yai.

Research Instruments

Because of the mentioned limitations, interview was chosen as the main research instrument to collect primary data from memories of people who were in the situations. Moreover, data collected through in-depth interviews could provide details that were sensitive and not available from other sources, especially data in the occupational dimension and the relationship dimensions between prostitutes and owners of the business places, and relationships between prostitutes and their male clients. Therefore, the interview that could reflect emotions and feelings of informants and provide in-depth information about some issues was the best instrument for understanding of prostitutes' lives in that period.

Key Informants

Even though interviews have some limitations in terms of accuracy and possible biases, data can be validated by cross-verification from various informants. For this study,

interviews were conducted with not only prostitutes but also former managers of entertainment places, local tour guides, restaurant owners, hotel owners, men who used services or mingled with prostitutes during the time set for this study, and Hat Yai locals who were older than 60 years old and lived in Hat Yai in the same period as the prostitutes. Collecting in-depth data through interviews required trust from informants, and therefore, informants were recruited using snowball sampling and purposive sampling. In snowball sampling, the researcher was trusted by the informants because the researcher was introduced to them by another informant who knew them well. However, in purposive sampling, especially recruiting prostitutes and brothel owners was difficult as they refused to provide information. Moreover, searching for prostitutes who used to sell services in Hat Yai 40-60 years ago was even more difficult. Even when they were found, they did not want to talk about their past unnecessarily. This difficulty in accessing the data clearly indicates how important and how interesting the topic of the study is.

Results of the Study

The study of prostitutes' lives in Hat Yai before the tourism boom could be reflected through two important topics as follows. (1) Changes of prostitution business in Hat Yai before the tourism boom to show a variety of prostitution business in Hat Yai which were factors and environments that were important to gain understanding of prostitutes' lives. (2) Lives of prostitutes in Hat Yai before the tourism boom to show the sources, paths to the occupation, work methods and relationships between prostitutes and prostitution business owners and relationships between prostitutes and their clients.

1. Changes of prostitution business in Hat Yai before the tourism boom

Prostitution business providing sex services to make clients happy usually grows along with the commercially wealthy community because the business is a good indicator of the community's economic growth and the size of the community. Hat Yai, which was a center for trading and exports of rubber and tin from the time before World War II also had prostitution business. Even during World War II when Japanese military was stationed in Hat Yai, there were prostitutes who wanted to sell their services to Japanese soldiers. This was reflected by Mr. Thakeongsak Phatthano, an informant, who said that *"During the 2nd World War when I was about 7-8 years old, I saw naked Japanese soldiers play baseball in the compound of Wat Khlong Rian. They took a bath in a well in Wat Khlong Rian. When they finished taking a bath and walked out of the temple, some prostitutes asked me to speak to the soldiers. The women said to me, 'Brother, please help me and tell the soldiers the price of my service.' They bargained in front of the temple"* [12]. This shows that sex services had been available in Hat Yai for so long and even during the world war, the services were offered as usual.

1.1 Prostitution business in Hat Yai before 1957

In Hat Yai before 1957, even though exports of rubber and tin were thriving and Hat Yai business area was centered in only five squares kilometers, one business of various types booming in the area was prostitution, and at least four types were available: teahouses, the wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater, Mae Ri's brothel, and Pa Sai brothels. These sex service places responded to different groups of male sex buyers, had different styles of services, and had prostitutes from different sources as follows.

1.1.1 Teahouses or ancient hotels: Providing traditional services

Teahouses or ancient hotels which were called “*Rong Tiam*” or taverns by Hat Yai locals in the past. They were generally two-story wooden buildings built along Niphat Uthit 1 and Niphat Uthit 2 Roads. They were built at the same time as when Hat Yai started to grow. As Hat Yai was a trading center, there were many traders and businessmen from other places coming to do business, to buy goods for selling in their hometowns or other towns. Thus, hotel business was growing along with the town. Hotels in Hat Yai provided not only accommodations but also food and tea on the ground floor, and usually had prostitutes waiting to give services upstairs. This was reflected by Ms. Rungthip Rot-anuson, a Hat Yai native who provided information by saying that “*Almost all hotels along Niphat Uthit 1 Road like **Tang Ha Heng** and **Yong Hap On** had prostitutes stationed in them. So, hotels in Hat Yai at that time were sources of sex services. Prostitutes disguised themselves at these taverns where tea was served downstairs and accommodations were provided upstairs; each tavern had 3-5 women stationed in it. Most of the women were from the South and were mostly older than 30 years old. They were usually women who were housewives with no one caring for them or with irresponsible husbands. Some of them had family problems before becoming prostitutes; others were uneducated and thus, unemployed, and prostitution was the only way to feed themselves and their children. They did not dress up and looked just like any other housewives. They wore sarong and sat around waiting for clients in their own rooms. Their regular clients knew their rooms and used the services there without having to pay for another room. These women provided services mostly to Thai clients who came to buy goods in Hat Yai. Certainly, some clients were Hat Yai local men. These women were independent prostitutes and were not controlled by anyone, and thus, they were not forced to sell sex services. They have probably all passed away by now*”[13].

Data collected through interviews with Hat Yai locals were corresponding. They all said that the ancient hotels or teahouses were 2-story wooden buildings on Niphat Uthit 1 and Niphat Uthit 2 Roads that were gradually replaced by commercial concrete buildings in the beginning of the decade B.E. 2500 or A.D. 1957. The main factor for such changes was

the growing economy of Hat Yai that required more commercial spaces. Mid-size hotels with more than 50 rooms began to emerge. The 2-story wooden hotels with less than 10 rooms became less and less popular forcing their owners to turn them into concrete commercial buildings. Consequently, prostitutes who used to live and sell their services in the small hotels had to stop their services and some moved to the wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater to continue their services.

1.1.2 The wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater: The sex services selling place for independent prostitutes

The wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater was a two-story wooden building with five adjoining front rooms built before 1937. It had tens of cheap rooms for rent and later prostitutes came to rent them to live and sell their sex services. Most of the women were middle-aged and older who were Southerners. They sat in front of the wooden house waiting for clients and sometimes they stood on the sidewalks near Hat Yai Junction Railway Station. When they were chosen by their clients, they brought them to the wooden house adjacent to the movie theater for the services. Hat Yai local men at that time knew very well that the service there was the cheapest in Hat Yai. *“It was so cheap that men seeking the service said that the price of sex service at the wooden house adjacent to the movie theater was as cheap as a pack of cigarette. The price for a pack of cigarette at that time was only 20 Baht. The women were from different places in the South coming here to sell the services by themselves without anyone to control them like prostitutes at other brothels such as Mae Ri’s brothel where they were controlled”* [14]. Generally, men of all ages, occupations and all walks of life who came for services here were from Hat Yai as well as nearby areas. Even though later there were also women from the North and Northeast coming to live in the wooden house and to independently sell their services here, one unique characteristic of the prostitutes at this place had always been that they were all old women. The wooden house adjacent to the movie theater was demolished in 2012. Thus, the place could be regarded as having been a source of sex services in Hat Yai for more than 70 years.

1.1.3 Mae Ri’s Brothel: A house of upper-class prostitutes

Mae Ri’s brothel was a house for women. It was the place they lived and a place where men came to choose the women from whom they wanted to buy sex services. The house had no accommodations for men, and it was not a place to have sex. Thus, when men wanted to buy sex services from the women, they had to take the women out to a hotel no matter how long they wanted the women for whether temporarily or overnight. Mae Ri’s brothel had no more than 10 women who dressed beautifully with modern clothing style. They did not dress like *“Sao Ram Wong”* (folk dancers). Besides, they were trained to

do ballroom dances so that they were able to entertain and take part in welcome parties for government officials or businessmen. Therefore, prostitutes in Mae Ri's brothel were high-class prostitutes of Hat Yai that had been in operation since at least the decade of 2480 (1937). At the beginning, Mae Ri's brothel was located near Amnuaywit School before it was moved to Niphat Uthit 2 Road near Sakura Hotel. Mr. Thakoengsak Phatthano told the researcher from his memories as follows. *"It was in 1947 when I was **Dek Wat** (a boy serving Buddhist monks in a temple), one of my duties was to go to the brothel to collect **Pinto** (food carriers) of food to the temple every day because the owner of the brothel cooked for monks as merit-making every day. She gave me a tip of one **Salueng** (a quarter or one fourth of a Baht) every day. She was a fat woman. When I went in the brothel, sometimes I saw naked women taking a shower together. I was still very young, then. The house was a 2-story wooden row-house. Inside the house, there was a well with a space around it where naked women took a shower. I saw at least 7-8 women sit around there"*[15].

Mr. Somkhit Chotkao was another informant who gave the researcher information from his memories as follows. *"In 1962, women who worked as sex workers at Mae Ri's brothel were about 20-22 years old with some education from Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Lampang. They were not from the countryside. They were well-trained and good-looking and were willing, not forced to work. There were at most 10 women living in Mae Ri's brothel. The prices ranged from 100 to 200 Baht or more depending on the women's beauty and age. Women in Mae Ri's brothel had to know how to do ballroom dances as well as standard **Ram Wong** dances. If important government officials came to Hat Yai and went to Sakurai Bar near Mae Ri's brothel, women from Mae Ri's brothel were called to participate in welcoming them and to be their partners"*[16]. Mae Ri's brothel was considered as high-class in Hat Yai and was in business since the decade B.E.2480 (1937) and was permanently closed at the end of the decade B.E. 2510 (1967) probably due to the death of Mae Ri's husband. It was told that her husband took prostitutes under their care to Songkhla for relaxation and on the way back, the taxi they were in collided with the rail of a bridge in Nam Noi area killing all of them. The accident was probably the main reason making Mae Ri to permanently close the business because she had no one to help her and her old age was probably another reason.

1.1.4 Pa Sai Brothels: Sources of cheap prostitutes in the middle of the town

Even though Pa Sai brothels were permanently closed over 40 year ago, it is a story that is still in the memories of Hat Yai locals who are 50-60 years old and older. This is because when asked about places for sex services in Hat Yai in the past, they all said that *"Most Hat Yai people knew Pa Sai brothels"; "Pa Sai brothels had been in Hat Yai for a long time and*

anyone who did not know Pa Sai brothels was not considered a Hat Yai local”; and “All Hat Yai (male) teenagers must have had Pa Sai experience.” All these statements should adequately reflect reputation of Pa Sai brothels. “Pa Sai Brothels” was not a name of any particular brothel but it referred to an area with 10 small brothels where a lot of Sai (banyan) trees grew in abundance, and thus, the area was called “Pa Sai” or banyan forest. Mr. Thakeongsak Phatthano said, “When I was 12-13 years old (1948-1949), while I was watching my cows graze, they went in the banyan forest and I had to go in the forest to bring them out. Pa Sai brothels were opposite the 3rd road (Niphat Uthit 3 Road) kitty corner to **Khao Tom Ko Yao** (a restaurant selling rice porridge and various side dishes). The brothels were wooden houses and at that time, 1947, there were no hotels around there. In front of the brothels or kitty-corner to the brothels was a **Ram Wong** (folk dance) place. There was an unpaved road to the brothels which were two rows of houses opposite each other. However, not every house was a brothel. No, not all of them” [17]. In addition, Mr. Nukun Munisit added that “In the past, Hat Yai had brothels all over the town. You could find it anywhere on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd roads but Pa Sai brothels were lowest in terms of grade or class and cheapest in price. Houses in Pa Sai were two-story wooden houses and about 10 adjoined houses were brothels. Pa Sai brothels opened from the afternoon and there were clients coming for sex services from the afternoon, too. They opened until one or two o’clock in the morning” [18].

Because Pa Sai brothels had been open for almost 40 years since the end of the B.E. 2480 (1937) decade until the decade B.E. 2510 (1967). The sources of prostitutes of Pa Sai brothels before the decade B.E. 2500 (1957) were probably the Southern part until the decade B.E. 2510 (1967) when some women from the Northern part were persuaded and brought to Hat Yai by agents. The prosperity of Hat Yai as recounted by a local news reporter was as follows. “When I was a teenager (1967), prostitutes in Pa Sai brothels were mostly from the Northern part. They had light skin complexion and spoke softly. They were persuaded to come and work in Hat Yai because of word-of-mouth recommendations by Sao Ram Wong (folk dancers) who had been to Hat Yai that Hat Yai was livable, prosperous and easy to earn money. So, it became the values for Northern girls to come and work in Hat Yai, a city seen with a good image by Northerners at that time”[19].

In an interview, Mr. Sawai Na Phatthalung told the researcher as follows. “Most prostitutes selling services in Pa Sai brothels were from the Northern and Northeastern parts. At that time (1967), there had already been Northeastern girls selling sex services in Hat Yai. As far as I know, women who worked as sex workers were bought and brought to do only this business. They were not allowed to go anywhere other than in front of the houses. They were not allowed to go and enjoy themselves anywhere even at the nearby **Ram Wong**

place”[20]. The recounts show that in addition to the persuasion process by sex service agents, another incentive for Northern women to come to Hat Yai to sell sex services was the image of Hat Yai in the decade of B.E. 2510 (1967) when the economic boom began, the town expanded rapidly and wooden row houses were replaced by concrete commercial buildings. A lot of people came to do business and to buy goods in Hat Yai. Hence, there were good opportunities for the women to earn a lot of money from selling sex services.

The above data indicate that prostitution business was a business that had grown along the growth of Hat Yai, and a variety of prostitution types existed in Hat Yai before the decade 1957. That was when there were independent sex service places as taverns and the wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater, and dependent sex service places like Mae Ri’s brothel and Pa Sai brothels. This did not reflect only the growth of this business while Hat Yai was economically growing but also lives of prostitutes in Hat Yai. Before so many women from the North and Northeast came to be prostitutes in Hat Yai, there were prostitutes in Hat Yai who were middle-aged women from the South. Most of these women became prostitutes as an occupation because they had economic and family problems. Nevertheless, prostitution was a legal occupation until 1960 when the government issued the Suppression of Prostitution Act. B.E. 2503. -

1.2 Prostitution business in Hat Yai during 1957-1977

Two important factors changing prostitution business in Hat Yai from the decade before 1957 were (1) The Suppression of Prostitution Act. B.E. 2503, and (2) Hat Yai’ rapid economic growth. (1) Regarding the Suppression of Prostitution Act. B.E. 2503. After the World War II, Thai government had tried to manipulate the prostitution business as they strictly prohibited the increase of brothels in 1949 and also prohibited registering more prostitutes in 1955. However, both laws had no effect on the independent prostitutes during that period until the Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act, B.E. 2503 was introduced, This act was condemned by people demanding women’s rights due to its weak points, inadequate definitions and discriminations. Moreover, the definition of a prostitution business place was too broad. The law did not exclude individuals who were forced to be prostitutes from being punished by the law, and the law punished only women not men who bought sex from the women [21]. This act thereby allowed the police to charge and fine any prostitutes, so it significantly affected the lives and businesses of prostitutes. As a result, prostitutes were arrested and fined forcing those who used to sell sex independently in taverns all around Hat Yai to move to work under a type of business place to prevent themselves from being arrested. (2) Hat Yai’ economic growth led to expansion of the town from five square kilometers to eight square kilometers with a population of 38,162 while in 1949 its population was only

19,425 [22]. The fact that the population doubled only in 12 years shows that Hat Yai was developed from a trading community near the railroads to a town that was a center for trading with more people coming to do business in the town. Many business services grew rapidly such as hotels, restaurants, small department stores, etc. Furthermore, more tourists from Malaysia and Singapore came to Hat Yai in the decade 1967. One of the most magnetic attractions in Hat Yai was its sex industry. Malaysia could not run the sex services in its country, and Singapore had much less prostitute brothels than Hat Yai. Moreover, the rates of Thai prostitution were relatively cheap compared to the income and cost of living of those male travelers. This was the main reason why this business in Hat Yai had attracted more and more thousands of foreign tourists each year. This resulted in a variety of sex services in terms of service places and styles of services. In addition to Mae Ri's brothel, Pa Sai brothels, the wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater that had been in business continuously until the decade 1977, four more types of prostitution business emerged in Hat Yai. They were Second grade brothels, third grade brothels, the new age women's houses, and bath and massage businesses described as follows.

1.2.1 Bua Khiaw's brothel: Second-grade women' house

If sex service places in Hat Yai were to be classified into levels or grades based on the beauty of the women, prices and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, Mae Ri's brothel was a grade A brothel or first class because besides being beautiful, women were well-trained in terms of manners, how to wear makeup and able to do ballroom dances. Bua Khiaw's brothel was probably ranked in the second place or grade B. It was situated on Si Phuanat Road in front of a petrol station that used to be there. Some Hat Yai locals called the brothel "Bua Siaw" (sexually excited). It was opened in the end of the decade 1957 with 20-30 prostitutes from the Northern part to provide services to men. They were brought to Hat Yai by the owner of the brothel who gave a sum of money to the girls' parents before bringing them to Hat Yai. The brothel was a women's house where men came to choose the women and took them out. Prostitutes at Bua Khiaw's brothel did not dressed up or wear makeup as neatly as those in Mae Ri's brothel but they did not dress like *Sao Ram Wong* like those of Saeng Chan brothel either. The services offered were either temporarily or overnight. The rate for overnight service was about 100 baht. Bua Khiaw's brothel was closed in the decade 1997 due to the death of its owner whose name was Bua Khiaw[23]. The emergence of Bua Khiaw's brothel or the second-grade women's house indicated that prostitution in the style of women's houses became popular in Hat Yai since the end of the decade 1957 when development of various prostitution types and styles began. The style where clients chose and took the woman out showed that even though women from the

Northern provinces were not totally willing to do the job, they knew what sort of job they came to do in Hat Yai. Thus, they were neither lured nor confined and forced to sell sex services at all.

1.2.2 Saeng Chan brothel: Third-grade women' house

Saeng Chan brothel was located on Saeng Chan Road so it was named after the road which is crossed with Saeng Athit Road kitty-corner to Wat Chue Chang, a Chinese style Buddhist temple. The owner was a former army sergeant who had now passed away. There were so many prostitutes (40-50 women) at Saeng Chan brothel who were as young as 15-20 years old. They did not wear makeup very neatly; they dressed like *Sao Ram Wong*, and their overnight rate was only 60 baht. Thus, Saeng Chan brothel was ranked as third grade with its lowest price. Their clients were local Thai men and some Australian soldiers who stayed at the nearby Hat Yai Motel. Mr. Somkhit Chotkaeo provided the following information. *"A few years after Hat Yai Motel was built (the end of the decade 1957), Australian military pilots staying at Hat Yai Motel usually asked the motel bellboy to ride a bicycle to call 4-5 women for them to choose. The women would come walking to the motel where only one or two of them were chosen and the rest walked back to the brothel. When soldiers stayed at the motel, the motel was a busy place with women walking in and out of it"* [24].

1.2.3 Sunny-Kaeochai: New age women's houses

The difference that clearly distinguished the women's houses called Sunny-Kaeochai from Mae Ri's brothel, Bua Khiaw's brothel and Saeng Chan brothel was that it provided services to only Singaporean and Malaysian tourists. The owner of Sunny-Kaeochai was "Pa Uan" whose second wife named Kaeochai was a native of Dok Kham Tai District in Phayao Province. Therefore, most prostitutes were from this district as they were persuaded by Kaeochai's relatives. Kaeochai was a girl from Dok Kham Tai District who worked selling sex services at Sunny's house in the beginning of the decade 1977 told the researcher as follows. *"When I started working for Pa Uan, he already had three women's houses. His women's houses had the most women because he had about 100 women in his houses. His houses were well-known and everyone in Hat Yai knew it. Around Chan Niwet area, in addition to Pa Uan's houses, there were houses owned by Pa Cha, Pa Chin, Pa So, and others. They probably had women from the North and the Northeast but women at Pa Uan's houses were all from the North and most of them were from Dok Kham Tai. Women working with Pa Uan were very young; the youngest were about 16-17 while the oldest were 22 and those who were over 22-23 were considered too old to sell services. The main clients were Singaporean tourists whose tour guides brought to Pa Uan's houses to choose the girls. There were large pictures of girls on the wall for them to choose from. After that they went to wait for the*

girls at their hotels where the girls would join them afterward. The services were all overnight services; there were no temporary services. The rate was 400-500 baht per night"[25].

1.2.4 Pink Ladies: The start point of the largest bath and massage parlor in the Southern part

Even though Pink Ladies was not the first bath and massage parlor in Hat Yai, when talking about the largest bath and massage business in the Southern part, men knew very well that it was "Pink Ladies". Mr. Sawai Na Phatthalung, whose ownership of the business started in 1973 recounted his business as follows. *"I bought the bath and massage business from a son of Khun Ying Chuenchit Sukhum. In the first couple of years, the business was not good, but it began to improve in 1975-1976, and I had to apply for permission to increase the number of rooms from 13 to 52. The clients were mainly Thais and Malaysians. In the beginning, women who applied to work as masseuses came by themselves in person not through any agents and there were no charges for them. However, after 1977, the agent system began. Before becoming masseuses, the women had to be trained how to massage, to give a bath and to give services to clients. In the first 10 years, masseuses had to wear Pink Ladies uniforms and then in 1983, they dressed in beautiful evening dresses, wore makeup and had their hair styled. At the beginning of the business, there were about 20 women working for Pink Ladies and later when the business was good, there were over 100 women working there"*[26].

The growth of prostitution business in Hat Yai during 1957-1977 revealed not only economic factors in terms of demand and supply but also the Suppression of Prostitution Act B.E. 2503 that forced independent prostitutes to move and work in prostitution business places. As a result, the number of prostitution business places in the form of women's houses in Hat Yai increased. During 1957-1977 in Hat Yai, apart from Mae Ri's brothel and Pa Sai brothels that had been in business continuously, there emerged many more women's houses like Bua Khiaw's brothel which was a second grade brothel, Saeng Chan brothel which was a third grade brothel, Sunny-Kaeochai which was new-age women's houses, and Pink Ladies, the bath and massage parlor. There were changes not only in the increase of the variety of service places, but also in the age and the sources of prostitutes and clients. Middle-aged prostitutes from the South were replaced by young prostitutes from the North. Clients were changed from local Thai men in Hat Yai and nearby towns to Singaporean and Malaysian tourists who began to visit Hat Yai in the decade 1967. Inevitably, these physical changes affected lives of prostitutes in Hat Yai.

2. Lives of prostitutes in Hat Yai before the tourism boom

This topic is intended to show that lives of prostitutes in Hat Yai before the tourism boom in the decade 1977 did not stand still but were dynamic and changing which could partly illustrate the economic and social growth of Hat Yai by reflecting lives of prostitutes through studies of the sources, paths to the prostitute occupation, prostitutes' methods of working, and their relationships with people around them as follows.

2.1 The sources of prostitutes and the paths to the prostitute occupation

Data collected through interviews with different people who were directly and indirectly involved in prostitution business were corresponding. They said that before 1957 women who were sex workers in Hat Yai whether independently provided their services in taverns or the wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater or those selling their services in Mae Ri's brothel and Pa Sai brothels were all middle-aged women from the South. These women had no education, had been married and had children. The reasons for becoming prostitutes were that they had economic and family problems and that they had to feed themselves and to raise their children. It was not until the decade 1957 when women from the North came to Hat Yai and became prostitutes. The reasons were that many troupes of *Sao Ram Wong* (folk dancers) from the North came to perform in Hat Yai and saw that Hat Yai was economically growing. Hence, they talked about it when they went back home and some women who heard about it through words of mouth thought that Hat Yai's economic growth could help them earn good income. so, they came to Hat Yai. Apart from the considerable economic growth of Hat Yai creating the reputable image of the city, what had attracted more and more women from the North to prostitution trade in Hat Yai in the decade 1957 was prostitute agents which traveled in Northern rural villages in search of girls and persuaded their parents to allow them to work as a prostitute in Hat Yai. This gradually added to the number of prostitutes from the North which corresponded to the growth of prostitution business in Hat Yai. At that time, apart from Mae Ri's brothel and Pa Sai brothels, there were the second-grade, third-grade, new-age women houses, and bath and massage parlors where girls from the North worked since the decade 1957. Some of them had some education while most did not. Even though many of them knew the kind of work they would be doing in Hat Yai, some of them were probably still lured by agents.

2.2 Working methods of prostitutes in Hat Yai

Before the Suppression of Prostitution Act B.E. 2503, prostitution in Thailand was not illegal. Even though being prostitutes were not socially accepted, prostitutes were not arrested, and prostitution was not prohibited. Some of middle-aged women in areas near

Hat Yai who had family problems, no education and no way to take care of themselves and their children opted for prostitution. Whether or not they were independent prostitutes or under any brothel, they chose it for themselves without being forced to provide sex services. They dressed like any other housewives wearing a sarong and a sleeveless blouse, but the difference was only that they waited for clients in the rooms they rented for their clients or in Pa Sai brothels which were not openly seen as service places. These prostitutes usually did not make themselves seen different from other people. However, prostitutes working for Mae Ri's brothels dressed beautifully and were trained to do some ballroom dances and their clients were mainly businessmen in Hat Yai and nearby towns.

In one aspect, the Suppression of Prostitution Act B.E. 2503 was a way to prevent more women to enter the prostitution occupation but in another aspect the act changed lives of independent prostitutes in Hat Yai. The act left them with even less choices in life if they had to remain in this occupation to raise their children. They had to move to the wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater or move to work under one of the brothels; otherwise they had to stop selling the services. Hence, it could be considered that the act forced prostitutes to be taken even more advantage of by brothel owners. Even though the act had reduced the number of prostitutes in Hat Yai, its economic growth and growth of prostitution business resulted in more women lured from the North to be sex workers in Hat Yai. All women from the North entering the prostitution occupation during 1957-1977 had to work under a brothel or a place of sex business which could be Mae Ri's brothel, Bua Khiaw's brothel, Saeng Chan brothel, Pa Sai brothels, new-age women houses or a bath and massage parlor that were all growing in the decade 1967.

Because the agents had given money to their parents before taking them out of their villages in the countryside to Hat Yai to be sex workers, these women began their lives as prostitutes with some debts. Even though they had more opportunities to wear makeup beautifully, to dress fashionably, to have enough to eat, and to see a prosperous town than did their parents and siblings in the countryside, they had no freedom in going anywhere, and had to unwillingly do the job serving many strangers as their clients until all the debts were paid to the owners of the business places. Nevertheless, the fact that each prostitution business place was different in its service styles, lives of prostitutes in each place were different. If their quality of life was measured from the income they made, the quality of life among those working for Mae Ri's brothel and new-age women's houses was probably better than that of other groups. This was because the clients of Mae Ri's brothel were high-class, wealthy and with good jobs, and the clients of the new-age women's houses were wealthy tourists from Singapore and Malaysia. Thus, the incomes of the prostitutes under these two

brothels were higher than those of the other groups. The incomes of the prostitutes under Bua Khiaw's and Saeng Chan brothels were less than those under Mae Ri's and the new-age women's houses, respectively. It could be considered that quality of life among prostitutes working under Pa Sai brothels were the worst because apart from a higher number of clients they had to serve each day, the rate of service each time was very low. Besides, their living conditions and prevention of sexual transmitted diseases were not good at all which made prostitutes working there suffer from the diseases.

2.3 Relationships between prostitutes and prostitution business owners and relationships with clients

After becoming prostitutes, important persons they had to interact with in their work were the owners of the prostitution business and clients. The relationships between prostitutes and owners of the brothels before 1957 and the period between 1957-1977 were different. Before 1957, prostitutes in Hat Yai consisted of independent prostitutes and those under brothels. The former type was the only group that brothel owners had interactions with and looked after. Prostitution business places could be classified into upper-class and lower-class brothels. If prostitutes from the two classes were compared, those working for Mae Ri's brothel received much better care than those working for Pa Sai brothels and other lower-class brothels. Prostitutes working for Mae Ri's brothel received care from daily life aspects to training in manners and etiquette, ballroom dancing, how to wear makeup, and disease prevention. They were also taken out of Hat Yai for relaxation and some were even given loans to send to their family. Thus, their relationships were of a patronage system where prostitutes and the brothel owner depended on each other. Prostitutes in Pa Sai brothels which were lower-class brothels had bad quality of life. They lived together in small rooms and each day they had to provide sex services to around 10 men. They were not allowed to go anywhere freely and had to suffer from sexually transmitted diseases. Their low quality of life reflected clearly their relationship with the brothel owners was relationship between the oppressed and the oppressors.

In the period between 1957 and 1977, relationships between prostitutes and brothel owners were of more types as there were more types of brothels from Grade 1 brothels like Mae Ri's brothel, Grade 2 brothels like Bua Khiaw's brothel to Grade 3 brothels like Saeng Chan brothel, and there were also Sunny-Kaeochai, the new-age women's houses and the lowest grade brothels like Pa Sai brothels. Thus, interactions between prostitutes and brothel owners were with different degrees of oppression and patronage varying according to conditions and styles of the brothels. Upper-class brothels provided more care and more help to prostitutes in terms of work and family than lower-class brothels. Therefore, it could

be considered that upper-class brothels provided more support and used less oppression with prostitutes than lower-class brothels. Nevertheless, if compared between the period before 1957 and that during 1957-1977, in the latter period, prostitutes owed some debts to brothel owners from the very beginning of their job. Thus, this probably made the interactions between them in terms of patronage and oppression more intense than the interactions they had in the period before 1957.

Concerning interactions between prostitutes and their clients, these were another type of relationship that had important effects on the working life of prostitutes in Hat Yai. The interactions between prostitutes and their clients before 1957 and the period of 1957-1977 were also different. Before 1957, whether they were independent prostitutes or not, the relationship with the client was usually that between a seller and a buyer of the service. The services were under male dominance. Male clients bought sex services only for temporary sexual satisfaction while female prostitutes considered their male clients as sources of income for their living only. No matter how good they felt towards each other and no matter how often they met, their relationship could not be developed to a status that was more than a seller and buyer. The reasons were clients were usually middle-aged men who already had a family while prostitutes were considered bad women and they usually were also middle-aged women who had been married and had burdens of looking after themselves and their children. Hence, the relationships between prostitutes and clients were usually under male dominance and prostitutes were only tools for men to release their sexual desire.

During the period 1957-1977, relationships between prostitutes in Hat Yai and their clients began to change because clients were changed from only Thai men to tourists from Singapore and Malaysia who began to come to Hat Yai in the middle of the decade 1967. The services to tourists from Singapore and Malaysia were usually overnight and they usually used services of the same women when they came to Hat Yai and sometimes for several days on their vacation. As a result, prostitutes and their clients had time to build further relationship and to learn more about each other. Moreover, prostitutes during this period were young girls of 18-22 years old who were pretty with fair skin, speaking softly and sweetly, and pleasing their clients. Therefore, it was easy for clients to be flattered. A certain number of wealthy men who were satisfied with the prostitutes' appearance, personality and the care given to them came to bail the women out of the brothel to start a family in Singapore or Malaysia. Here is an example. Mae Kaeo, a 17-year old from Dok Kham Tai, who had worked for Pa Uan at Sunny-Kaeochai for three years was bailed out from the brothel by a Singaporean man. Mae Kaeo recounted her life as follows. *"When I came to work with Pa Uan, I owed him a debt. I stopped working for him because a client from Singapore bailed me out. He told me that he liked me and wanted me to go and live with him in Singapore. Before he*

bailed me out, I took him to see my house and my family in Dok Kham Tai. When he saw my house and my family, he felt even more sorry for me. So, after he came back from Singapore, he brought with him some money to bail me out, and that was when I stopped working for Pa Uan” [27].

The example of relationship reflected the interaction between a prostitute and a foreign client which had become a model of hope and dream for younger generations of prostitutes. They probably hoped that they would be lucky enough to have a foreign client take them out of the brothel as some older generations were. Such a hope and dream had become a tool for agents to use for luring more women from the Northern part to sell sex services in Hat Yai.

New findings from the study

Issue	Former perceptions	New findings
Types/Styles of prostitution in Hat Yai before 1977	Most people could recall only prostitution in a slum in the middle of the town like Pa Sai brothels	1. There were many sex business places in Hat Yai. Apart from Pa Sai brothels, there were Mae Ri’s brothel, the wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater, and many small hotels. 2. Prostitution business before 1957 and during the period of 1957-1977 was dynamically changed due to two major factors: an increase in the number of clients along with the rapid economic growth of Hat Yai, and the Suppression of Prostitution Act B.E.2503.
Sources of prostitutes working in Hat Yai	No prostitutes in Hat Yai were from the South because the economy in the South was good, and so there were only prostitutes from the countryside of the North who came to Hat Yai because of their poverty.	Before 1957, most prostitutes were middle-aged, from large cities in the South such as Nakhon Si Thammarat and Songkhla, with no education but with burdens of raising children. After 1957, most were from the North and persuaded by agents who sought women for the growing sex industry during the Vietnam war period. Some women came because of word-of-mouth recommendations from <i>Sao Ram Wong</i> (folk dancers) who had been to Hat Yai during the decade 1947-1957.

New findings from the study

Issue	Former perceptions	New findings
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Quality of life among prostitutes	No matter what type of prostitutes they were, their quality of life was the same because they were oppressed and forced to sell sex services.	Not always true. Prostitutes' quality of life varied according to the conditions of sex business places. If they were in Mae Ri's brothel, their quality of life was better than that of prostitutes in Pa Sai brothels. Prostitutes who owed a debt to the brothel's owner had less freedom than those who did not.
Relationships between prostitutes and the business place owners	Only one relationship existed which was between the oppressed and the oppressor. The brothel owner took advantage of all kinds over prostitutes.	Not always true. It depended on the type of the business place. In a brothel like Mae Ri's, the owner felt sympathy for prostitutes and helped them. They were under a patronage system. In Pa Sai brothels, prostitutes were exploited, and the relationship was that between the oppressed and the oppressor.
Relationships between prostitutes and clients	Prostitutes were only a tool for men's sexual outlets.	Relationships were changed during 1957-1977, especially between prostitutes and foreign clients where some were developed into marriage and family.

Conclusion

Hat Yai was a new town established in 1917 as a railroad junction town. However, because it had always been a railway junction connecting the lower Southern provinces and Malaysia, it had grown rapidly with many people migrating to it to seek opportunities for their lives. After the end of World War II, the rubber prices in the world market went up making the economy of Hat Yai, a center for rubber exports, better and resulted in an increase in the number of populations from 5,000 in 1935 to 19,425 in 1949 or almost four times in only 14 years. The increasing number of the population not only promoted trading businesses but also service businesses, especially sex business, to grow more rapidly. Prostitution business in Hat Yai was available in various types to respond to the needs of clients who were different. For example, Pa Sai brothels provided cheap sex services to respond to teenagers and men with low incomes. The wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater with middle-aged to older independent prostitutes responded to men in the same age group with low incomes while Mae Ri's brothel, an upper-class brothel, responded to men who were government officials, rich men and businessmen with high incomes.

Lives of prostitutes in Hat Yai before the tourism boom or before 1977 were changed during the decade 1957 due to two significant factors: the Suppression of Prostitution Act B.E. 2503, and the economic growth of Hat Yai. (1) The Suppression of Prostitution Act B.E. 2503 which illegalized prostitution was one factor. As a result, independent prostitutes who were the largest number of all prostitutes in Hat Yai had to move to one type of prostitution business places to be protected by the owner of the place. Consequently, some of them moved to one of the brothels such as Pa Sai brothels or women's houses of different grades while others moved to the wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater even though they had to risk being arrested by the police. Thus, prostitutes' lives became more difficult. (2) The other factor was the economic growth of Hat Yai as a result of its being a center for exports of tin and rubber to Malaysia and Singapore before becoming a commercial center for the lower Southern part of the country after 1952. The economic growth attracted a lot of people in areas around Hat Yai and nearby provinces to migrate and settle down, to work and to start business in Hat Yai. Therefore, the population of Hat Yai increased from 19,425 in 1949 to 38,162 in 1961 which doubled in only 12 years. Furthermore, there were many people who came to Hat Yai occasionally to do business such as businessmen, merchants, government officials, etc. The rapid increase of population promoted not only the economic growth of Hat Yai but also the growth of service business and prostitution business. This resulted in more varieties of prostitution business types and places in Hat Yai during 1957-1977.

The source of prostitutes was another significant change in the decade in addition to the change in lives of prostitutes in Hat Yai. Before 1957, prostitutes in Hat Yai were from large towns or port towns on the eastern coast where prostitution had existed for a long time such as Nakhon Si Thammarat and Songkhla. Most of the prostitutes were middle-aged, with little education and had family problems such as being divorced, abandoned by their husbands and having burdens of raising children. So, to raise their family, they had to sell sex services as independent prostitutes in small hotels, the wooden house adjacent to Siam movie theater, and as prostitutes under a brothel like Mae Ri's brothel or Pa Sai brothels. Nonetheless, during the period of 1957-1977, when the demand for prostitutes increased along with the rapid economic growth of Hat Yai, middle-aged prostitutes from the South were replaced by young women from the countryside of Northern provinces. These young women were told by *Sao Ram Wong* (folk dancers) who had been to Hat Yai with their troupes in the decade 1947 that Hat Yai was the most economically prosperous in the Southern part with electricity everywhere, many commercial buildings and a lot of shops selling many types of goods. Another reason why so many of them came to Hat Yai was that there were agents seeking young women from the countryside for the sex industry, the service industry, that was also growing rapidly as American military were stationed in Thailand

during the Vietnam War in the decade of 1957. That also contributed to the growth of prostitution business.

Regarding the relationship between prostitutes in Hat Yai and owners of prostitution business places, it was found to be entirely different from other places because the relationship was not always that between the oppressed and the oppressors. Therefore, the quality of life among prostitutes under upper-class houses or Grade A or B houses was better than that of others because the relationship was of a patronage system under which prostitutes were supporters of the brothel owners. Even though prostitutes used to be only tools for sexual outlets of their clients, when their clients were later changed to foreigners, there were opportunities for them to develop the relationship into marriage and family. This had happened to some prostitutes in Hat Yai.

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