PART I

Introduction

Figure 1.1 The transformations of schoolgirls' sexualities in modern Thai society

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the recovery of Thai economy, led by the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, has brought significant socio-economic improvements to both the provinces and the Thai capital in the late 2010s (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2009). Urban cultures and consumerism have spread from Bangkok to other regions of Thailand. In many ways, these urban cultures and consumerist lifestyles emerged or were invented in the provincial cities and towns throughout Thailand and were further defined and would evolve in their own unique ways (A. Cohen, 2006, 2009). In Chiang Mai, a famous tourist area of Thailand (and the hometown of the ousted prime minister), global flows of people, capital, and information have brought rapid changes and expansions into the city—physically, economically, and socially. Changes in city planning and urban space development in Chiang Mai have led to an increased number of its new residents, including foreign tourists who have come from around the world and immigrants, particularly from Burma, Laos, and southern China. This has lead to dramatic changes in city dweller's experiences, ways of living and thinking. This is especially true among young people who form and operate their own subcultural lifestyles (A. Cohen, 2009; Fongkaew, 2002; Michinobu, 2005). However, youth subculture lifestyles are often seen by the public as a form of social deviance, particularly when focusing on their sexualities and identity expressions in everyday life (Bucholtz, 2002; Laungaramsri, 2010; McRobbie & Garber, 1976; Willis, 1977). From time to time, Thai youth subculture lifestyles have been labeled by a mainstream discourse as a social disease, a psychologically abnormal development, as deviance, aggression, or even as mindless and immoral. Frequently, all forms of this deviance are

2

labeled as 'non-Thai' and this has led to the state's concerns about the ways Thai teenagers appear to challenge the moral order, Thai values, and traditions. Examples of activities seen as deviant include different ways of dressing, dancing, motorcycle riding, speaking, media consuming and having sex. In Thai society, in other words, 'unsuitable' sexual practices and expressions performed by the young, especially girls, are often seen as the enemy of the established order, leading the state to see a need to morally judge and regulate them (A. Cohen, 2006; Fongkaew, 1995, 2002; Fongkaew, Fongkaew, & Suchaxaya, 2007).

Throughout pre-and early modern Thai society, especially in northern Thailand, there was a strong belief in *phii pu njaa* – the ancestral spirits – who were inherited matrilineally and have been interpreted to function as a traditional sexual control mechanism among northern Thais (Mougne, 1984). The interaction between economic and demographic change have since impacted on these social structures and cultural beliefs and has resulted in a substantial transformation of traditional patterns and beliefs related to sexuality and gender. Several recent ethnographic studies in northern Thai society found out that it mothers found it impractical to teach their daughters about *phii pu njaa* and that the belief in these ancestor spirits has degraded and had no relevance in controlling their daughters' sexuality (Fongkaew, 1995; Michinobu, 2005; Muecke, 1981). Meanwhile, the emergence of urban middle class ideologies derived from the central Thailand began to assume an increasingly powerful influence in modern northern Thais' cultural lives and established the ground for the new social meanings and norms, including in the area of gender and sexuality. People became more and more exposed to new narratives from which they could shape, inform, or enrich their lives, which were integral to the process of constructing and deploying modern social meanings. As bearers of modernity, the Thai middle class have been involved in two interconnected process: the articulation and development of new ideas for consumerism and the progress of economic livelihoods, on the one hand, and conservative sexual norms influenced by Victorian values on the other. The middle class sought to define and control what they considered to be the appropriate relations between men and women as a sociological process of redefinition required to establish order through the creation of a new contemporary morality that was seen as fundamental to progress and prosperity. Through this process, the sexual double standard between men and women,

and in particular controls over female sexuality have become a central defining element in gender relations and identity across the social spectrum. Despite seeing benefits in female education, mainly as a status symbol and means to develop a broader cosmopolitan awareness, female identity, especially regarding unmarried women, remains closely bound up with the maintenance of virtue revolving for the most part around the role of motherhood and domesticity (Barme, 2006; Sornchai, 2004). Foucault (1977) refers to the body as a target of disciplinary forces; in consequence, the modern Thai nation-state has systematically worked towards achieving greater institutional and social control over the bodies of local northern Thai populations, in particular of women (Tanabe, 2002). This process involved constant patrolling and surveillance by the agencies of the nation-state – through families, schools, universities, and the mass media. Northern Thai girls' bodies thus were a focus of external powers to manipulate, shape, train, and punish to become docile so that they could be subjected, transformed, and improved for the ultimate formation of the hegemonic sexual identity. The ways young northern Thais express their sexual identities and experience their sexual activities have been regulated or suppressed by those modern state control systems (Foucault, 1977).

In northern Thailand today, several kinds of media, particularly those that are related to Thai popular culture, have become an integral part of young Thai's lifestyles. The increased exposure to global mass media and youth popular culture in Thailand is profound as young Thai embrace Western, Japanese and Korean popular music, series, films, dressing fashion, television shows, and other forms of popular culture (A. Cohen, 2006; Panritdam, 2011; Saisin, 2011; Siriyuvasak, 2002, 2008). In this context, the impact of global media and culture worries the state and this impact is seen as the enemy to Thai-ness. The Thai youth's consuming lifestyle is itself the intersection between local culture and the global capitalism. A common thinking in Thailand today is that stories the media conveys are mostly 'bad messages' that are powerfully transmitted to influence the young Thai audiences. Thai authorities, academics included, also tend to see what is disseminated and represented through the media in this way. On the other hand once could argue that control of the media is a means to maintain social order and the Thai identity in the age of globalization (Reynolds, 1991). The media and popular culture, therefore, are conceived by many ordinary Thais and the

4

state authorities as a powerful means to convey messages and a pedagogical tool to domesticate young people. Previous studies also showed that media and popular cultures play an important role in conveying gender roles and sexual representations to Thai teenagers, especially in Chiang Mai city. From television programs to popular magazines and other various forms of new media technologies, particularly social media, it is believed that media has a strong influence on how young northern Thais perceive, express and perform their sexual desires, love, intimacy, identities, and gender practices (Fongkaew, Wongpanarak, Fongkaew, & Lertmallikaporn, 2007).

In the age of globalization, Chiang Mai city today offers various opportunities of lifestyle for youth in northern Thailand. Northern teenagers, similarly to teenagers in other big cities, are now able to gain some authority over the everyday construction of their lives through engagement with the media, urban spaces, and consumer cultures. Even romantic love has become intimately tied to consumption, which is, in Chiang Mai city, explicitly displayed in the shopping malls and consuming areas. Dating practices are now determined by a growing commercial leisure industry as depicted in the media. Romantic dates usually entail trips to modern shopping complexes, eating or drinking at restaurants or cafes, watching films at movie cinemas, or hanging out at bars and nightclubs. These are social forms or new lifestyles that have been actively created and practiced by the teenagers. But they are often seen as social outrage which leads to moral panic, for example, the way Thai girls who danced topless on Silom street during the Songkran Festival in April 2011 were sued and punished (MCOT, 2011) or the Thai state's campaign on 'protecting Thai girl's virginity on the Valentine's day' (A. Cohen, 2006). Paradoxically, many young Thais actively seek to have sex on Valentine's Day as a way to express their love for their partners.

According to this perspective of youth behavior, most previous studies on Thai youth culture have emphasized and pursued an approach that tends to see the youngsters as victims of the commercial media and consumerism (Fongkaew, 1995, 2002; Fongkaew, Wongpanarak et al., 2007). While those studies tend to emphasize the powerful roles of the media and popular culture discussed above, this study focuses on Thai girls' sexualities that are practiced, experienced, and perceived by the girls themselves in their everyday life in Chiang Mai city. For my preliminary fieldwork, I deeply engaged by

5

approaching and going native with a group of girls from June 2009 to March 2010. Then, I applied ethnographic methods from March 2010 until April 2014. In this study, I began to focus on the girls' experiences and interpretations of media and popular culture as well as diverse sexual and cultural practices in their everyday routine within the structures of social power relation in the particular social settings. During this time period, I applied Michel de Certeau's idea of strategies and tactics by distinguishing two opposed forms of power in relation to practices (de Certeau, 1988). On one hand, there are 'strategies' of the Thai state that try to construct a desired sexual identity among schoolgirls. On the other hand, there are diverse 'tactics' of schoolgirls in everyday life to compromise, negotiate, and resist those strategies through everyday practices. With respect to young girl's 'ways of operating', I examined the 'tactics' the schoolgirls employed, often improvised on a daily basis, to deal with the dominating strategies imposed by the social institutions – focusing on families, school, universities and other related institutions. In doing so, this dissertation aims to find a better understanding of how media and popular culture are tactically utilized and appropriated by the northern Thai girls in a range of consuming activities and social practices in order to gain a certain level of sexual freedom within the structural constraint of sexual control in the urban setting of Chiang Mai city.

6

1.2 Research Questions

Mainstream youth studies in Thailand have approached the study of Thai youth from an adult perspective, which downplays the youth-centered experiences and activities and their cultural production of meanings and lifestyles (Bucholtz, 2002). In this study, however, I attempt to understand the northern Thai schoolgirl's sexual and cultural practices from their everyday experiences. This approach will describe how the girls make sense of, negotiate, and/or appropriate sexual domination mechanisms they encounter in their everyday life in urban Chiang Mai. Following de Certeau's approach of strategies and tactics, there are two main research questions of this study:

1. What are the 'strategies' of the social institutions—focusing on the families, school, and university systems—that try to construct a desired sexual identity among schoolgirls in the daily life?

2. What are the diverse 'tactics' of the schoolgirls in everyday life to compromise, negotiate, and resist those domination powers through everyday sexual and cultural practices?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

According to research questions, this study aims:

1. To explore the various 'strategies' of the social institutions, through the families, school, university systems and media that try to construct a desired sexual identity among schoolgirls in the daily life.

2. To examine the diverse 'tactics' of schoolgirls in everyday life to compromise, negotiate and resist those domination powers through their everyday sexual and cultural practices.

7

1.4 Literature Review

1.4.1 Media and Popular Culture

While there are now numerous institutions around the world participating in and reshaping the field of media and popular culture studies, the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) can justifiably claim to be the key institution in the history of the field. According to the works of Hoggart, Williams, and Hall during the 1960s, Hoggart's project of understanding the everyday 'live' cultures of particular classes was overtaken by interest in the mass media, which quickly came to dominate the Center's research and has provided it with its longest-running focus. The CCCS broke from the American communication research influence and with the empirical aspects of social science research. The center shifted its focus towards the analysis of the ideological function of the media. The media thus were defined as a 'major cultural and ideological force.' The result was to seriously take class as the foundation of youth culture (Turner, 1996). The newly emerging field of cultural studies focused primarily on youth cultural practices in late industrial urban British society. One of the most widely read studies emerged from CCCS was Willis's (1977) ethnography of a group of white working-class boys. Willis describes how these "lads" perpetuated their class position in the world of work by embracing an anti-school youth culture. This contrasted with the "ear'oles," who accepted the authority of school and the goals of schooling. This type of study focusing on the practices of groups understood as distinctive and separate from one another came to typify work in the Birmingham tradition. Thus Hebdige (1979) offers a semiotic interpretation of white British working-class styles, including the 'teddy boy, the mod, the skinhead, and the glam rocker', arguing that they are different responses to black culture and racial politics. These acts of semiotic resignification subvert the meanings assigned to the appropriated objects within the dominant culture, often in ways that challenge class arrangements. Both the lads investigated by Willis and the working-class youths described by Hebdige are therefore understood as a response to the class-based subject positions assigned to them and as carving out distinctive semiotic spaces for themselves, although this dimension is much more fully elaborated in Hebdige's work.

Regarding the field of media and popular culture studies, the outcome of CCCS was a concentration on the ideological 'affectivity' of the media. In 1973, Stuart Hall's *Encoding/Decoding* communication model was introduced and can be seen as the beginning of research into how audiences are active consumers rather than passive recipients. The initiative of Encoding/Decoding (Hall, 1997) became a turning point and a conclusive break with the dominant American communication models, with aesthetics, and with the notion of the audience as passive consumers of mass culture. In their place, Hall installed a new vocabulary of analysis and a new theory of cultural production and reception. Finally, over the second half of the 1980s, audience studies became the major influence on the theory and practice of CCCS. During 1970s and 1980s, ethnographic work was introduced to CCCS. Ethnography is a term used to describe a tradition of work in sociology and anthropology that provides techniques for researchers to enter to the studies of media and popular culture, participate in it, and observe it; and then describe the ways in which it makes sense for those within it. The work of Phil Cohen and Paul Willis provided the basis for the CCCS ethnographies of urban subculture. In 1982, an important moment in the development of ethnographic audience studies in the realm of CCCS was the study of Dorothy Hobson, *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera*. This study exploits a moment when the relations among producers, programmers, performers, programs and audiences were unusually clearly exposed. The researcher attended production meetings, rehearsals, and taping sessions, and talked to those involved about what she observed. However, she did not hesitate to draw conclusions about the consequences of the practices and ideologies she observed. As a result, the study provides an exemplary account of how the culture industries work, through is examination of the articulation among the broadcasting institutions, the production company, the program makers and the audiences—bringing the audiences into her academic world. The researcher watched television with her audience subjects in their own homes at the normal viewing times. Her research data came from interviews and observations made while watching episodes and from 'long, unconstructed conversations' she had with her subjects after the programs finished. The study's influence may not have been direct in all of the above instances, but it has been profound, not only in its revelation of the gaps in our understandings of the ways in

which popular texts and audiences are related, but also in its demonstration of the power of the method of ethnographic research (Turner, 1996).

Integrating the ideas of media and popular culture studies can reveal an actual relationship between schoolgirls who are subordinated in certain ways and the controlling social system. Analyzing media and popular culture consumption from the schoolgirls themselves who lack some of the privileges that social power provides, they are not passive victims. Instead, they are active consumers who are constantly resisting the media texts or cultural commodities produced by the dominant forces by giving them new meanings. Following de Certeau's idea of *strategies* and *tactics* mentioned above, Fiske further states that popular culture is made by the people at the interface between the products of the culture industries and everyday life. Popular culture is made by the people, not imposed upon them; it stems from within, from below, not from above. Popular culture is thus the art of making do with what the system provides(Fiske, 1989). In studying media and popular culture consumption, on one hand, popular culture does not exist because the dominant forces of production are too powerful; according to this view, people are powerless and passive which leads to a standardized and homogenized mass. On the other hand, the opposite view only emphasizes people are active as they attach their own meaning to the products they use. However, people can change these meanings, but they can never entirely escape these dominant forces. While they can never entirely escape dominant forces, they can resist them, which they do by transforming the original meanings. Understanding popular culture through the lenses of de Certeau's and Fiske's ideas, the way schoolgirls utilize media and popular culture should be understood as a site of struggle against the hegemonic power mechanisms imposed via family, school, university and other social institutions. While accepting the power of the forces of dominance, more attention should be diverted to the popular tactics by which these forces are coped with, are evaded or are resisted by the schoolgirls.

To understand popular culture consumption, in this dissertation, every cultural practice should be seen as a 'social phenomenon'. This study employs the audience ethnography (Moores, 1993) among the schoolgirls regarding their experience, interpretation, negotiation, or even resistance. This approach helps to highlight the variation in

interpretations among the schoolgirls. Hence, I found it useful to engage in an multi-sited ethnography which is concerned with 'going out to the place, coming back with information about how people live there, and making that information available to the professional community in practical form.' This multi-sited ethnographic study among schoolgirls is also grounded in the 'reality' of other's lives. The researcher's task is 'to go into the field' and, by ways of observation and interview, to attempt to describe and interpret the practices of the subjects in the cultural context, on the basis of his or her first-hand observation of day-to-day activities (Fiske, 1989; Hinviman, 1999; Marcus, 1995).

1.4.2 Youth Gender & Sexuality

Previous studies of youth culture have tended to see young people gender and sexuality as victims of modernity, urbanization and consumerism while failing to give attention to their individual agencies; the era of global capitalism that led to rapid economic and social transformation in modern society, youth gender and sexual agencies become most apparent through the appropriation, rejection, or reproduction of notions of sexuality and romance. The progression of modern capitalist and democratic societies has unavoidably led to the development of the individual's self. Therefore, the notion of romantic love for personal fulfillment has played more significant role in people's life. In other words, contemporary notions about intimacy, love, sexuality, and self are direct consequences of social transformation led by modernity (Boonmongkon & Jantong, 2008; Bucholtz, 2002; Marddent, 2007; Michinobu, 2005; Thaweesit, 2000). Giddens (1992) equates the final stage of processes of female sexual emancipation with sexual democracy—a new social order in which sexuality is expressed without compulsion or dependency, representative of total equality between genders. He argues that sexual emancipation can be the medium of a wide-ranging emotional reorganization of social life and cultural norms of relationship behaviors. As the Enlightenment brought about modern society, the institution of marriage was allowed to shift from an economic or purely functional union to one associated with freedom of choice. Romantic love then both broke from and embraced sexuality and introduced the role of the self and the question of intimacy. Romantic love introduced the idea of a sexual or romantic narrative into an individual's life—a formula which radically extended the reflexivity of

11

sublime love. The telling of a story is thus one of the meanings of 'romance', but this story now became individualized, inserting self and other into a personal narrative that had no particular reference to wider social processes. Moreover, the complex of ideas associated with romantic love was for the first time associated with the concept of 'freedom'. The conditions of democracy in the public sphere bear very directly upon the democratizing of personal relationships, thus the guiding principle is clearly respect for the independent views and personal traits of the other. Therefore, the democratizing of personal relationships expressed a major difference between traditional and the present-day forms of intimacy (Giddens, 1992). Furthermore, the material force of globalization plays a significant role in restructuring young women in negotiating gender and sexuality roles. They become 'modern' women whose life patterns, aspirations, desires, and lifestyles are at odds with, and often represent a radical break from, the past. Their ways of life represents emancipatory movements toward personal autonomy. However, what can appear as a source of greater personal autonomy can also seen as a new form of subjugation. While the global flow of capital and culture liberates young women from the authority of the patriarchal family, they increasingly come to assert their agency through consumption. And despite the fact that young women are still governed by institutionalized hegemony regarding gender and sexuality that restrict them, they simultaneously suggest that women can no longer afford to take the prescriptions of female gender and sexuality for granted or that they accept them uncritically. Rather, they challenge and dispute authoritative discourses which constrain them as women (Thaweesit, 2000). In terms of romance, Thai girls in the teenage years are able to control their sexuality by redefining the meaning of their love and having a 'boy/girl-friend' in their own way, which stands in contrast to adults' meaning. Female youth in modern society have liberal ideas about being active in their sexuality as a commodity links beauty with power. Moreover, girls can control their sexuality under the sexuality discourse of the modest girl and that of taboo/danger which shows that these teenagers have diverse thoughts and behaviors on various discourses in society where traditional discourses on sexuality as taboo are strong and are reproduced continuously by families and schools (Sornchai 2004). Moreover, romance and courting practices in modern society take place in an urban sphere of conspicuous consumption. Many of young northern Thai females deliberately attract male attention by wearing low-waisted stretch

denim jeans, revealing spaghetti strap tops, and sexy high heels, all of which are now commonplace among the new generation of Thai females aiming to establish one's place in the world and shape a sense of identity (A. Cohen, 2006). Female youth can display their bodies and express their sexuality which occurs within contesting discourses on femininity and feminine sexuality that are shaped by the state, consumer values, and the media as well as by young women's individualized discourses in patriarchal society (Boonmongkon & Jantong, 2008).

Therefore, the conventional attitude toward youth sexuality labels youth as being 'immoral' and 'deviant' and as challenging moral standards and traditional Thai values. For understanding most contemporary Thai youth, these conservative perspectives are out-of-date and clearly influenced by imaginary, nostalgic, and essentialist values idealized in nationalist ideologies which hold limited meaning in everyday life (Bucholtz, 2002; A. Cohen, 2006, 2009). Moreover, in order to understand the dominant discourses of female sexuality mediated through various powerful social institutions, an individual's choice and judgment should also be closely examined. Young women are able to assert their 'agencies' and find ways they can negotiate and challenge traditional forms of femininity and representations of 'being a good woman' that they encounter in their day-to-day lives (Michinobu, 2005; Thaweesit, 2000; Van Fleet, 1998). To understand female youth sexuality in modern society, the anthropological approach has been primarily concerned with how the researcher can experience the ways female youth, as cultural agents, actively construct their sexual identity and express their sexual selves within diverse social contexts and dominant sexual discourses in their everyday life, particularly through symbolic boundaries, consumption, social spaces, and subculture capital. (Boonmongkon & Jantong, 2008; Bucholtz, 2002).

13

1.4.3 Youth Culture

So far, the developmental model of childhood has been challenged by anthropological studies of youth (Bucholtz, 2002; A. Cohen, 2006, 2009). The most prominent and controversial anthropological research involving childhood in a cross-cultural context involves the initial work of Margaret Mead in *Coming of Age in Samoa* (Mead, 1949). Mead rejected traditional notions, based on a model of development, that the 'storm and stress' encountered by youth is universal and biologically determined. Other cross-cultural studies of youth following Mead similarly demonstrated that the changes young people experienced during their adolescence period were not universal, but were socially and culturally constructed. However, these studies were later criticized for focusing on initiation ceremonies, sexual practices, and kinship structures that highlighted adolescence as a life stage. Such studies focused on children's transition into adulthood whilst overlooking youth cultural production and youth-centered interaction (A. Cohen, 2006). During the first half of the twentieth century in the United States, many studies on youth culture occurred which were an outgrowth of criminology and delinquency studies within sociology; the concern was not with youth directly so much as with deviant subcultures that were seen as sources of crime. This perspective had a significant impact on the work that is often identified as the foundation of youth culture studies that turned their focus primarily on ethnography and a semiotic interpretation of a group of white working-class boys' cultural practices and styles in late industrial urban British society (Hebdige, 1979; Willis, 1977). In 1976 the study of youth culture was challenged by Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, who questioned why girls seemed to be invisible in the research reports. They asked, 'are girls… really not active or represented in youth subculture? or has something in the way this research is done rendered them invisible?,' in order to find out that whether or not girls are active but often in different ways from boys (McRobbie & Garber, 1976). The introduction of gender has thus broadened the focus of cultural studies work on youth subculture. For example, McRobbie has introduced dance into cultural studies. She claimed that when dance found its way into accounts of working-class culture, it had tended to be either derided as trivial or else taken as a sign of moral degeneration. According to McRobbie, dance is a form of artistic practice as well as a social practice, a leisure activity, a ritual form of sexuality, a method of exercise, and a means of communication, a way of

14

speaking through the body. Dance for girls represents a public extension of the private culture of femininity that takes place outside the worried gaze of the moral guardians and indoors in the protected space of the home. Moreover, dance offers 'the opportunity for fantasy'. The dancer can retain some degree of anonymity or absorption, blotting-out of the self, a suspension of the real, daylight consciousness, and an aura of dream-like self-reflection. In sum, the studies of youth culture were developed around the recognition that all young people are active consumers of culture and are not simply passive cultural dupes (Bucholtz, 2002).

Most studies of Thai youth still approach youth from the perspective of adulthood, downplaying youth-centered interaction, and cultural production. Rather, identity is agentive, flexible, and ever-changing—but no more for youth than for people of any age. Therefore, the academic trend has expanded the range of anthropological inquiry, and as a result the field has seen much more investigation of youth cultural practice. Recently, it has become clear that anthropology is particularly well situated to offer an account of how young people around the world produce and negotiate cultural forms (Bucholtz, 2002; Wulff, 1995). Where most studies of youth in Thailand generally concentrate on how bodies and minds are shaped for the future adult, the ethnographic study of youth emphasizes the here-and-now of young people's experience, the social and cultural practices through which they shape their worlds. Sociological and anthropological studies about youth culture in Thailand remain relatively limited; most existing studies on young people label youth as being 'immoral' and 'deviant' due to their media and popular culture consumption, sexual risky behavior, drugs, gang involvement, violence, aggressive behaviors, etc. However, there were some anthropological studies which pay more attention to diverse identity constructions and spatial meanings as part of youth cultural experiences; these studies try to rethink youth culture as something independent from mainstream culture and society (Laungaramsri, 2010; Tovijakchaikul, 2008). These ethnographic studies of youth culture in Thailand concern important issues that highlight the youth capability as cultural agents namely: "youth identity" which explores the emergence of various youth sub-cultural groups and illustrates how these young people construct an identity through various means such as symbolic boundaries, consumption, and cultural practices (A. Cohen, 2006); "youth media and popular culture consumption" which focuses upon how media and popular

15

culture consumption is central to the everyday life of youth and is systematically utilized in the (re)production of their identity, especially those who are among the working and middle-class in Thailand (Panritdam, 2011; Saisin, 2011; Siriyuvasak, 2002); and "youth gender and sexuality" which illustrates how modernization and globalization play a significant role in restructuring young people's gender and sexuality and the ways those young people negotiate their gender and sexual subjectivities in the light of the competing and perplexing dominant sexual discourses in Thai society (Boonmongkon & Jantong, 2008; Michinobu, 2005; Sornchai, 2004; Thaweesit, 2000).

Since psychological models of childhood development and socialization theories have dominated most academic studies on youth culture, there has been a tendency to portray youth, especially female, as incomplete social actors and fail to give attention to the agency of young people (Amit-Talai, 1995; Bucholtz, 2002; A. Cohen, 2009). The anthological studies of youth culture should, therefore, fill the knowledge gap by focusing on youth cultural production in which the sexual selves can emerge. Moreover, anthropological studies should contribute to new approaches of understanding female youth sexuality by giving attention to them as cultural agents. In the acts of appropriation, negotiation and rejection against hegemonic powers operated by social institutions through their media and popular culture consumption in everyday life in the context of northern Chiang Mai City, this study closely investigates the way their agencies and sexual selves becomes evolved. Therefore, female youth must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own lives, the lives of those around them, and of the societies in which they live.

16

1.5 Conceptual Framework: Thai State's Strategies and Schoolgirls' Tactics

As de Certeau (1984) notes that while ordinary people are constrained by a dominant cultural order, they can adapt it to their own ends. By doing an anthropological study of northern Thai youth's sexual and cultural practice, giving attention to female youth agency has illuminated the ways their sexual identity formation evolves. Simultaneously, this creatively combines the elements of local culture and global capitalism in the age of transnationalism (Bucholtz, 2002). Chiang Mai City has various shopping malls, movie theaters, nightlife venues, or fashion outlets through which young people can 'make use' of these places and cultural commodities to express their sexual selves and practice in everyday life. In nightclubs, young couples can be found expressing their intimacy with each other. Or at the shopping malls in the city teenage lovers date, hold hands, spend time together to shop, dine, drink, or watch movies to evade from being monitored by their teachers or parents. Moreover, the way in which they dress, the trends of fashion they follow, they adapt and remake into their own style depending on their budget and what is commercially available, not by strictly following the trend of global fashion. Their agencies obviously emerge through the way they consume any media, popular culture, or cultural commodity.

In contrast to the old paradigm of youth studies which approached young people as almost entirely passive, and are 'subjected' to the ideological works of media industry, the anthropology of youth leads me to reverse the question which has long been influential in media studies, on 'what young people do with the media' instead of 'what the media do to young people' (Moores, 1993). In terms of popular culture, Fiske notes that a commodity must bear the interest of the people. Popular culture is not merely consumption. It is the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures of each individual within a particular social system. In other words, popular culture is necessarily the art of making do with what is available (Fiske, 1989). Therefore, the way to understand popular culture as 'agency' provides a great contribution to this dissertation. It puts more importance on the interpretation of youth within particular power relations and understands media and popular culture consumption as a site of struggle between schoolgirls against the dominant sexual controls operated by various social institutions. According to this perspective, I would

gain deeper understandings of teenage girls' agencies and the ways they struggle for their sexual autonomy in the context of contemporary northern Thai society.

The theoretical discussion stated above enables me to aim this study to, on one hand, explore the various 'strategies' of the Thai state. Here, I focus on the context of the school, universities, families, and related social institutions that are trying to construct a desired sexual identity among schoolgirls in daily life. On the other hand, the study examines the schoolgirl's diverse 'tactics' in everyday life to compromise, negotiate, and resist those domination powers through consuming activities of media and popular culture practiced in the globalizing urban Chiang Mai context. The multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995) helps me investigate the strategies of social institutions that impose themselves or try to influence schoolgirl's sexual identity formation and expression; meanwhile, the audience ethnography of media and popular culture consumption (Moores, 1993) contributes to illuminate the tactics that are employed by the girls themselves, within diverse contexts, in appropriating, negotiating, or contesting such powerful discourses and social regulations (de Certeau, 1988; Fiske, 1989; Friske, 1989). Through this study, northern Thai girl's 'negotiating sexualities' in Chiang Mai City which are manifested through their popular culture consumption, sexual practice, and identity expression in everyday life, have been explored, which, I argue, have recently emerged and developed among the young Thais. The analysis supporting the study arguments is guided by the following conceptual framework:
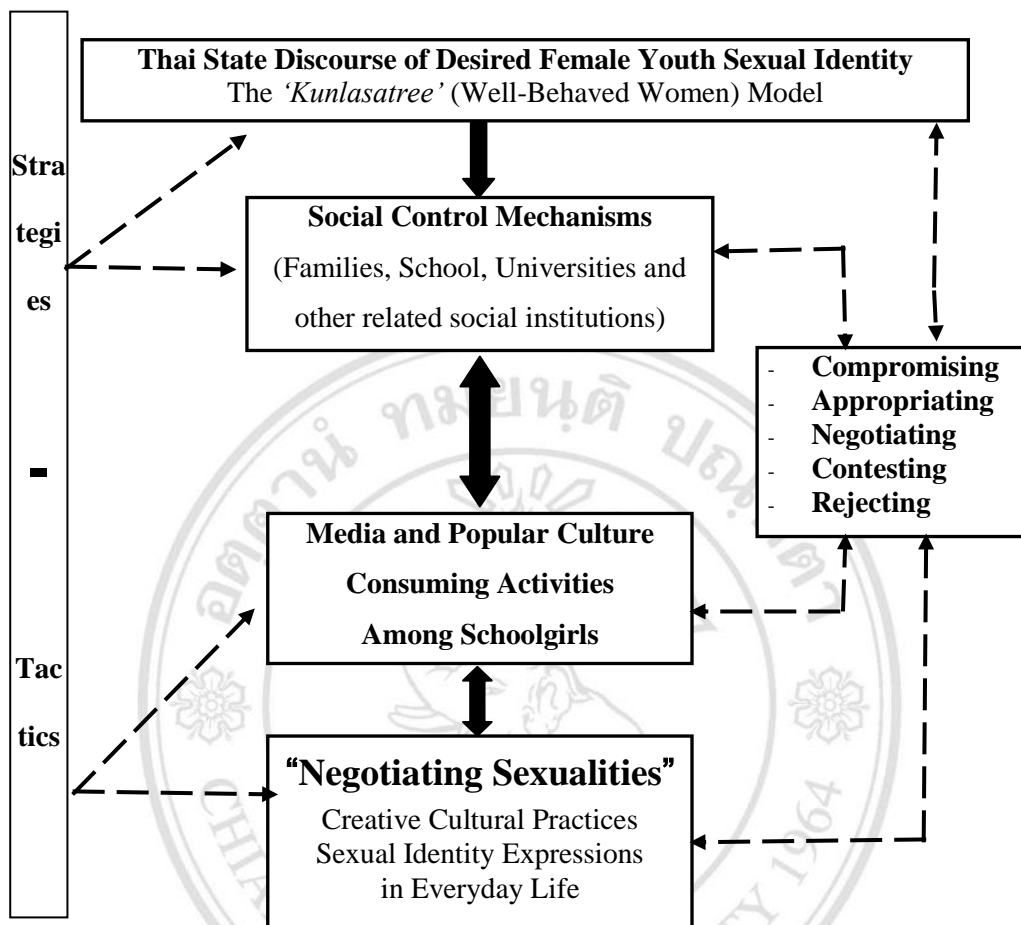
18

Figure 1.2 The conceptual framework for analyzing strategies to influence sexual identity formation and expression of female youth by the Thai state and schoolgirls' tactics to respond to those dominate social control mechanisms

19

1.6 Methodologies, Ethnographic Sites and Fieldwork Process

1.6.1 Data Collection Techniques

From my experience during preliminary fieldwork, I established good rapport with a group of schoolgirls in a state school and their transitions to various universities in Chiang Mai city. According to George E. Marcus, the era of transnationalism, globalization, and post-colonialization have provided ideas and concepts for the emergence of multi-sited ethnography that defines its objects of study through several different modes or techniques. Media studies have been one important arena in which multi-sited ethnographic research has emerged (Marcus, 1995). Therefore, I pursued my study using participant observation and experiencing media and popular culture consuming activities in daily life by following schoolgirls to different places and social settings such as in a school, universities, shopping malls, cafés, entertainment venues, etc. In addition, the techniques of in-depth interviews, personal narratives, and life stories were also applied to collect ethnographic data. All of these research methods enabled me to investigate and understand a complicated intersection between northern Thai girls' media and popular culture consumption and their sexual identity construction and expression under various conventional sexual control mechanisms in the daily life of globalizing Chiang Mai City.

Firstly, I employed participant observation techniques, which enabled me to accurately understand what was going on in the field and let me make the strong statements about schoolgirls' everyday media and popular culture consumption culture. I was able to gain an understanding of the way they experience, appropriate, negotiate, contest, or reject conventional sexual discourse through social regulations, as reflected through their cultural practices, sexual identity expressions, and self-presentations in their daily life. However, in order to profoundly understand what was going on in the field, I put the first priority in giving great attention to youth's perspectives and their agencies in the particular contexts. Whenever I went to a setting and observed, I tried to capture the 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) such as the schoolgirls' cultural practices, sexual behaviors, or the environment around the sites. I tried to capture 'what is going on' in their lives. Then, I would ask the girls or other related persons about what I saw and the

motivations for their actions. Only the ethnographer's eye, diaries, and brain are not enough (Panyagaew, 2006); in the present time technological advancements allowed me a wide range of choices to implement various field note styles. I could use MP3 recorders to record during informal conversations and in-depth interviews. I could also use my smart phone and iPad to immediately capture both still and motion pictures during my fieldwork. I could download web-pages or video clips that were frequently viewed by young people. I also could gather data from chatting with them in chatting applications, and use the chatting records for future reference.

After going to the field and creating tight relationships with female youth for a while, schoolgirls and other related persons such as their boyfriends, girlfriends, other peers, teachers, and parents were invited to be in-depth interviewed. Each party emphasized particular topics in order to gain deeper information regarding issues such as their perceptions and attitudes towards sexual representations in media or their experiences towards social regulations. An interview guideline was developed based on data gathered from doing ethnographic fieldwork.

In order to understand youth agency in the context of Chiang Mai city, the narrative method proved very helpful. Life stories of the girls provided me with a tale of the self, their story regarding what it means to be "me." This method is suitable for this study, which stress young people's subjectivities and their creation of meaning—especially as it is related to their sexual and gender identities. Life story as a method offered a public construction of self that could be encountered without invasive probing. Moreover, throughout an implementation of the narrative method, youths were acknowledged as 'narrators,' and 'storytellers,' and I myself as a 'reader,' 'listener,' and 'interpreter' because the stories are indeed told by a particular individual aiming to draw attention to the vantage point of situatedness and subjectivity from which the stories are told. It also simultaneously provides entrées into the prevailing specific discursive system that shape youth individual subjectivities (Costa & Matzner, 2007; Sornchai, 2004).

Lastly, various interpretations of media popular consumed among the girls have been understood as their attempts to chart the sense that media consumers make do of the media text and communication technology in everyday life. The audience ethnography equipped to map out the media's varied uses and meanings for particular social subjects

21

in a particular cultural context – the diversity and dynamics of media reception and interpretation. By doing this, the potential for giving voices to everyday interpretation 'from below' was stressed (Moores, 1993); we thus were able to disclose the negotiating meanings of the schoolgirls which reflected their views regarding hegemonic controlling power in patriarchal Thai society.

1.6.2 Doing a Multi-Sited Ethnography: Ethnographic Sites

The fieldwork of this study took place among a group of northern Thai girls while they were in high school and through their transitions to various universities. During school time, most of them lived with their families in the urban and peri-urban areas of Chiang Mai, where many real estate projects, or Ban Jad San, are situated. When they continued at the university level, most of them chose stay in dormitories—both in and out of the university compounds—during the course of their study. During leisure times, various places were visited to get drunk, eat, meet friends, etc, in order to explore and express sexual subjectivities. In the era of communication technology advancement, cyber space and social media provided them with the platforms beyond the control of conventional social regulations.

The first ethnographic sites of the study were educational sites consisting of a public school and universities in Chiang Mai. I started approaching research participants while they were studying in high school and followed them as they continued their studies in various universities in Chiang Mai. According to many youth studies, school and university are the sites to be selected in this type of study (Fongkaew, Fongkaew et al., 2007). A majority of Thai youth, including in Chiang Mai, spend most of their time studying and spending in the school. According to the Thai state compulsory educational system, all Thai citizens must enter school from when they are 6 or 7 years old. And this schooling takes until they reach the age of 18, after which they can then continue their study at the university level. The school site I selected was a state-run school located in the city of Chiang Mai. This school was one of the schools in Chiang Mai that became well-known—apart from its excellent education quality—for its student fostering system and student control mechanisms.

Domestic sites, which consisted of homes (while research participants were in high school) and dormitories (after their transitions to universities) were also the main ethnographic sites of this study. The group of schoolgirls I followed during my fieldwork spent most of their off-school time watching TV, chatting on the online social networks such as Facebook and chatting applications. Therefore, both their homes and dormitories became significant sites to be closely explored. Apart from their media and popular culture consumption in the domestic contexts, their family background, life stories, and other cultural and sexual practices in these private sites were investigated. Family rules and parent regulations, particularly on the opposite sex relation, were interviewed and monitored.

Many sites in Chiang Mai city were also found to be this girl group's favorite places where they spent their leisure times, to shop, to eat, and to see friends and their loves. These places included shopping malls, coffee shops, nightlife spots, and other entertainment venues. These places are very important since various ranges of sexual identity expression and cultural practices were observed. I found that schoolgirls performed distinctive cultural practices in different places. As discussed above, I tended to see such different cultural practices as their 'tactics' to negotiate or contest conventional sexual discourse and social regulations in a context of northern Thai consumer society.

The youth of Thai middle-class families in the city tended to spend a large part of their time using social media and the Internet (Fongkaew, Wongpanarak et al., 2007). Such leisure activities became a central part of their learning experience and a means to escape the social disciplinary practices. The spread of new media technologies and its uses, especially smart phone and Internet usage in Thailand, has profoundly altered young Thai people's perceptions of and their interactions with the world. The research participants' experiences of space and time in the information age have been significantly different from previous generations. New media technologies have played crucial roles in these teenage girl's daily lives, particularly in their sexual relations and expressions. They had their own Facebook accounts— some of them had several accounts—as well as chatted with their networks via social media and chatting applications. These online spaces thus allowed them to connect to other friends beyond

23

Chiang Mai or other physical boundaries in their daily life. It also enabled them to establish their own secret and public communities. In the online space, they could share ideas, opinion, and information with one another. There were platforms for them to create their desired sexual identities as well as a freedom space to express their sexual subjectivities. This online space, therefore, was another significant site that was closely followed and investigated in this study.

In order to argue any view of audience as passive, this dissertation is concerned on the schoolgirls' television series viewing practices and their various interpretations to highlight them as the productivity and negotiating of consumption. During fieldwork, positioning myself as a fellow fan of the television series, I involved with the research participants' discussions in social media and informal conversation in a daily basis in order to understand their viewing pleasures and interpretations at that particular moment in which television series texts were actively appropriated and negotiated as the schoolgirls come into contact with the everyday practices under the hegemonic control power of conventional sexual discourse in Thai society.

1.6.3 Fieldwork Process: Getting Involved with Research Participants and Related Persons

As discussed above, I first began my fieldwork in one public school located in an urban area. After submitting an official letter from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Chiang Mai University to the school administration, approval was obtained and preliminary fieldwork was carried out from June 2009 to March 2010. The ethnographic method was conducted during the period April 2010 to April 2014, when the research participants were in their last year of high school and transitioning to various universities.

Ethnography is both a process and a product; although it is often time-consuming, challenging, and can be difficult, the outcome of such work has proven its worth and benefit. In revealing private lives and telling others' stories, ethnographers often face ethical dilemmas and moral choices that cannot be easily resolved with general ethical guidelines. It is very important for ethnographers to adapt their data collection methods and presentations to the vulnerability of the researched. Ethnographers undertaking

24

studies on sensitive or taboo topics should always make effort to fulfill their social responsibilities in fieldwork interactions, protecting the vulnerable from further stigmatization or marginalization (Li, 2008). Clifford (1986 p.6-7) states that ethnography is inherently a process of obtaining 'partial truths'. The making of ethnography is artisanal, tied to the worldly work of writing and translating the reality of others. Purportedly irrelevant personal or historical circumstances need to be excluded as one cannot tell all (Clifford, 1986). Put in this way, ethnographic fieldwork in itself is a problematic process, and naturally implies a subjectivist methodology. Its process and experience thus have to be reflexively shown in written works which themselves reveal the ways in which 'social reality' has been investigated, used and interpreted by authors. This process has to be opened for its readers to examine, debate, and scrutinize, epistemologically and ethnographically (Panyagaew, 2006).

In addition to participant observation, informal conversations and in-depth interviews were also conducted among research participants and other relevant persons. All in-depth interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. In order to conduct the study following ethical principles, the consent to the fieldwork was obtained from the school director, school administration board members, teachers, and all participants and their parents after the purpose and process of the study were explained to them. All research participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonymous were assigned instead of their real names. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from participating in this study at any moment without consequence.

During the preliminary fieldwork period, I served as a volunteer teacher for one academic year. I was allowed from the school administrative to initiate a class namely *"Let's have fun with media and popular culture"* on Friday afternoon. Thirty students grades 10-11, twenty-eight females and two males, enrolled in this class. Then, all students were broken down into seven groups; each group was assigned to share a particular genre of media or popular culture in which they were interested. This class was held in a school theatre room where was fully equipped with modern entertainment facilities. Every Friday afternoon, several kinds of media (movies, music videos, magazines, concerts, etc) were presented by each responsible group of students. I found

25

that the students were really enthusiastic with this class because it was rather different to other academic classes they had experienced at school.

Doing preliminary fieldwork resulted in a unique chance to observe the school environment from the inside and to create a good rapport with fellow teachers and other relevant actors such as school security personnel, members of Parent and Teacher Association (PTA), and members of the Volunteer Student Inspectors (VSI) team. At the end of this period, a group of thirteen schoolgirls who had been enrolled in my class volunteered to be research participants for the consequent study. They were a group of close friends named 'The Group' (anonymous). Most of them, nine out of thirteen, were studying in the same Japanese language class. Two were studying mathematics and the other two members were studying science and Chinese language respectively. This group of friends had become very close to each other because they all came in at a later stage, transferring from other secondary schools. Only one member, Nancy, had studied at the current school since the beginning of the secondary level. All of them met each other during the preparation courses before officially entering grade 10 in this school.

After the preliminary fieldwork was done and the research participants were identified, I started employing the method of participant observation. I realized just how strong the power relation between teacher and students is in Thai society. I therefore had to transform my status from outsider to insider by shifting positions from their teacher to become a member of the girl's social group. One critical transitional event with research participants was spending time with them at a department store during first day of the school vacation. Due to the school regulations that forbade students to have ear piercings or wear earrings in school, research participants thus went to earring shops in department stores to have new ear piercings at the beginning of three-month summer school vacation so that their piercings would be healed before the following semester. While observing the girls shopped for earrings and having their ears pierced, some of them had more than five or six piercings on one ear. I decided to join, and had six ear piercings in a row, two piercings on the right side and four on the left. This act served to symbolically abandon my former role as their teacher. After that, I went out at nightlife spots to dance, drink and get drunk with them regularly, partly aiming to establish a sense of becoming a member of the group. Having two younger sisters the same age as

26

research participants gave me some familiarity with the specialized language, music, lifestyle, fashion, and other trends of this distinct group. As a result, instead of calling me teacher as they had previously done, the group members started calling me 'mommy' (*khun mae*) and allowed me to accompany them to several places outside school settings. When I went out with the group to a nightclub for the first time, I had one female research assistant who was a graduate student with me, since in certain spaces only females were allowed to enter, especially female restrooms. But the fact that I was openly gay and relatively young (early thirties) provided an advantage in gaining access to the lives of these girls. Since then, I gained the privilege of entering into those private spaces. No longer using a research assistant, the girls were very happy to let me accompanying them to the female restrooms because I could help them out with dressing or with make-up. Soon I was invited to join other 'private' spaces such as their bedrooms, dormitories, and even private parties. Another important space I was also included in was their social media 'secret groups,' where they shared confidential stories, sexual fantasies, and sexual experiences seen exclusively by group members. I was also introduced to their boyfriends and girlfriends, who were sometimes jokingly introduced to me as my sons or daughters in-law. Since I involved myself with this group of female youth, I slowly gained an understanding of their lifestyle, media and popular culture consumption, as well as their sexual practices in various ways. Applying diverse research techniques and becoming an insider were helpful in observing and understanding what was going on within the group.

As this study also tried to explore the various control mechanisms operated by families and educational institutions in constructing and imposing a desired sexual/gender identity among schoolgirls, I accompanied them to their homes and introduced myself to their parents. I tried to immerse myself into their families. At first, I merely offered to drive the girls back home after school. After a while, I facilitated good rapport with their parents. I was regularly invited to join dinners, parties, and other family activities. Sometimes I helped the girls do their homework or tutored them in English at their places. Having been their teacher and a Ph.D. student—regarded by parents an ideal education status they wished their daughters would reach—provided me with advantages to involve myself in research participant's families; parents welcomed and trusted me in my association and friendship with their daughters. Most of the parents

27

asked me to visit their places more often to provide guidance to their children about how to receive a scholarship to study at the Ph.D. level like I had done myself. Some parents said that they wished that I would be an inspiration for their daughters to be successful in studying.

Most families lived not very far from my home. While conducting fieldwork, I was able to visit and attend activities with some research participants more often than others. Being openly gay, parents sometimes semi-jokingly referred to me as an 'older sister' of their daughters, as Nancy's mother said: *"I am worried when Nancy goes out with other people—especially with guys—but I'm totally fine if she goes out with you."* Consequently, when research participants planned to go out with their friends, they usually told their parents that they would go out with me. Most of time, they called or sent me message in advance asking me to tell their parents that they were out with me in case their parents would call me to verify this. On the way back from hanging out at night with their friends or their boyfriends, they would ask me to drive them back home so that their parents would not be mad at them. In a way, they used their involvement in my Ph.D. research as a tactic in reconciling their need for freedom with the expectations and regulations of their parents.

Having been involved with research participants for years, some parents regarded me as one of their family members at a certain level. Once in the middle of my fieldwork, Nancy's family was facing a conflict between the father and mother. I was the one who they confided with to share the problems they had been facing, especially Nancy's mother. When they finally divorced, she asked me in tears to take care of Nancy instead of her because she was planning to move out and let Nancy stay with the father. She was afraid that Nancy, and especially her study results, would be negatively affected by their decision to divorce.

While doing my fieldwork, the multiple ways I positioned myself with particular groups of research participants was the main factor to obtain trust and cooperation from each research participant. When I first began my fieldwork in the school, I asked the school for cooperation and I was uncertain how to position myself vis a vis the other teachers. I approached the school administrative office wearing long hair, a t-shirt, and jeans. This entrance was unsuccessful because the officers and teachers in the office did not

28

welcome me due to my 'unofficial' appearance. One administrative level teacher talked to me in an obviously impolite tone and manner that: *"Doing research in the school should be officially approved by the school administrative board because the school administrative data is confidential. Only the responsible officials and those who were officially approved by the school administrative board are allowed to access this kind of information"* and then I was asked to leave the office. She also told the school security of keep an eye on me. After this experience, I reflected on the way in which I had approached the school and what I should have done better in order to gain their trust. I asked the Faculty of Social Sciences of Chiang Mai University to issue me an official letter introducing me as a Ph.D. student and asking for the school's permission to conduct my research project in the school for two years. Before reentering the school administrative office, I had my hair cut and dressed up to look more 'official' than the previous time. Instead of approaching the school administrators by myself, I asked one teacher who knew my background to introduce me to the school administrative board. While meeting with school administrative board members, I was officially introduced by this teacher who confirmed with the other people presented that I was indeed a Ph.D. student from Chiang Mai University and that I was about to conduct my Ph.D. dissertation on the sexuality of female teenagers in urban Chiang Mai, and that I was there to ask permission to pursue my research project in the school. In a completely different manner compared to the a previous time we had met, the school administrative board member—the same one who had denied me at a previous time—talked to me in a respectful manner and expressed willingness to allow me to conduct my research project in the school, calling me 'Doctor to be' *(waa tii Doctor)* in an attempt to express her acknowledgment of me as a significant person. Through this endorsement of the school administrative board, I gained access to any school information such as confidential data concerning the student monitoring system that contained pictures recorded from school surveillance cameras. The school authorities allowed me to invite related persons to be interviewed, ranging from school administrative, teachers, Volunteer Student Inspectors (VSI) team members, a chairperson of Parents and Teachers Association (PTA), and school security guards. Being a Ph.D. student and wearing professional clothes also positively contributed to establishing good

29

relationships with the teachers so that I could approach and ask for their cooperation to observe their classes, have informal discussions, or have in-depth interviews.

After successfully approaching the teachers, however, I found out that the 'official' identity I had obtained while engaging with school administrative board members and teachers unintentionally brought about a negative effect while approaching youth research participants. As stated above, I served as a volunteer teacher for one academic year and I was responsible for a multi-media class on Friday afternoon. During the introduction class in the first week of semester, I gave the students an academic form of lecture about the history of British cultural studies and Stuart Hall's theory of encoding/decoding. I noticed that many students felt asleep and expressed boredom while I was teaching. Eventually, twenty-two students withdrew from my class. While signing the withdrawal forms for them, I randomly asked some of them the reasons for withdrawing from the class. As they were talking to a teacher, most of them tried to answer in a compromised way that my class was not their style or they wanted to enroll in other classes with their friends. However, a few of them put it bluntly that when they saw the class name for the first time they thought that it would be fun, but that it turned out to be a boring class with full of academic content and theories. After that significant failure, I worked on dramatically altering my teaching style. I abandoned most academic content and theory. Instead, I asked permission from the school to teach the class in the school's 'mini-theatre room', which was fully equipped with modern entertainment and communication facilities. With no more boring lectures, I let students share with their friends their favorite media and popular culture. It turned out to be a very fun class. Each week, movies, music videos, magazines, concerts, and television series were displayed that fostered lively discussion. In some weeks, the whole class would go out to sing karaoke together at a karaoke bar at a nearby department store.

Since I was conducting a multi-sited ethnographic study, I followed my research participants to various places outside school. At a later stage I decided I would have to quit my teacher position if I wanted to become a real member of their social group. I realized that if I followed the girl group in their particular places outside school and had to associate with other teenage groups, the 'teacher-like' personality I was occupying at that time would prevent me from getting fully involved with them. As stated above, the

30

critical rite of passage for me to transform my status from their teacher to a member of their group was the way I had six ear piercings in a row, showing them that I was abandoning my teacher status, and was hoping and willing to become a part of their group. Besides ear piercings, there were several other social and cultural practices that I had to learn and employ to gradually gain the trust from my thirteen research participants. I had to learn a new dress code, how to act appropriately with the group while accompanying them to certain places, such as the right places to sit, what to drink, and the way to dance along with the group in nightclubs. I learned the ways they listened to their favorite kinds of music, their specialized slangs and coded language, and specific gestures that they used, which could be understood exclusively by the members of the group.

As discussed above, most parents were happy for me to associate with their daughters. Some, however, remained reluctant in the first period of my fieldwork due to the fact that I was physically male. Amy revealed that she was warned by her mother to be careful associating with me after I had introduced myself to her mother for the first time that: *"Even he's gay, he still has a penis."* Apart from introducing myself and obviously expressing my gay identity to their parents, the girls also assisted me in confirming and talking about my sexual orientation to their parents. I was also aware that some parents might secretly check my Facebook account. For that reason, I intentionally displayed my personal information as 'public'. I also indicated my sexual preference as 'interested in men' on my public profile page.

In summary, while seeking deeper understandings of the research participants' sexual subjectivities and other related persons' perspectives and practices—especially parents and teachers—the success of my data collection and fieldwork process depended to a large extent on my ability to establish rapport, mutual respect, and trust with participants, their parents and other significant persons.

1.7 The Organization of the Dissertation

Applying Michel de Certeau's idea of strategies and tactics (de Certeau 1988), this study aims to explore various 'strategies' of the Thai state that try to regulate and construct a desired sexual identity among young women according to *'kunlasatree'* (well-behaved women) model; meanwhile, diverse 'tactics' of schoolgirls to compromise, negotiate, and resist those strategies through media and popular culture utilization in their everyday lives are closely investigated. This dissertation comprises of four parts and nine Chapters as are briefly detailed below:

Part I Introduction

Chapter 1 explains the background and significance of the research problem, research questions, and objectives of the study. This Chapter also offers the literature review regarding media and popular culture, youth gender & sexuality, and youth culture. The conceptual framework is stated to provide theoretical discussion and guidance to understand the interactions between Thai state strategies and schoolgirls' tactics. The section of methodologies, ethnographic sites, and fieldwork process describes the ways in which I get involved with and collected data among research participants and related persons. Meanwhile, **Chapter 2** presents brief life histories of thirteen research participants.

PART II Thai Middle-Class Sexual Discourse and Its Discursive Practices

Chapter 3 explores the historical development of the power controlling young woman's gender and sexuality in northern Thai society. This Chapter consists of three main parts; the first part draws on the decline of the local *phii pu njaa* or ancestor spirit beliefs. The second part examines the rise of the *kunlasatree* discourse which was imposed from the culture of middle-class people in the central part of Thailand. These two parts describe transformation of the gender and social position of women from matrilineal to patriarchal in northern Thai society. The third part investigates the ways modern Thai state constituted a "science of sexuality" *(scientia sexualis)* (Foucault, 1990) through an explosion of various academic studies. These studies portrayed the vulnerability of Thai youth aiming to provide a rationale for state interventions to

control of young woman's sexuality via a range of state-led campaigns followed—social order campaigns, sex education, media ratings system, Internet monitoring, etc—to control and repress female youth sexuality to be "proper" and "healthy" according to the *kunlasatree* model, the Thai state's hegemonic sexual characteristic.

Chapter 4 examines various strategic practices (de Certeau, 1988) operated by families and educational institutions to construct an idealized female youth sexual identity. Foucault's model of panopticon (1977) is also employed to explore the systematic operations of the families', school's and universities' control mechanisms that forced the schoolgirls to discipline themselves while facing the possibility that they were under constant surveillance and under threat of the immediate punishment for any wrongdoings. This Chapter shows that the families, schools, and universities developed various means to conduct surveillance, discipline, and punish the schoolgirls.

Chapter 5 draws on two Thai television drama series, *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*, which tried to address the model of *'well-behaved women'* (*kunlasatree*) and were popularly consumed and discussed among all key informants. Both of these series were debated throughout Thailand due to their controversial stories. This Chapter begins with briefly elaborating the stories of *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* respectively. The last part of this Chapter is the audience ethnography focusing on how the school girls, as television drama series viewers and fans, actively engaged with, talked about and re-appropriated the series' texts offered to them (de Certeau, 1988).

PART III Schoolgirls' Tactics and Social Practices

Chapter 6 illustrates a variety of tactical practices (de Certeau, 1988) employed by the schoolgirls in order to compromise, evade, negotiate, contest, or resist those control powers for reaching a certain level of sexual autonomy in particular context. The first part investigates the schoolgirls' domestic contestations against their parental controls. Applying the concept of "bedroom culture" (McRobbie & Garber, 1976), this part argues that this concept should not focus merely the activities that take place within the physical arrangement. Online social network also provides another space for the schoolgirls to gather through online social networks instead of the conventional

33

physical gathering places; and assists them with a certain level of freedom and various tactics to contest the strict parental controls. The second part draws on the ways schoolgirls' everyday life negotiating practices within the school compound such as the uses of language, their reactions to time restrictions and inspected territory of the school, homosexual practices, friendships, consumptions of cultural commodities, technological advancements, and other cultural practices. The third part focuses on the negotiating practices when the research participants continued their studies in various universities in Chiang Mai. The schoolgirls could make use of the transitional period from high school to university life to temporarily cast away from the strict control from their parents and senior students. As Goffman (1959) states that individuals are able to modify their behaviors in different social contexts, the last part explain the ways schoolgirls compromise with the governing power by being obedient or turning into a humor when they perceived they could accept the rules or regulations rather than subvert them.

Chapter 7 employed Giddens's idea of 'the reflexive project of self' (1991) and the ways schoolgirls 'make do' (Fiske, 1989) their female sexuality and popular culture consumption to investigate the everyday life practices of research participants who became a *pretty* (product presenter or brand ambassador), model, and beauty queen. The first part demonstrates the ways they tactically appropriate, negotiate, or contest the conventional sexual discourse for their own benefits. The second part pays special attention to three schoolgirls who underwent plastic surgeries and most of the girl group members who wished or had plans for surgeries. Their meanings and experiences of plastic surgeries are elaborated and understood as the ways 'the reflexive project of self' (Giddens, 1992) is intensively practiced among key informants and as the various ways they actively interpreted and 'made do' (Fiske, 1989) different kinds of plastic surgery to sustain their interests in everyday life in the context of contemporary northern Thai society.

Chapter 8 presents ethnographic data on schoolgirls' everyday life social and sexual practices in shopping malls and nightclubs in Chiang Mai, which contributed to their distinctive sexual identity construction and expression. In the first part, I investigate how the girl group members utilized their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) to construct

34

the distinctive social identity against the Other, called *sakoy*, a reference to what the girls perceived as 'working class and backward' young women in urban Chiang Mai society. The second part describes the various tactics (de Certeau, 1988) that schoolgirls employed to negotiate mechanisms of dominant state control that aims to regulate their sexual and social practices in shopping malls and nightclubs in Chiang Mai.

PART IV Conclusion

Chapter 9 provides the conclusions and arguments of each chapter. The implications of this study to understand the interactions between female youth sexualities and popular culture, as well as to give greater respect to youth agencies in developing any successful programs, especially regarding sexuality education and sexual health promotion, in the context of contemporary northern Thai society are discussed.