

## CHAPTER 8

### **The Girly Production of Space and Sexualities in Shopping Malls and Nightclubs**

This Chapter presents ethnographic data on schoolgirls' everyday life cultural 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 constructed their distinctive sexual 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. In the second part of the Chapter describes the various tactics that schoolgirls employed in shopping malls and nightclubs to negotiate mechanisms of dominant state control that aimed to regulate their sexual and cultural practices.

#### **8.1 'Sakoy' as the Other: Distinctive Sexual Identity Construction and Expression in the Realms of Shopping Malls and Nightclubs**

As mentioned before, Chiang Mai is one of the largest cities in Thailand and is the capital of the northern region. It is important as the major commercial, administrative, educational, and tourist center in the north of Thailand (A. Cohen, 2006). In modern Chiang Mai society, shopping malls and nightlife spots have become favorite public spaces where many urban residents come to spend their leisure time. Shopping malls and nightclubs serve more than just commercial purposes; they have become an important part of the city's social life. These venues have become indispensable in the work, leisure and day-to-day life of urban residents. Shopping malls and nightclubs thus provide an important stage and resource for the formation of contemporary urban identities and for a range of social interactions, especially for young people

(Wilson, 2004). As one of major arenas for modern social life, this part of the Chapter describes how shopping malls and nightclubs have become one of the centers where different classes of young people actively construct and express their distinctive identities and relationships through consumption and space utilization in a number of ways.

### **8.1.1 “‘Cen’ is for Sakoy and ‘Ro’ is for Higher Class People Like Us”: How Female Youth Differentiate Between Different Classes of Shopping Malls**

During fieldwork, one of my research participants shared a topic namely ‘Certain Stories about Chiang Mai You May Not Know’ posted on [www.pantip.com](http://www.pantip.com), one of the most popular web-boards in Thailand. This post presented contemporary information widely known among local youth in Chiang Mai but was unknown to outsiders. It described the terms ‘*saap*’ (for men) and ‘*sakoy*’ (for women). Both of them referred to working-class youth in urban Chiang Mai society who are supposed to be ‘local’ (i.e. not ‘inter’[national]) and backward; and linked these to two major shopping malls, *Cen* and *Ro*, where were widely known among young people in Chiang Mai. These two malls functioned as the social arenas for two opposing classes of youth:

*‘Saap’ and ‘sakoy’ rarely go to Mall A [anonymous].*

*There are a lot of gay and lesbian [toms and dees] couples hanging out at Mall A.*

*‘Saap’ and ‘sakoy’ are mostly found at Mall B [anonymous].*

*Chiang Mai local people call Mall B ‘Cen.’*

*Meanwhile, Mall A is called ‘Ro.’*

*Keep in mind... So you [outsiders] can call them correctly [while visiting Chiang Mai] (Pantip, 2012).*

According to Wilson (2004), shopping complexes and department stores generally target specific class ranges of consumers. In Chiang Mai during my fieldwork, apart from five major department stores located in downtown, *Cen* and *Ro* were the two major places where Chiang Mai youth usually gathered after school and during weekends; some of them were also found skipping classes to spend time at these two shopping malls during school hours. *Ro* was recognized among local young people as a

place for youth who were *'hi-so noi'* (a bit high-class) while *Cen* was well-known as a space for an opposite group of lower or working class youth groups called *'saap'* for male and *'sakoy'* for female, as stated above.

As a way to distinguish between different social classes such as the northern female youth who belonged to *'hi-so noi'* and *'sakoy'* groups, Bourdieu offers his idea of 'cultural capital.' According to this concept, knowledge gained through education and social origin grant a person's social status. Cultural capital plays an important role in a system of distinction whereby one's personal taste corresponds with one's upbringing, education and class (Bourdieu, 1984). To understand similar social hierarchies that are formed within northern Thai youth culture, Cohen found that class indeed acts as an important measure of social distinction between groups among young Thais. It is especially evident through the overt distinction in 'rural' and 'urban' cultures and people that are made by Thai youth, which in Thailand is also often a strong signifier of class. For young Thais, one's status within the Thai youth hierarchy is determined by a combination of style, leisure activities and class (A. Cohen, 2009).

I often accompanied research participants to shopping malls. As explained, they preferred to spend their leisure times at *Ro* rather than *Cen* since, according to Kim, they liked to see themselves as "*a bit high class*" (pen phuak hi class noi). One of the main factors why they considered themselves as such was due to their education and the relatively prestigious school they attended. Research participants explained to me that since their school was located in the same area of vocational schools, they learned that they had different styles and tastes from those vocational students. Kim explained: "*Students in my school and those students in vocational schools have different ways of thinking* (wii tee kid tang kun)." To understand the term 'different ways of thinking' between high school students and vocational school students, while accompanying research participants to shopping malls I usually asked them to explain the characteristics of *'sakoy'* and how those *sakoy* group had different ways of thinking from them.

After graduated high school, Kim was taking care of her father's coffee shop business at the basement of *Cen*, one of the major spaces were *sakoy* congregated. While research participants preferred going to *Ro*, Kim's coffee shop at *Cen* basement however later

became like a meeting place for research participants studying in various universities. *“It’s like a ghetto. If Kim doesn’t open a coffee shop and I have to meet you guys here, I’d never come to this place. It’s very old. I used to watch a movie at the cinema up there. It was very cheap but very few people went there; very haunted. I saw a rat running passing me. Soooo disgusting!”*: Mary complained about *Cen* with the girl group members while various groups of *sakoy* were walking passed the coffee shop. *“Piek”* (gossiping about/critiquing) *sakoy* girls who were passing by the coffee shop became one of the favorite activities among the girl group members. Through this activity I also learned what Kim had meant when she said that *sakoy* had different ways of thinking from the girls in their own group.

At *Cen*, most *sakoy* usually assembled at the basement floor around the area of the mall’s back entrance since there was a private motorcycle park available there. Working class youth usually rode motorcycles, while higher-class youth mostly drove cars and therefore used the car-park entrance. In front of the back entrance outside the mall, there were many food stalls selling food and drinks that were cheaper compared to those available inside the mall. Walking in the mall’s back entrance, there were cheap karaoke machines and game booths, as well as clothes, shoes, and accessories shops along the way at the area that provided merchandises of lower quality and price than those sold inside the mall. These areas were packed with various working class youth groups after school hours and during weekends. After Kim had been working at her coffee shop for a while, she talked about her observations on *sakoy* around that area that: *“Those sakoy usually come to gather here. They don’t do anything, just sit together in small groups, chat, and buy cheap food and drinks that they share with each other. They come looking for ‘saap’. And the ‘saap’ try to show off by smoking. When they skip schools to gather here during study hours, I see the officials come down here to chase them away (laughs).”*

Having visited Kim’s coffee shop more often, I could myself notice some *sakoy* gathering around the area who showed up in their school uniforms or school sport uniforms that indicated they were studying in vocational schools or in what research participants considered lower-class schools. Their uniforms were adapted according to international fashion trends but the ways that styles appropriated by *sakoy* were always

looked down on and made fun of among research participants, who considered *sakoy* to have the ‘wrong taste,’ partly because of their use of cheap accessory items. For example, Kim pointed me to see a group of female vocational students in their school uniform wearing their socks up to middle of their lower legs level, which were higher than usual. Kim teased them that:

*“Look at those socks! They tried to imitate the Japanese school uniform but they make it look ‘local’ (baan) since everyone knows that those cheap socks might be bought from a local fair market somewhere. And you see that Japanese students wear their socks up to knee levels but these sakoy wear those cheap socks merely up to the middle of lower legs level. And wearing socks at that high level doesn’t go along well with their uniform at all. That looks so ridiculous! (laughs).”*

Other ‘unique’ characteristics of *sakoy* were their hairstyles and hair colors. *Sakoy* tried to imitate hairstyles of celebrities who were popular at particular periods of time. During my fieldwork, the hairstyle of one of the most popular Thai pop rock vocalists, Da Endorphin, was being appropriated among *sakoy* at that time. Her unique fashion and hairstyle became an inspiration for most *sakoy* in Chiang Mai, especially her unevenly sliced hairstyle from front to back, as shown in the next page:

ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่  
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Figure 8.1 Da Endorphin's unique fashion and hairstyle (left) versus fashion and hairstyle appropriated by *sakoy* (right)

Jill gave more information about the hairstyle of the *sakoy* imitated from Da Endorphin's. Since female students were required to tie up all of their hair properly while at school, having their hair sliced and bangs were then not allowed. Therefore, appropriating this particular hairstyle can be described as a tactic to contest school regulations. When being approached by teachers or school authorities, they could spend a very short period of time to tie up their sliced hair and bangs so as to be in line with the school regulations. Some *sakoy* also had their hair colored but since they usually had little budget, they would color their hair by themselves using cheap hair dyes, rather than have it done by professional hair stylists. The ways their hair colors and hair-do turned out was therefore made fun of as 'low-class'.

During weekend, *sakoy* showed up at *Cen* wearing cheap tight-fitting t-shirts, short pants and rubber slippers, which was called '*sakoy* fashion' by the members of the girl group. Research participants enjoyed teasing and joking about *sakoy* for having dark skin, big-boned legs, as well as spots, scars, and cellulite visible on their legs, as illustrated by Amy that: "They might think that the shorter pants they wear, the sexier

*they are. But in reality, their cellulite and spotted dark-skinned legs totally turn guys off! (laughs)."*

Regarding accessories, *sakoy* used relatively cheap handbags, necklaces, rings and bracelets, which research participants estimated might not cost more than 199 baht each, and which could be bought at any local market, temple fair market or shop around the *Cen* basement area. Most *sakoy* also had multiple piercings, especially on their ears. Some of them had more piercings on their navels, eyebrows or tongues. Those who had multiple piercings were teased by research participants for having bad taste, as they were seen as being too extreme and wearing too many earrings that were cheap and did not match together in terms of style. Kim added that a little towel of particular brands was another accessory that was popular among *sakoy* at that particular period of time. This little towel fashion was first initiated among schoolgirls in high-class private schools in Chiang Mai. The little towel was worn around the shoulders, with the brand-name visible, to show their wealth. *Sakoy* then started to follow this fashion trend by putting less expensive towels around their shoulders. Kim expressed her attitude toward this fashion appropriated by *sakoy* that: *"They try to make themselves look as cute and rich as the groups of higher-class girls but their cheap dress and towel make them look funny."* Some *sakoy* could afford brand name towels because they managed to buy them when a particular towel brand offered a discount, but by that time that items would already have become out-of-date for the higher-class groups. Some *sakoy* would also buy copied brand-named items or cheap ones from local markets.

Regarding the make-up style of *sakoy*, Mary commented that: *"They don't have any principle of applying cosmetics on their faces. They just put those cheap and thick cosmetics on and try to look as white-skinned as possible."* Since female youth who were categorized to be *sakoy* were often raised in rural working class families, riding motorcycles rather than cars, it was true that they would be exposed to sunlight since they were children much more than girls who were born in more privileged circumstances. Therefore, most of them had darker skin, identifying them, in the eyes of the girl group, as lower-class. *Sakoy* perceived that wearing make-up could make them look whiter and more attractive; and their make-up style became one of the favorite topics for the members of the girl group to gossip about. Amy disparagingly described

the way *sakoy* applied make-up ‘*white face, dark neck*’ (naa kaw kor dum). Some *sakoy* had such dark skin that the white foundation and powder they applied made their skin color look almost violet or dark blue. They also applied ‘thick’ cosmetics on other parts of their faces especially bright-red lipstick. Some of them applied ‘Uthaitip’, a Thai traditional liquid which is used for coloring drinking water, instead of lipstick. Janet explained to me that apart from very low price, Uthaitip was another tactical practice among *sakoy* to evade school punishments for applying make-up in schools. Since Uthaitip was not considered a cosmetic by school authorities, carrying and applying Uthaitip on their lips instead of lipsticks was not considered as breaking the school regulations. Furthermore, most *sakoy* perceived red lips as indication of being healthy and attractive. Janet commented further that: “*They always bring little mirrors and are putting on more cosmetics all the time. Why don’t they know that when they put very thick white powder on their faces, the skin looks like bruised? It looks funny indeed!*”

*Sakoy*’s taste for having a relationship with male was also often discussed among research participants. *Sakoy* were seen as being attracted to *saap* who were typically associated with aggression and delinquency, as well as membership of youth gangs. The members of the girl-group saw *saap* were ‘uncool’ male working class youth who commute into the city in search of fun and trouble. *Sakoy* would ride motorcycles with their *saap* around Chiang Mai. They would meet especially at the back entrance of *Cen* and other nightlife zones where they could afford cheap food and (alcoholic) drinks at night time. While gossiping about *saap* and *sakoy* couples riding their motorcycles, Kim told me to take a look carefully at some *sakoy*’s necks and explained that: “*Some sakoy have little bruises on their necks (roy dude tee kor, or love bites) to show off that they already had (sex with their) boyfriends because their boyfriend sucked up their necks. Sakoy have boyfriends to show that they are beautiful so they were attracted to saap. Those who don’t have saap boyfriend and are still virgin (sing) will be ashamed (for not being attractive).*”

Since being called ‘*sakoy*’ was unpleasant, female working class youth tried to rename themselves to be ‘*dek naew*’ (alternative style youth group), ‘*dek indy*’ and ‘*dek hip*’ (hipsters). However, the research participants and other higher-class youth would continuously use the disparaging term *sakoy* to maintain their higher status.



Apart from spending their time at Kim's coffee shop at *Cen*, research participants mostly went to *Ro* during their leisure time. As mentioned that *Ro* was a shopping mall where mostly higher-class youth groups gathered. For example, B-Boys could be found there, rehearsing and showing their break-dance performances; skateboarders and other youth groups were there collecting various kinds of vehicles such as Vespa scooters and various models of car, and they would usually congregate and display their vehicles at the mall's parking spaces. In contrast to *sakoy* and *saap*, these higher-class youth groups required a certain amount of financial capital to be able to establish and maintain their social network and needed access to commercial commodities to purchase and signify their distinctive social identities.

In the mall building, especially on the upper floors, had a range of famous restaurants and coffee shops that were well-decorated, serving high-quality food and drinks. Despite the high prices they charged, these restaurants and coffee shops, especially those owned by celebrities, were filled with higher-class Chiang Mai teenagers. Prior to entering or eating, they often took pictures of the shops, food and drinks; and posted these in social media to show that they came to these relatively expensive places. The front area of these well-known restaurants and coffee shops was made of glass so that people who were passing by could take a look at the customers inside. Meanwhile, youth who were in those restaurants and coffee shops preferred sitting around the front area so that they could be gazed at by others.

Around the areas at *Ro* especially where higher-class youth groups gathered, *saap* and *sakoy* were rarely found since they did not feel a sense of belonging to these places. Once I found a group of *sakoy* walking past the coffee shop where I was spending time with research participants. Those *sakoy* were stared at by girl group members; other higher-class groups also obviously gossiped and laughed which made the *sakoy* girls uncomfortable. Research participants commented that those *sakoy* did not belong there since they did not dress appropriately to be in line with the majority. They also could not afford the more expensive food and drinks around that area. If *sakoy* came to *Ro*, they mostly were found on the basement where certain cheaper local food and cloth shops were available to them. Mary told other group members a funny story about *sakoy* going to a high-class coffee shop. At one day she was studying and enjoying her

coffee with her friends there when she saw a group of *sakoy* entering. They made a lot of noise trying to be at the center of attention; but it turned out that customers looked at them for all the wrong reason, since it was understood that customers should be quiet inside this coffee shop. While ordering, the *sakoy* girls could not correctly pronounce the names of the coffee types on offer. After they ordered, they immediately left the counter to find a place to sit but a waitress told them that they had to pay first and wait for their coffee at another counter. From this story, the group members were laughing for the way that those *sakoy* did not know the way to behave and order coffees in a high-class coffee shop.

Regarding consumption practices among research participants at shopping malls especially at *Ro*, although it was the place for the higher-class girls in the group I was studying, I noticed that the girl group members rarely bought items while shopping there. Apart from spending time in well-known restaurants and coffee shops, they mostly walked around the mall to do window-shopping. Rose explained the meaning of her window shopping that: *“I don’t come for buying anything in a mall. It is too expensive. I’m not stingy. I spend money wisely. We come to check out the latest fashion styles and then I try to mix and match what I’ve got at home later.”* Other research participants described their shopping and dressing practices in similar ways. Once in a while, they would decide to buy expensive major items such as shoes, handbags, cloths and cosmetics at the mall; but minor things, such as hair and fashion accessories, they could find in other (cheaper) community malls around Chiang Mai. Then they mixed and matched expensive major items bought from shopping malls with other minor items into their own style, which they learned from various sources, including from doing window shopping at shopping malls. Janet elaborated more that: *“Firstly we have to figure out the main items of that day, such as shoes, handbags, skirts, or shirts. Then we mix and match other items and make-up that get along well with the particular color and style of the main items of that day. So we can end up with our own outfit.”* Other research participants added that they believed in minimalism, meaning that they wore fewer accessories so that when they considered any item did not get along well with others, they took it off and changed it to something else. Moreover, the group members often exchanged clothes and accessories among themselves, so that they did not have to buy new items very often. Some research participants, especially Cindy, posted various

pictures of her used clothes on her Facebook page, asking to exchange them with other Facebook friends who belonged to the same higher-class group. Thus, clothes and fashion commodities were circulated among higher-class female youth groups to mix and match into their own style.

Besides window shopping, Internet idols who produced video clips or Internet TV programs to review and tutor various styles of dressing and make-up also served as an important inspiration for the girl group members to appropriate new fashion and make-up styles. *Momay Paplern* (Being Amused with Momay) was one of the independent Internet program hosted by *Momay*, a Thai singer who was well-known a decade ago and then became an Internet idol for her Internet make-up tutorial video clips posted in *SpokeDark* Internet channel and Youtube. Some of her make-up tutorial clips, especially make-up in a *pretty* (mentioned in Chapter 7) style hit more than million views during the last period of my fieldwork. Most research participants were huge fans of *Momay Paplern* and followed almost every clips of her. Nancy expressed her admiration of *Momay* that: *“I watched almost every of her make-up tutorial clips, especially the one about make-up for pretty. It was very useful for me. I learned a lot about make-up tricks from her.”* The main reason that research participants followed *Momay* was that she tutored and provided various tricks for make-up that was not ‘low-class.’ *Momay* always kept up her make-up tutorial program details by updating it with both national and international make-up trends from celebrities and events at that particular period of time. Lisa also added that, apart from her cheerful personality and sense of humor while hosting the program, the products that *Momay* reviewed in her program were not the kind of cheap items that were used among *sakoy*. *Momay* reviewed cosmetic products with high quality and affordable prices. *Momay*’s make-up tricks also emphasized various themes that were appropriate for their particular social context, such as make-up for hanging out at night, going to a wedding, going to classes, or even joining a Halloween party; each of which required different styles and tricks. Nancy concluded the main idea of this program, from her perspective, was that: *“I leaned from her that the most important is healthy-looking skin. Like I have a tan skin; no need for me to put thick foundations and powder to make me over-whitened. I should apply cosmetics that are compatible with my original skin color. Every time I use make-up I should come up with a clear concept in my mind of how I’m going to dress and*

*where I'm going to go; so that I can come up with particular style of my make-up for that day. Unlike sakoy, they don't have any concept for the way they dress and apply make-up so they look tasteless and funny. Another thing is that some of Mamay Paplern clips are in English so that sakoy will never understand (laughs)."* Vicki said that *sakoy* always follow dressing and make-up trends from celebrities without realizing that everyone had her own unique face outline which was different from person to person. She said that *sakoy* only tried to imitate intending to look exactly like those celebrities by putting cosmetics on their face as thickly as possible. Vicki kept in mind what *Momay* said in her program: *"We can't exactly imitate the ways those celebrates make-up and dress, but we can appropriate their styles into our own."*

Once I accompanied Rose to do shopping at the cosmetic counters at *Ro* prior to going out with other girl group members that night. Rose asked the sales persons for certain cosmetic items. Then she asked them to demonstrate several cosmetic products on her face and ended up buying just a few of them. After leaving, Rose revealed that it was a trick she used to obtain free make-up before going out. It was considered a win-win situation for Rose that while those salespersons could sale some of their products, she could learn more make-up techniques from them as well as obtain free make-up.

The girl group members explained that the principles that distinguished them from *sakoy* was that, apart from the latter's lack of financial capital, *sakoy* had also a lack of taste through the ways they tried to dress and make-up. For example, Jill posted a picture taken in a mall of a *sakoy* who was wearing a shockingly pink shirt and black pants, which was considered to be bad taste, in the online secret group. Jill explained that while a *sakoy* in the picture was on a motorcycle (identifying her as lower-class) someone who was in a car (i.e. belonging to a higher- class) yelled at her that she had bad taste of dress. Jill then posted a sarcastic face icon.

### 8.1.2 Social Capital and Practices of Female Youth between Different Classes of Nightclubs

Thornton argues that youth in club cultures are filled with cultural hierarchies and reveals how clubbers have a strong sense of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ groups (Thornton, 1996). This part then demonstrates that youth belonged to different classes had their own places and patterns of cultural practices in enjoying nightlife in Chiang Mai.

Regarding *sakoy* and other youth groups that belonged to the working class, in the beginning of my fieldwork, research participants brought me to a restaurant not very far from Chiang Mai. The place was located next to a pond. It opened from evening until midnight and was crowded with teenagers in their school uniforms. There were low tables and customers were required to sit on mats on the floor, where they were served with cheap Thai beer or whiskey. There were several bands playing live music and there were DJs until the restaurant was closed. Around 10 p.m. the young customers were getting drunk and began to dance along with the music. Jill told me that most customers were *saap* and *sakoy* who were studying in lower-class schools, vocational schools, and lower-prestige universities. The place was popular as it did not required youth customers to show their ID card. The reason research participants brought me to this place because food and alcohol were very cheap. The girl group members could ‘warm up’ with cheap beers at this restaurant before spending the rest of the night at other nightclubs that operated to attract higher-class youth. I was suggested by Nancy not to stay at the restaurant until too late at night because these working class youth groups, especially the boys, would misbehave while they were getting to a certain level of drunkenness. Some of them would search for a fight with other groups of *saap*.

Most of the nightlife places for lower-class youth were located close to the institutions where they were studying. Most customers who came to these places were working class youth groups. Nancy described the ways they dressed: “*They wear cheap rubber slippers into those places. Sakoy who come to this place wear t-shirts and short pants with slippers, like they usually dress.*” Cheap brands of Thai beer and whiskey were severed in various ‘*pro*’ (promotions), the more bottles included in one order, the cheaper the price per bottle was. I noticed that most customers who came to these places were big groups consisting of around five to ten persons per table. They ordered cheap

Thai beer brands in a wholesale box for their group since it was much cheaper than coming in small groups and ordered smaller 'pros'. At that time I chose to order an imported beer, which was the most expensive brand sold at that place. It turned out that the beer was not very tasty since this brand had not been ordered for a long time due to being expensive compared to the Thai beer brands.

The music played in these nightlife spots for working class youth was another topic that research participants negatively commented on. Most played Thai folk songs (*phleng pheua chii wit* and *phleng luuk thoong*) which were recognized among the girl groups as music of the lower classes. Thai pop songs and English songs were also occasionally played by live bands at these places but they were negatively critiqued by the girl group members, who found that they were played and performed 'not as good as they could be' (*yang mai theung*). Commenting on the English songs performed there, Amy said: *"I don't know if a singer understands lyrics of the song he is singing or not. It doesn't sound like English at all. It's a weird pronunciation and I don't understand at all."* Tina sarcastically added: *"I think he has a special gift. He can sing English songs that can make farang (Westerners or English native speakers) get confused what he is singing about. I can't do it like that!"* Then the group members laughed out loud at the singer.

Thornton's study among different classes of youth clubbers in UK argues that youth use the activities and tastes of other young social groups to define and measure of their own cultural worth (Thornton, 1996). While research participants were spending their time at working-class nightlife spots, they actively gossiped and gave negative comments on several aspects of working-class youth they saw in order to maintain their higher status. For example, at one night Cindy went to a lower-class nightclub which had a coyote (sexy dancers) show. She took pictures of those sexy dancers and posted them in the online secret group. The rest of girl group members actively gave comments on the way the coyote dancers dressed, which was seen as tasteless and lower-class, for example the way they wore only one stocking and up only until the middle of upper leg; the way they wore cheap clothes and shoes; the way they danced in a bad taste and looked funny to the girl group members.

In opposite to low-class nightlife spots were most customers were *saap* and *sakoy*, research participants preferred to spend their night time at pubs and nightclubs belonging to higher-class youth groups. Kim gave her definition of higher-class nightlife spots as: “*Those places must have a good taste in their interior design. People who go to those places must look OK, not look low-class. They must have good taste in the way they dress, make-up, hairstyle, and no flip-flops (laughs). It’s all about a good image. Not to dress in low-class style, like sakoy. I also check what brands of handbags and smart phones they are using. If their hairstyles become out-of-date or not...*”

The types of drink customers ordered also identified the class of that particular place and who went there. Nancy explained that: “*At low-class places, they serve whisky smoothies (lao pun) which is a cheap alcohol shacked with very strong colored syrup. It’s for sakoy who don’t have much money because it’s so cheap, not more than 79-99 baht per jar. It tastes so bad. I used to try it once; its color looks really scary and I know that it’s a very low quality drink.*” At the higher-class places where research participants usually went, I noticed that women and *tom* mostly ordered different kinds of drink. The menus of these places offered a section for ‘lady drinks’ which consisted of various kinds of cocktails for female customers; each of them was given a female name. The price ranged from 250-350 baht. Research participants who identified themselves as *toms* would not order these, but preferred drinking beer or whiskey mixed with water or club soda as a way to express their masculinity. Kim explained: “*Man (people who are masculine) don’t drink sweet.*” Cigarettes were another symbol to express masculinity by *toms*. Most of *toms* smoked tobacco, not in daily life but just while going out, as their believed that it made them look masculine. Even the ones who did not smoke before would practice it until they could do so effortlessly, as if they usually smoked in everyday life. While spending time at certain pubs or nightclubs where smoking was not allowed, the *tom* research participants would still put their cigarette packages on the table, not only to express their masculinity but also to show that they smoked an expensive brand of imported cigarettes. Kim illustrated this: “*Higher-class people like us smoke expensive brands like Marlboro. Those low classes smoke other cheaper brands like L&M or Thai brands.*” I noticed that research participants preferred buying Marlboro cigarettes in a hard package since its price was

higher than that a soft package. They were more proud to display other expensive imported cigarette packages on the table to indicate their higher class.

Certain pubs and nightclubs for higher-class youth did not serve and did not allow customers to bring any Thai brand of alcoholic drink into their places. Once after I spent time with the girl group at a pub, we moved to another nightclub that closed later at night in order to dance. Some of the Thai whiskey that we had drunk at the previous place remained in a bottle and I had brought it with me to the other nightclub. It turned out that I was not allowed to bring my whiskey into the place although I insisted that I was willing to pay a corkage fee according to the nightclub regulations. A waitress still stood firm that it was a nightclub regulation not to allow customers to take any Thai brand of whiskey inside. Meanwhile, Thai brands of whiskey were served at some nightlife spots for higher-class youth but the price would be around 2-3 times higher than usual.

Most of youth who identified themselves to be higher class, however, preferred ordering imported brands of whiskey. The way they put whiskey on the tables or beverage stands was another means to display their high class and good taste for drinking to other youth customers. Some nightclubs designed their tables or beverage stands to be in a high position, bringing them closer to eye-level, so that the customers could display their drinks and whiskey brands to each other. Apart from the high price of alcoholic drinks and whiskeys, the rituals of drinking a particular beverage would also indicate the good taste of the customers. At one night while I was in a higher-class nightclub with the girl group members, Nancy whispered to me to take a look at a youth group next to our table. They ordered and displayed Johnnie Walker Blue Label, an expensive imported whiskey, on their table; but they mixed the whiskey with Coca-cola (it was believed that expensive brands of whiskey should not be mixed with Coca-cola since it would ruin the whiskey's classy smell and taste). Also, they drank very fast. I heard them constantly encouraging each other to drink more and more by saying "*bottoms-up*" (mod kaew). Nancy was laughing and called that group of youth customers "*three-wheel taxi drivers who won the lottery*" (sarm lor thuuk huay). Then she told me to take a glimpse at another group of few female youth customers. They enjoyed their red wines but some of them were already drunk and continued to drink their wines



throughout the evening. Nancy sarcastically criticized those female youth for wasting the wine by drinking it like cheap rice whiskey (*laow kaw*). From Nancy's perspective, although those two groups of youth customers dressed appropriately to come to a higher class place and could afford expensive alcoholic drinks, their lack of taste showed, making that they were still not welcome in that society.

Music was another factor that could distinguish between low-class and high-class places. Professional bands played at higher-class places; most had a good profiles and lots of experience. Some singers and musicians graduated from famous musical schools. Certain singers were known to have participated in national-level singing contests. Lisa explained about her choices of music at nightlife spots. If she had a mood to listen to Thai pop songs played by a DJ, she would go to nightclub A. Nightclubs B and C were famous for professional bands which mostly played live English songs; or if she preferred to dance late at night, she chose to go to nightclub D and E where were famous for playing contemporary and electronic dance songs. Research participants praised the professional bands played at higher-class nightclubs because of their good taste for Thai pop music; most of these Thai songs were famous and well-liked among urban middle-class youth at that particular period of time. During my fieldwork, the rock band 'Bodyslam' was popular and was highly admired among research participants, not only because of its songs but also because of the profile of the lead singer, which the Thai media reported widely. Before becoming a rock star, the lead singer graduated from a top-ranked law school in Thailand. After graduating he worked as a flight attendant and then became a famous rocker. This story signified the lifestyle of those in upper class in Thai society in several ways, especially that he graduated from law school and worked as a flight attendant. His profile contributed to the good image of the songs he wrote and the music he composed. Meanwhile, most pop songs produced by the Bakery Music, one of the leading music companies in Thailand, were frequently played in high-class nightclubs and were well-liked among research participants. The executive manager and the founder as well as most artists in this music company belonged to the networks of upper-class society. Most of them were educated from universities in Western countries or were raised in wealthy elite families that owned large businesses in Thailand. Research participants also liked the ways the bands in higher-class nightclubs played and sang English songs; in contrast to the lower-class

entertainment venues discussed above, they would give positive comments here, saying that they played professionally like the original version of the song and that they sang in an ‘understandable’ English pronunciation.

Bringing boyfriends and girlfriends to nightlife spots was also recognized by research participants as a way to display their high-class status, since research participants could show their taste through the appearance of their boyfriend or girlfriend. At the last phase of my fieldwork, Rose often spent time at nightclubs with her new boyfriend who was a half-American, half-Vietnamese. He had studied at international school and they were studying in the same university. Since he was from a wealthy family, had a good profile, was good looking and muscular, he met an ideal type of boyfriend most female youth could only dream of. Rose was very proud to show her boyfriend to her friends by bringing him to nightlife spots with her. Meanwhile, Vicki’s and Nancy’s *tom* boyfriends also expressed their pride spending time at nightlife venues with both research participants, since they often quickly became the center of people’s attention. They loved to show to other youth customers that they had girlfriends who were a ‘beauty queen’ and ‘pretty.’ Sometime they were even more proud that their girlfriends were asked to take their pictures to be posted and shared in social media or to promote the nightclubs.

For *tom* research participants who did not have a girlfriend, they revealed that the best way to flirt other female youth was to employ certain techniques to ‘look classy’ (*do mee class*). This was in contrast to most lower-class *toms* and males, who would just stare directly at the ones they liked; some of them would approach a woman and ask for her contact number right away. Once I was with Lisa at a nightclub and I noticed a male customer at the next table who was frequently looking at her. Although Lisa realized that she was looked at, she pretended not to notice until he gave up his attempts. I asked Lisa why she did not respond to that young man. Lisa replied that she did not like the way he behaved. Staring directly to a targeted lady was considered to be low-class. Then I learned from other research participants, especially those who were *toms*, that the most important thing they were concerned about was assurance that the young woman (or man) they liked belonged to the same society or class as they did. At least he or she should be known by someone who belonged to higher-class society. Therefore,

the way to approach a targeted young woman or man was that firstly they needed to find out whether they knew any member at the same table where he or she was seated. If this was the case, they would approach the person they knew first, in order to ask some basic information. Kim explained her experience that:

*“When I like a girl at a nightclub, I will ask my friend if anyone knows that girl. If they do I will ask them how is she? Is she available? Where is she studying? If her profile is ok and if she studies in a good university, I will ask my friend to bring me to that table and I will find a chance to get to know her and talk to her. If we are ok to each other we will exchange our Line IDs”.*

Kim explained further that another advantage of having her friend to introduce her to the targeted young woman was that her friend would further inform the woman about Kim’s profile in order to assure her that Kim also had a good profile and belonged to the same society as hers. Kim concluded that: *“The most important is that she has to dress in good taste, has a good profile, studies in a good university and is known by people who belong to the same society as me. I would be totally ashamed if I happened to be flirting with a sakoy in public. I have to check the girl from head to toe.”*

When both of them were assured that each party belonged to the same society/class, usually they would exchange their IDs from a chat application, especially Line. Male or *tom* usually took the initiative by handing over their smart phone with a chatting application already turned on, so that the woman were after just had to type her ID. This ritual of handing over smart phones had two main hidden meanings; firstly, it was a respectful way to show the female who was asked about the possibility for a date or a relationship; the fact that little words were used would make it less embarrassing for both parties if the women refused. As Kim explained, it was the decision of the woman whether to type in her Line ID or not. Sometimes the woman did not like the one who asked for her ID but she tried to be polite by giving her ID, but then never replied to any of the messages sent to her after that—also getting the message across in a rather painless way. Indeed, according to Kim, giving her Line ID was not really a big deal; the question was whether the girl would reply to any forthcoming messages or not. Secondly, handing over one’s smart phone for someone to type in their ID was a way to

show their wealth, indicated by the particular brand of smart phone one possessed. I learned that those who handed out expensive smart phones, especially the latest model of iPhone, would be more likely to be successful in wooing a woman than those with cheaper brands and models.

During fieldwork, I found out that when any girl group member approached (or was approached by) someone, she usually asked (or was asked) for Line ID instead of a mobile phone number. Kim clarified that no one asked for mobile phone number anymore since communicating via Line at the beginning of relationship was more comfortable than talking to a mobile phone. Texting via the Line chatting application could reduce their anxiety and provided them with time between their chats that gave them a chance to carefully think and create the right words for communication. Moreover, the Line chatting application had various emoticons which could convey their feelings effectively and could be downloaded mostly for free. Pictures, video clips, and sound recordings could also be shared. They would only decide to talk via mobile phone or video camera chat after cementing their relationship to a certain level, as Kim illustrates: *“We only texted via Line for a month at the beginning of our relationship. Then we exchanged our mobile phone numbers and talked on the phone after we decided to become tomboyfriend and girlfriend.”*

Several other friend finder applications were used among young people in Chiang Mai. These applications could assist those who wanted to know new people by searching for other members by posting their pictures and user names with basic biographic data such as gender, age, etc. The distinctive functions of these applications were that they could identify other members who were online around that particular geographical area. I learned from my research participants that they called these applications ‘*app ha kuu*’ (searching for a partner application) or ‘*app nad yed*’ (hooking up to fuck application) since most members in these applications were intending to find a partner mainly for sexual proposes. Kim shared her experience using these applications that: *“I used to install these applications and searched for other online users around the place I was hanging out. Most of them were sakoy and they looked really different to the pictures posted in the applications. Some of them looked really beautiful in pictures but they*

*were very ugly and sakoy in person so that I uninstalled all these kinds of application. No one of my friends in higher-class society use this application anymore.”*

## **8.2 Tactical Practices and Negotiating Sexualities in Shopping Malls and Nightclubs**

According to de Certeau (1984) the opposite of ‘strategies’, which in this case refer to the Thai state’s efforts to construct a hegemonic sexual identity for northern Thai female youth, there are ‘tactics’ practiced among those young women to negotiate these controlling powers that aim to regulate and suppress their sexuality. These tactics are attempts to subvert the repressive order at the individual level. These ‘everyday practices’ enable them to survive the oppressive structure of society through creating alternative spaces for social actions and ideas (Khosravi, 2008). Borrowing de Certeau’s idea, this part of the Chapter illustrates the various tactical practices operated by research participants in the context of shopping malls and nightclubs in Chiang Mai.

### **8.2.1 Negotiating Sexual Selves through Consumption and Space Utilization in Shopping Malls**

Shopping malls are not an empty stage, but a structured commercial zone dedicated to motivate desires and identifications. Shopping malls allow a venue away from home and school that provides a space for freedom for youth and host a variety of expressions of identity (Wilson, 2004). Shopping malls then become a site that provides an opportunity for young people to present themselves in a particular way, and as such they become ‘sexualized spaces’ (Khosravi, 2008) for youth to experiment and complete their sexual selves and negotiate the state control mechanisms through consumption practices and spaces unitizations.

As mentioned above, *Ro* served as a place where the girl group members would spent their times when they wanted to skip classes while they were in high school. Nancy was one of the group members who used to get caught by authorities for this. In a result, she was brought back to the school; her behavioral scores were decreased and her parents were ultimately informed. Therefore, Nancy learned from her experience that authorities would approach teenagers who went to shopping malls by searching for any

sign that could identify that they were students of a particular school. As mentioned in Chapter 4, students in Chiang Mai schools are required to use items that were exclusively designed by each school, such as a particular type or color of jacket, backpack, etc, while skipping classes and spending times at places outside school during school hours, the girl group members would usually prepare another set of clothes and a non-identifiable bag, so that they could change and conceal their status of high school students. Nancy stated further that being female helped too: *“Most students [who are skipping class] who are caught are boys because they have their short hair which is obvious. Girls have long hair so we just make a little hairdo, put some make-up, and change the ways we dress so we can look older.”*

While spending time in shopping malls, the girl group members also warned each other not to go online to their social media pages, and especially not to post any status update or check-in on their Facebook accounts, as this would identify them as being outside the school area. Jill shared that her friends were tracked and caught by school authorities because they had left their Facebook accounts online while they skipped classes and spent time outside the school during school hours. This story corresponded with the data I collected from SAD teachers:

*“When I’m at my office, I also track students from Facebook. I could track the location where they are and I could drag them back to the school... I’m not smart but I can follow them wherever they are. I have the expanded networks, even with traffic policemen. I stay at this room but I can call my networks to drag those students back to the school. I have a lot of experiences on this.”*

As stated in Chapter 4, within the strictly controlled territory of the school, homosexual relationships among female students were another tactic to express their sexual subjectivity in ways that shielded them from the eyes of school authorities. Female homosexual relationships were also widely expressed in shopping malls in Chiang Mai, especially at *Ro*, as a transcription from a topic posted in a popular website mentioned earlier. Around the mall territory, especially on the upper floors where higher-class youth would gather, female youth were found expressing intimacy with other girls widely, particularly during the weekends and public holidays. Like the situation at

school, research participants stated that homosexual relationships in shopping malls, especially among females, had never been reported by authorities. In contrast, heterosexual relationships were likely to be monitored. In *Ro*, female homosexual couples could make do more general spaces since *toms* were able to socialize in the same pattern as other women. As research participants mentioned that the some of the benefits of having female homosexual relationships were that women understood each other's needs better and they could go out together without any suspicion from parents and authorities, for that reason female same-sex couples could be usually seen accompanying each other in shopping malls. While they were doing shopping and walking together in the mall, some of them were found holding each other's hands. *Tom* was the one who took care of her lover's handbag and shopping bags to conform the expectations that would be placed on a masculine lover. They could go together everywhere, even to restrooms and fitting rooms. Restaurants and coffee shops that were mostly designed with large windows in the front, allowing people passing by to gaze at the customers and at the situation inside, female homosexual couples were comfortable touching, hugging, and expressing their affection in front of the public while people also seemed comfortable seeing them expressing intimacy to each other at these places.

Various spaces and activities in *Ro* were also tactically utilized by female youth to gain a certain level of sexual freedom. Many couples went to watch movies in order to spend time alone together. Erotic or romantic scenes, darkness in a theater, and special seats where the arm-rest could be raised, exclusively designed for couples, conveniently located at the back-rows were supportive factors for them to express intimacy in various forms, range from toughing, holding hands, hugging or kissing. Research participants who had boyfriends or girlfriends said that they chose to watch movies especially later at night when there were not too many people in the cinema. If they did not book special seats at the back rows (which were more expensive), they waited until the movie was about to start and bought tickets in seats that were far away from other customers (unlike in Western countries, in Thai cinemas the customers can see which seats are occupied and which are still available and pick their own seats). During the fieldwork, there were also some leaked video clips about young people having sex in the cinema,

which was caught by surveillance cameras; these clips were widely shared in social media.

Some coffee shops and restaurants were also attracting young romantic couples by having certain tables located at a corner or behind partitions that could thus be used as private spaces to spend their time together. Various activities such as games booths, karaoke booths, and photo booths were also tactically used as opportunities for them to get close to each other in public spheres.

### **8.2.2 Challenging the Limits through Cultural and Sexual Practices in Nightclubs**

Due to the mechanisms of bureaucratic discipline in the name of ‘Social Order Campaign’ (*Jud Rabiep Sangkhom*) – which mainly aimed to control Thai youth sexuality, ordering nightspots to close by midnight and raising the age at which young people could enter entertainment places from 18 to 20 years as explained in Chapter 3 – were strictly enforced nationwide during fieldwork. Emphasizing the tactical practices of research participants to evade and contest those dominated disciplines, nightclubs therefore became another main arena to negotiate and to achieve a certain level of sexual freedom among female youth in Chiang Mai.

While the research participants were in high school and the first two years in university, they were not allowed to enter nightlife spots due to their age. Despite this, some of them went out to nightlife spots often, especially on Friday and Saturday night. Their female sexuality and various commodity consumptions contributed to this, as a tactic to be able to enter nightlife spots despite being underage. As mentioned that prior to going out at night, the girl group members usually gathered at Kim’s place to dress up and make-up, transforming themselves to look mature and ‘sexy’, or in Vicki’s words: “*Sometimes they don’t ask to check my ID card when I dress up in sexy ways (sai haen haen).*” At Kim’s place, the group members helped each other dress and put on make-up. Most of them came up with various tricks in utilizing cosmetics, creating hairstyles and the ways they would act in order to evade being detected as underage and getting caught by authorities.



When I joined the girl group preparing themselves I witnessed Nancy was dressing up and saw her put something between her breasts and her bra. When I asked her what it was, she showed a sponge and said: *“The magic stuff that makes me look so fabulous!”* After that, most of the girl group members also started putting pieces of sponge behind their bras which – together with the ways they dressed, make-up, and their hairstyle – made them look much more mature than their actual age. From this experience I learned that different sizes of breasts could also be tactically utilized by schoolgirls to evade the state control in a particular context.

At nightlife spots, there were several other tactics that the research participants employed in their own ways to avoid being asked for ID cards. Showing other persons' ID cards was widely practiced among them; some carried older-age friends' or older sisters' ID cards, choosing ID cards with pictures that looked similar to them as much as possible. What was important in this regard was remembering the name, address, and birth date indicated in the card so that they could answer correctly in case they were randomly asked. Once Cindy was asked for her ID card checked at a nightclub entrance, authorities doubted whether the ID card was really hers and noted the face looked different. Without hesitating, Cindy replied that she just had had plastic surgery on her nose so that she looked different to a picture in ID card, after which she was allowed to enter the nightclub. Cindy added: *“They usually don't check it seriously. They can't take very long time to check the detail. You see there are a lot of people waiting to come in.”* Some research participants took advantage at the time that it was very crowded at a nightclub entrance so they could slip in unnoticed; but this tactic was occasionally done only when they were confident that they dressed up to look mature enough and the authorities were busy at checking ID cards of other customers that looked younger. I noticed that the one who used this tactic most was Vicki. In addition to the ways she dressed and put on her make-up, while entering a nightclub entrance during a busy period, she would walk in confidently. Sometimes when authorities noticed her appearance and were about to ask for her ID card, she immediately distracted them by lifting her hands to give them salute (*wai*) and said certain greetings words, acting as if she knew them well, and she would just continue to walk past them, making use of the time they were momentarily startled.

Most nightclubs affixed a seal on customers' inner arm or wrist in order to give a signal that those particular customers already had their ID cards checked by the authorities. Research participants who were affixed a seal could quickly copy the seal to other group members while the ink was still drying; they would pair up with an underage (or ID-less) group member and go to a restroom somewhere outside the nightclub. They put a little water on the seal and then put the seal on their friends' inner arm or wrist. This tactic could be done only one time per person since the ink would be pale. Most of the girls benefiting from this were *toms*, who would be less likely to pass the ID card checkpoint since they did not have ID cards or could not dress up and put make-up to look mature enough.

Certain pubs and nightclubs did not require customers to show ID cards at the entrance; but every customer was asked to show his or her ID card to waiter so that the waiter would give a glass and serve drinks to each of customer; and every customer was required to pay immediately after ordering each time. This rule was strictly enforced without exception. Once I arrived at the places before other group members in order to get the table in a good location, after showing my ID card a waiter gave me only one glass. When I asked for more glasses for the other research participants, explaining that they would show up shortly, he refused my request explaining that it was a rule of the pub. If he did not act according to that rule, it would create trouble for him and the pub in case the state authorities randomly came to check and found out that the pub let underage persons enter and drink. When other group members arrived after that, since they had known about this rule before, the ones who did not have ID card were told to wait outside while the rest members who carried other older persons' ID cards sat at their seats, showed ID cards, and were provided their glasses by a waiter. Then they moved to another area of the pub to sit at a new table in order to get more glasses from different waiters; meanwhile the group members who did not have an ID card came to sit with me at my table and used the glasses that had previously been ordered by their friends. The group of girls who had ID cards spent time for a while at the new table and then moved back while carrying their glasses and drinks with them. For the next order for drinks, all of them were not required to show any ID card since it was understood that the one who already had a glass obviously must have had ID card checked by a

waiter. A similar tactic was asking senior friends who had ID cards and were nearby to come in, order drinks for them, and then leave again.

Like shopping malls, nightlife spots were also intensively utilized as ‘sexualized spaces’ (Khosravi, 2008) for female youth to explore their sexuality and complete certain level of sexual freedom. The nightlife spots then illustrated how consumer market economy had produced a proliferation of social contexts for sexual interaction (Farrer, 2002). As mentioned earlier that each nightlife spot represented different classes of customers that led to different tastes for dressing, drinking and music. Moreover, each pub and nightclub also represented different types and levels of sexual expression. Generally, most pubs and nightclubs in Chiang Mai were designed for customers to be able to see each other. Most places were designed to have different layers; the centers of the place were designed to be at the lowest level while the peripheries were at the upper layers. The lowest layers were usually the areas that most youth customers, including research participants, gathered since they realized that those who were around that area were likely to be center of attention. Those who were eye-catching by dressing and dancing in attractive ways would be likely to become popular (*kerd*) for the night. Prior to going out nightlife, the girl group members had to realize the tradition – such as dressing, drinking, and dancing – of the particular place they would go so they could get along well with the majority of goers. In spending time with the girl group members in several higher-class nightlife spots in Chiang Mai, they could be distinguished into three main types according to different levels of sexual expression: mild, moderate and extreme. For the first type, the music, mostly in English songs, was usually slow in the evening and fastened the rhythm when it came at late at night. It was mutually understood that most customers would stand up; some of them would gather at front of the stage to enjoy the music by moving their body gently along the beat. Touching other customers and expressing obvious intimacy among couples were not expected to happen at these places. Some couples were occasionally found holding each other’s hands but could not express more overt level of closeness such as sitting on each other’s laps or kissing. The second type of nightlife spots mostly played Thai song and fastened the rhythm around 11 p.m. Most customers, especially those who were already drunk, stood up and they were required to dance at their table areas. They were not expected to dance out of the areas of their tables since a dance floor was not provided. Moreover, the light was on in

certain level at these places so that any sexual contact or touching each other was rarely found. However, most couples who were found expressing their intimacy were female homosexual. Kim, a research participant who identified herself to be *tom*, revealed that female homosexual couples were able to ‘fool around’ (*fud kan* or *sa wee wee wee*) at this kind of nightlife spot since females who had homosexual relationships were not considered as ‘*sia tua*’ (losing a virginity) and people were more comfortable witnessing two females express closeness to each other. Moreover, female homosexual had never been caught by authorities so far. In contrast, male homosexual and heterosexual couples were likely to be centers of attention. Especially heterosexual couples, conventional Thai belief recognized female who had sexual relationships with opposite sex to be ‘contaminated’ and that would likely to be inspected. Kim proudly said that: “*I know those guys are jealous to toms [that toms could express intimacy with their girlfriends in public]. Some of the toms’ girlfriends are more beautiful than theirs.*”

The last type of nightlife spots, which I called ‘extreme,’ were the places where most customers intended to go to dance since this place emphasized on playing dance music. These nightlife spots were closed around 2 a.m. while certain places were closed later than that (more detail below). These places were usually crowded after midnight since most customers would move in from the first and second type of pubs and nightclubs which were closed earlier. Apart from dance music, these places decreased the light to be at a low level. Being under alcohol influence, Nancy told me that: “*Even women who look ugly like a termite (pluak), they can look beautiful like angels (nang fah) in these places.*”

Due to supportive environmental factors such as dance music, darkness, and drunkenness, customers could gain a certain level of sexual freedom. During dancing along the dance songs, apart from the ritual of hanging out smart phones as mentioned earlier, there were other tricks through youth customers who did not know each other could approach or touch each other when the counterparts allowed them to. Homosexual and heterosexual couples were found sitting on each other’s laps, hugging, and kissing. In these places, dancing was recognized to be the ways young women expressed their sexual selves and communicate certain meanings to others (McRobbie

& Garber, 1976). It was understood among goers at this type of nightlife spots that a woman who was dancing alone together with a man or *tom*; or those who was enjoying with her friends and did not turn her eyes to other customers was not expected to be approached. Meanwhile, any young woman who was dancing in her individual area – even she was being with her friends – and did not exclusively focus her attention on her friends was likely to be approachable. Kim shared her experience that a female who was dancing in a sexy way in her individual space meant that she was likely to be available. According to Kim, since these places were noisy, communicating through body language especially via eye contact and dancing were widely used. Kim elaborated further that: *“At this place, everyone gets drunk and they aren’t shy to send eye contact to each other. When I send my eye contact to anyone but she doesn’t look back means that she doesn’t like me. If she smiles or sends her friendly eye contact back, I will continue by rising up my glass to her. If she raises her glass back to me, that means we can get to know each other...”*

At certain places where sexual expression was limited – especially nightlife spots belonged to the second type – they took opportunities during traditional events to offer the youth customers a ‘special moment,’ which Bakhtin calls ‘the carnivalesque’ – a celebration of chaos and disorder, an inversion of social norms and codes, and a pause from the seriousness of everyday life (Bakhtin, 1984). For example, these places were usually filled by young customers at Thai New Year or *Songkran* nights since these places were well-known for a special celebration at late at night by splashing water throughout the places while most customers were getting drunk. By doing this, these places were turned into sexual loaded spaces since every customer was totally wet and most of them intentionally wore thin t-shirts, especially tank-tops for women. Some of them intentionally wore white cloths and they could be seen through after being splashed by water. While dancing, the drunken youth customers took this chance to touch and explore each other’s bodies, especially female, as the way to take advantages from an inversion of conventional Thai tradition.

As mentioned that most pubs and nightclubs were ordered by the ‘Social Order Campaign’ (*Jud Rabiap Sangkhom*) to be closed by midnight. During my fieldwork, it found out that some places, especially those belonged to the third type, could open until

2 a.m. or later than that. The nightclub where was well-known by youth in Chiang Mai for ‘opening until morning’ (*perd thung chao*) was located at center downtown. This place was an entertainment complex where was very famous for being one of the biggest nightclubs and dancehalls in Chiang Mai. It was understood that when it was almost 2 a.m., customers would be asked by the waiters that whether they would like to ‘move up’; customers who were not asked by the waiter but knew about ‘moving up’ could also send their requests. Then the waiters would assist those customers to move all drinks which had previously ordered to the upper floor of the building. Customers were guided to walk up through the small stair which was located at the different area from the main entrance. The small room on the upper floor could contain around two hundred customers and was very crowded after 2 a.m. Those who did not know this place would not realize that this place existed since the light outside the building was already turned off. Sometimes when I went there, I left the place around 4 a.m. to 5 a.m. in the morning.

The nightlife spots where belonged to types one and two were closed at midnight as being ordered by the authority. Some of them closed the front doors, turned off the music and light pretending that they were already closed at the time given. But it was understood among customers that they should order more drinks before midnight in order to continue staying even though the places were closed. Many young customers were willing to continue drinking during that time; some of them called this period of time a ‘highlight’ since most customers were already drunk and those were ‘available’ were dare enough to approach targeted persons who they were interested.

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## Conclusion

According to Bourdieu (1984) the objects of consumer choice reflect a symbolic hierarchy that is determined and maintained by the socially domination in order to enforce their distance or distinction from other classes of society. Appropriating Bourdieu's idea, taste becomes a 'social weapon' that defines and marks off the high from the low, the sacred from the profane, and the legitimate from the illegitimate (Allen & Anderson, 1994). Therefore, this Chapter shows that research participants used the 'social weapon' to identify themselves to be 'higher-class' comparing to *sakoy*. Through various forms of space utilization and cultural commodities consumption, the girl group members always compared themselves as having better taste and being higher-class to other youth groups. At the same time, those practices were also the ways they negotiated and contested various dominating powers, such as school, family and the state, which imposed on them. The results of this Chapter highlight the profound influence of global consumerism over the formation of youth culture and identity.

For the girls, moreover, cultural commodities appealed in some ways to them. I noticed that they have an ability to modify the resources made available to them depending on how it is used and how it is interpreted such as window shopping at shopping malls, the way they increased their breast sizes, and the ways they ordered drinks at nightclubs. These sexual and cultural practices can serve the interests of the schoolgirls to achieve a productive pleasure by utilizing them in alternative ways – to send a message of evasion or even resistance that they are not conformists to mainstream standards (Fiske, 1989). In contrary, they seek to create their own identity and sexual selves apart from conventional control powers, and this produces a productive pleasure for them.

In sum, this Chapter has illustrated the ways in which female youth utilized shopping malls and nightlife spots in Chiang Mai to define and express their identities. I found out that research participants were not only proper "consumers," but also "users" of the shopping mall and nightclubs. Their consumption practices sought to send the messages that they were the creators of their own selves.