

CHAPTER V

The Determinants of the change in Thai drinking behavior



5.1 Economic growth and social Change

There were three waves of economic development in East Asia in the twentieth century. The first one originated in Japan in the mid 1950's and ended in the early 1970's. This first wave saw a flow of Japanese capital to many of the other countries in the region. The second wave spurred the economic rise of East and Southeast Asian countries such as; South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, which were collectively became known as the "Asian Tigers" This wave started in the mid 1960's and ended in the early 1980's. The third and final economical wave of the century took place from 1980's and lasted until the mid 1990's or until the Asian financial crises. The final economic wave saw three Southeast Asian countries follow in the footsteps of the "Asian Tigers" they were; Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. This massive boom was fueled by the fast growing manufacturing industry in the Southeast Asian countries, who were mostly manufacturing products for export. The economic growth was so rapid in that period that these countries were known as the "Asian miracle" in economic terms.¹

¹Terence Chong. (2005). *Modernization trends in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Pages 5-6

With the departure of the US troops from Vietnam saw Thailand move toward this new era of economical developments. Manifested by liberation of trade, followed by acceleration of finance along with industrialization and urbanization.² The last quarter of the 20th century saw Thailand's economic growth rise to new heights, causing the quality of life of the Thai people. This period saw a considerable reduction in poverty as well as increased trade, adult illiteracy was reduced from 10,7% of the nation to 4,7% during 1983-1999 and accesses to healthcare services improved tremendously. Moreover infrastructure improved rapidly especially with regards to transportation and telecommunication³ The same period saw the rise of the tourism industry in Thailand, which in the mid 1970's was attracting only few hundred thousand tourists. With governmental support the tourist industry took off and reached ever greater heights and by the end of the millennium Thailand was attracting around twelve million tourists on a yearly basis.⁴

The rise of the Thai middle class went hand in hand with process of urbanization. Bangkok dominated that process, and grew over forty times the size of the next largest place in the country Khorat. Business prospered especially in the capital stimulating the growth of the middle class to grow larger and expanding the urban working class, mainly with people from the poorer villages in the country or by attracting workers from Thailand's neighboring

²Chris Baker & Pasuk Phongpaichit. (2005). *A history of Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Page 199

³Wisarn Pupphavesa. (2002). *Globalization and social development in Thailand*. Antwerp: Centre for ASEAN Studies. Page 9

⁴Wisarn Pupphavesa. (2002). *Globalization and social development in Thailand*. Antwerp: Centre for ASEAN Studies. Page 204

nations, such as Cambodia, Myanmar and Lao.⁵ The rise of the middle class was one of the manifestations of the economic rise, with the number of the Thai middle class more than doubling in just a seven-year period, from 310.000 in 1987 to 710.000 in 1994. The Thai middle class was mostly made up of executives, managers and other high-skilled technicians.⁶

Even though prosperity grew more in the urban areas than the rural areas in Thailand, there was considerable change in rural societies as well. Dr. Graham Fordham points out in his research on the social changes in the rural north part of the country, that in the mid 1980's it was considered a symbol of status to own a scooter or a motorcycle. A decade later the possession of a scooter was common and the status symbol had switched to owning a pickup truck, which in the mid 1990's was rare.⁷

The prosperity of the Thai economy in the second half of the 20th century not only stimulated mass urbanization. It was also a huge factor in fundamental culture change, that saw consumption patterns of the Thai nations shift to a model influenced mostly by Japan and the west. The foundations had been laid for the culture change in the shadow of the Vietnam War, when a large number Americans had occupied Bangkok, and influenced the capital with their western

⁵Wisarn Pupphavesa. (2002). *Globalization and social development in Thailand*. Antwerp: Centre for ASEAN Studies. Page 199-203

⁶Tereance Chong,. (2005). *Modernization trends in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

⁷Graham Fordham. (1995). *Social change, cultural logic, and the transformation of domestic relations in rural Northern Thailand*. Canberra: Australian National University.

way of life. In continuation many Thais traveled abroad for education, western movies became more popular, and shopping malls started to rise in the capital.⁸

5.2 Modernization, consumerism and alcohol

The economic growth period in Thailand can be described as period where Thai society was propelled toward modernity at an enormous speed. Although this development did not affect all parts of society equally, it is safe to say that the majority of the Thai nation experienced this newfound modernity

Academic scholars have different ideas on what modernization is, some emphasize on change in social structure and changes as in education, mass media and political aspects of the phenomenon, while other emphasize on the self-sustainable economic growth, increased education, public participation in policy arguments, diffusion of secular –rational norms in the culture.⁹

Socialist Alberto Martinelli describes the process of modernization in the following way;

“Modernization is specific sum of the large scale social, economic, political and cultural changes that have characterized the world history in the last 200 years and that originate from the multi-

⁸Chris Baker & Pasuk Phongpaichit (2005). *A history of Thailand*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Page 201

⁹Chavivun Prachuabhoh. (1997). *Famiy, comunity and codernization in Asian Societies; Japan, Vietnam and Thailand*. Thammasat University, Assistans Professor at the faculty of Sociology and Antropology. Fukuoka: ASIAN Pacific Center. Page 47

faced revolution (economic, social, political, cultural) of the second half of the eighteenth century. It is a process that tends to be global in two senses: it affects all aspects of involved societies and it progressively extends to the rest of the world from its birthplace in Western Europe”¹⁰

A more simplistic outtake on modernization is seeing it as an industrial progress that signifies the transition of a developing society in to a developed one. These changes consisting of major changes in most social sectors as well as with ideology and philosophy of the countries culture.

Modernization is also often linked with the term modernity, which refers to the notion of being a modern individual. This differentiates between the living conditions and the ideological perspectives of an urban living individual and an individual living in an rural area. These individuals have different visions and experiences on work, entertainment and material possessions.¹¹

According to Martinelli there are various characteristics that define how a society progresses from a traditional society to a modern one. He summarizes these essential aspects of the modernization transition in the following thirteen categories as shown on the table below:

¹⁰Alberto Martinelli. (2005). *Global Modernization; Rethinking the project of modernity*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. Page 8.

¹¹Terence Chong. (2005). *Modernization Trends in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Page 8.

Table 8: 13 characteristics of modernization

1. Development of science and technology, which becomes the primary source of economic growth and social change, and ultimately changes the way human beings view the environment and the universe.
2. Industrialization, founded on technology greatly increases the capacity to manufacture and trade with goods and ever-accelerating price and value.
3. Forming of a global capitalist market and an economic interdependence between different parts of the world
4. Structural differentiation and functional specialization of social life, bring forth a new form of a power struggle with in the modernizing society.
5. Transformation of class system, a decline of farm laborers and a growth of the bourgeoisies and an expansion of diversity with in societies.
6. Development in political mobilization of movements and parties and representative associations, as well a development in the establishment of a nation state.
7. A liberation from religious con ¹² trol over society and scientific knowledge, and the privatization of faith,
8. Popularity of new values related to modernity, such as individualism, rationalism and utilitarianism.
9. Mass urbanization, where the majority of society live in urban environment, which are functionally complex, culturally pluralistic and socially inharmonious
10. The privatization of family life and separation of workplace from the home, women's liberation.
11. The democratization of education and the development of mass

culture and mass consumption
12. The development of a material and symbolic communication methods, which unite incomparable people of society.
13. The compression of time and space according to the demand of the industrial production and the world market.

Source: Alberto Martinelli.¹³

As seen on Marenelli’s list on table 7, the process of modernization affects all the major spheres in society, including the economic, political, social and cultural spheres. If Thailand’s evolution is compared to this model, it will in most cases fit the description of the characteristics at hand.

Thailand was transformed from an agriculture society to a consuming society over a very narrow period of time. These social changes also saw a fundamental change in ideology towards consumerism, which sociologist Zygmunt Bauman is defines as follows;

“Consumerism is a type of social arrangement that results form recycling mundane, permanent and so to speak “regime –neutral” human wants, desires and longings in the principal propelling and operating force of society, a force that coordinates systematic reproduction, social integration, social stratification and the formation of human individuals, as well as playing a major role in

¹³Alberto Martnelli. (2005). *Global modernization; rethinking the project of modernity*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. Pages 10-11

the process of individual and group self identification and the selection and pursuit of individual life policies”¹⁴

Sunate Suwanalong states in his doctoral thesis that changes in of Thai identity and individuality were considerable and there were increasing number of Thai people who defined them self through their patterns of consumption rather than of their work role, as before. Their consumption also reflected how they wished to be seen by others in the community. As the Thai public developing an appetite for a new consumer driven society soon, it paved the way for the use of advertisements to create further desires.¹⁵

5.3 Thai consumerism and increased alcohol consumption

The role of the marketing is essential when explaining the increase in alcohol consumption in the Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries. As seen in chapter four the alcohol industry has been progressing aggressively with their marketing strategies, and it does not hesitate to use all available tactics to increase the sale of its controversial products. It uses to its advantage the developing environment of the countries. Both the lack of policy on alcohol products and the lack of force to implement those policies that are at hand. The general ignorance in some parts of the societies on the harm of alcohol is also in their advantage.

¹⁴Zygmunt Bauman. (2007). *Consumng Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Page 28.

¹⁵Sunate Suwanalong. (2006). The history of consumerism in Thai society. *PhD Thesis*. Munser, Germany. Page 204.

Among the debates about the nature and content of marketing is on the deceptive or manipulative element of the marketing practices. How far can the promoters go to make his product more attractive than his rival products? Some say that debate on the manipulative aspects of marketing ultimately lead to freedom of choice, but in all fairness it is about the right of the consumer not to be systematically deceived.¹⁶

David A Aaker and Geogre S. Day say in their book *Consumerism; a search for consumer interests*, claim that there ore those who fear that the freedom of the consumer to make a well informed judgment call on what product they should consume and purchase, is being restricted by the manufacturers right to promote his products. There are three basic arguments on this aspect, which are;

1. The concern of using motivation research, which appeals to motivate the consumer on a subconscious level. A classic case is James Vicary's theater experiment, by flashing the phrase "drink Coke" and "Eat popcorn" at an exposure of 1/3.000 of a second during the showing of a movie, xhich ultimately led to an 57% increase on the sale of Coke and popcorn.
2. Indirect emotional appeals are related to issues of deception, where the line between artistic presentation and deception can easily get blurred.
3. There are more general claims that the power of modern advertising, which can stimulates individuals to consume products, and conduct in

¹⁶David A. Aaker & S. Day Georg. (1971). *Consumerism; search for the consumer interest*. New York: The Free Press. Page 199

behavior that has negative affects for themself as well as society as a whole.¹⁷

The social effects of marketing have a huge impact on the choices an individual makes, and consequently his lifestyle and values. The impact of the marketing has its positive and negative sides. The main issues in the debate on the effect of marketing are if the values and lifestyles represented in the marketing message lead to a unhealthy lifestyle, it is of course debatable how much of an impact marketing can have on an individual.¹⁸

There is greater consensus on the harm marketing can have on the youth. It is generally recognized among sociologists and professionals in the marketing industry that children are more susceptible to manipulation. They are thought to lack the perceptual defense of adults, therefore not being able to evaluate marketing strategies and advertisements objectively. There are those who claim that all advertising directed at children should be banned.¹⁹ A resolution from the 63rd annual World Health Assembly concluded on the marketing tactics on food and non- alcoholic drinks that the governments of all nations need to show leadership in monitoring and implementing a policy to protect children from the negative marketing effects.²⁰ This consensus on marketing food and non-alcoholic drinks is a made to counter the fight obesity of children, which has

¹⁷ David A. Aaker & S. Day Georg. (1971). *Consumerism; search for the consumer interest*. New York: The Free Press. Page 193

¹⁸David A. Aaker & S. Day Georg. (1971). *Consumerism; search for the consumer interest*. New York: The Free Press. Page 200.

¹⁹David A. Aaker & S. Day Georg. (1971). *Consumerism; search for the consumer interest*. New York: The Free Press. Page 200.

²⁰WHO. (2010). *Set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children*. Geneva: WHO. Page 10.

been rising in most societies and now ranks as the fifth major health threat for children in the world.²¹

The growth of consumption in Thailand has mainly had two external influential sources, the western world being Europe and North America and Japan.²² Westernization, in the region of Southeast Asia is more so influenced by American culture than European, which manifested by the popularity of American pop culture. Chua Beng-Huat, finds the term Americanization more appropriate to describe the trends influencing the Youth of Southeast Asia.²³ The Japanese influences in Thai society are tangible as well with, but have in recent years been replaced by South Korea, the influence of these two East Asian nations on pop culture in Thailand is considerable, manifesting in the popularity of both J-pop and K-pop among Thai consumers.

It is important to recognize that there does not have to be a correlation between what products the public might be demanding and the actual quality or usefulness of the product. In other words the wants and needs of the public are not always in their best interest. The Betamax versus VHS format war in the 1980's is a classic marketing example on how product of lower quality gained market dominance. These were the two rival formats for video recorders in the late seventies and early eighties, competing for dominance for the market. VHS was victorious in the end in spite of the fact that Betamax was arguably a better

²¹WHO. (2010). *Set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children*. Geneva: WHO. Page 4.

²²Terence Chong. (2005). *Modernization trends in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Pages 59-61.

²³Chua Beng-Huat. (2000). *Consuming Asians: ideas and issues*. In *Consumption in Asia; Lifestyles and identities*. London: Routledge. Page 15.

format, both smaller and with stereo sound, while VHS was larger and with mono sound. There were great many factors that contributed to the fact that VHS came out on top, one of them being that the sex industry chose the VHS format. In the end the public was left with market dominance of a product with less quality.²⁴

Roman Meinhold points out that many of the products being marketed and pushed on to Thai consumers are not necessarily products that are of the best quality or in the public's best interest. To substantiate he takes the example of the Western style toilet. The use of western toilet has been spreading, and can be found in most new buildings, hotels and shopping complexes in Bangkok. For some reason the constructors or the owners of the new buildings in Bangkok choose the western style over the Asian Squat toilet. The Squat toilets usually come with a small water sprayer, sometimes called a bum gun. Meinhold argues that the Asian squat toilets are better in almost every way compared to the Western sitting toilets. According to him the Squat toilet uses less water when flushed, individuals use less toilet paper, because of the water sprayer, the water sprayer provides better hygiene and it takes shorter time to use a squat toilet, but often people spend long time on the toilet and find it comfortable to read while taking care of business.²⁵

²⁴Dave Owen. (1. May 2005). *The Betamax vs VHS Format War*. Retrieved 15. September 2010 from [mediacollege.com](http://www.mediacollege.com):

<http://www.mediacollege.com/video/format/compare/betamax-vhs.html>.

²⁵Roman Meinhold. (2009). Popular culture and consumerism Mediocre, (schein-) Heilig and Pseudo-Therapeutic. In D. I. Yusuf, & C. Dr. Atilgan, *Religion, politics and globalization: Implications for Thailand and Asia* (pp. 51-65). Bangkok: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Pages 55-56

The increased consumption of alcohol in Thailand is similar to the two examples above, in that way the Thai public is buying into a trend or behavior, which is of poor quality and does not serve any particular use, except for short time self fulfillment.

5.4 The Mass media and alcohol consumption in Thailand

Globalization can be described as a process which regional economies, societies, and cultures become integrated through a global network of communication, transportation, and trade.²⁶

Neil A Englehart argues that the forces of globalization had considerable impact on the democratization in the 1990's in Thailand. The country had been moving toward a steady integration into international trade and financial networks since the mid-1980's. One of the side effects being increased vulnerability to international public opinion, especially with the foreign investors. The fact the investors were worried about political instability and preferred democratic governing system paved the way for Thai democracy activists to push for the passing of the new constitution.²⁷

It is highly logical that globalization has had a similar effect on the Thai public regarding to the consumption of alcohol. For the modernization of the country can in many ways to be seen as a form of westernization, for the public

²⁶Christopher Barbara, *International legal personality: panacea or pandemonium? Theorizing about the individual and the state in the era of globalization* (Berlin: DVM Verlag, 2008). Page 3

²⁷ Neil A. Englehart, „Democracy and the Thai middle class: globalization, modernization, and constitutional change,” *Asian Survey*, 43, nr. 2 (March 2003): 253-279. Page 267

are not simply getting more modern, they are adopting to lifestyles of the more developed parts of the world, with alcohol consumption being one of those adopted elements.

The media environment in Thailand is considered to be one of most liberal among the Southeast Asian countries, though it has a history of governmental interference especially in the in the 1960's and 70's as well as having a tradition for being corrupt, but various forms of gifts to the members of the press where common practice especially in the 1970's. Fortunately these practices have decreased considerably.²⁸

Thailand was the first country in Southeast Asia to start television transmissions in 1955, since then the media operations of the country have grown immensely. With a variety of government run television stations and a few privately owned, as well as a cable network. Thai television mostly transmits commercial and popular entertainment, ranging from news to soap operas. Domestic productions are popular as well as foreign shows mostly originated from china, Japan, America and England.²⁹

Ever since birth of mass media, companies have used this means of communications to let a large number of people know about their products. . However, as the years have progressed, the sophistication of advertising

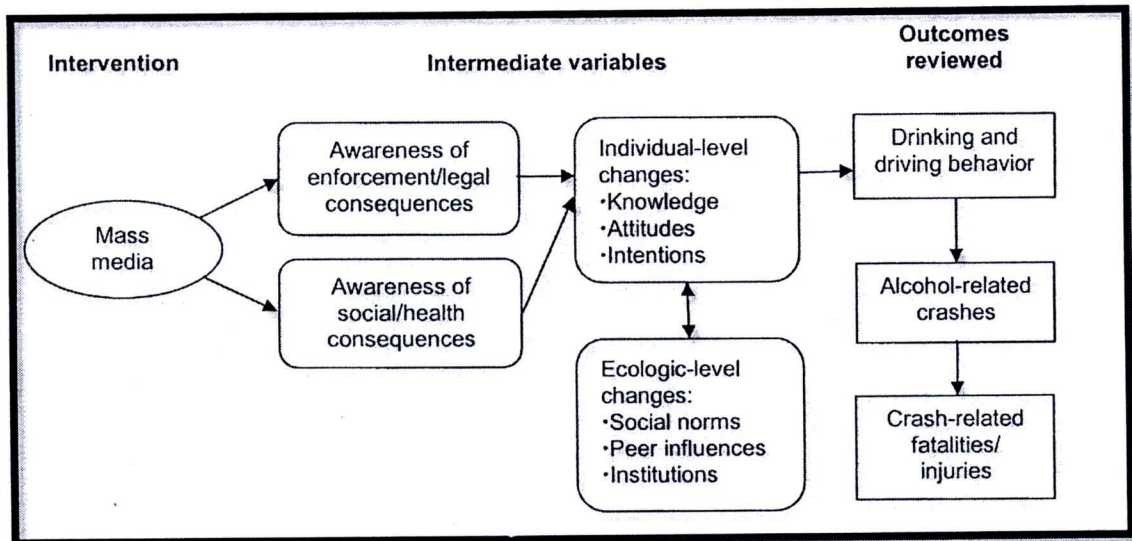
²⁸ Kavi Chongkittavorn. (2002). The media and access to information in Thailand. In R. Islam, *The right to tell: the role of mass media in economic development* (pp. 255-266). Washington DC. Page 255

²⁹ Kavi Chongkittavorn. (2002). The media and access to information in Thailand. In R. Islam, *The right to tell: the role of mass media in economic development* (pp. 255-266). Washington DC. Page 255

methods and techniques has advanced greatly, creating needs where there were none before, or turning luxuries into necessities.

The alcohol companies put a considerable amount of effort in to the branding of their alcohol beverages, as shown in chapter four. They align their beverages with desirable and positive elements such as sport and entertainment. The branding of an alcohol beverage is carefully molded so it mirrors the image of its intended target group. Moreover the Thai alcohol industry conveys messages in their advertisements and promotions that certain activity calls for the usage of alcohol and they encourage many forms of socialization to involve drinking of alcohol.³⁰ As if people are not capable of socializing without drinking. To stimulate people towards these behavioral or consumer changes, the alcohol industry uses the power of the mass media.

³⁰ Bantid Sornpaisarn, „The impact of Alcohol advertisement on Youth,“ í *The 3rd National Alcohol Conference; "Alcohol No Ordinary Commodity"*, 33-40 (Bangkok: Center for Alcohol Studies, 2007). Page 39

Figure 13: Mass media and alcohol

Source: TFCPS.³¹

Figure 13 portrays in a very clear manner how the mass media can affect the behavior of an individual. The messages from the media effect knowledge, attitudes and intentions relating to the individuals drinking behavior.

5.5 The Thai alcohol paradox, Buddhism and modernization

Theravada Buddhism in large part can be summarized as follows: the four noble truths, the concept of transmigration, the doctrine of Karma, the concept of merit, salvation from rebirth or nirvana and the eight precepts. The precepts. The eight precepts are assorted in to the five and three, the latter ones are considered for the more serious practitioners of Buddhism such as monks and nuns. To live ones life in accordance the precepts is to follow rules of abstaining

³¹Task force on community preventive services, *Effectiveness of mass media campaigns for reducing drinking and driving and alcohol involved crashes*, (New York: American journal of preventive medicine, 2004). Page 3

form behavior that is determined harmful to one self, other or the environment.

Following are the eight precepts:

1. To abstain from killing
2. To abstain from stealing
3. To abstain from sexual indecency
4. To abstain from lying or falsehood
5. To abstain from intoxicants and over consumption
6. To abstain from eating food at an inappropriate time
7. To abstain from indecency associated with music, dancing, entertainment, bodily adornments and decorations
8. To abstain from using large and high sleeping place (which is generally seen as a statement of luxury in Thailand).³²

One of the most significant aspects of the modernization process in Thailand is the ideological clash between the traditional or a Buddhist ideology and of the modern consumerism ideology. It is plain to see that these ideologies are clear opposites of each other. In fact consumerism can be interpreted as the vital component one should avoid in order to follow the fifth precept of Buddha. The moral of the fifth precept is to counter suffering caused by mindless consumption, more so the precept also specifically instructs the followers of Buddha to avoid the usage of mind altering substances, such as drugs or alcohol.

When asked about the recent trend in alcohol use of Thais and the clash with the fifth precepts. Thai monk and director of the addiction treatment in the Watt Thamkraborg, Prah Kong Suk, enlightened the researcher on the practice of Buddhism, especially tolerance and non-judgment. According to his explanation,

³² Paul James Rutledge. (1992). *Central Thai Buddhism and modernization*. St. Luis: Dhamm pradipa. Page 10-11

Buddhists are given freedom to choose how they follow the teachings of Buddha. The most important thing is that one is trying his best is on the way to improving oneself. The precepts are ways to improve one behavior toward other and the nearest environment, but usually it takes time and experience to follow them, their objective is more to be suggestive than strict laws that Buddhist follow. Even monks are not required to follow the precepts to the fullest, it is simply expected that they try there best. While staying at Watt Thamkraborg, the researcher observed that mostly all of the monks there smoked cigarettes, some of them had girlfriends and even drank alcohol on a regular basis.³³ Therefore it is not the understanding of Thai people that Buddhism forbids the use of alcohol, as in Islam, it is just a recommendation.

Practitioners of Buddhism always emphasize on anti material value. In fact it is considered to be one of the main characteristics of Buddhism. It is believed that the pursuit of material possessions, limits the capability for spiritual growth and the possibility to become enlightened. In reality, however Thai behavior does mirror those values completely, In the later part of the 20th century it has become a social norm to simultaneously pursue abstaining material possessions as well as regularly practice Buddhist faith³⁴

Western values particularly those relating to materialism and consumerism are considered to be the source of the decline of Buddhism in

³³Prah Kong Sak (25. July 2010). Director of addiction therapy at Watt Thamkraborg. (P. A. Steinarsson, Interviewer).

³⁴Paul James Rutledge (1992). *Central Thai Buddhism and modernization*. St. Luis: Dhamm pradipa. Page 29.

Thailand. Paul James Rutledge states the following paragraph on attitudes towards modernization in Thailand in his paper on *Central Thai Buddhism and modernization*:

“For the monks in the central provinces, there is a nefarious aspect to modernization, which to large extent negates whatever good modernization has, to the point in time, brought to the provinces. The allure of commercialism and the temptations of consumerism are considered being the handmaidens of social evils which are a part of western development.”³⁵

Some of the social evils Rutledge mentions are elements such as age discrimination, increased violence and drug use and a more impersonal society, where monetary transactions are valued more important than interpersonal relationships. These effects of modernism are mainly felt by the younger generations of Thailand.³⁶

The increase of alcohol use certainly belongs with the above-mentioned westernized social evils. Prah Kong Sak monk of the addiction therapy Watt Thamkraborg , claims that the dangers of alcohol is far more dangerous and affecting more people with negative consequences than drug use. He underlines that he does not mean to belittle the drug problem, which he considers to be very

³⁵Paul James Rutledge. (1992). *Central Thai Buddhism and modernization*. St. Luis: Dhammpradipa. Page 38.

³⁶Paul James Rutledge. (1992). *Central Thai Buddhism and modernization*. St. Luis: Dhammpradipa. Page 38.

serious in Thailand, especially amphetamine. The element that makes alcohol use so more dangerous is the outspread belief that alcohol is relatively harmless and is a normal consumer product which is accessible almost everywhere. There is even a widespread belief that alcohol is a health product and is used in medical purposes, while the stigma of drugs is widespread in society.³⁷

³⁷Prah Kong Sak. (25. July 2010). Director of adiction therapy at Watt Thamkraborg. (P. A. Steinarsson, Interviewer)