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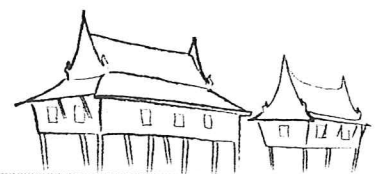
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# Socio-cultural factors influencing face manifestation and communicative behaviour in Thai service encounters

## ปัจจัยทางสังคมวัฒนธรรมที่ส่งผลต่อการแสดงหน้าตาและพฤติกรรม การสื่อสารในการปฏิสัมพันธ์เพื่อการบริการในบริบทไทย

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### Abstract

This paper aims at providing the literature review regarding Thai society and values and service encounters which are likely to affect face manifestation and communicative behaviour of participants in the contexts of Thai service encounter by examining socio-cultural and socio-economic factors influencing communicative behaviour of participants. This examination of those influential variables was conducted in order to draw a diagram which demonstrates the relationship between those factors which engender appropriate communicative behaviour of participants in Thai service encounters. Furthermore, this paper also illustrates *faces* or a basic conceptualized thought that societal members expect agents and customers to perform. Results revealed that the difference in the socio-economic roles (occupation) between agents and customers, power of money which customers occupy and which dominates agents to provide customers with good services, and the Thai value เกรงใจ /*kreng cay*/ have played a vital role in determining communicative behaviour of participants in Thai service encounters. In addition, faces that agents need to take to meet customers' expectation in service encounters may contradict those expected by their professional organization.

**Keywords:** service encounters, Thai, face, socio-cultural factors, communicative behaviour

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความฉบับนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อทบทวนวรรณกรรมที่เกี่ยวข้องกับค่านิยมและสังคมไทย รวมถึงการปฏิสัมพันธ์เพื่อการบริการ ที่มีแนวโน้มที่จะมีอิทธิพลต่อการแสดงหน้าตา และพฤติกรรมสื่อสารของผู้ให้บริการและผู้รับบริการในบริบทการปฏิสัมพันธ์เพื่อการบริการของไทย โดยการรวบรวมปัจจัยทางสังคมเศรษฐกิจและสังคมวัฒนธรรมที่มีผลต่อพฤติกรรมสื่อสารดังกล่าว การรวบรวมปัจจัยดังกล่าวทำขึ้นเพื่อเขียนเป็นแผนภาพแสดงความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างปัจจัยเหล่านั้นที่ก่อให้เกิดพฤติกรรมสื่อสารที่เหมาะสมในการปฏิสัมพันธ์เพื่อการบริการของไทย นอกจากนี้บทความฉบับนี้จะแสดงให้เห็นถึงหน้าตา หรือความคิดรวบยอดพื้นฐานที่สมาชิกในสังคมได้คาดหวังให้ผู้ให้บริการและลูกค้าต้องปฏิบัติ ผลการทบทวนวรรณกรรมเปิดเผยว่า ความแตกต่างในบทบาททางสังคมเศรษฐกิจ (อาชีพ) ระหว่างผู้ให้บริการและลูกค้า อำนาจเงินที่ลูกค้าครอบครองและที่ควบคุมผู้ให้บริการเพื่อให้บริการที่ดีแก่ลูกค้า และค่านิยมที่เรียกว่า *เกรงใจ* นั้นมีบทบาทสำคัญในการกำหนดพฤติกรรมสื่อสารของผู้ให้บริการและผู้รับบริการในการปฏิสัมพันธ์เพื่อการบริการ อีกประการหนึ่ง ในบางครั้งหน้าตาที่ลูกค้าคาดหวังให้ผู้ให้บริการจำเป็นต้องถือปฏิบัติในการปฏิสัมพันธ์เพื่อการบริการอาจจะขัดแย้งกับหน้าตาที่องค์กรคาดหวังให้ผู้ให้บริการจำเป็นต้องถือปฏิบัติ

**คำสำคัญ :** การสนทนาเพื่อการบริการ, ไทย, หน้าตา, ปัจจัยทางสังคมวัฒนธรรม, พฤติกรรมสื่อสาร

## 1. Introduction

Face and activities involved in face and politeness have been broadly studied across cultures and in various contextual situations since they are significantly recognized with regard to their importance as a way to help communicate effectively. Nevertheless, most studies in Thai contexts have investigated face concern as well as the involvement of speech acts with politeness through written responses and focused on the sentence level. Examples of those studies include Computer-mediated communication (CMC) (e.g. chatrooms) (Hongladarom & Hongladarom, 2005), idioms and expressions (Intachakra, 2012; Khanittanan, 1988, 2005; Kummer, 2005; Ukosakul, 2009), Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) (Panpothong, 2004; Promsrimas, 2000; Rhurakvit, 2011), letters (Chakorn, 2006) and group discussion (Aoki, 2010). This research area in Thai contexts was also conducted in relation to the pragmatic transfer, in particular Thai speakers of English such as the studies of Cedar (2006), Wannarak (2008), Thijittang (2010) and Chiravate (2011). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the previous research as mentioned was undertaken in academic settings or simulation situations, not in other settings such as business settings possibly because of the difficulty in accessibility. Business hosts tend to be reluctant to grant permission to record and observe naturally occurring conversations (Kasper, 2000, pp.318-319) since they are significantly concerned with the privacy of recorded participants and possible losses of commercial business. The business contexts have played an important role in the current world where the economy significantly affects people's life and their behaviour. Tourism and hotel industries have been a more popularly monetary income; therefore, encounters between customers and agents tend to have an impact on customer satisfaction and entrepreneur income.

Institutional contexts, in particular service encounters, can be called as daily social encounters between agents and customers (Merritt, 1976). However, the main objective of service encounters is contrast to everyday interactions such as dinner talk between family members which has conducted two functions: Creating sociability and helping socialization (Blum-Kulka, 1997). Service encounters are defined as *a period of time during which a consumer directly interacts a service* (Shostack, 1985). It can be assumed that the definition of service encounters broadly covers not only customer's interaction with agents but also with machines, physical facilities and other visible elements (Bitner et al., 1990; Massad & Crowston,

2003). Furthermore, service encounters are primarily business-oriented interactions. The roles of participants, i.e. customers and agents, are fixed and the participants must manage the expectable activities around which the encounter is constructed (Solon, 2013), for example, requesting and offering a service. In terms of the industrial area, (non-)verbal behaviour in institutional settings where the transactional goal is primarily in focus is potentially associated with the increase or decrease in the commercial achievement. It is because agents' communicative skills and situational management skills can affect customers' perception of the institutions and thus their purchase decisions.

Nevertheless, previous research in *Thai* hospitality contexts, in particular, was conducted within marketing and management disciplines, e.g. looking at customer/tourist satisfaction (Rittichainuwat et al., 2002; Somwang, 2008; Thitthongkam, 2013). It has thus not taken into account pragmatic views on face, and thus result in limited insights into the (in)appropriateness of participants' behaviour in Thai hospitality settings. Agents are one of the main elements which satisfies customers and thus results in the growth of the profits. Therefore, the examination of factors which have an impact on the effective communication in service encounters is vital for both agents and customers in Thai society. Consequently, this paper aims to provide literature reviews on those socio-cultural variables which are likely to influence the presence of Thai face and Thai people's behaviour in service encounters. After reviewing a number of academic research and articles of Thai and non-Thai service encounters and their relevance, including research in Thai cultures, those factors are summarized as follows.

## **2. Influential factors towards face manifestation and communicative behaviour in service encounters**

Earlier and recent research in cultures and communicative behaviour has revealed the impact of culture on (non-)verbal behaviour in particular situational contexts, for instance, in everyday contexts (Tannen & Kakava, 1992), in academic contexts (Hwang et al., 2003) and in service encounter contexts (Wong, 2004; Thitthongkam, 2013). Thus, the first part of this section will be contributed to Thai culture before moving onto other variables influencing communicative behaviour in service encounters, i.e. power of money and Thai values.

### **2.1 Thai culture**

Thai culture is categorized as *collectivism, high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance* when compared to western cultures (Hofstede, 2001, p.270). However, this categorization is criticized due to the change in individuals' behaviour according to periods of time and a rapidly high development of telecommunication, broadband and the media (Jones, 2007). The change in global communication leads to distant communication in term of both face-to-face spoken responses and written messages and multiparty communication amongst strangers through social media (e.g., webboards, chat groups and Facebook). Then, this shift results in the change in people's communicative behaviour. Most social media, e.g., Facebook and webboards, is a community where both intimate and non-intimate people visit and construct talk without face-to-face communication, social variables influencing the linguistic choice such as socio-cultural differences (e.g., age, occupation and education), are likely to be less influential to the weight on face concern and to produce explicit expression of face-sensitive activities, for example, explicit rejections and disagreements, rather than implicit ones. This behaviour seems to contradict Hofstede's categorization of Thai society. According to Morand and Ocker (2003), computer-mediated communication (CMC) users tend to be considered impolite when they are analysed by politeness theories for non-computer-mediated communication, e.g., the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987).

Despite the influence of the change in telecommunication and CMC on Thai people's communicative behaviour, Thai culture is basically constructed on the strong hierarchical system (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1996; Klausner, 1997) under the conceptual thoughts of Buddhism (Taylor, 1997; Wiriyaseabpong, 2015). Thai people are socialized to be aware of the social status; they usually elevate elder people and people with power and/or with the higher social status, including those who work in some professional fields such as teachers and doctors (Kummer, 2005). This behaviour results from the strong feudalism in the past. Klausner (1997) claims that the hierarchical system and the difference in social status bring about Thai people's avoidance of confrontation, i.e. they do not often express their feelings such as disagreements, anger and happiness. In addition, most Thais seem to acknowledge and learn their position of seniority that they have towards some people with the lower status and simultaneously their position of inferiority to those with the higher position (Taylor, 1997). Due to their belief in Buddhism, the

higher position of a person or the lower status of another person varies according to that person's *bun* [“บุญ” (merit)] or *baap* (“บาป” (demerit)] people with the higher social position are believed that have occupied more *bun* and less *baap* from their previous lives whereas those with the lower status are believed the other way round (Taylor, 1997). However, this Thai value has changed in Thai society (Phanphae, 2011). Thai people are likely to express explicit feelings.

Moreover, the influence of the hierarchical system and the difference in social status is also reflected through the choice of linguistic features of pronominal references in accordance with the interlocutor, time and place. Each pronominal form reflects the speaker's intentional instance in connection with socio-cultural norms (e.g., intimacy and deference of subordinates towards superiors) and their emotional stance towards his/her interlocutor (e.g., anger and friendliness) and the discussed issue. In conclusion, the hierarchical system by birth, areas of living and occupations is still influential on Thai people's ways of life and their communicative behaviour. Thai society values deference to authority. Subordinates, e.g., younger people and students, should be quiet in confrontational situations and display modesty to superiors, e.g., older people and teachers (Knutson, 1994, 2004). Consequently, Hofstede's criteria are likely to be partially applicable to Thai society, i.e., Thai society described as high power distance.

Taking Hofstede's cultural classification of Thailand as high power distance into account, in service encounters high power distance may strengthen the social position between customers and agents, and then increase customers' expectations, such as the way in which agents deliver their services with deference. Let us draw on the hierarchical position between customers and agents in Thai society. A customer-agent relationship includes that the agent is socially and professionally expected to satisfy customers' needs and pleasure (King, 1995, p.228). Despite the private and equal relationship between agents and customers which they are socially obliged to maintain by being a good company, commercial relationships which are unequal seem to dominate people's behaviour in hospitality contexts. The impact of commercial relationship on their actions can be evidenced through explicit or implicit expressions of interpersonally sensitive activities in sensitive situations such as direct disapproval in complaining situations. Interpersonally-sensitive activities are defined as “(non)verbal actions that indicate participants' concern about their own face and their interlocutor's face, as well as



their interpersonal relationship when participants in interaction show disalignment (Goffman, 1967) with the interlocutor” (Leelaharattanarak, 2015), for example, disagreements, complaints and refusals. According to Taylor (1997), the difference in the social position is also affected by economic factors. Due to the lack of social welfare and the problematic distribution of wealth in Thai society, Thai people need to earn money to feed themselves and their family. They want to do a job which allows them to make much money. Therefore, occupations have become an indicator of the variation in the social status. In general, most agents, in particular those working at the front desk and hotel staff members, are categorized as people in the lower-middle class where on average citizens in Thai society are classified, i.e., lower officers working for private companies or governmental sections, technicians, small-business owners, or the upper-lower class where poor people who have a partly command of knowledge and skills, i.e., non-skillful and semi-skillful laborer (Kummer, 2005; Triwittayapoom, 2011). On the other hand, most customers receiving services at hotels include people from different classes, i.e., those from upper-middle class whose members include those who reach an achievement in profession, e.g., doctors, lawyers, administrative officials, professors, etc., including university students expected to reach the professional achievement, to upper-upper class whose small group of members in Thai society are celebrities in a variety of professions, e.g., business and entertainment, CEO and members of executive committees, genetic successors from aristocrats in the past (e.g., His/Her Serene Highness Prince/Princess) (Triwittayapoom, 2011) due to the high price of products and services. At this point, taking into account the universal concept of the customer-agent relationship and the role of occupations as an indicator in the Thai hierarchical system, agents are likely to be considered socio-economically subordinate. This signifies that unlike politicians, doctors and professors, due to the low level of education and the absence of authorities on other people, agents are socially regarded as subordinates. Economically, they do not occupy power of money in interacting with customers either. Therefore, it may be said that power of money is another variable which affects people’s communicative behavior in Thai society.

## **2.2 Power of Money**

In a commercial relationship, customers who occupy power of money can leave a service if they are dissatisfied with the provided service (King, 1995), and

agents must give them a good service for the sake of their professional institution. As institutional representatives, agents must sell as many products or services as possible for the sake of their professional institution and their own benefits, e.g., incentives, commission fees and job promotion. The increasing amount of money that customers pay for products and services implicates an increase in profits of the professional institution and agents' progress of career path. In other words, the decreasing amount of money that customers pay for services or products may partially reflect agents' service quality and their work effectiveness. Consequently, power of money entails the communicative behaviour of participants in transactional exchanges, i.e., agents are subordinated to power of money whereas customers dominate and manage it.

A well-known economically-related thought that *ลูกค้าคือพระเจ้า* *lūk kháa khuu phá?cháo* ("The customer is God") (Arrington, 1990) and an idea called "Customers are always right" (Thitthongkam, 2013; Wu, 2015) are likely to result from the way in which Oriental agents, for instance, the Japanese (Arrington, 1990; Witkowski and Wolfinbarger, 2001) elevate customers and from the potentially business competitiveness (Thitthongkam, 2013), in particular at the period of the global business world. These sayings indicate that although their communicative behaviour is considered incorrect, agents are socio-economically unlikely to disagree with or reject customers' ideas and behaviour or to conduct any actions violating customers' expectation. In other words, ideally agents must do everything that they can in accordance with customer need because customer satisfaction is highly important (Thitthongkam, 2013). To achieve the transactional exchange, agents can make neither explicit disagreement nor non-compliance with customers if they want to sell products. Unlike agents, customers have legitimate rights to express explicitly negative opinions towards the provided services or products in order to reserve their own personal benefits. They desire the best service which is the best value for their money. Taking into consideration agents' behaviour in the management view, staff members, i.e. agents in service settings, are one of the three key factors of "service triangle", a concept broadly used to meet customer satisfaction in service industry, in addition to strategies and systems (Karl Albrecht, quoted in Kraingoo (2010); Piromrat (2012); Wichato (2011)). According to the concept of service triangle, strategies used must be adapted in accordance with customers' needs in order to retain customers. Moreover, service sites must

organize the friendly system which allows customers to get access to easily. In addition, staff members, the last factor, are people who employ those strategies and systems in practice. Therefore, staff members must behave appropriately and avoid potentially dissatisfying behaviour in order to meet customer satisfaction. If we assume that that theoretical sayings and the concept of the service triangle are true, interpersonally-sensitive activities, for example, rejections of offers, disagreements and complaints, are unlikely to be salient at least from the point of view of agents.

Moreover, agents are likely to be assumed regarding the weight of face concern in transactional interaction through the use of various (non-)linguistic forms, for example, nonverbally and prosodically dispreferred responses (e.g. silence and hesitations) (Leelaharattanarak, 2015) in order to avoid confrontation. However, at the same time, agents take the role of good employees being loyal to their institutional site, where they must be concerned with its business, benefits and regulations. In some interpersonally sensitive situations, agents' social roles to customers and to their professional institution may contradict with each other. That means that agents want to sell products or services, but cannot provide everything that customer requests. This results in the loss of benefits of the professional institution. The contradictory roles of agents may affect their communicative behaviour when conversing with customers. Communicative behaviour occurring in service encounters shapes customers' expectations, satisfaction, loyalty and *word-of-mouth* behaviour (Tsiotsou & Wirtz, 2011, p.14) which will happen after service encounters end. It may cause difficulties in an agent's career and the reputation of the institution later. Negative reputation and negative word-of-mouth, after the service is provided, can significantly have an impact on future purchases. They may be significantly concerned by Thai agents since, according to Hofstede's cultural criteria, Thai society is classified into a high uncertainty avoidance culture group. Pornpitakpan (2000) claims that Thai customers rely on suggestions from personal sources of information, for instance, friends and relatives, in order to decrease commercial risks. These claims signify that agents' expression of (non-)verbal actions considered appropriate in service encounters can lead to the high tendency of the transactional accomplishment, implying that agents' ability to get customers to align and be satisfied with them. In contrast, the fact that agents express (non)verbal actions that customers and others consider improper results in

customers' negative assessments towards the provided service and their negative expectation about the future actions which may cause institutional loss of benefits and negative reputation.

### 2.3 Thai Values

According to Leelaharattanarak (2015), the significance of a Thai value called *เกรงใจ* /*kreng cay*/ (*KJ*) has played an important role in the manifestation of face in Thai service encounters. It involves one's consideration of others' faces, needs and feelings so that one shows an extreme reluctance to impose on others (Knutson, 1994; Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin, 1999; Pornpitakpan, 2000; Ukosakul, 2009; Intachakra, 2012) and is linked to the deference to power and distance. Both Thai agents and Thai customers display implicitness when expressing disagreement with and rejections to each other because of the Thai value "KJ" (Leelaharattanarak, 2015), which is closely related to the concept of face (Ukosakul, 2009). The Thai value "KJ" results in twofold: (a) a person may need to do something that he/she does not want to do and/or (b) a person will occasionally lack independence of doing what he/she wants to do (Ukosakul, 2009). In addition, in Thai contexts, *เกรงใจ* /*kreng cay*/, a Thai national value, affects the linguistic choice in expressing refusal, non-compliance and disagreement in both hierarchical (e.g., subordinate-superior and elder-younger relationship) and non-hierarchical (e.g., friend-friend relationship) conversations. This interactional principle seems to be accurately equated with a concern or an anxiety about how others may think or feel as a result of one's expressed words and action (Intachakra, 2012) and about the fact that one should not take advantage of another person (Ukosakul, 2009). In other words, the metapragmatic concept "KJ" can engender the expectable style in interaction, i.e., the speaker tends to be concerned about the benefit that the interlocutor will receive and about the avoidance of conflicts. Regarded in this viewpoint, this interactional principle is significantly dominated by relational work rationality (Watts, 2003): In this case there is an interrelated relationship among three aspects, i.e. the speaker's desire for interpersonal relationship-building, the Thai value "KJ", and the linguistic choice in social practice. The relationship-oriented idea forces the presence of the Thai value "KJ", and then the latter concept forces the speaker to choose (non-)linguistic forms socially-prescribed as appropriateness. Thai people usually say "yes" and hardly say directly "no" when answering the question or agreeing with others (although in reality they do not)

(Hendon, 1999; Witkowski & Wofinbarger, 2001; Katz, 2008). In general, Thais value a hierarchical system: Subordinates needs to show “KJ” to superiors.

At the end, for showing cross-reference to the influence of culture on communicative behaviour of agents and customers, the impact of power of money on it and the Thai values, let us draw on a model of the macro-scale variables on communicative behaviour of agents and customers’ perception of service satisfaction and recovery in Thai society. Communicative behaviour of agents and customers is professionally-oriented by an economic variable, i.e., *power of money*. The power of money motivates agents to get customers to make a positively purchase decision for the sake of their benefits in diverse forms (e.g., job promotion and commission fees). It also provides customers with authority on agents to decide whether to purchase products and services and to evaluate them. In addition, power of money in transactional exchanges originates the conceptualized thought “the customer is God” which implicates that customers’ want is the most priority and that customers are highly elevated and honored by agents. This conceptualized thought also indicates that, in theory, customers are always right. It dominates mainly not only customers’ expectation about the manner in which the service is delivered but also agents’ communicative behaviour performed. Culture is a significant variable which has large impact on agents and customers, in terms of the manner in which they perform and the way in which their thoughts are constituted. The relationship of service encounters (or communicative behaviour in service encounters), customer evaluation and satisfaction towards the provided service and agents’ benefits is interrelated, interactive and role-expectative. That signifies that agents’ (non)verbal performance can affect customer satisfaction (Tsiotsou & Wirtz, 2011), that simultaneously customer satisfaction can affect agents’ benefits and agents are required to recover customer dissatisfaction, if it occurs, and that both prior variables affect the latter pace of service encounters.

Figure 1 as shown below is constructed on basis of: (A) The impact of cultural orientation towards face manifestation and communicative behaviour of participants in service encounters and service assessments (Wong, 2004; Mattila & Patterson, 2004; Thitthongkam, 2013); (b) power of money which affects (b1) agents’ communicative behaviour, such as, their effort to satisfy customers, to recover the service when agents fail to achieve customers’ wants (Arrington, 1990) and (b2) customers’ expectation toward the provided service and their purchase



decision (Burgers et al., 2000; Tsiotsou & Wirtz, 2011); and (c) positively and negatively assessed communicative behaviour of agents and customers (Solomon et al., 1985; Price et al., 1995a; Tsiotsou & Wirtz, 2011).

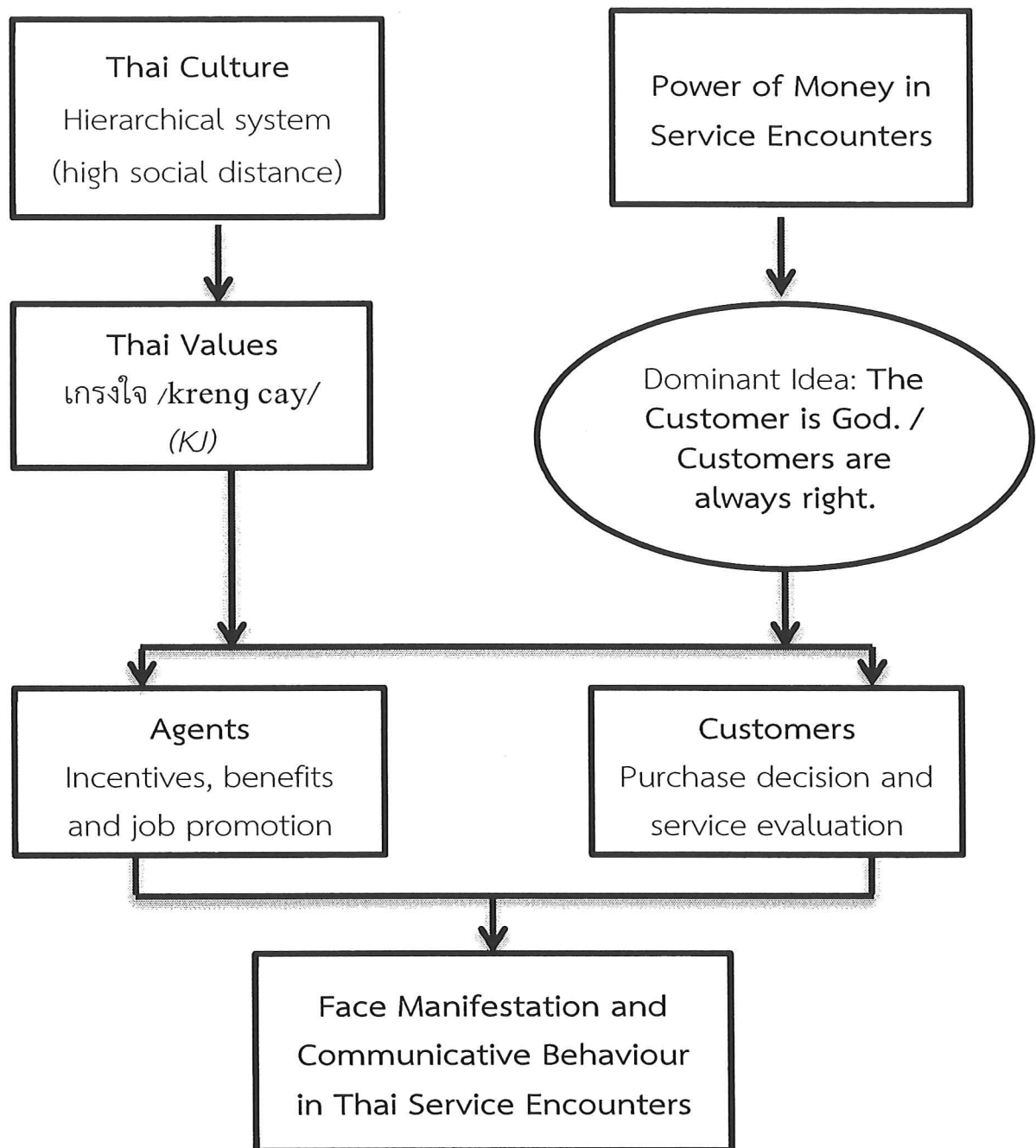


Figure 1 Socio-cultural factors influencing face manifestation and communicative behavior of participants in Thai service encounters

The section sheds light on the socio-cultural variables influencing communicative behaviour of both service providers and service takers. Those variables are likely to stimulate the presence of expectable behavioural characteristics of both stake holders in service encounters. Consequently, the next section will focus on faces of agents and customers.

### 3. Faces of Agents and Customers in Service Encounters

Before taking into consideration faces of agents and customers in service encounters, the definition of face should be drawn. The term “face” has appeared in various expressions in diverse languages, for example, Thai (e.g. *รักษาหน้า* (face-saving), *เสียหน้า* (lose face)), Japanese (e.g. *kao*, i.e. face associated with representative of a person and power in terms of one’s degree of influence in a group (Tao, 2014) and *mentsu*, i.e. face used to reflect one’s social image (Tao, 2014)) and Chinese (e.g. *mianzi*, i.e. face related to social expectations influencing a person’s effort to secure public acknowledgement of his/her prestige (Ji, 2000; Kádár & Pan, 2013) and *yan*, i.e. one’s physical face and prestige (Kádár & Pan, 2013)). Face is focused on not only by Easterners but also by Westerners. Goffman (1967) defines the term “face” as:

“...the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. ‘Face’ is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes—albeit an image that other may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself.”

Unfortunately, Goffman’s definition of face has been broadly criticized regarding its ambiguity of what triggers the manifestation of face such as O’Driscoll (1996) and Arundale (1999, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010) and about its limited applicability in Eastern cultures (Arundale, 2009; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003). Nevertheless, Goffman’s notion of face is adapted by subsequent scholars, e.g. Brown & Levinson (1987), Spencer-Oatey (2000) and Watts (2003), in establishing frameworks of politeness and face. Adapting Goffman’s notion of face (as he claims), Watts (2003, p.125) proposes his adaptive concept of face defined as a basic conceptualized thought which determines a person to conduct politic behaviour or what is socio-culturally required with regard to social norms (Leelaharattanarak, 2015).

Shall we focus on faces of agents and customers in service encounters? Earlier several studies in service providers' performance during the encounter (Bitner et al., 1990; Price et al., 1995b; Burgers et al., 2000; Tsiotsou & Wirtz, 2011) have provided an insight into customer expectations toward agents' behavioural characteristics, such as, friendliness, assurance and command of knowledge provision. Service encounters are related to role performance (Price et al., 1995a) of participants socio-economically assigned by the mainly transactional goal. Accounting the customer expectations suggested by those studies with the lines that customers and the public assume agents to be taking according to Watts's (2003) adaptive notion of face, agents are expected to perform different faces assumed as an institutional representative, i.e., socially-prescribed communicative behaviour, before and during the interaction. However, agents roles are not only determined to customers but also to their professional institution. Thus, the lines which agents loan from the institutional site should be taken into account.

Let us examine the faces that agents are expected to express in the view of a business representative and an employee for a company. In service exchanges, the public and customers expect that agents must be friendly and positively emotional for customers, as well as give customers a warm welcome (Bitner et al., 1990; Price et al., 1995b; Tsiotsou & Wirtz, 2011) despite the low degree of intimacy between them. The assessment of service quality and customers' impression partly depends on the positive emotional expression of agents (Pugh, 2001). Agents must express more on characteristic of friendship than commercial service provision. When acknowledging customers' arrival at the hospitality setting, agents should display their pleasure of the service provision to customers. Secondly, the face that agents should attribute to customers is the face related to secure the public acknowledgement of their professional competence: They must be competent, skillful and helpful for customers (Bitner et al., 1990; Price et al., 1995b; Burgers, et al., 2000; Tsiotsou & Wirtz, 2011). They must have sufficient knowledge regarding the provided service and can explain where the complaint arises from. Thirdly, agents are expected to manage various interpersonal situations (Burgers, et al., 2000). They must adapt their behaviour to customers in various situations. For instance, agents should provide customers with other services when customers' prior request fails to be served or when their prior offer dissatisfies customers. Fourthly, in critical situations, the face that people expect agents to be carrying is the management of feelings. They must sustain the emotional energy, i.e.,

their emotional restraint, to accomplish service encounter goals. When customers assess the provided service negatively, the face that their institution and customers assume agents to be taking is the avoidance of the explicit disagreement and negatively emotional expressions, such as, in a complaint sequence where customers may display outrage with the provided service. Fifthly, in addition to the sustenance of emotional stance, in critical situations the face that agents professionally borrow according to socio-economic norms is the expression of empathy (Price et al., 1995b; Tsiotsou & Wirtz, 2011). That means they must be emotionally sharing and caring with customer difficulties. For instance, when customers describe the experiences of their problems which arise from the provided service, agents should signal their pleasure listening to it. Finally, another face that others assume agents to be taking is that agents must occupy empowerment. This assigned face signifies that agents must be empowered to take any actions which help customers obtain whatever they wish. The absence of authority of agents results in the fact that customers feel annoyed (Burgers, et al., 2000) since they leave customers' questions unanswered.

Considering the agents roles as an institutional representative, the face that agents are expected to perform as a part of their professional institution includes that they must protect an institution image from a bad reputation, if the provided service is negatively criticised by customers. However, to accomplish the transactional goal, agents are expected by the public and their institution to maintain interpersonal relationship with customers. They should avoid conducting verbally and nonverbally face-sensitive activities through which they need to express dis-alignment with customers in order to minimize confrontation since those actions are vulnerable for the interpersonal and transactional relationship. Thus, the maintenance of the institution image should be conducted on the basis of the avoidance of vulnerable (non-)verbal behaviour. Secondly, agents as an employee are also assumed to be restricted to institution policies. That means they must follow strictly institution regulations, i.e., what they are (not) allowed to do, e.g., discount-giving, a payment process and an amount of deposits. Agents are also professionally expected to reserve their institution benefits, i.e., they must attempt fundamentally to get customers to accept their offered product but simultaneously it must be undertaken under institution regulations. At this point, the lines of agents assigned by customers and by their employer may contradict in some occasions, for example, the fact that customers request for something which infringes the institution regulations. Agents' awareness of the institution benefits is associated

with another of their institutional expectation, i.e., the delivery of functional outcomes. Digression of commercial topics for a long stretch of talk can break the line that agents and the institution assume. Service encounters normally take place for a limited period of time because they are mainly transactionally-prescribed and both agents and customers have their commercial goal in mind. Thus, agents should gear the interaction into the fundamentally transactional goal. However, digression of commercial topic for a short stretch of talk, for example, greeting-summon at the beginning of the encounter and small talk during the interaction (e.g., the current hot news) may be established for sociability and interpersonal relationship in mainly service exchanges.

Figure 2 presents a summary of the faces that agents are socio-economically expected to be carrying as a company representative and as an employee of the company.

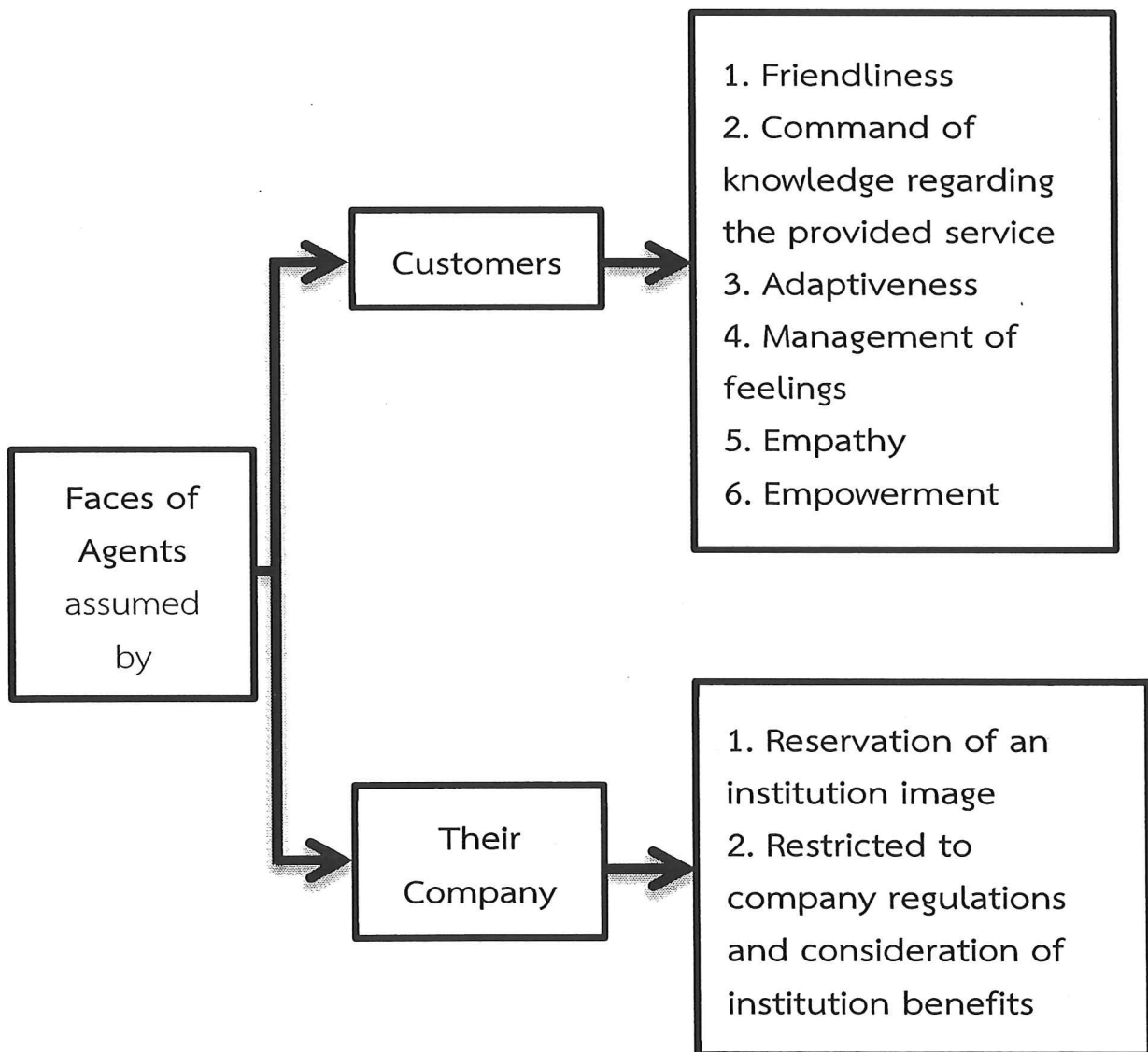


Figure 2 Faces of Agents



Shall we take faces of customers into account? Although customers are considered as a money power holder, the public can expect customers to accompany socially-prescribed etiquette, i.e., they must manifest sociability and friendliness to their interlocutor. Thus, what customers are expected to perform is to maintain interpersonal relationship in non-everyday interactions when elaborating requests and rejecting offers through appropriate verbal and nonverbal acts, for example, silence and the use of hesitators (Leelaharattanarak, 2015). Furthermore, the line that the institution and public assume agents to be taking is to protect institutional benefits, whereas customers are socially predictable to protect their own benefits. That means customers want the best service that they think is the most valuable for their amount of money.

#### 4. Conclusion

Culture has a significant impact on a person's communicative behaviour in diverse situational contexts, including Thai service encounter contexts. Thai society is characterized as a hierarchical pyramid where people are classified by birth (His Majesty the King and his royal family), age and occupation due to the influence of the feudalism in the past (Phanphae, 2011): Thai people elevate people with the high social position such as royal family members, older people, superior governmental officers and doctors (Kummer, 2005; Phanphae, 2011). The hierarchical system and the difference in the social position are reflected through the choice of linguistic forms such as pronominal terms. The Thai value called *เกรงใจ* /*kreng cay* / (*KJ*) has also played a vital role in the face manifestation of Thai people in Thai conversations. The Thai conversations include both everyday encounters and service encounters, in particular those between Thai agents and customers. The Thai value "KJ" dominates people in Thai service encounters to produce implicit expressions of face-sensitive activities such as disagreements and refusals (Leelaharattanrak, 2015) in order to avoid confrontation and maintain harmonious relationship. Not only Thai culture and the Thai value "KJ" affect face manifestation and communicative behaviour of participants in Thai service encounter contexts but power of money, which is strongly associated with the institutional roles of participants and commercial-professional benefits, also does. These three variables, i.e. Thai culture, the Thai value "KJ" and power of money, influence communicative behaviour and the face manifestation that people assume agents and customers to be carrying during the service encounter. In other words, faces and lines that are socially assigned to a societal member to behave are context-based, i.e., socio-

cultural or socio-economic roles as well as values. Faces and lines socially assumed by the public and its members have become “behavioural expectations” that a person who resumes a social or socio-economical role needs to be taking. If he/she disaligns them (or one of them), the communicative breakdown or misunderstanding between participants in situational contexts is likely to take place.

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