

Assessment of sexual health needs of males who have sex with males in Laos and Thailand

Some reference resources



Conducted for Pact by
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MSM and HIV in Thailand

Some references

Allyn, E.G. Trees in the Same Forest: The Thai Gay World; (excerpted from *The Men of Thailand* and updated for the web); <http://www.floatinglotus.com/tmot/gaythai.html>

“The Thai gay world is as varied, colorful, baffling, amazing, and wonderful as is Thailand itself. It is a gay world very different from its Western counterpart, although at first glance, these differences may appear minor. Superficially, this difference appears to be the predominance of the male sex trade (discussed later), but there are several realms to the Thai gay world. The institutionalized commercial realm of male prostitution is the most obvious one and mirrors its Thai heterosexual counterpart.

The other realm, the one that was once more difficult for foreigners to find and participate in, has always been there. It is the more private, personal world in which Thai gay men seek the company of other men. Until recently, the key to entering this realm was excluded to most foreigners, for it mostly required the ability to speak Thai—and to behave in very Thai ways. It is also a discrete and even hidden because Thai gay men were well aware of the attitudes about *gà'tubhy* (a Thai term that until recently had a broad meaning that included homosexual male [see below]). Over the past two decades, however, as a Thai gay identity has evolved, and the larger Thai society *didn't* step forward to challenge its validity, as feared by some gay Thai, this part of the Thai gay world more boldly stepped out—creating viable commercial alternatives to the predominant gay commercial-sex businesses.

This evolution from a conspicuous Thai gay world that is primarily commercial-sex oriented to what might be described as more peer oriented (or non-commercial sex oriented) might seem “backward” to some. For those Western gay men who came out after Stonewall, all this might seem odd or even baffling, because we *expect* a distinctive gay identity and a gay world. Although male-to-male sexual behavior is universal, an identity based on it is not. In other words, having sex with another man, and even loving another man, does not require an identity—an “I am not like other men” identity or even “I am different from other men” identity, let alone an “I am gay” identity. Such a phenomenon may occur in a society that doesn't explicitly acknowledge it or in one, like Thailand, that doesn't explicitly proscribe it.

It has only been within the past five years that a clearer distinction about what it means to be gay (as opposed to being *gà'tubhy*—effeminate, transvestite, transsexual) has evolved. Previously, many Thai have seen homosexual behavior as simply sexual behavior; it was only *gà'tubhy* who sought a “husband,” they assumed. Male-identified Thai gay men may have settled for trysts and the normal, strong bonds of male friendship that are typical in Thailand but with a sexual element. They were raised on the idea that the only male who wanted a romantic relationship with another male looked, dressed, and/or acted like women. But this has all changed, particularly among young Thai gay men.

Social Tolerance and Homophobia at Thailand

When we say that Thailand is not a homophobic society, this doesn't mean it *accepts* homosexuality. It simply means that it neither culturally fears nor loathes homosexual behavior or homosexual men. There are, in fact, some Thai who espouse Western homophobic ideas, but they haven't had much impact on social attitudes. Chinese-Thai and Islamic-Thai gay men are very much victim to their subculture's homophobic attitudes. Chinese-Thai, in particular, suffer

great conflicts because of Chinese cultural homophobia. (Not every Chinese society is virulently homophobic. For example, Taiwan is considerably less homophobic and oppressive than Singapore.)

There are layers of social attitudes about *chao gay* (gay people) that seem confusing to wade through (but, then, so are Western attitudes). They differ by social class and perhaps even by region. Social ideas expressed by middle- and upper-class Thai about sexual behavior are sometimes extremely prudish and conservative; yet, these are the classes that make the sex trade flourish. (It is a myth that Thailand's sex trade was created or even significantly supported by foreigners.) Many Thai males who are sexually and emotionally oriented toward other men express anxiety and shame about the consequences of their homosexual behavior being publicly exposed; yet, gay magazines contain personal advertisements with photographs of men seeking other men, suggesting an astonishing lack of concern about “exposure” or perhaps ultimate bravery. Even defunct gay magazines printed twenty years ago contained photos of men seeking male friends and lovers.

Some Western observers point to the internationally publicized 1997 ban of “gay student” by the Rajabhat Institute as an example of an undercurrent of homophobia and intolerance in Thai society. Rajabhat is a teacher's college, with campuses Kingdomwide. The controversial announcement, however, was never against gay men, but was aimed at *gà'tuhy*. Nonetheless, it was heavily criticized in Thailand and was dropped.

Before we begin wandering the maze of Thai homosexuality, social attitudes, and gay behavior, we'll introduce you to some Thai words for the types of people found in the Thai gay world.

The Meaning of “Gay”

“Gay” is an English loan word and, for three decades, until recently, has been popularly used by the Thai public as another word for *gà'tuhy*. The term *gà'tuhy* originally meant “hermaphrodite,” later coming to mean transvestite, transsexual, effeminate male, as well as a vague general term for homosexual males. *Gà'tuhy* is sometimes a common, but mild, pejorative, but most Thai use it in a neutral way to describe males who don't conform to Thai gender norms. Its use generally causes titters. However, “gay” has become something more distinct from *gà'tuhy*. In 1994 “gay” began to be more widely used to refer to masculine-identified men who are emotionally and sexually attracted to other males. By the end of the decade, Thai media usually emphasized the distinction.

It was just a few years ago that Thai of the lower classes might deny he's gay, associating the word with being anally receptive (the equivalent Thai gay slang term for “bottom man” is *kween* or *gay-kween*), because everyone knew that *gà'tuhy* were the *kween*. Because of the distinction, it is more common for a barboy (a male sex worker), whose sexual orientation is often the subject of great speculation, to declare in English or Thai that he's “gay.” Read more about how to tell if a barboy is gay or straight.

The label *mæn* (from the English “man” and pronounced almost the same way) generally means one “straight-acting” and, by implication, is the sexually “active” partner. In a gay context, or with a bar host, a Thai may state, “I [am a] man” (*pöm' bhen' mæn*)—meaning he is the inserter, or “*gay kóng'*. To the average gay Thai a *mæn kóng'*, seemingly a redundancy, means either “a straight-looking male who is the inserter” or a “straight male who is the inserter.” A *mæn-kween* is, to Thai gay logic, an impossibility. It used to be that a foreign gay's claim that he is a “gay man” was met with bewilderment, as the two words together seemed illogical to

many Thai. Though *mæn* normally means “straight,” if a Thai male says, *Pöm' bhen' mæn mâi' sà'dæng àwk*, it means he is gay who has no outward behavioral signs (not effeminate).

Occasionally a lower-economic status Thai man will apply the term “gay boy” to himself to mean he likes men. “Lady boy,” a term fairly common in Southeast Asia, refers to an effeminate male, transvestite, or transsexual, and means he is a *kween* and will take the passive role sexually. Being both *king'* and *kween* (versatile) sometimes is called *kwíng'*.

Besides “gay,” a common neutral term for homosexual is *mái' bhà deeo gan'* (tree in the same forest). It might be used like this: *Kào' bhen' pòo-chai têe châwɔp mái' bhà deeo gan'*—“He’s a man who likes trees in the same forest.” It is an insightful description capturing the Thai modesty about sexual matters and the tolerance of Thai culture and Buddhism.

About 20 or 30 years ago, the Thai invented the words *rák'-dhàng-pêt* (different-sex love) and *rák'-rúam-pêt* (same-sex love), equivalent to heterosexual and homosexual, respectively. What is significant about both terms is the word “love.” Both terms are primarily academic, though the average Thai would understand them. Unlike the term *gà'tuhy*, *rák'-rúam-pêt* itself doesn’t imply gender deviance, although some Thai may connote it so.

To refer to gay people, *chao gay* is most common phrase. One can ask, “*kao' bhen' gay, châi' mâi'*” (He is gay, isn’t he?). Among gay friends, it is more simply “*bhen' mâi'*” (Is he?).

Another polite compound term for a gay man or lesbian is *chai-mâi'-jìng'-yìng'-mâi'-tâe* (literally, “male-not-true, female-not-real”), meaning the person is not-a-male/not-a-female. This non-pejorative term suggests that gay males and lesbians are thought of as distinctly different from heterosexuals—almost as if they were a third gender.

It is rare for the Thai to use a term that is equivalent to “straight.” In fact, it is usually said as *kao' mâi' châi' gay*—“He/she is not gay.” One could say “heterosexual person” in Thai as *chao rák'-dhàng-pêt*, but that would sound strange to the Thai ear. The phrase some Thai would use, if they needed to make a distinction, is *chai-jìng'-yìng'-tâe* (true male, real female); two concepts put together to mean “heterosexual.” (Despite the literal translation, the term does not mean that gay people are false males and females.)

Labels and labeling in Thailand are not as fixed as in the West. So, Westerners with a strong sense of gay identity may be in for a bit of “cognitive dissonance.” A Thai man with a wife and five children might make gay love with such passion that we might want to insist he’s really gay, just closeted. A sexy drag queen who beds a man with ease periodically goes “straight” and has sex with a woman might have our minds grasping to understand. Some *gay-kween*s we know take off a barboy for an evening when they are in the mood to be a *king*. A Thai man with a lithe, graceful body, feminine gestures, and a high, soft voice would fit both Thai and Western standards of “queer,” but never has thought of making love to a man. And the barboys, the “hosts” at gay bars, who agree to have sex with men aren’t “really gay,” they’re just “gay for pay,” or aren’t they?

Despite the evolution of a Thai gay identity in Thailand, it should be remembered that our gay culture evolved in a very different setting. Whatever “gay” means to you, expect your standards of it to be challenged.

Transgender/Gà'tuhy

If “gay” isn’t a universal, the transvestite perhaps is. Westerners are astonished by how ubiquitous are Thai transvestites. There’s no debate about what to call them: *Gà'tuhy* is most widely used term for them, though there are perhaps a dozen terms. The term is pronounced as *Gàh'tuh-y*, but often spelled as “kathoey” and also refers to transsexuals and effeminate males.

The feminine male who sometimes crossdresses and has sex with men is a clear, socially articulated model in Thailand. For this reason, if a young Thai male is at all effeminate, he might slip into the role model of *gà'tuhy*, a character often regarded with good-hearted mirth in some upcountry areas, and, until recently, a growing derision in others, particularly in large cities. It seems that even the smallest village has at least one, and it is remarkable how many *gà'tuhy*'s family and neighbors do not shun him (though his family may be very distressed about it). He may be teased and even flirted with, and he is surely the subject of much gossip, but he’s still part of the clan, the family, and the village. Not all *gà'tuhy* enjoy reluctant acceptance or even toleration. Many crossing-dressing and gender dysphoric males do have stormy conflicts with their fathers, in particular, and are subjected to verbal abuse by peers and strangers.

Kathoey, krathoey, katoi, katoey, katoye are ways people try to spell the Thai word for what they call ladyboys, shemales, transgendered males, transsexuals, and transvestites. *Kathoey* is the most common way to transliterate it. *Krathoey* (*grà'tuhy*) is a less commonly used variation. Although crossdressing is most common in the West among heterosexual males, in Thailand, pre-operative transsexuals (they do not consider themselves male) and female-identified males (many of them do not consider themselves gay and would shun gay men as partners) most commonly dress as women. As in the West, some gay men crossdress occasionally for fun or if they have a strong attraction to “real men” (*pôo-chai tae*—e.g. straight men).

During the late 1980s a social debate erupted. Despite the media’s use of the term “gay,” the debate was really about the *gà'tuhy*: How were they *made* that way? Were there more of them than there used to be? Wasn’t it really socially bad? And didn’t the media glamorize them so that young people emulated them? The debate spawned a government decree that banned effeminate actors and *gà'tuhy* slang from television. The ban lasted a few years and didn’t have an effect on Thai attitudes about them. Despite some rather vocal protest about *gà'tuhy*, Thai people love them.

There have always been popular, even loved, actors who were very effeminate, who usually play “gay” parts in films and television shows, often in serious roles. Since the democratically elected government took over in 1992 (from the 1991 coup leaders) and the government reigns on the media were untangled, the “gay” stars came back and “*gà'tuhy*” characters often were integrated into television series. For the most part, other characters didn’t label them, and their love/sex lives aren’t focused on . . . but these characters were loved family members and best friends. *Gà'tuhy* characters, however, were often the clowns and their flirting with handsome co-stars was amusing. Everybody knows a *gà'tuhy*, so their pervasiveness on TV and in the movies reflected a degree of reality. By the new millennium, several series seriously dealt with the problems *gà'tuhy* face—the disapproval of the father, cruel remarks by strangers, and their frustrations in finding true love.

Like the Filipino *bakla* and certain Native American tribes, the Thai *gà'tuhy* probably at one time had a special place in Thai society. We get a hint of that role upcountry, where traditional sexual mores are still strong. Though young men and women choose their own marriage partners, their interaction is chaperoned and good girls aren’t touched. There is evidence to

suggest that, rather than the Anglo-Saxon approach to *suppress* the male sex drive, Thai society has *channeled* it. One option as a sexual outlet is the *gà'tuhy* and the other the prostitute.

Today, some transvestites and transsexuals are prostitutes (some straight bars employ them). Transsexuals desiring sex change operations often raise enough money for the surgery this way. *Gà'tuhy* have become successful as gay bar owners, cabaret performers, or involved in the fashion industry. Several of Thailand's top models are transsexual and a beloved popular singer is *gà'tuhy* also.

They are fascinating to the Thai public, and even admired, if beautiful, classy, and successful. Cabaret performers are aesthetically judged by the Thai for their beauty, costuming, and performance. In mid 1998 (and every year since) Thai newspapers carried side-by-side photographs of the new Miss Thailand (a woman) and Miss Alcazar (a *gà'tuhy*), rhetorically asking which was more beautiful. Many people agree Miss Alcazar was the clear winner. Miss Alcazar admitted in the report to having an edge up on a real beauty queen because she can spend all her prize money on cosmetic surgery to become even more glamorous. Alcazar, like Tiffany, is a world-renowned cabaret theater in Pattaya transgender. The pageants are even broadcast nationwide.

However, throughout the most of the 1990s, perhaps coincidentally, as a masculine-identified homosexual male identity emerged, *gà'tuhy* became increasingly criticized by the Thai. *Gà'tuhy* were more frequently seen as ostentatious, loud, uncouth, uncultured, selfish, and even as criminal. However, classy *gà'tuhy*, who dress well and behave with grace and polish are still socially accepted and integrated, as suggested by an old Thai term, *nang fá jam' læng* (transformed angel or “angel in disguise”), and the more common term, *säo' bhrà'pâyt säwng* (“second type of woman”).

In the late 1990s, Thailand's champion volleyball team, Iron Ladies (*Sadhree Lek*) was composed entirely of *gà'tuhy*. The team made headlines when Thai sports authorities, out of concern for the country's international reputation, refused to allow the team entry into an international competition. The story was reported with more sympathy than one might imagine and team members expressed dismay that they shouldn't have a chance to prove their abilities. A successful movie was made of this story and a sequel is pending release.

The Thai media focused on stories of *gà'tuhy*, including a former transgender beauty queen, who were forced by hardship to become laborers, unloading and lugging truckloads of lugging heavy rice bags. During a television interview with several *gà'tuhy* manual laborers, a reporter asked what term they would like to be called. “You can call us anything you want,” said one, “except *dhóot*” (a pejorative somewhat equivalent to “faggot” or “poofter”).

A teenaged transgender Muay Thai boxer, Parinya Kiatbusaba, achieved global fame by racking up an impressive record of eighteen knockouts in twenty-two bouts in two years as of April 1998. However, in February 1998, when he refused to disrobe fully during a pre-bout weigh-in, his tears of modesty touched Thai hearts. In the match which followed, to the largest crowds ever accommodated in the boxing stadium, the then sixteen-year-old Tum (*Dhôm'*—his nickname) defeated his opponent who had taunted him for not being a real man, then planted a consolation kiss on the cheek of the surprised loser. That kiss played for weeks on Thai television. Despite the sudden glare of the world media, the boxer is not a publicity hound. *Nong Tum* was a shy and dedicated athlete whose talents were seriously cultivated by a proud coach. The photo above is of *Nong Tum* after sex-change surgery.

Tum is also completely comfortable with his identity, and he used his frequent media

appearances to help change negative social ideas about transvestites. When asked by a reporter whether his developing muscles would ruin his feminine figure, Parinya replied that many women also have muscles. The then sixteen-year-old boxer said that he gets a lot of advances from men after a bout, but that he's in no hurry to find a boyfriend.

The undefeated champ also said: "It is hard to fight beautiful men. I can easily knock them out. On the other hand, I want to hug and kiss them. But don't be distracted by my looks. This smile has knocked out eighteen boys."

In December 1999 Tum successfully underwent a sex-change operation. She continued boxing in women's bouts and exhibition fights at temple fairs and reportedly operates a gay pub. For more info about the upcoming Thai movie about Nong Tum's life and boxing career, see *Beautiful Boxer*.....

Lesbians (Tom-Dee)

The Thai terms that some lesbians prefer for lesbian is *let-bien* while others favor *tom-dee*. (*Tawm* comes from the English "tomboy" and *dêe* comes from the last syllable in "lady.") *Tom* and *dee* roughly correspond to the western terms "butch" and "femme." It is not definitively known why some Thai lesbians consider the term "lesbian" derogatory, but some have suggested it is because the term in Thailand is associated with pornographic videos depicting sex between two women.

Thai *tom-dee* face considerably more social resistance than do Thai gay men and *gà'tuhy*. Peter Jackson reported that "Thai lesbians . . . report widespread job discrimination, as well as risk of rape by men" who are threatened by women-centered sexuality. He also described how many Thai lesbians resist telling their families for fear of upsetting them and being rejected. [*Dear Uncle Go: Male Homosexuality in Thailand*; 1995, Bangkok: Bua Luang Books; pp. 70-72.]

The question we are most often asked by visiting lesbians is "where do the Thai women who like women go to socialize?" The answer, as frustrating as it may be for visitors, is—anywhere they want to. Lesbian activities are loosely organized around groups of friends, other than the lesbian organization, Anjaree (see below). There are few venues specifically for lesbians. *Tom* are quite obvious to *dee* in a crowd, so *tom* will go to whatever pubs and nightclubs are popular at the moment, and this will attract *dee*. At these pubs, tables of *tom-dee* couples cluster.

Lesbian travelers should feel free to approach a group of *tom-dee*. As is Thai custom, you will be welcomed, and if someone can speak English better than polite school phrases, you will have access to the budding Thai lesbian world. Since foreign lesbians often fall somewhere between butch and femme in appearance (short hair like a tom, but make-up like a *dee*), Thai *tom-dee* will likely be curious about your role (*tom* or *dee*).

Anjaree is Thailand's pre-eminant group for lesbians (and the only true activist Thai homosexual organization for that matter). They have publicly defended *gà'tuhy* and Thai gay men on several occasions, in particular, challenging the bizarre (and failed) 1996 attempt by Thailand's Rajabhat Institute to ban "gays" from attending their national teachers' colleges. Aside from a few well-known gay men (discussed later), the general silence of Thailand's gay "community" has understandably dismayed and frustrated Thai lesbians. In 2002 they successfully lobbied the Thai Ministry of Public Health to issue a statement confirming that homosexuality was normal (see our Thai Gay News section).

Anjaree's limited resources are aimed at Thai speakers, but they occasionally plan social, educational, or travel events that welcome visiting woman.

Thai Gay “Community”

Over the past two decades, superficial aspects of Western gay culture have been borrowed to a certain degree by Thai who have traveled abroad and by Thai who read Western gay media, but as the Kingdom traditionally has done—by adaptation, not adoption. Thai saunas, gay magazines, and pubs may have been inspired by Western models, but Western gay people will quickly see how different are these Thai gay institutions. An idea of “being in the closet” has been adapted to mean, “a hidden inner being” (*æp-jit*), but there is no equivalent idea of coming out of the closet. “Not being identifiably gay” is *mâi' sà'dæng àwk* (not showing outwardly).

Despite exposure to Western gay culture, a Thai gay community barely exists, except as a commercial entity in certain cities. Most gay Thai say they think social or political organizations are unnecessary, because they are “not oppressed.” There are, however, social forces that lead many homosexual men grappling with their identity to feel repressed, and a lack of a clear definition of what being gay means may be part of it. What is clear is the public's stereotype that gay equals *gà'tuhy* has complicated formation of a Thai gay identity for those who are not transgender.

Social organizations are not typical organizing structures in Thai society, but even among those that do organize, there are often tremendous underlying tensions caused by gossip and the surreptitious competition for the attention and loyalty of members and outsiders. Also, the Thai social system is a strong barrier to groups that attempt to have an open membership. Middle-class and higher Thai do not mix well with members of the lower class, and there can easily be tensions and resentments between middle and upper class people in groups.

Perhaps other brakes on the development of a Thai gay community are a lack of homophobia or explicit social opposition in Thai society and that few gay men perceive of themselves as outsiders, as is the case in the West. The central role of family and the group orientation of most social activities ensure that Thai gay men have a strong and assured sense of belonging. It is this affiliation with one's clan and friendship network that is paramount, not one's sexual life or one's identification with the amorphous group of other gay men.

There is an informally organized Thai gay world, with loose boundaries and affiliations. Most organized gay activities revolve around gay bars, saunas, and pub-restaurants. But without an outside threat to organize them, as was the case in the West, urban middle- and upper-class Thai gays appear content to create a circle of friends and to meet at these gay venues. Others, including those of the lower class, may build these gay networks at local pubs and discos, but most will attempt to seek friends and lovers through the Thai gay media.

The “average” masculine-identified gay Thai's sexual life is a private, personal thing. While he may at first fear turning *gà'tuhy* or the indistinct consequences of losing face if his sexual life were discovered, he, like all Thai males, has and takes advantage of tremendous personal freedom.

He interacts daily with family, friends, and co-workers, while his gay activities are viewed by all as private, just as is another's heterosexual life. This, for many, is sufficient, and they profess satisfaction. The Thai are trained since childhood to accept their “fate,” so a private sexual life,

and a façade of being a model Thai, may not be fraught with the psychological pain his Western counterpart often experiences.

The problem he will confront will be the time when he no longer thinks of his sex life as the key part of his being “gay.” He may, as do many Thai gay, believe that it is impossible for two men to have a long-term relationship. The frustration in fulfilling this primal human need for a loving, stable relationship with another man may well lead many of them into a pattern of strictly sexual relationships. As a gay Thai identity emerges, one that defines “gayness” as masculine and gay relationships as something more than sexual, an understanding that has gained astonishing acceptance (though by no means universal) it will be interesting to observe whether gay men will risk being more open about their gay relationships.

Young urban gay males have clearly benefited from the social changes the Thai consider “modern,” which include more sexual and romantic freedom. We have observed numerous times cases in which a young Thai gay’s straight peers are actually interested in the gay life, and go out to gay places with their “gay brother.” His group is often supportive when he finds a suitable boyfriend.

While all this sounds encouraging, it must be kept in mind that it is much too early to draw any firm conclusions, that these are mostly capital city trends, and most Thai gay men aren’t ready to test the waters of Thai tolerance.

With the election of the *Thai Rak Thai* (Thai Love Thai) Party in 2001, the former Interior Minister, Purachai Piumsombun [pron. *Bhoo'ra'chai Bhiam-sam'boon'*], began an astonishing, but measured and ongoing, attack on gay institutions, particularly gay host bars, saunas, and media, under the guise of the “New Social Order” campaign. (For background and reports on the campaign, see Thai Gay News.) Ostensibly, this campaign targeted nighttime entertainment venues, such as discos and popular restaurants and pubs, which illegally allowed young Thai under age 20. The campaign was strongly supported by Thai people who were concerned about drug use, and other issues, by minors.

By mid-2002 nearly every gay sex venue in the Kingdom had been raided and gay host bar owners complained of frequent undercover police activity; however, the campaign left the heterosexual sex trade untouched. (Police raids against the sex trade employing underage Thai have been ongoing for many years and continue today. It should be noted here that gay host bars have rarely employed underage young men and, except for a few cases in the late 1980s and early 1990s, never employed young teenage boys.)

In late 2002, the Interior Ministry and police concentrated on gay saunas. The Deputy Prime Minister, along with Thai television and newspaper crews, accompanied police on several raids. Scenes of floors littered with used condoms shocked many Thai people and some commentators pointed to this as an example of moral decay in Thai society, rather than lauding the fact that condom use was so obviously common. Police ordered doors off private cubicles and lights turned on in cruise areas. The raid on Babylon, one of the world's most famous gay bathhouses, in January 2003 made international news and brought protests by foreign gay men.

Many Thai gay men have been angered and offended by the raids and reports, but did not protest. “That’s asking gay men to defend something deeply private to a Thai—sex. It makes it worse that it is anonymous sex in a place like a sauna. Also, there are many Thai gay men who disapprove of gay saunas for that reason,” explained Nat. “They do see the raids as an invasion of privacy and a violation of their rights, but it is the Thai way to accommodate, rather than

resist. Everyone believes it will all go back to business as usual when the heat is off. They think that protests would make matters worse."

Allyn, Eric and Collins, John P. Men of Thailand: Noom Thai; Bua Luang Publishing Co., 1988; ISBN: 0-942777-01-8.

Introduction of the Second Edition by Eric Allyn

"The Men of Thailand has been a fascinating, challenging international labor. The manuscript has circled the globe several times with generous readers dissecting it. It has been a long effort too, beginning in 1986 with Dr. Collins, a sexologist with someone interesting things to say about the Thai sexual behavior.

The pleasure in writing it has been in meeting the many people who really made the book..the Thai and foreign tourists with whom we spoke, and the Thai and foreigners who read both versions of the book.

It is more than a guidebook, somewhat of a cultural primer, but it also pulls in many aspects of Thai life that I simply find interesting (and not all of it "gay"). It isn't research, but there's a lot of that too. I have eclectic, and Thailand and its people are fascinating to me. Where may be "too much" for the tourist who hasn't been here before, I suggest reading what is of value. Where it may not be meaningful now, bear with it. Experience will test it out. There are times when what is written about Thailand may not make "sense" and may not be a matter of Western logic, but of Thai logic.

This edition is very different than the first. It is twice as long and completely revised. The "gay" bar scene, the Thai gay world, and aspects of Thai culture discussed in first edition were written wholly from a tourist's and a scientist's point of view. This edition, though rooted in the fertile soil of Dr. Collins' thinking has been nourished (or distorted) by my longer-term experience as a resident. This has made it more difficult for me to anticipate the needs of tourists, but perhaps will provide a visitor with fuller, though perhaps less immediately relevant, insight. This edition contains new photos, new maps, and a fuller discussion of Thailand's non-commercial Gay scene.

In preparing both editions, I've worried about my eyes, which have been so trained to see, I'm sure, in a Western way. I've worried about my thinking process, which often is more like the reflex of an overtended Western muscle. Yet I think we've done well toward our goal to help translate Thai culture into terms better understood by Westerners.

Thailand's gay scene is fascinating, frequently baffling, and often disturbing from a Western point of view. The following issues about Thailand are constantly raised Westerners: prostitution, exploitation, homosexuality, AIDS, poverty, international tourism, etc. They are often discussed emotionally, and almost always with little insight into Thai culture. They come up for me too. Bad or good? Right or wrong? Moral or immoral? Heads or tails? Sometimes I've felt I'm on a roller coaster ride trying to decide which side of the "or" I believe—as if it truly were important for me to decide! I often forget to substitute "and" for "or".

The behavior of tourists is discussed in more detail in this edition, and this often isn't a pleasant subject. But I feel obligated to report how the Thai respond to certain behavior, because bad behavior stands in the way of a visitor's experience. Because of my so-called "anti-ugly tourist" stand in various magazine articles, a dear friend with a broad cynical streak believes I idealize the Thai (and I want to protect them from "nasty" tourists!). The Thai can well take care of

themselves, but the purpose of my book is not to criticize Thai ways (which I'm not qualified to do) but to prepare tourists for interaction with the Thailand and to encourage polite, considerate behavior. Ultimately, I believe an open tourist will benefit much from his experiences in Thailand and it is toward this goal I think book pleads.

The Thai and their country are easy to love and there's much about them and their culture to admire and from which to learn. It would be a shame if the traveler missed out on the real Thailand. If this book helps travelers to appreciate Thai just a little more, then perhaps I've accomplished something of which I can be proud."

The Dove Coos: Gay Experiences by the Men of Thailand; Translated by Benchamat, Nukul and Inpradith, Somboon; Edited by Allyn, E.G.; Bua Lung Publishing, 1992; ISBN: 0-942777-07-7 (pbk.)

The dove coos II: Gay Experiences by the Men of Thailand; Translated by Jonathan, David; Floating Lotus Books, 1993; ISBN: 0-942777-09-3

This is a collection of stories written by the gay men of Thailand about their gay experiences. Translated from the original Thai by editors of three gay magazines (Midway, Neon, Weekend Men), the "one-handed" first-person narratives delightfully celebrate robust man-to-man encounter.

Beyrer, C; Artenstein, A; Kunawararak, P; VanCott, T; Mason, C; Rungreungthanakit, K; Hegerich, P; Nelson, KE; Khamboonruang, C; Natpratan, C. The molecular epidemiology of HIV-1 among male sex workers in northern Thailand; J Acquir Immune Defic Syndr Hum Retrovirol. 1997 Aug 1;15(4):304-7.

"Male commercial sex workers (CSWs) in northern Thailand are at high risk for HIV-1 infection and may be exposed to multiple subtypes of HIV-1 through sexual contact with men and women from Thailand, other Asian nations, and the West. We studied 103 male Thai nationals working in gay bars and clubs in Chiang Mai city who participated in the 1994 sentinel surveillance of the Thai Ministry of Public Health using HIV serologic testing, DNA polymerase chain reaction methods, molecular cloning, differential colony hybridization, nucleotide sequencing, and a third hypervariable region (V3) peptide enzyme-linked immunoabsorbent assay to differentiate subjects infected with HIV-1 subtypes B, E, both, or neither. The majority (58%) reported heterosexual orientation, and 35 (34%) were married. Seventeen (16.5%) were HIV infected: 16 (94%) of 17 had HIV-1 subtype E; 1 had HIV-1 subtype B. Two subjects had dually reactive results by molecular techniques but colony hybridization sequencing revealed only HIV-1 subtype E. HIV-1 subtype E appears to be the predominant clade among male CSWs in northern Thailand. This may have important implications for the global kinetics of the HIV epidemic.

PIP: Male prostitutes in northern Thailand are at high risk for HIV-1 infection and may be exposed to multiple subtypes of HIV-1 through sexual contact with men and women from Thailand and elsewhere. Blood samples of 103 male Thai nationals working in gay bars and clubs in Chiang Mai collected during the Thai Ministry of Public Health's 1994 sentinel surveillance were studied to determine the prevalences of HIV-1 subtypes B and E in the population. The men reported having an average of 2.5 male clients per week and had been in the business from 1 month to 7 years, with a median duration of 4 months. HIV serologic testing, DNA polymerase chain reaction methods, molecular cloning, differential colony hybridization, nucleotide sequencing, and a third hypervariable region (V3) peptide enzyme-linked immunoabsorbent assay were used to differentiate subjects infected with HIV-1 subtypes B, E, both, or neither. 58% of the men reported a heterosexual orientation outside of work and 34% were married. 72.1% reported inconsistent or no condom use with sex partners. 17 (16.5%)

were infected with HIV. Of those infected, 16 (94%) had HIV-1 subtype E and 1 had subtype B.”

Beyrer, C; Eiumtrakul, S; Celentano, DD; Nelson, KE; Ruckphaopunt, S; Khamboonruang, C. Same-sex behavior, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV risks among young northern Thai men; AIDS. 1995 Feb;9(2):171-6.

OBJECTIVES: To assess the risks for HIV infection and sexually transmitted diseases (STD) among young northern Thai men who have sex with men (MSM), and to examine the possible role of male same-sex behavior in the northern Thai HIV/AIDS epidemic.

METHODS: Two cohorts of northern Thai military conscripts and one cohort of recently discharged conscripts, a total of 2047 men, were studied. Data were collected by interview on behavioral risk factors, and sera were examined for syphilis and HIV-1 antibodies. Univariate and multiple logistic regression analyses were used to determine risk factors associated with HIV and STD, and to assess the frequency and patterns of same-sex behaviors among these men. **RESULTS:** Of 2047 men, 134 (6.5%) reported one or more male lifetime sex partners. Of these MSM, 130 (97.0%) also had female partners, and four (3.0%) had exclusively male partners. Compared with men who reported only female sex partners, MSM had a higher number of lifetime sex partners, a higher mean number of female sex partners, more female and male commercial sex worker (CSW) partners, and were more likely to be married. MSM were significantly more likely than exclusively heterosexual men to report having had any STD [odds ratio (OR), 2.72], gonorrhea (OR, 2.05), syphilis (OR, 3.17), non-gonococcal urethritis (OR, 4.54) and penile discharges (OR, 6.24). They were at borderline increased risk for HIV infection [OR, 1.51; 95% confidence interval (CI), 0.95-2.41]. Men with more than one lifetime male sex partner compared with those with only one partner were significantly more likely to be HIV-infected (OR, 2.81; 95% CI, 1.09-7.19). **CONCLUSIONS:** Northern Thai MSM are a high-risk population for STD, including HIV. Reported same-sex behavior in this population appears to vary considerably with data collection techniques. HIV and STD prevention strategies aimed at changing unsafe sexual practices may need to be targeted to the general population of young Thai men.

PIP: In northern Thailand, baseline interviews with and blood testing for syphilis and HIV-1 antibodies of military conscripts were conducted during May-November 1993. Researchers also examined conscripts discharged in April 1993. They interviewed and tested a total of 2047 men. 134 men (6.5%) had had at least one male sex partner. (These men are referred to as MSM.) Only 4 (2.9%) had had sex with only men. The remaining 130 (97.1%) had also had female sex partners. The 134 MSM men were more likely than heterosexual men to be married (odds ratio [OR] = 2.67) and to have a girlfriend with whom they had sex (OR = 1.6). They were also more likely than heterosexual men to have ever had any sexually transmitted disease (STD) (OR = 2.71), gonorrhea (2.05), syphilis (OR = 3.17), nongonococcal urethritis (OR = 4.54), penile discharge with pus (OR = 2.47), watery penile discharge (OR = 6.24), and dysuria (OR = 2.43). The overall HIV prevalence was 12.1% (247 men). MSM men were only somewhat more likely to be HIV infected (PR = 1.51). MSM men with more than one male lifetime partner were significantly more likely to be infected with HIV than those with only one male partner (OR = 2.89). Same-sex behavior was more common among discharged men who had returned to civilian life than those were still in the military (9.3% vs. 6.5%). Discharged bi/homosexual men was the only group of Royal Thai Army current or former conscripts in which sex with men was independently associated with HIV infection (27.3% vs. 12.4% for HIV-infected heterosexual former conscripts; OR = 2.54). Among all subjects, HIV infection was associated with ever visited a female commercial sex worker (OR = 4.16) and ever had any STD (OR = 5.47), gonorrhea (OR = 3.08), syphilis (OR = 3.81), genital herpes (OR = 3.54), genital warts (OR =

3.56), and genital ulcer disease (OR = 5.59). These findings show that MSM in Northern Thailand are at high risk of STDs and HIV. HIV/STD prevention efforts should target all young Thai men and try to change high risk sexual practices.

Beyrer, Chris; Jittiwutikarn, Jaroon; Teukul, Waranya; Razak, Myat Htoo; Suriyanon, Vinai; Srirak, Namtip; Vongchuk, Tasanai; Tovanabutra, Sodsai; Sripaipan, Teerada; Celentano, David D. Drug Use, Increasing Incarceration Rates, and Prison-Associated HIV Risks in Thailand; *AIDS and Behavior*, 7 (2): 153-161, June 2003.

“Background: Incarceration is a known risk for HIV infection in Thai drug users. Through the 1990s, incarceration rates for drug-related offenses rose sharply, whereas HIV prevention and drug treatment in prisons remained limited. **Methods:** We assessed HIV and incarceration risks for injection drug users (IDU) and non-IDU in a large treatment center cohort in northern Thailand to investigate HIV and prison risks in this period. We used Thai Bureau of Corrections data to assess incarceration and prevention funds in prisons, 1992–2000. **Results:** Among 1,865 drug user in the treatment cohort, 503 (27.0%) had ever been jailed. Men (OR 3.3, 95% CI 2.1, 5.2), IDU (OR 6.3, 95% CI 5.1, 7.9), and men who have sex with men (MSM) (OR 3.4, 95% CI 1.8, 6.3) were more likely to have been jailed. Among male IDU who had ever been jailed ($N = 272$), 15.8% had used drugs in prison. In a multivariate model, incarceration and ever IDU remained independently associated with HIV infection; IDU, MSM behaviors, and harmful traditional practices remained independently associated with having been jailed. From 1992 to 2000, overall alleged narcotics offenses increased from 117,000 to 276,000/year. The number of persons incarcerated for narcotics offenses increased fivefold from 1992 to 1999, from 12,860 to 67,440. For FY 2000, narcotics treatment accounted for 0.06% of the Thai corrections budget, whereas HIV programs in prisons were 0.017%. **Conclusions:** Incarceration rates for narcotics offenses have increased sharply in Thailand, whereas prevention has lagged. Having been jailed is an important independent risk for HIV infection among Thai male drug users, especially IDU and MSM. HIV prevention and drug treatment are urgently needed in Thai prisons.”

Borthwick, Prudence. HIV/AIDS Projects with and for Gay Men in Northern Thailand. (Published in *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*; Edited by Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan; Harrington Park Press, 1999; ISBN 1-56023-119-X [pbk.]

“Summary: In this paper I look at three HIV/AIDS projects which were run by and for gay men, transsexuals and men who have sex with men (MSM) in northern Thailand in the early 1990s. These three projects were very different in format and in the context, ranging from a rural village AIDS association to an urban drag beauty contest. The projects were located in settings as different as gay bars and cruising areas, shopping malls and rural villages. Aspects of the three Thai projects have important implications for those working in HIV/AIDS prevention and in the care and support of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) across cultures, particularly in relation to education, outreach and counseling programs.”

Brummelhuis, Han ten. Transformations of Transgender: The Case of the Thai Kathoey. (Published in *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*; Edited by Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan; Harrington Park Press, 1999; ISBN 1-56023-119-X [pbk.]

“Summary: Transgender males, called katoey in Thai, are an ancient and widespread phenomenon in Asia and especially Southeast Asia. In this paper I consider Thai transgender males from a more contemporary perspective, focusing on changes in the definition and presentation of katoey in the last two decades. These changes are related to alterations of the sex scene in western countries, the application of new medical technologies, and the development in Thailand of a new katoey “career.” I base my study on in-depth interviews

conducted in Thailand and the Netherlands. I discuss the inadequacy of conceptualizing kathoey as a category of homosexuals, arguing that kathoey first and foremost have to be seen as women. From this perspective, kathoey's relationships with the partners they prefer become more understanding. I also interpret kathoey's preference for *farang* (Caucasian) partners, the meanings they ascribe to having a sex-change operation, and their sexual behavior from the perspective of considering them as women. I conclude with recommendations for social service work among kathoey and a reflection on theory of sexual and erotic excitement."

Griensven, Frits van Ph.D. M.P.H.; Kilmarx, Peter H. M.D.; Jeeyapant, Supaporn M.A.; Manopaiboon; Chomnad M.A.; Korattana, Supaporn B.H.P.; Jenkins, Richard A. Ph.D.; Uthaiworavit, Wat M.D.; Anarat, Khanchit Limpakarnj M.D. M.P.H.; and Mastro, Timothy D. M.D. The Prevalence of Bisexual and Homosexual Orientation and Related Health Risks Among Adolescents in Northern Thailand; Archives of sexual behaviour. Vol. 33, No. 2, april 2004

"Homo- or bisexual (HB) adolescents may have greater and different health risks than the population of heterosexual adolescents. We assessed sexual orientation and health risk behaviors in 1,725 consenting 15- to 21-year-old vocational school students in northern Thailand. Data were collected using audio-computer-assisted self-interviewing. Nine percent of males and 11.2% of females identified themselves as homo- or bisexual. HB males had an earlier mean age at sexual debut (14.7 years) and a higher mean number of lifetime sexual partners (79) than did heterosexual males (16.8 years and 5.8 partners, respectively). HB males (25.9%) and females (32.2%) were sexually coerced more often than were heterosexual males (4.6%) and females (19.6%). Drug use was reported significantly more frequently by HB females and significantly less frequently by HB males than by their heterosexual counterparts. HB males showed more signs of social isolation and depression than did heterosexual males. We conclude that HB adolescents in northern Thailand are at greater and different health risks than are their heterosexual counterparts. Differential health education messages for HB and heterosexual youth are warranted."

Griensven van, GJ. The epidemiology of HIV infection among male commercial sex workers in northern Thailand; AIDS. 1996 Jan;10(1):112.

Hiransuthikul, N; Hanvanich, M; Dore, GJ; Mokkhawes, T; Li, Y; Perriens, J; Kaldor, JM. Factors associated with tuberculin skin test reactivity among HIV-infected people in Bangkok; Southeast Asian J Trop Med Public Health. 2003 Dec;34(4):804-9.

INH preventive therapy (IPT) has been shown in several randomized controlled trials to reduce the risk of developing active TB in tuberculin skin test (TST) or purified protein derivative (PPD) positive HIV infected individuals. Detection of latent tuberculosis by TST and determination of factors associated with the PPD positivity in HIV-infected persons are important for the targeting of chemoprophylaxis. Six hundred asymptomatic and early symptomatic HIV-infected subjects attending the AIDS Clinic of the Chulalongkorn University Hospital, Bangkok, Thailand were enrolled in two randomized clinical trials of chemoprophylaxis against TB from December 1994 to December 1996. The availability of baseline characteristics, including TST reactivity, among these participants enabled a cross-sectional analysis of factors associated with PPD positivity. The results showed that 117 (19.5%) were PPD positive and 483 (80.5%) were PPD negative with ages 18-65 years (median 29 years). HIV exposure category was 46.2%, 34.5%, and 6.7% for heterosexual contact, commercial sex work, and homosexual and bisexual male contact respectively. The median CD4 cell count was 315/mm³ (range, 5-1,074/mm³). HIV exposure category and CD4 cell count were significantly associated with PPD status. Homosexual/bisexual contact had 3 times higher risk of PPD positivity than heterosexual contact (adjusted OR=2.9; 95% CI, 1.4-6.1) and risk of PPD positivity was higher among

patients with CD4 cell counts of 200-500/ mm³ (adjusted OR=1.8; 95% CI, 1.0-3.1) and above 500/mm³ (adjusted OR=3.4; 95% CI, 1.7-6.7) when compared to patients with CD4 cell counts of less than 200/mm³. The HIV-infected persons in Bangkok with homosexual/bisexual contact are at higher risk for latent TB. Population-based tuberculin screening without accompanying HIV testing cannot be used to estimate the prevalence of actual latent TB in a population where HIV infection is widespread, such as in Thailand.

Ismartono, Y. Thailand's head-on approach; AIDS Watch. 1989;(8):4-5.

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) education in Thailand takes place in such unlikely places as bars and prisons. A gay activist and founder of the Fraternity for AIDS Cessation in Thailand (FACT) informs bar patrons and the homosexual community in Thailand on AIDS and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). 5 brightly dressed male dancers perform with this activist whose name is Natee Teerarojanapong. They visit gay bars and bath houses in Bangkok and will now go to the provinces. The Thai government realizes the seriousness of the AIDS problem. Recently it began a 3-year program and set up an AIDS Prevention and Control Center headed by the Ministry of Public Health. It has started an intensive information campaign. Plans to distribute 30 million condoms are underway. This year's AIDS budget has been increased. The government has called upon nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector to help. With FACT, groups like Empower, a sister organization of prostitutes, the Duang Prateep Foundation of the Klong Toey slums, Population and Development Association (PDA), the Red Cross and Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand (PPAT) have begun their own AIDS prevention and control programs. Public Health Ministry officials say only 18 persons are showing full-blown AIDS symptoms. But, more than 7500 tested positive for HIV antibodies. 84% of current seropositives are intravenous drug users; there are an estimated 500,000 heroin addicts in Thailand. The main activities of the AIDS programs has been concerned with heroin addiction. 400,000 of the 1/2 million heroin addicts are in Bangkok. In Klong Toey, the biggest slum area in Bangkok, the AIDS problem is compounded by extreme poverty. The Thai Red Cross is very active in the AIDS program. Officials at Bangkok's Klong Prem prison are being trained by PPAT. They are taught about AIDS control and prevention. Among the 400 prison inmates, those infected with AIDS are mostly intravenous drug users; some have contacted AIDS through homosexual transmission. A random survey of prostitutes in 14 provinces showed some 3000 prostitutes tested positive for HIV.

Jackson, Peter. A. Dear Uncle Go: Male Homosexuality in Thailand. With a foreword by Gilbert H. Herdt. Bangkok: Bua Luang, 1995; Pp. 310. \$15.95 (paper).

Book Review by Rosalind C. Morris, Department of Anthropology, Columbia University.

“In 1989, Peter Jackson published *Male Homosexuality in Thailand: An interpretation of Contemporary Thai Sources* (New York: Global Academic Publishers) and, in so doing, helped to open a new domain of inquiry for the surprisingly chaste field of Thai studies; namely (male) sexuality. *Dear Uncle Go: Male Homosexuality in Thailand* is a revised and significantly expanded version of the first book and includes a chapter, “The Emergence of Thai Gay Identity,” coauthored with Eric Allyn. The former book consisted mainly of translated letters from a popular advice column in the sensationalist magazine *Plaek*. The new book is also structured around the letters, but offers a more ambitious theorization of male sexuality in contemporary Thailand.

Readers wanting either a Foucaultian archaeology or a materialist analysis of sexuality as a discourse of transnationalism will be disappointed. Queer Theory is entirely absent and, in a passage that will come as a shock to many, Jackson even remarks on the disrepute into which

psychoanalysis has fallen as a tool for analyzing the assumption of sexual identities (p. 183). Clearly, and for better or worse, this is a book written by someone outside the American cultural studies hegemony. *Dear Uncle Go* is located in a more conventional tradition of psychological anthropology and owes its debts to the works of Stephen O. Murray and Gilbert Herdt rather than Judith Butler or Eve Sedgwick. The result is an enigmatic text, at turns theoretically imaginative and at others bound by an out-moded structural - functionalism. However, despite a *troubling* silence regarding current theory on sexuality, Jackson's book offers some extraordinarily acute observations and analyses, and it demonstrates an impressive command of both the Thai language and classical Thai ethnography. Given the paucity of work on this subject, *Dear Uncle Go* is mandatory reading for anyone in the field.

The letters at the book's core are at once personal expressions of sexual confusion and highly formulaic texts. They appear in a magazine that Jackson likens to the *National Enquirer*, and are edited and answered *by* a heterosexual man whose main criterion for inclusion is explicitness. Jackson insists on the genuineness of the letters, although he made no attempt to verify them, but Go's criterion effectively serves as an inducement to hyperbole. In effect, Go assumes the role of the secular confessor, acting as an arbiter of truth, a truth that cannot speak its own name and that ultimately relies on figures like Go for its objectivity. Inevitably, this truth is a normative one and its normative power derives precisely from Go's capacity to designate people as abnormal, even if natural. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the letters chosen for publication would be written by individuals who experience their sexuality as problematic. Any effort to theorize sexuality on the basis of such a marginal group will beg close scrutiny, and Jackson is able to justify his statements only to the extent that he relies on additional material and his own abundant fieldwork.

The letters themselves reflect a diverse social terrain and in this regard are somewhat different from those of the "Dear Abby" column more familiar to American readers—a point that Jackson belabors. Written mainly by men from various age, class, and ethnic backgrounds, the letters generally begin with an account of an unwanted homoerotic experience and a subsequently unexpected (for the letter writers) pleasure. These initiations are invariably followed by a tale of "love" lost and a plea for advice from Uncle Go. All of them end with a series of questions, which inevitably translate as a request for identification: "What type of a gay am I?"

Jackson situates these letters within a broad ethnographic context, describing the practical discourses of masculinity within both Thai and Sino-Thai communities, as well as the impacts of tourism, an international AIDS crisis, and the multinational media. Emphasizing the centrality of hierarchy, "face," and the necessity of avoiding confrontation, Jackson explains the gay community's distaste for "outness" and the relative lack of homophobia in Thailand as extensions of the local culture. Indeed, a primary objective of this text is to demonstrate the existence of an indigenous "homosexuality" which, while transformed and renamed as "gay" under Western influence, nonetheless has a logic of its own that predates such contact. Jackson refers to this indigenous culture as the "little tradition' within the ... 'great tradition' of Thai sex/gender categories" (p. 279). In this context he articulates his most provocative thesis: that masculinity in Thailand is something exchanged between and conferred by men, and that the category of maleness contains its own binarity, with heterosexual maleness and the *kathoey* (a kind of transgenderism) at opposite ends of a spectrum. Here, gayness constitutes a mediate point and femaleness is irrelevant except as a site at which maleness can perform itself. Subsumed within this overarching argument are a variety of lesser claims: that *kathoey*s historically served to alleviate the sexual desires of young men and to preserve the virginity of unmarried women; that the growth of a gay public culture oriented around prostitution was the effect of economic growth and increased disposable income in the 1980s; and that modern gays

have attempted to legitimate themselves through claims to masculinity and in so doing have allied themselves with, rather than opposed, patriarchal heterosexuality.

Of course, Jackson's argument that *kathoeyes* were the safety valves of patriarchy presumes the absence of both female prostitution and rape in precapitalist Thailand but both were clearly present, although prostitution was often hidden under the rubric of debt slavery. Recent historical ethnography also suggests that an obsession with women's chastity is a feature of modern bourgeois ideology more than a dimension of precapitalist Thailand. And ultimately, the whole analysis renders both *ka thoeys* and women mere objects in the process of masculine subject formation. More important than his argument about *kathoeyes* is Jackson's claim that maleness operates as a closed symbolic system. It is an idea worthy of much consideration and it could have enormous implications for studies in the history of sexuality, although the exclusion of women needs to be rethought as an ideological process rather than a condition of male Being. Unfortunately, much of the potential of Jackson's primary insight is negated by his own reticence to distinguish between homoeroticism and homosexuality.

Jackson reads the relative plurality of homoerotic experience among gay men today as the effect of a loosening in which individuals who previously assumed discrete homosexual roles now engage in multiple homoerotic practices. As evidence for this historical movement, Jackson cites the introduction of a term, *gay-king* (an amalgamation of king and queen), to denote gay men who assume both penetrative and receptive positions. Unfortunately, he does not date any of the letters, and so any historical argument must find its evidence elsewhere, although Jackson argues convincingly that gay roles have become more fluid in recent years. Regardless of this new liability, I would suggest that gayness itself is a historically recent phenomenon and something quite different from anything previously seen in Thai society. This is not to suggest that homoeroticism was absent from traditional masculine cultures, but that homoeroticism, which was previously a prerogative of all Thai males, has, in this century, become the basis for an exclusive sexuality. Here I use the term *sexuality* in Foucault's sense, to indicate a historically particular organization of subjectivity in which erotic practice is seen to emanate from, and index, a unified identity.

The letters in *Dear Uncle Go* seem to justify this choice of terminology. Even as they describe ubiquitous sexual encounters between men, they suggest that homoeroticism is organized into a subjectively felt identity much later, through acts of naming by dominant society and individuals like Go Pak-nam. The enormous ambivalence in these letters attests to a period of profound transformation in Thailand, and the longing for categorization suggests an anxious desire for clear and identifiable status. Nonetheless, this anxiety has a history and that history could, I believe, be productively read from within a Foucaultian paradigm: as the effect of newly transnational discourses in which homosexuality proliferates precisely to the extent that it is named as such. The virtue of *Dear Uncle Go* lies in its capacity to provoke these kinds of questions. Its failure consists of a refusal to take them up."

Jackson, Peter A. Tolerant But Unaccepting: The Myth Of A Thai "Gay Paradise"; Published in *Genders and Sexualities in Modern Thailand*: Edited by Peter A. Jackson & Nerida M. Cook; Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, 1999; ISBN 974-7551-07-1

"INTRODUCTION

Western observers, including many foreign gay visitors, commonly view Thai culture as expressing liberal, even accepting, attitudes towards male transgenderism (*kathoey*) and masculine-identified male homosexuality (gay). Since the 1970s Western gay travel guides, in particular, have portrayed Thailand as a "gay paradise," as in the following description from

the *Spartacus 1980 International Gay Guide for Gay Men* (Stamford 1980, 502),

Thailand is a gay and a tourist paradise . . . it offers the finest sight-seeing in Asia, and with such warm, friendly, happy people and such handsome young men, it is a Mecca for gays . . . Thais do not use the artificial Western way of putting us all into classifications like gay' or straight. The most heterosexual young man ma)' readily make love with you if he likes you.

Such representations have continued into the 1990s, at times being disseminated by international press networks as well as through gay media. For example, "Thailand, the Gay Heaven?" was the title of a 1994 Associated Press Internet news item about the plans of a Thai gay businessman, Dejdeow Srichai, to establish a housing estate for gay men called Flower Town. This item was subsequently redistributed globally through gay-lesbian-bisexual Internet news lists. While the title of the item was phrased as a question, the anonymous author made it clear that he (she?) believed Thailand is in fact a "gay heaven". However, the international press failed to report that the Flower Town gay real estate venture subsequently collapsed because of lack of investor interest and local people's opposition to the idea of living next door to thousands of gay men.

Idyllic accounts of Thailand as a "gay paradise" are at odds with anti-homosexual views that have long been expressed in both popular and official discourses, which are often stridently critical and intolerant of non-normative sex/gender behaviors. Thai academic writings commonly problematize male homosexuality as a perversion (*khwam—wiparit*) that needs to be corrected (*kae-khai*), or a "disease" or "illness" (*rok*) that needs to be "treated" or "cured" (*raksa*). For example, in discussing the psychotherapeutic treatment of homosexual patients the psychologist Somphot Sukwathana (1973, 119) has written,

An interesting abnormality which is frequently met is the problem of homosexuality [rak-ruam-phet]. Contemporary society considers this to be a significant social problem~ leading to moral degradation. It is also a legal problem, as it may be the cause of an increase in sex crime.

In this chapter my aim is to begin to unravel the contradiction between the common perception of a Thai gay paradise and the actual antipathetic character of Thai discourses on male homoeroticism and transgenderism. As one of the first non-Thai academics to conduct detailed research on male homosexuality in Thailand (see Jackson 1989, 1995), I have often struggled to reconcile the widely disparate views on this topic held by both Thai and non-Thai informants and reflected in both English and Thai language discourses. On the one hand, it is undeniable that sanctions against male homosexuality and transgenderism are much less severe in Thailand than in Western societies. Homosexuality is neither illegal under Thai law nor immoral according to Buddhist teachings (see Jackson 1998), and homophobic violence against masculine—identified homosexual men appears to be almost non-existent. It must be emphasized, however, that cross-dressing *kathoy*, like Thai women, are often subject to sexual harassment and even sexual violence by heterosexually identifying males. The sexual attractiveness of gender—ambiguous *kathoey* to many Thai men is discussed further below.' [or those who are aware of or have experienced firsthand the intensity of anti—homosexual sanctions in many Western societies, Thailand may at first sight indeed appear to be a homosexual paradise, at least for masculine—identifying gay men.

Yet significant opposition to male homosexuality does exist in Thailand. For several decades "Agony Aunt" and "Agony Uncle" columns in newspapers and popular magazines have replied to a regular flow of letters from distressed homosexual men anxious about having their sexuality exposed or at their wits end because of pressures to marry and conform to heterosexual norms. It is extremely difficult for Thai scholars to conduct research openly on homosexuality within Thai

academia, with mention of the topic tending to arouse either embarrassment (especially amongst female academics) or derisive and dismissive laughter (from males). While there are numerous homosexual academics teaching in Thai universities, very few are prepared to reveal their sexuality to colleagues or to direct unwanted attention towards themselves by researching homosexuality or transgenderism. The case of the well-known former academic, Dr. Seri Wongmontha, a flamboyantly public gay man who has written much on the topic, is an exception who proves the rule. Seri resigned from his post as Dean of the Faculty of Mass Communications at Thammasat University in Bangkok in 1987, in part because of colleague's criticisms of his openness about his homosexuality.

In discussing my own research with heterosexual Thai and Western academics, some of the most common informal responses have been that homosexuality is “not a problem” in Thailand and that gay men and transvestites are widely “accepted.” These views pervade the field of Thai studies but are almost never committed to writing because homosexuality has not been seen as a “serious” topic worthy of academic inquiry. These views not only misrepresent the actual situation, but are also used to dismiss research on this topic as irrelevant or unimportant. “If homosexuality is not a problem, why bother studying it?” The indirect nature of this opposition reflects the broader character of Thai sanctions against same-sex eroticism, which are rarely confrontational but rather operate to undermine the “reputation” (*cheu-siang*) or “image” (*phap-phot*) of homosexual people. Countering the myth of a Thai gay paradise is therefore important not merely to correct a misunderstanding but also to defuse an argument which is hindering the development of academic research on this topic.

In attempting to understand how the image of a supposed Thai gay paradise has emerged in the face of often intense anti-homosexual rhetoric, I here consider three features of Thai understandings of transgender and homosexual men which together often lead both Thai and Western heterosexual observers to misperceive Thailand to be more accepting of sexual diversity than it in fact is. These three discursive themes are:

1. ambiguity in the cultural construction of masculinity in Thailand and apparent widespread tolerance of the transgender or *kathoey* model of homoeroticism
2. the often strident criticism of gay-identified homosexual men as “diseased or “perverted”
3. the critical character of discourses about male homoeroticism, yet the rarity of practical interventions to force males to conform to heterosexual norms

The intersection of these three themes produces more finely nuanced discourses of homoerotic sin and transgenderism in both everyday and academic contexts than have historically been found in Western society. This necessitates employing a more refined model of cultural antipathy towards kathoeyes and gay men than the Western notion of homophobia in understanding Thai discourses. If homophobia can be conceived loosely as intolerance combined with lack of acceptance, then Thai views can be described as tolerant yet unaccepting. Tolerance denotes a preparedness to endure, put up with, or permit to exist, but does not necessarily imply the lack of criticism or the favorable or approving attitude connoted by acceptance. It is possible to tolerate something even while considering it inappropriate, misdirected, or wrong. Because of the historical intensity of antipathies towards homoeroticism in Western societies, which in the past have been both intolerant and unaccepting, observers from these societies commonly conflate these two concepts. In everyday life as well as in formal and legal contexts the Thai typically tolerate men who engage in non-normative sex/gender behaviors without intervening to punish or otherwise penalize them. However, very few people accept such non-normative behaviors as being unremarkable or immune from moral or other criticism.

While the quotation from the *Spartacus Gay Guide* cited above mythicizes Thai homosexuality, it does not acknowledge that Thai understandings of homoeroticism differ from those in Western societies, and care must be taken in the use of language to reflect these different cultural understandings. Here I use term “homosexual” and “homoerotic” to refer all forms of same sex desire and eroticism. I use *kathoey* in its local senses to variously denote hermaphroditic persons as well as effeminate, cross-dressing, or transsexual males who are believed to relate sexually with masculine-identified males. While academic discourses recognize different types of *kathoey*, with hermaphrodites being called “true *kathoey*” and transvestites and transsexuals “pseudo-*kathoey*”, in popular discourses these various categories are indiscriminately labeled *kathoey*, with the term describing those who deviate from biological sex norms as well as behavioral gender norms. The use of “man”/”men” within inverted commas denotes Thai category of normative masculinity, *phu-chai*. The term “gay” here denotes the recently introduced and still developing Thai notion of a non-*kathoey* masculine male whose prime (but not necessarily exclusive) self-acknowledged sexual interest is in other masculine- identified homosexual men. While the term “gay” has been borrowed from English, the Thai and Western constructions of gayness are not identical. In the West “gay” is discursively constructed in an oppositional binary relationship with “straight” (heterosexual). Thai has not borrowed the English notion of “straight,” with gay instead being constituted within a more complex ternary relationship with both *kathoey* and “man” (see Jackson 1997a).”

Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand: Edited by Jackson, Peter A. and Sullivan, Gerard; Harrington Park Press, 1999; ISBN 1-56023-119-X (pbk.)

“This book presents a series of case studies of contemporary forms of male and female homosexuality and transgenderism in Thailand. The studies concentrate on the three most visible, and within Thailand, most stigmatized homosexual behaviors and identities, namely *kathoey* (transgender and transsexual males), tom boys (“masculine or “butch” lesbians) and male sex workers who service male clients. The title of this book derives from the focus of the following papers on these three groups. In Thailand, transgender *Kathoey* are also commonly called “lady boys”, butch lesbians are called “tom boys” or simply “toms,” and male sex workers are also called “boys” or *dek*. In English the use of the term “boy” in such expressions would often be considered derogatory or demeaning. However English terms borrowed into Thai often take on distinctive local nuances, losing some of their original meanings. “Lady boy” and “tom boys” (or *tom*) are self chosen terms that are widely used with pride by transgender males and butch lesbians respectively. Use of the term “boy” for male sex workers is arguably more problematic and suggestive of social inferiority, but reflects current Thai usage where adolescent and adult males who work in any service capacity (sexual or otherwise) are widely called *dek*. Male sex workers also not uncommonly refer to other workers as *dek*, when it can be imbued with a sense of solidarity. The papers in this collection do not deal with pedophilia.”

Jackson, Peter A. Thai Buddhist accounts of male homosexuality and AIDS in the 1980s; *Aust J Anthropol.* 1995;6(3):140-53.

“In this paper the author considers the scriptural background to homophobic diatribes that emerged in the mid-1980s as the HIV epidemic slowly gained recognition in Thailand. By scrutiny of references to homosexuality in the Pali canon, he concludes that the scriptures are open to widely divergent interpretations. This doctrinal malleability is expressed in the contrasting views of contemporary Thai Buddhist intellectuals. The 'traditional' view claims that homosexuality is the kammic consequence of past sexual misconduct but in itself is not sinful and does not have future kammic consequences. The other, less tolerant view is that homosexuality derives from sexual excesses and, moreover, is the cause of the contemporary

AIDS epidemic. Paradoxically it is the reformist Buddhist thinkers who have adopted the latter anti-homosexual position in that they tend to place less emphasis on kamma and more on individual responsibility for life circumstances.”

Jackson, Peter A. Same-Sex Sexual Experience in Thailand. (Published in *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*: Edited by Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan; Harrington Park Press, 1999; ISBN 1-56023-119-X [pbk.]).

“**Summary:** In this paper I consider a number of studies of rates of same-sexual experiences among young men and women in Thailand which have been conducted since the late 1980s. Interest in conducting these qualitative studies was prompted, first, by concerns among Thai educators and social commentators about a perceived increase in homosexual behavior among both male and female adolescents and, second, by the need to determine the prevalence of different sexual behaviors considered to be associated with the risk of transmitting the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Studies of rates of same sex experience have a more recent history in Thailand than in the United States or other Western countries, beginning in the second half of the 1980s. The first studies were undertaken by researchers working within a psychological framework which problematized homosexuality.....The second, HIV/AIDS-influenced set of studies, have been undertaken by epidemiologists and demographers operating within a framework that has not problematized homoeroticism. In reviewing the Thai research, I critically assess the methodologies of the various studies and point to possible biasing factors in data gathering techniques. I conclude by considering the implications of these studies for the provision of social services to homosexuality active men and women in Thailand”

Jackson, PA. Pre-gay, post-queer: Thai perspectives on proliferating gender/sex diversity in Asia; *J Homosex.* 2001;40(3-4):1-25.

Jackson, Peter A. An explosion of Thai identities: global queering and re-imagining queer theory; Taylor & Francis Health Sciences, part of the Taylor & Francis Group; Volume 2, Number 4 / October 1, 2000; pp. 404-425.

“**Abstract:**

This paper reflects on recent research on Thai discourses of gender and eroticism in order to problematize some of the universalist assumptions that have dominated discussion of the international proliferation of forms of erotic diversity. By mapping the proliferation of Thai gender/sex categories from the 1960s to the 1980s, the paper shows that Thai homoeroticisms are not converging towards Western models and points to the cultural limits of Foucauldian-modelled histories of sexuality. In particular, it demonstrates the inability of Foucauldian history of sexuality, and queer theoretical approaches drawing on Foucault, to account for shifts in Thai discourses in which gender and sexuality do not exist as distinct categories. Only when current feminist theories of gender and queer theories of sexuality are integrated so as to offer a unified account of the eroticization of gender, and the gendering of eroticism, will Western theoretical models be capable of mapping shifts in non-Western patterns of eroticism.”

Jackson, Peter A. Performative Genders, Perverse Desires: A Bio-History of Thailand's Same-Sex and Transgender Cultures; *Intersections: Gender, History, and Culture in the Asian context*; Issue 9, August 2003

“**Introduction**

In this study I explore an apparent paradox in the history of Thailand's same-sex and transgender cultures. In Thailand, the later decades of the twentieth century were witness to a

proliferation of transgender, transsexual and male and female same-sex identity categories and a dramatic increase in the public visibility of new gender/sexual cultures. However, this proliferation of identities and cultures, which superficially mirrors the historical situation in the West, occurred in the absence of the forms of bio-power that Foucault argues incited the origin of the contemporary discourse of sexuality and the associated speciation of 'the homosexual' and 'the heterosexual'. In exploring this apparent paradox, I 'forget' the details of Foucault's history of sexuality in the West while relying upon his conception of bio-history and his genealogical method. While the empirical contents of *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* offer little insight into transformations of Thai gender and eroticism, Foucault's genealogical approach provides a productive tool for understanding how local forms of power incite distinctive and equally local forms of discourse and subjectivity. In this study I draw upon Butler's Foucault-influenced account of the performativity of gender and sex to trace the ways that shifts in the forms of bio-power over gender in Thailand not only altered norms of masculinity and femininity but also radically changed patterns of desire and identity. I account for the emergence of the new Thai identities and gender/sexual cultures by mapping the precise character of changes in the forms of power that the Thai state deployed in its efforts to 'civilise' the public gendering of the populace—a project of power incited into being as a response to the combined challenges of English, French, Japanese and American imperialisms in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This study reveals that even in the absence of Western-style interventions in sexuality, the disruptions of traditional Siamese gender culture caused by the state's response to the West radically altered the performative norms of masculinity and femininity, which in turn contributed to the proliferation of new forms of transgender and same-sex identity. This Thai case study provides a counter-example to the presumption that modernity and globalisation necessarily lead to an international homogenisation of sexual cultures.

Since the middle of the 1960s, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of gender/sex identity categories and related cultures in Thailand. I have documented how new male and female same-sex [*gay king, gay queen, tom, dee*], male bisexual [*seua bai*] and male-to-female transgender/transsexual [*kathoey*] categories emerged in public discourse and formed the basis of new homosexual and transgender identities and cultures in Bangkok and other Thai cities. Superficially, these new identities and cultures appear very similar to gay, lesbian, transgender, and transsexual identities and cultures in contemporary Western societies, and Thailand provides an example of the widely noted globalisation of new homosexual identities in the later decades of the twentieth century. Because of the apparent similarities between modern Western and Thai gender/sex cultures, I began exploring the origins of the proliferation of Thai identities by attempting to locate similar changes in the historical forms of bio-power in Thailand to those that Foucault described for nineteenth century France. Foucault argues that an intensification of the state's intervention in everyday life accompanied the transition to modernity, For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence.... Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself ... that gave power its access even to the body.

Foucault defines this new operation of power over the body and 'life itself' as 'bio-power', with 'bio-history' denoting the transitions that led to the greater intersection of institutional power and the body, If one can apply the term bio-history to the pressures through which the movements of life and processes of history interfere with one another, one would have to speak of bio-power to designate what brought its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life.

Drawing on the insight that the operation of power is productive rather than merely repressive, Foucault argued that the history of religious and legal prohibitions of homosexuality together with medical and psychiatric projects to 'cure' the putative illness of same-sex desire formed a constellation of powers which conferred a concrete social existence upon the homosexual. Queer theory approaches to the history of sexuality and the proliferation of sexual identities in the West draw on this argument that new regimes of bio-power over human bodies and sexual life—mediated by religion, law, medicine, education, the family, and other institutions—incited new sexualised understandings of self-hood which in turn provided the basis for new forms of culture and social organisation. Following the analytical path laid out by Foucauldian queer studies, I proceeded to undertake separate studies of the histories of religion, law, and biomedical research and practice as they related to homosexuality and transgenderism in Thailand in an attempt to isolate a similar constellation of powers which may have incited the new Thai identities into being.

However, these studies revealed that no new regime of legal, religious or bio-medical power intersected with either same-sex eroticism or transgender behaviour in the period immediately before the new identity categories began appearing in public discourse in the 1960s. Unlike the situation in the West, where both homosexuality and cross-dressing had long been explicitly prohibited, until the later decades of the twentieth century same-sex and transgender behaviours almost completely escaped the attention of Thai authorities.

While the sexuality of ordained Buddhist monks is strictly controlled in Thai Buddhism—celibacy is a requirement of ordination into the monkhood or *sangha*—the only significant control over lay sexuality prescribed by the religion is a prohibition against (heterosexual) adultery. Thai Buddhism does not regard same-sex eroticism between laymen or laywomen as a sin. In the legal domain, sodomy was made a punishable offence in the first decade of the twentieth century as part of an effort to make the Siamese legal code appear to conform to European norms of civilisation. This legal review took place in response to the extraterritorial provisions of trading treaties signed with European powers, the United States and Japan in the nineteenth century (discussed below). In its Siamese form 'offences against the human order' [*phit thammada manut*] included both male and female same-sex activity as well as bestiality. However, while the presence of an anti-sodomy clause in the legal code gave the appearance of conforming to Victorian era sexual norms, not a single prosecution for homosexuality was made under this law and Thai police ignored the clause, continuing, as previously, to overlook consensual same-sex activities. (Thai legal archives record only one unsuccessful prosecution for bestiality under the anti-sodomy clause.) The clause was removed from the books in 1956 as part of a review to purge the legal code of anachronistic and obsolete edicts.

In summary, same-sex and transgender behaviours have historically been ignored by Thai religious and legal authorities. Nevertheless, the later decades of the twentieth century did see the rise of a Thai bio-medical project aimed at controlling, if not reversing, the proliferation of same-sex and transgender identities. Beginning in the 1960s, Thai physicians and psychologists drew upon Western biomedical sciences in an attempt to control, suppress, and cure both cross-dressing and homosexuality. However, the Thai project to renormativise 'perverse' [*wiparit*] genders and 'deviant' [*biang-ben*] sexualities only came into being *after* the existence of the diverse array of new identities and cultures had been exposed to public view by the sensation-seeking Thai press. The Thai biomedical project was itself incited into being by the presence of the new identities, and drew upon Western knowledges in an attempt to put the genie of proliferating sexual and gender diversity back into the bottle. This is the converse of the situation that Foucault described for Western Europe, where it was the rise of new biomedical knowledges, amongst other factors, that in turn incited new sexualised identities into being. The biomedical project has had a significant impact on the recent history of Thailand's same-sex and

transgender cultures, but it could not have had a role in inciting those new cultures into being because it only came into existence *after the fact* as an ultimately unsuccessful regime of control and containment.

The key finding of my earlier studies is that despite the global spread of Western power and the intensity of homophobic discourses in the early modern West, these discourses failed to register in Thailand or to be communicated through local networks of discursive power until the 1960s. The approach I adopted in these studies appeared to lead to an analytical dead end. I was presented with what appeared to be a proliferation of sexual identities in the absence of a domestic regime of power over sexuality that might have incited these new forms of subjectivity into being. The type of cultural outcome that Foucault sought to understand had come into being in Thailand in the absence of the forces that he identified as having brought it into existence in Western Europe. This finding is the opposite of Rosalind Morris' view that, 'the arguments in *The History of Sexuality* ... seem to offer the most fecund possibilities for reading the transformations [of gender/sex culture] that have come to bear on Thailand.'

At this point in my explorations I abandoned the attempt to undertake a Foucauldian history of sexuality in Thailand. Instead, I sought to understand the history of modern Thai gender/sex cultures by investigating another phenomenon that Morris comments upon—the accentuation of binary gender difference—but which she does not integrate into her account of Thailand's same-sex cultures. I suggest that the way to relate the intensification of the masculine/feminine gender binary with the proliferation of same-sex identities is by means of an historical investigation of the widely reported anthropological finding that all contemporary Thai identities are constituted more within the field of gender than within the domain of sexuality. Anthropological studies have consistently reported that even in the closing years of the twentieth century gender rather than sexuality was the dominant factor in the constitution of personal identity. This result has been found in studies of heterosexual cultures as well as in analyses of male and female same-sex cultures. Instead of attempting a history of sexuality in Thailand, I decided on what at first sight might appear to be the more circuitous approach of seeking to understand the proliferation of same-sex and transgender identities and cultures through a history of Thai gender. In this alternative approach to the history of Thai homoeroticisms I draw on the work of feminist critics who argue against the analytical separation of sexuality from gender, which was one of the founding moves that established queer studies as a distinct line of inquiry from feminist analysis. I also draw on Judith Butler's account of the performativity of gender identities and the cultural priority of gender in all understandings of sex and sexuality. This alternative line of inquiry reveals that the new Thai identities did not emerge from disruptive interventions in sexuality but rather from radical shifts in the performative norms of masculinity and femininity. As Butler points out, when gender norms change, so do forms of desire and subjectivity, and dramatic changes in understandings of what it means to be a 'man' or a 'woman' will bring with them equally new understandings of erotic being.”

Jackson, Peter A. An American Death in Bangkok: The Murder of Darrell Berrigan and the Hybrid Origins of Gay Identity in 1960s Thailand; *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5.3 (1999) 361-411

“Bangkok today is home to some of the largest and most visible *gay* and transgender subcultures in Southeast Asia, and it is the site of the region's most extensive commercial gay scene of bars, discos, restaurants, saunas, and boutiques. I have described elsewhere the cultural and socioeconomic factors that have supported the historical development of a commercial *gay* scene in Thailand. Here I consider an originating moment in Thai gay history: the murder in October 1965 of the expatriate American Darrell Berrigan, the homosexual editor of the English-language newspaper *Bangkok World*. The Thai- and English-language press reports that

followed police efforts to solve this crime documented for the first time the existence of a subculture of Thai homosexual men who called themselves the *chomrom gay*, the "gay association" or "gay community."

Before the 1960s male homoerotic relations in Thailand were structured within discourses that ascribed masculine [*phu-chai*] and feminine/effeminate [*kathoey*] gender positions to same-sex partners. This gendered pattern was reinforced by a number of related oppositions, such as senior-junior and inserter-insertee, that established a power hierarchy between a masculine, senior "man" and his feminized, junior *kathoey* partner. Notions of class and social status were also important in marking the *kathoey*- "man" distinction; *kathoey* were commonly thought of as low-class social riffraff. In contrast, *gay* marked the emergence of a more prestigious form of male homoeroticism in which both partners assumed a masculine gender identity and to some extent participated in the higher status accorded the Thai "man." Here I draw on contemporary Thai- and English-language press reports to reconstruct police attempts to solve Berrigan's murder, and I use this long-forgotten event to trace the emergence in Thai public discourses of the category of *gay*. These press reports do not merely reveal a preexisting but previously hidden set of homoerotic institutions and sentiments; having contributed to the establishment of a new form of public discourse about male homoeroticism, they also provide insights into attitudes and practices at a crucial transitional moment in the history of Thai discourses of gender and sexuality. I italicize "gay" where the term refers to the Thai appropriation of the English word in order to mark its reinscription and redefinition in Thai discourses. For I argue that the Thai construction of *gay* identity is a distinctive formation in which gender and sexuality remain integrally bound and so cannot be reduced to Western understandings of "gayness" or "gay identity."”

Jackson, Peter A. The Persistence of Gender: From Ancient Indian Pandakas to Modern Thai Gay-Quings. <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Jackson.html>

“Bangkok's gay and *kathoey* (transvestite/transsexual) subcultures are among the largest and most vibrant homoerotic subcultures in Asia. But while pride in masculine homosexual identity is common to Western and Thai formulations of gayness, there is much about being gay in Thailand that Western gay men would find foreign and unexpected. In this paper I suggest that contemporary attitudes to homosexuality and transgenderism derive from an ancient and distinctively Thai cultural source.

Historical linguistic evidence suggests that prior to the 13th century AD, when the Thais adopted Buddhism, Thai language and culture lacked a concept of non-normative male sexuality that did not at the same time involve culturally ascribed cross-gender behaviour. The Buddhist scriptures, often called the Pali canon, include examples of gender-normative male homosexuality among monks and among others, but in Thai these men are consistently misread as being *kathoey*s, transvestites or transsexuals. Pali, a close relative of Sanskrit, is the classical language of Theravada Buddhism. Indeed, it appears that Buddhist teachings have not had sufficient cultural power in Thailand to supplant indigenous sex/gender conceptions, and that instead there has been a consistent historical misreading of the Buddhist scriptures.

The continuing power of indigenous gender-based conceptions of sexuality in Thailand is not only evidenced in erudite translations of the Buddhist scriptures. Indigenous attitudes are also strongly reflected in the history of the new homosexual identity of gay. Until the past couple of decades Thai language and culture possessed only two sex/gender categories for males, namely, the gender normative 'man' (*phu-chai*) and the non-normative *kathoey* which included all males who were regarded as breaching normative male biology or normative masculine behaviour. In the past two decades, however, there has been an explosion of new bisexual and homosexual

identities in Thailand, with a range of new nouns entering the Thai language to denote new forms of sexual and gendered being. These new identities include the *bai* (from 'bisexual') or *seua-bai* (Literally: 'bi-tiger', denoting a masculine bisexual male), the *gay-king* (denoting an active and presumed masculine homosexual male) and the *gay-queen* (denoting a passive and presumed feminine homosexual male). Since the late 1980s an intermediate category between the *gay-king* and *gay-queen* has also come into being, the *gay-king*, whose identity is marked by his sexual versatility. All of these new terms draw on English sources, but they have been playfully reformulated within the Thai linguistic and sex/gender systems to mark distinctively Thai configurations of male gender and sexuality.

The coining of these new terms marks an important development in the history of the Thai sex/gender system. Since the early 1970s Thai language and culture have witnessed a transformation from verbs that described homoerotic behaviour between 'men', or between 'men' and *kathoey*s, to a series of new nouns that label the sex/gender status of bisexual and homosexual men. More importantly, these new terms are used self-referentially by bisexual and homosexual men to describe themselves and to differentiate themselves from the traditional categories of 'men' and *kathoey*s.

The persistent strength of traditional conceptions in defining Thai males' views of their sexual and gender status is indicated by the fact that all the new bisexual and homosexual identities have come into being in a sex/gender domain between the two traditional poles of 'man' and *kathoey*. Indeed, as can be seen from the above table, the new identities mark out a gender continuum that shifts from identities that are regarded as being close to normative masculinity (i.e. *bai*, *seua-bai*) to those which are seen as being close to, if not indistinguishable from, the non-normative status of a *kathoey* (i.e. *gay-queen*).

The persistence of traditional notions is also shown by the fact that when first borrowed into Thai in the 1970s and 1980s, the meaning of the English term 'gay' was almost universally conflated with *kathoey*, i.e. a transgender male. Only slowly has the notion of masculine-identified male homosexuality (*gay-king*, *gay-king*) as a distinct phenomenon gained currency in Thailand. Yet, even though contemporary gay-identified Thai men now assert their masculinity and their difference from effeminate and cross-dressing *kathoey*s, they continue to reproduce gender distinctions between themselves and their partners in the differentiation into active *gay-kings* and passive *gay-queens*.

In Thailand, the new identity of gay is moulded and expressed within a culture that insistently characterizes all sexual relations in terms of gender differentiation. While Western gay men have sexual preferences, these usually remain subordinate to their identification as gay, which is defined on the basis of masculine-identified homoeroticism. However, in Thailand gay exists only in the pairing of a sexually complementary *gay-king* and *gay-queen*. Even the notion of sexual versatility, which is gradually gaining currency within Bangkok's gay subculture, is accommodated within this gendered framework. In Thai a sexually versatile homosexual man is not simply gay, he is a *gay-king*, combining elements of the queen and king in a uniquely Thai play upon the English terms.

We need to be cautious in characterizing the power of external cultural and ethico-religious systems to alter fundamental conceptions of sex and gender in Thailand. Indigenous Thai notions have not only survived a millennium of Buddhism but also show considerable resilience in the face of the recent marketing of Western-styled gay identities via globalizing transport and communication networks. It also raises questions about the extent to which the Western conception of gay has, or can be, borrowed within the Thai context. The mere existence of the word 'gay' in the contemporary Thai language does not indicate that a global gay identity or a

transnational homogenization of human sexuality is a necessary outcome of the impact of yet another universalizing world culture. Thailand has withstood waves of universalizing cultures in the past--notably Indian and Chinese--appropriating and accommodating elements of these foreign influences while retaining a distinctive cultural formation in the domains of sex and gender. For at least the last couple of centuries, and perhaps longer, the Buddhist scriptures have been consistently (mis)understood as reflecting what are in fact distinctively Thai, not Buddhist, notions of non-normative gender and sexuality.”

Jackson, Peter A. Male Homosexuality in Thailand: an Interpretation of contemporary Thai Sources; Global Academic Pub., 1989; ISBN: 1-55741-007-0.

This book is the first systematic study of homoeroticism in Thailand.

Based on translations into English of contemporary Thai materials, it reveals, if not approval, at least a degree of acceptance of homosexuality, bisexuality, and a corresponding lack of overt homophobia among the Thai people. All homosexuals share the experience of being outsiders in their own society, the author observes. “This simple truth,” writes Dr. Herdt in his introduction, “was used to a valuable end in this case, and serves as a source of empathy and narrative power in this illuminating contribution on crosscultural forms of homoeroticism.”

Jan W. De Lind van Wijngaarden, Between Money, Morality and Masculinity: Bar-Based Male Sex Work in Chiang Mai. (Published in Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand: Edited by Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan; Harrington Park Press, 1999; ISBN 1-56023-119-X [pbk.]).

“**Summary:** This paper focuses on the supply-side of Chiang Mai’s gay bars, that is, the male sex workers called dek bar or “bar boys”¹ in Thai. I formulate some explanations why these young men—more than half of whom do not consider themselves to be “homosexual”—take on traditional Thai society, trends in contemporary urban Thai society, the economics of work in gay bar, as well as the sexual behavior of male sex workers and the concepts they use to describe their work.”

Jenkins, Richard A. and Kim, Bryan; Cultural Norms and Risk: Lessons Learned From HIV in Thailand; The Journal of Primary Prevention, Vol. 25, No. 1, September 2004.

“Men who have sex with men (MSM) have received varying amounts of attention in the HIV epidemic, as evidence of HIV risk among MSM has varied over time. As noted previously, the first HIV cases in Thailand occurred among gay men (Thongchareon et al., 1989) and some early intervention activity took place in the gay community and among male CSWs (de Lind van Wijngaarden, 1995; Sittitrai, Phanuphak, & Roddy, 1994; Jackson, 1995b). The much larger CSW and opiate IDU epidemics absorbed most of the subsequent attention and resources, while evidence began to accumulate that suggested that MSM experience did not elevate HIV risk (Nelson et al., 1993; Nopkesorn, Mastro, et al., 1993; Nopkesorn, Sweat, Kaensing, & Teppa, 1993). More recently, there is evidence of increased HIV prevalence among MSM (Beyrer, Eiumtrakul, Celentano, Nelson, Ruckhaopunt, & Khamboonruang, 1995) and among male CSW (Kunawararak, Beyrer, Natpratan, Feng, Celentano, deBoer, et al., 1995). Significantly, many of the men in these studies (CSW and non-CSW MSM) also report female partners and do not identify themselves as “gay.” Much of the commentary and investigation regarding MSM and HIV risk has come from foreigners. Hence, this is an area where foreign researchers have particular obligations to recognize local cultural norms and related social dynamics.”

“It has been speculated that “kathoey” have long functioned as an alternative sexual outlet for young men when premarital or extramarital female partners were not available (de Lind van Wijngaarden, 1995; Jackson, 1995b; 1997a). Among academics, it is believed that “kathoey” gender and “gay” sexual orientation arise from different causes (“kathoey” as biological, “gay” as acquired behavior; Jackson, 1997b). Hence, the assumption that one can be “made gay” has led to public alarm and homophobic policy gestures during the past two decades (Jackson, 1997a,b; Jackson, 1999a). “Kathoey” are more publicly visible than transgendered persons or transvestites in the West; however, their place in Thai society is relatively marginal and sometimes subject to derision (Jackson, 1997a,b; Storer, 1999). The accepted social roles tend to be in occupations such as entertainment, hairdressing, and clothes making, although “kathoey” athletes (volleyball players, Thai-style boxers) have made headlines in recent years (Jackson, 1995a; 1997b, Jackson & Sullivan, 1999). Despite the established social roles of “kathoey,” they have received little research attention and it is unclear how a “kathoey” identity emerges and evolves over the life course. In addition, studies that have looked at sex between men generally have not asked about “kathoey” partners or considered whether “kathoey” partners were included among male sexual partners.

In sum, sex between men in Thailand illustrates some of the difficulties of trying to infer sexual norms, associated social dynamics and categories of behavior without understanding social context. Like the tendency to overestimate the “acceptability” of sex work without recognizing a variety of important social, economic, and political considerations, many inappropriate inferences have been made about the tolerance of homosexuality in Thailand and the elasticity of Thai male sexuality. On the other hand, inadequate attention has been given to the role of gender in defining sexuality and empirically demonstrable parallels to sexual behavior in other cultures (e.g., experimentation with sexual partner of different genders) have often been neglected. Because local norms regarding the discussion of homosexuality have ceded a major role to foreign researchers, sensitivity to differences and commonalities across cultures has needed to be present and deepened (Jackson & Sullivan, 1999).”

Kitsiripornchai, S; Markowitz, LE; Ungchusak, K; Jenkins, RA; Leucha, W; Limpitaks, T; Sangkharomya, S. Sexual behavior of young men in Thailand: regional differences and evidence of behavior change; *J Acquir Immune Defic Syndr Hum Retrovirol.* 1998 Jul 1;18(3):282-8.

An anonymous, self-administered behavioral survey was conducted in Royal Thai Army (RTA) conscripts from 19 provinces throughout Thailand in May 1996. All (to a maximum of 350) Thai men who entered the RTA in each province were selected. Data from 5474 men were included in this analysis. High-risk behaviors were reported nationwide; however, some regional differences were found. Men from the upper North were more likely to have had a commercial sex worker (CSW) as their first sexual partner (42%) than men from any other region. However, in the past year, reported sex with CSWs in the upper North (41%) was similar to or lower than those in other regions. Consistent condom use with CSWs was higher in the North than in any other region. Condom use at first sex with CSWs increased with later years at first sex in all regions. These data suggest that past higher-risk behavior among young men in the upper northern part of Thailand may have contributed to the concentration of the HIV epidemic in that region. Risk behaviors, particularly unprotected sex, appear to be decreasing nationwide.

PIP: The HIV behavioral risk factors associated with temporal and regional trends in HIV prevalence were investigated in a 1996 survey of 5474 Royal Thai Army conscripts from 19 provinces. 89% of respondents were 21 years of age and 77% were single. HIV prevalence was highest among men from the upper north (4.3%), followed by 2.6% in the central region, 2.4% in Bangkok, and 1.2% in the southeast. The median age at first intercourse was 17 years. Among sexually experienced men, a significantly higher proportion of those from the upper

north (42%) had their first such encounter with a commercial sex worker (CSW). However, sex with CSWs during the year preceding the survey was similar or less frequent among men from the upper north (41%) compared with other regions. Also, significantly more men from the upper north (62%) used condoms every time with a CSW. Overall, 10% (range, 8-12%) reported having had sex with a man and 13% reported symptoms of a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Men whose sexual initiation occurred after 1990 were more likely to use condoms with a CSW partner. The decrease in sexual risk factors documented in this survey is consistent with national declines in HIV prevalence, especially in the upper northern region, after 1992. The increase in condom use with CSWs coincides with the 100% condom campaign initiated in 1991, intensified STD control efforts, and the emergence of AIDS deaths. Sex with non-CSW female partners, where condoms are rarely used, and homosexual sex require attention as situations where HIV risk may persist.

Kunawararak, P; Beyrer, C; Natpratan, C; Feng, W; Celentano, DD; de Boer, M; Nelson, KE; Khamboonruang, C. The epidemiology of HIV and syphilis among male commercial sex workers in northern Thailand; AIDS. 1995 May;9(5):517-21.

“OBJECTIVE: To examine the prevalence and incidence of HIV and syphilis, and risk behaviors for these infections, among 1,172 male commercial sex workers (CSW) followed prospectively from 1989 to 1994 in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. METHODS: Twice yearly visits were conducted by the Thai Ministry of Public Health at all cooperating gay bars and clubs (17 sites) in Chiang Mai City as part of a national HIV sentinel surveillance. Men and boys who agreed were followed prospectively. Sentinel visits included an interview, HIV pre-test counseling, HIV and syphilis serology, condom distribution, and referral for post-test counseling. Participation was voluntary, confidential, and individual HIV results were available only to participating subjects. A total of 219 CSW were seen at least twice, allowing for incidence estimates based on 100 person-years (PY). RESULTS: Median age of male CSW was 20 years. Median time of work as a CSW was 4 months. Most men (57.6%) described themselves as heterosexual. Median number of clients was 2.5 per week, and reported condom use with clients was low: 42% reported inconsistent or no condom use, while 58% reported always using condoms. Reactive Venereal Disease Research Laboratory results were 7.6%, overall, but showed a declining trend. HIV prevalence was 1.4% in June 1989, 13.9% in June 1990, and 20.1% in December 1993, and showed a significant increasing trend. There were 27 incident HIV infections in 227.3 PY of observation, for an overall incidence during the 4.5-year period of 11.9 per 100 PY (95% confidence interval, 7.42-16.38). CONCLUSION: Male CSW in northern Thailand are at high risk for HIV despite current prevention efforts. The majority are heterosexual, which may be an important epidemiologic link in the spread of HIV between male CSW users and heterosexual women in Thailand.

PIP: The first confirmed case of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection in Thailand was that of a Thai male commercial sex worker (CSW) in 1985. Since that time, this disease has manifested itself among injecting drug users, female sex workers, and in the general heterosexual and homosexual population. This paper reports the findings of a 5-year Thai study in which 1172 male CSWs were studied at least once. The purpose of the study was to identify the prevalence, incidence, and risk behaviors of CSWs regarding HIV and syphilis. The HIV prevalence increased from 1.4% in 1989 to 20.1% by 1993. Overall, the HIV prevalence for the 5-year period was statistically significant at 16.6%. Syphilis for this same period was 7.6% HIV infections were confirmed using enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA). Multivariate analysis was calculated using multiple logistic regression. All CSWs in this study were provided with HIV pre-test counseling, were subjected to HIV and syphilis serology, were given condoms, and were provided with a referral for post-test counseling. Of the 1172 men seen, 219 (18.6%) were seen more than once. 27 cases of HIV infection were confirmed in the latter group

(12.3%). Heterosexual men were found to be at lower risk of contracting an HIV infection than homosexual men.”

London, AS; VanLandingham, MJ; Grandjean, S. Socio-demographic correlates, HIV/AIDS-related cofactors, and measures of same-sex sexual behaviour among northern Thai male soldiers; Health Transit Rev. 1997 Apr;7(1):33-60.

“We use data from an anonymous self-administered 1991 survey of military personnel in northern Thailand to estimate overall levels of and socio-demographic differentials in same-sex sexual behaviour in this population. Additionally, we examine the relationship between sexual experience with another male and a variety of outcomes relevant to HIV prevention and policy. Overall, 16.3 per cent of the sexually active soldiers report ever having had anal or oral sex with other males. Same-sex sexual behaviour in this sample is positively associated with several indicators of higher socio-economic status. All of the men who report having had sex with other men report having had vaginal intercourse with females as well. Comparison of our estimate of same-sex sexual behaviour with those obtained from two similar samples drawn in 1991 suggests that the lower estimates observed in the other two studies are largely due to differences in data collection methods. Regarding the HIV/AIDS-related outcomes we examined, men who have had sex with other men are significantly more likely than those who have not to have ever injected drugs, to personally know someone with HIV/AIDS, to have had sex with a female prostitute in the last six months, and to have had a sexually transmitted disease in the last six months. In this sample, men who have had sex with other men are also less knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS than are men who have not. These results are discussed in terms of their implications for HIV-prevention policy in Thailand.”

Lyttleton, C. Framing Thai sexuality in the age of AIDS – introduction; Aust J Anthropol. 1995;6(3):135-9.

“PIP: Four of the papers presented at a panel on acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) at the 1994 conference of the Australian Anthropological Society focused on Thailand, which is widely regarded as the epicenter of the epidemic in Southeast Asia. In his introduction to these papers, Lyttleton notes that the discourse on AIDS in Thailand has been characterized by a medical, hierarchical approach. Unlike the situation in countries such as the US, where homosexuals have engaged in collective activism to prevent the further spread of AIDS, Thailand's high-risk groups (e.g., prostitutes and injecting drug users) lack the group identification essential for the development of a culture of safe sex practices. Any discussion of AIDS in the Thai context must include an examination of the role of social drinking in framing men's public sexuality and male identity. Moreover, the homophobic nature of Thai culture has led to a dismissal of the reality of homosexual transmission.”

Matzner, Andrew. On the Question of Origins: Kathoey and Thai Culture. http://web.hku.hk/~sjwinter/TransgenderASIA/paper_on_the_question_of_origins.htm. Uploaded 11/11/02

“Introduction:

What is the cultural history of transgenderism in Thailand? Is there an unbroken link which connects kathoey living in Thailand today with transgendered beings found in a primeval mythology? Is there something in the "Thai religious belief system" or "Thai world-view" which provides a space in society for those who exist between the poles of male and female? Addressing these questions might help to explain the apparent toleration of transgenderism in contemporary Thailand, which is especially striking when compared with other countries. However, this is a difficult undertaking for two reasons. First, there is very little information

written in Thai or in English about transgenderism in pre-contemporary Thailand. Indeed, due to a lack of oral history collecting, we know very little about the lives of kathoey and their place in Thai culture even fifty years ago. Second, the very idea of a homogenous "Thai culture" or singular "Thai nation" is itself problematic.

In this essay I will try to begin to make sense of the place of kathoey in the cultural history of those people who live in what is today known as Thailand. I will do this by examining creation myths found in this area of the world which include the figure of a "hermaphrodite." These creation myths are significant because they provide some clues as to the role and status of the transgendered individual in southeast Asian religious tradition. As these stories were created by groups of people who existed before the concept of "Thailand" did, I must begin my discussion by providing a brief background of their ethnic origins (based on Wyatt, 1984). We shall see that Thailand – in its existence as a nation-state – is a relatively young entity. Accordingly, a concept such as "ancient Thailand" is actually an oxymoron, and the linkage of pre-Thai myths involving "hermaphrodites" with present-day Thai kathoey by various authors is not as straightforward as they would have us believe.”

McCamish, Malcolm. The Structural Relationships of Support from Male Sex Workers in Pattaya to Rural Parents in Thailand; Taylor & Francis Health Sciences, Volume 4, Number 3 / July 1, 2002, pp 297-315

“Abstract:

Parents in rural Thailand expect their children, once they start earning an income, to provide them with financial support. The pressure to fulfil this obligation has recently been used to explain why so many rural daughters become sex workers. Beyrer has argued that the special strength of these pressures in Northern Thai culture can explain the differential high HIV seroprevalence among female sex workers from that region. What has not been previously studied is whether these same cultural values place a similar obligation on rural sons. Parents expect these sons to provide ongoing financial support as well as to assist in emergencies and with the education of younger siblings. This qualitative study of more than one hundred male sex workers in Pattaya shows that, despite the continued exposure to non-Thai cultural norms through almost exclusive commercial contact with foreign customers, the overwhelming majority of male sex workers still acknowledge and respond to these societal norms. Despite the greater choice of occupational opportunities for young men than young women, the need to meet their filial obligation may contribute to the choice of sex work.”

McCamish, Malcolm. The Friends Thou Hast: Support Systems for Male Commercial Sex Workers in Pattaya, Thailand. (Published in *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*: Edited by Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan; Harrington Park Press, 1999; ISBN 1-56023-119-X [pbk.]).

“Summary: Most studies of male commercial sex workers (CSWs) in Thailand have been framed within a context of HIV risk and have investigated sexual behaviours and HIV knowledge. However, Mann et.al. (1992) have identified health and social services and a supportive social service and a supportive social environment as equally essential partners in an HIV-preventive triumvirate. This paper is based on extended observation and a series of in-depth interview with forty-three male CSWs who are born both organized (bar workers) and freelance as well as a number of clients (farang and Thai) and bar management , and how these are influenced by workers’ cultural norms. A number of recommendations designed to reduce HIV-infection rates are made.”

McCamish, Malcolm; Storer, Graeme; Carl, Greg. Refocusing HIV/AIDS interventions in Thailand: the case for male sex workers and other homosexually active men; Taylor & Francis Health Sciences, Volume 2, Number 2 / April 1, 2000, pp. 167-182

“Abstract:

Although seroprevalence studies have shown that Thai male sex workers are at heightened risk of HIV infection, no sustained preventive strategies have so far targeted homosexually active men in Thailand. In this paper, we bring together data from qualitative research carried out in Pattaya (McCamish and Sittitrai 1995, 1997) and Bangkok (Storer 1999a, 1999b), with data generated during a bar-based intervention in Bangkok (Carl, unpublished report), to develop a taxonomy of sites in which the recruitment of male commercial sex can occur. We also examine the sexual networks of Thai male sex workers and their clients in order to demonstrate the overlap of commercial and non-commercial male-male sex sites, and the intersection of male commercial sex with heterosexual sex. Previous interventions directed towards Thai male sex workers been non-continuous; largely restricted to high-profile tourist areas, have not acknowledged the importance of recreational sex; and have not built up a capacity for ongoing intervention. With a change of focus, interventions directed towards sex workers could reduce the risks of HIV infection among both organized and freelance sex workers as well as their commercial and male and female casual sex partners. First, however, there needs to be a commitment to well planned and long range interventions directed by and at male sex workers.”

Mills, Stephen; Benjarattanaporn, Patchara; Bennett, Anthony; Pattalung, Rachitta Na; Sundhagul, Danai; Trongawad, Peerayot; Gregorich, Steven E.; Hearst, Norman; and Mandel, Jeffrey S. HIV risk behavioral surveillance in Bangkok, Thailand: sexual behavior trends among eight population groups; AIDS 1997, 11 (suppl 1):S43—S51

“Objective: To assess trends in HIV risk behaviors over a 3-year period in eight population groups in Bangkok, Thailand.

Design and subjects: Using a repeated cross-sectional survey design with a structured questionnaire, we collected five sets of self-reported sexual behavior data related to HIV risk from the following subject groups at the same sampling sites during 1993— 1996: direct and indirect female sex workers, male attenders of sexually transmitted disease (STD) clinics, female attenders of antenatal care clinics, male and female vocational students, and male and female factory workers.

Results: Reported patronage of commercial sex by the three male groups declined by an overall average of 48% over the 3-year period. Other non-regular sexual partnerships declined among male STD clinic attenders and vocational students. Condom use during most recent sexual intercourse between sex workers and clients peaked at high levels (>90%) in the early data waves, while among indirect sex workers and their clients, consistent condom usage increased from 56% to 89% Low condom use persisted among sex workers and their non-paying sex partners. Single women reported low levels of sexual activity and condom use with no signs of an increase. Similarly, married women from antenatal clinics reported low condom use with their husbands, with no change throughout the period of the study.

Conclusions: HIV risk behavioral surveillance is a useful way of determining whether behavior change has occurred in specific population groups. The results here confirm and add to a growing set of evidence of risk behavior reduction in Thailand. The behavioral changes did not occur uniformly but varied depending on the sexual dyad and the population group under study. Behavioral surveillance should be promoted and its methodologies strengthened in attempts to understand the local dynamics of HIV epidemics.”

Murray, Stephen O. Increasingly Gay Self-Representations of Male-Male Sexual Experiences in Thailand. (Published in *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in*

Contemporary Thailand: Edited by Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan; Harrington Park Press, 1999; ISBN 1-56023-119-X [pbk.]).

“Summary: With Thailand’s economic development, urbanization (especially the rapid growth of Bangkok), growing contact between Thais and non-Thais, an increased availability of representations of homogender homosexuality (i.e., masculine men being sexually penetrated), and international AIDS discourse, male homosexuality not structured by differences in age, gender or class has become more apparent. Three sets of stories and letters sent by Thai men to Thai gay magazines show a decline in a gender-stratified conception and enactment of homosexuality in Thailand, paralleling the heterogender-to-gay transformation of homosexuality elsewhere in the world. The highly developed commercial venues for males who have sex with males in Bangkok are little mentioned in these texts and suggest the need for the development of other kinds of community infrastructure such as telephone advice lines (providing information about the basic mechanics of safe sex and other aspects of male-male relationships). Males who have sex with males in Bangkok, in particular, need a community centre in which to discuss issues of power, gender, and sexuality.”

Nanda, Serena. Transgendered Males in Thailand and the Philippines. (Published in *Gender Diversity: Crosscultural Variations* by *Serena Nanda*; Waveland Press, Inc., 2000; ISBN 1-57766-074-9 [pbk.]

“Thailand and the Philippines share important themes regarding gender diversity. In both societies today gender diversity primarily refers to transgendered males who, by preference, take the receptor role in same-sex sexual relations and who appropriate feminine attributes and engage in feminine behavior, particularly transvestism. The *kathoey* of Thailand and the *bayot/bantut/bakla* (regionally variant names, which I use interchangeable) in the Philippines are sometimes referred to as a “third sex” but they are more widely understood to be effeminate homosexuals who are like women but also are not women. The definition of gender diversity as transgendered homosexuality in both these cultures has an important effects on social attitudes towards the *kathoey* and the *bakla*.

Both Thailand and the Philippines are characterized by multiple sex/gender discourses (Garcia 1996; Jackson 1997a; Johnson 1997; Manalansan IV 1997; Morris 1994). Both cultures have been influenced sexual/homosexual dichotomy, which exist alongside older and more traditional concepts. As in Brazil, in traditional Thai and Filipino cultures, sexual orientations and sexual practices were not the basis of a personal or social identity, and the modern Western opposition of homosexual/heterosexual as types of persons did not exist. Since midcentury, however, Western biomedical concepts of homosexuality and, more recently, Western concepts of “gay” identity have become part of both Thai and Filipino culture, though in different ways.

In Thailand and the Philippines, sex/gender diversity is significantly associated with beauty and entertainment. If gender is a performance, as modern gender theorist claim (Butler 1990), Thai and Filipino gender variants have dual gender performances: one in their everyday activities and another on the stage, which in a literal sense is an important site of the creation and enactment of sex/gender transformations.

Much Western writing about sex/gender diversity in Thailand and the Philippines portrays these societies as approving or tolerating sex/gender diversity, partly because it is highly visible. In fact, because of the overlay of Western cultures, and/or the absence or bias of historical records, traditional attitudes toward sex/gender diversity are not easily it is a clear that historically transvestite, transgender, “third sexes,” and other forms of sex/gender diversity were more accommodated than is the case today. In indigenous pre-Spanish Philippine cultures,

homoeroticism was unmarked and in Thailand it was not a matter for surveillance either by the Buddhist religion or state law.

Currently in Thailand and the Philippines, however, attitudes toward gender diversity are complex and ambivalent and include hostility and ridicule. Legally, the energetic state regulation of sexuality in the West contrasts to the absence of such legislation in either Thailand or the Philippines. Socially, however, gender diversity is accepted or tolerated mainly at the margins of society, with the exception of the entertainment and beauty industries. In both cultures, the diffusion of Western biomedical models of homosexuality as inversion has negatively affected social attitudes (Garcia 1996; Jackson 1997b), though, at the same time, the Western-inspired “gay” identity has put a more favorable gloss on gender nonconformity (Manalansan IV 1997; Sullivan and Leong 1995).

THE *KATHOEY* OF THAILAND

Thailand’s culture is closely associated with Theravada Buddhism, and much of what is known about Thai sex/gender diversity historically is based on Buddhist records. In Thai culture, biological sex, culturally ascribed gender, and sexuality are not clearly distinguished, and all three concepts are rendered by the Thai term *phet*. Historically, the Thai sex/gender pattern included an intermediate category, the *kathoe*y, which was available to both males and females and existed alongside normative masculine and feminine identities (Jackson 1997a; 1997b).

Until the 1970s, males and females, (biological) hermaphrodites, and cross-dressing men and women could all come under the umbrella term, *kathoe*y. Subsequently, however, the term *kathoe*y was dropped for Transgendered Males in Thailand and Philippines

Cross- dressing masculine females who are now universally referred to as Tom, derived from the English “tomboy.” The feminine lesbian partners of the tom, previously not distinguished from gender- normative females, are called dee (from the last syllable of lady). (For a feminist interpretation of the shift in meaning of *kathoe*y to males, see Morris 1994). As a result of shifts in meaning, the term *kathoe*y today is most commonly understood as a male transgender category. Which in different contexts can refer to transvestites (cross- dressers), hermaphrodites, transsexuals, and effeminate homosexuals (Jackson 1997b:60).

The *kathoe*y has a long history in Thailand Buddhist origin myths describe three original human sex/ gender – male, female, and biological hermaphrodite or *kathoe*y. The *kathoe*y was not defined merely as a variant of male or female, but as an independently existing third sex, though perhaps with a secondary meaning of a male who acts like a woman. This system of three human sexes, with the *kathoe*y as the third sex, remained prevalent in Thailand until the mid-twentieth century.

In the 1950s, a western “scientific” or biomedical discourse on sex and gender was introduced into Thailand. In its Thai version, this discourse emphasized the difference between homosexuals, who were viewed as psychological “ inverts ,”and *kathoe*y, who were viewed as biological hermaphrodites (Jackson 1997b:61) The biomedical approach implicitly continued older, Buddhist viewed that *kathoe*y were natural phenomena, whose condition was a result of karmic fate, preordained from birth and thus beyond their capacity to alter. This view is still commonly held in Thailand both by ordinary people and by *kathoe*y. This identification of the biomedical with the Buddhist position preserved- indeed was developed in part to preserve – the traditional Thai ethical position regarding *kathoe*ys: people who are different or disabled because of their karma should be pitied rather than ridiculed. The biomedical view also reinforced the Buddhist-based Thai belief that *kathoe*ys are not sinful because their behavior is beyond their control.

HOMOEROTICISM IN THAI CULTURE

Same-sex sexual activity between masculine-identified men, called “playing with a friend” (and applied to lesbians as well), has historically been distinguished in Thailand from sex between a man and a (feminine) *kathoey*, whose homoeroticism was seen as rooted in biological hermaphroditism. The biomedical and the Buddhist views reinforce the popular Thai belief that cross-gender sexual relation (that is, between a *kathoey* and a man) are less stigmatizing than same-gender sexuality (between two masculine appearing males), because men unlike *kathoey*s, are not fated to engage in this type of activity. Same-sex / gender eroticism (what would be called homosexuality in the modern west) was considered inauspicious, resulting in natural disasters, such as droughts, being struck dead by lightning, or becoming crazy. These consequences do not appear to have been directed at (heterogender) man/*kathoey* relationships (Jackson 1997b:63-64).

In traditional Thai sex/gender discourse, male (and female) homoeroticism was understood as sex/gender inversion or “psychological hermaphroditism,” that is, having a woman’s mind in a man’s body. Though homoeroticism has long been recognized in Thailand, Thai culture and language did not recognize distinctive homosexual or heterosexual identities for those homoerotic males and females who in other respects adhered to normative masculine or feminine gender roles. Thus, traditionally, sexuality (same-sex sexual activity) was not central in defining the gender identities of man, woman, or *kathoey*. However, this has now changed.

In the last several decades, with the spread of the biomedical definition of homosexuality as inversion, homosexuality has become central in the cultural construction of the *kathoey*, who is now primarily considered a transgendered homosexual rather than a biological hermaphrodite (Jackson 1997a:172). Echoing a discourse about the *hijras*, “genuine” hermaphroditic *kathoey*s are distinguished from “false” or “artificial” *kathoey*s, who are transgendered homosexuals. This distinction continues to emphasize that the “genuine” *kathoey* has both male and female genitals. Although the older definition of *kathoey* as a distinctive intermediate or third sex/gender category (with no reference to sexuality) is still sometimes used in the popular media, the dominant popular stereotype of the *kathoey* today is that of a male who dresses and acts like a woman and who sexually relates exclusively to other males (in the receptor role) (Morris 1994; Jackson 1997a:312, fn 6).

TRANSFORMATIONS IN TRADITIONAL SEX/GENDER IDEOLOGY

In the 1970s, with the introduction of the term “gay” in Thailand, the meaning of homoeroticism changed. This resulted in a change in the meaning of *kathoey* and in the structure of Thai sex/gender system. In traditional Thailand male homoeroticism was largely ignored if it remained private. As in Brazil, insertive anal sex by a masculine appearing man did not damage his masculine identity; indeed, it might be viewed as an enjoyment of sexual variety that even enhanced masculine identity. “Feminine” sexual practices, however, specifically, taking the receptor role in anal sex, were stigmatized and if publicly known, defined a man as socially deficient and ranked him even lower than a *kathoey*.

When the English term gay entered Thai culture, it referred mainly to a cross-dressing or effeminate homosexual male; by the 1990s, however, the Thai image of gay became increasingly masculinized (as also occurred in Euro-American culture by the 1960s). The gay man in Thailand today is identified with gym-enlarged biceps and pectoral muscles and with accentuated body and facial hair. As newspaper and magazine personal columns demonstrate, the Thai gay confidently proclaims his identity as a man (Jackson 1995).

Self-identified gay men in Thailand are equally or even more concerned with their masculine identity than heterosexual men and model themselves on the dominant masculine image except for their sexual orientation. This masculinized gay identity which strongly disassociates itself from the imputed feminine gender status of the *kathoey*, is now well established among educated and middle-class Thai male homosexuals and appears to be filtering down to the lower and working classes. Gay identity offers Thai homosexual men a new subjectivity; it now exists alongside the category of *kathoey*, and both categories appear to be growing.

The emerging gay identity in Thailand has blurred the earlier opposition between “masculine” and “feminine” roles in same-sex erotic practices. Traditionally, in man/ *kathoey* sexual relations, the man penetrated the *kathoey*, never the reverse. In the new Thai construct of Gay identity, insertive and receptive anal sex are no longer defining markers of gender identity, but rather are viewed as mere personal preferences. Gay identity in Thailand is thus identified with homoerotic preference (sexual orientation), not (as in Brazil) with any particular sexual practice (i.e., active vs. passive sex role). The gay in Thailand today represents the emergence of a third term added to the earlier structure of Thai male sex/gender categories in which *kathoey* and man were positioned as polar opposites.

Gay identity may be new in contemporary Thailand, but it refers to an earlier, implicit, subcategory of masculine status: a man who is gender normative in all but his homoerotic preferences. Gay identity is thus consistent with the traditional Thai concept of “man” as a sex/gender category that accommodated homoerotic preferences as simply a variation of masculine sexuality in men who otherwise were gender normative.

In Thai popular culture today, the categories of man (which includes gays and heterosexual men) and *kathoey* are viewed as polar opposites: each category represents a constellation of sexual norms and gender characteristics regarded as mutually exclusive. A Thai man regards himself as either a man or a *kathoey*. In the modern Thai sex/gender system the *kathoey* becomes the negative “other” against which the masculine identities of both gays and men are defined (Jackson 1997a:172). The Thai gay man defines himself as a man and not as a *kathoey*, rejecting all the *kathoey*'s feminine attributes except his exclusive homosexual orientation. Together, gays, men and *kathoey*s form structurally related components of an emerging Thai sex/gender system: each component defines and supports the construction of the other. With the emergence of “the gay” (normally used as a noun in Thailand) as a masculine identity, the *kathoey*'s transgendered behavior and his feminine gender identity, along with his inverted (homo)sexuality, becomes structurally significant, distinguishing him(her) from other males.

The sex gender system in contemporary Thailand, then, comprises two discrete and parallel sets of discourses. A borrowed Western system of four sexualities, in which the homosexual/heterosexual binary crosses the man/woman binary (see Morris 1994), has been imposed on the indigenous system of three sex/genders—the *kathoey*, woman, and man. The older system has been transformed and adjusted by the diffusion of the newer, Western, model.

SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE KATHOEY

As in other patriarchal cultures, like the Philippines, in Thailand the less-valued status of women stigmatizes effeminate or transgendered men. This stigma attached to the *kathoey* today is reinforced by the contemporary denigration of transgendered homosexuality by self-identified gay males and the larger society. This suggests that it is not same-sex sexuality per se that is stigmatizing, but rather the associated mark of femininity. Both traditionally and currently, a Thai male who dresses, talks, and acts like a Thai man and who fulfills his social obligations by

marrying and fathering a family is honored by being considered a man, even if his preferred sexual partner is a male.

Unlike the West, in Thailand homoeroticism traditionally was neither condemned as sinful nor criminalized. Thai society is generally non-interventionist in sexual matters, and Thai culture (like Polynesian culture) puts a greater premium for everyone on the conventionality of one's public acts, rather than on the nonconformity of one's private emotions or behavior. Therefore, a homosexuality that does not breach other masculine gender norms need not be-and is not viewed as-a source of confrontation with society or a matter of social condemnation.

In Thailand, how one act is more important than how one feels, and the public expression of one's "true self" is not valued as it is in the West (Morris 1994). Thus, "coming out" as a gay or a *kathoey* brings a "loss of face" without the compensating value of "being oneself," which is part of modern Euro-American culture. Against this Thai cultural pattern, the visibility of the *kathoey* becomes less rather than more valued.

On the other hand, traditionally and also in some contemporary contexts, *kathoeyes* are accepted." They are highly visible and found in all social strata (except at the highest levels of Thai nobility). *Kathoeyes* live and work openly in cities, rural towns, and villages. Many perform in transvestite revues at gay bars and theaters and also participate in transvestite beauty contests, which are very popular and attended by local dignitaries, politicians, the public at large, and tourists. Thai men and women exhibit an open fascination with *kathoeyes*; they are viewed as entertaining and humorous, and also (in contrast to the Indian attitude toward *hijras*, but similar to the attitude in the Philippines), associated with feminine grace, elegance, and beauty (Jackson 1997b:71).

Nevertheless, (again like in the Philippines), among upper-middleclass urbanities, *kathoeyes* are criticized for being loud, lewd, and vulgar, particularly un-Thai-like behavior. Although many *kathoeyes* work at ordinary jobs and also run their own businesses, they have the reputation of being sexual libertines and prostitutes, which contributes to their generally derided social position. In the past this sexual license was accepted in Thailand, possibly because the *kathoey* provided a "safe" sexual outlet for unmarried youth, whose sexual initiations might otherwise sully the reputation of young unmarried women (Jackson 1997a:173), a role similar to that played by transgendered males in the Philippines (Whitam1992).

With the emergence of the gay as a masculine male, and the changing meaning of *kathoey* from biological hermaphrodite to transgendered homosexual, however, *kathoey* face increasing social and sexual stigmatization, and even physical violence (Jackson 1997a:171). The *kathoey's* cross-gender persona, with its assumed permanent sexual subordination in the receptor role, now makes him a kind of "deficient male," not an independent sex/gender category. The *kathoey* is also derided because of his rejection of the strongly sanctioned expectation that all Thai men other than Buddhist monks should marry and become fathers.

Finally, the *kathoey* is increasingly derided because of his homosexuality, as this concept has been influenced by mid- twentieth- century American psychiatry. In this spread to Thai scientific/ academic discourse and the Thai upper-middle, educated classes, homosexuality is an abnormal, unnatural, category of "inversion" and of perversion.

By the 1970s and 1980s, transvestites and transsexuals were also distinguished from (biological) hermaphrodites and viewed as "false" *kathoey*, who, like homosexual men, were considered to suffer from a psychological disorder. Homosexuality and male transgenderism are now considered "social problems" by Thai academics and the upper -middle classes. Attempts to

“root out” these “perversions” have become part of official rhetoric, which at the same time, however, urges compassion toward homosexuals and transgenders as individuals.

The complex and multiple discourses of the Thai sex/gender ideology, along with other Thai cultural values challenge any oversimplified characterizations of Thai “acceptance” of sex/gender diversity. Nevertheless, sex/gender diversity has a long history in Thailand, with roots in a traditional religious culture. As in the Philippines, these echoes of a more human and flexible past continue to influence contemporary attitudes.”

Pongthai, S. Sexual outlets among homosexually oriented medical students as compare to heterosexuals; J Med Assoc Thai. 1990 Feb;73 Suppl 1:87-92.

“Sexual outlet of the homosexuals was rarely studied, any information obtained could give more understanding about their sexual development. This study aimed at exploring some sexual outlets among homosexually oriented medical students at Ramathibodi Hospital compared with the heterosexuals. Ninety per cent of male students and 85.71 per cent of female students voluntarily answered the questionnaires during the academic year 1982-1988. No difference was observed in the proportion of homosexuals and heterosexuals of both sexes. Most of the homosexuals were bisexual with predominant heterosexual feelings. Homosexual males performed similar sexual activities as heterosexuals. However, more homosexual males engaged in homosexual contact than heterosexual males while the proportion of engagement in heterosexual intercourse did not differ between these two groups. Among the females, solitary sexual activity occurred in the same proportion between both groups. These findings indicated the similarity in sexual development among the homosexuals and the heterosexuals of each sex but there was a certain difference in learning experience.”

Sinnott, Megan. Gay vs. ‘Kathoei’: Homosexual Identities in Thailand; IAS Newsletter, #29, November 2002

“In December 1996, the largest Thai government institute of higher learning, the Ratchaphat Institute, announced that they were banning homosexuals from their nationwide system of teacher’s colleges. The ruling was withdrawn after widespread criticism, but only after lengthy public debate in which NGO activists and liberal academics, calling for the protection of human rights, rallied against state officials. Yielding to critics who claimed the college’s actions violated the newly ratified ‘people’s constitution’, Ratchaphat modified the ban to the point of nullity in a face-saving retreat.

Ratchaphat’s action was newsworthy not because it was a typical repressive action by the Thai state. On the contrary, men and women engaging in homosexual relationships in Thailand have been relatively free of the kind of official legalistic discrimination and harassment that gays and lesbians in Western countries have historically faced. Unlike its southern Muslim neighbour, Buddhist Thailand is without religious or legal injunctions against homosexuality, apart from a brief and unused law dating from legal reforms in the early part of the twentieth century. Ratchaphat’s official condemnation of homosexuality appears oddly out of place given the historical lack of official concern with homosexuality.

The significance of this brief yet sensational controversy concerning the Ratchaphat ban lies in its articulation of a relatively new discourse of public sexual morality in which homosexuality has become a marked, lived, and challenged identity. In the past thirty years, Thai society has witnessed both an increase in anti-homosexual statements propagated by the state, and the rapid growth of communities of men and women who are engaged in long-term homosexual

relationships. These men and women have formed hybrid identities in which traditional notions of gendered identities have combined with newer concepts of sexual orientation.

The more traditional understanding of what is now called 'homosexuality' in Thailand relies on the primacy of gender (visible markers of masculinity or femininity) rather than sexual behaviour per se. The imagery of a third gender within Thai culture dates back hundreds of years, evident in pre-Buddhist myths and the Thai concept of *kathoey* (Morris 1994). *Kathoey* means an indeterminate gender or a combination of masculine and feminine gender, and is usually translated into English as either 'hermaphrodite' or 'third sex'. In contemporary usage, *kathoey* is commonly used to refer to a man who appears to embody what are understood to be feminine characteristics. 'Homosexuality' (*rak-ruampheet*) is a mid-twentieth-century addition to the Thai vocabulary but is largely understood as existing within this model of gender inversion represented by the *kathoey* (Jackson 1997). Therefore, homosexuals are commonly understood to be emotional *kathoey*, such as men who feel they are women, or women who feel they are men.

In the past three decades, some homosexual Thai men have formed a personal identity that distances itself from the transgendered *kathoey*. These men use the English term 'gay' as a positive self-referent in which they position themselves as extensions of a transnational gay identity. However, even within this gay identity are referents to gendered positions. While these distinctions may not be obvious to the general Thai population, gay men often mark themselves as masculine or feminine in terms of sexual roles, appearance, and mannerisms (Jackson 1995).

Over the past twenty years, Thai women have followed this tradition of gendered distinctions by forming a distinct masculine identity for women. These masculine women refer to themselves as *tom* using the first syllable of the English word 'tomboy'. *Toms* are a new phenomenon in that they are a formalized category of specifically masculine women. However, their feminine partners, marked as *dee*, using the last syllable of the English word 'lady', are the truly novel phenomenon in the Thai social landscape because they rely on sexuality rather than gender as a significant dimension of their identity. *Dees* are understood to be distinct from heterosexual women only in their sexual attraction to masculine women. Thai female same-sex relationships are thus a hybrid form of older gendered categorizations (they are marked as masculine or feminine) and newer sexualized personal identities.

Alongside this growth of gendered/sexual identities is the production of largely state-sponsored discourses in which 'homosexuality' is marked and vilified as a threat to the national culture. The Ratchaphat controversy is not an isolated instance of state attempts to regulate the discourse of homosexuality. A survey of recent history in Thailand reveals a persistence, if not an actual increase of anti-homosexual positions taken by officials. For example, in October 1998, a leading professor in the film department at one of the most prestigious Thai universities, Chulalongkorn, attempted to ban a gay/lesbian film festival organized by a junior faculty member of the same institution, by claiming the films were not appropriate for Thai audiences or Thai culture. The senior professor, using her seat on the national censorship board, mobilized reluctant local police to attempt to prevent the films from being shown. The police, knowing they were being manipulated by the influential professor, awkwardly attempted to follow her instructions without causing undue conflict by performing a perfunctory inspection of the films, amidst jeers from the audience, and then quickly leaving after deeming the films acceptable. After a brief visit by police officers on the opening night, the festival continued uninterrupted. These often-contradictory efforts by agents of the state to repress homosexuals become largely symbolic gestures rather than sustained campaigns of persecution.

The simultaneous growth of the large, visible communities of *kathoey*, gays, *toms*, and *dees*, and that of antihomosexual discourses makes definitive statements concerning the 'Thai attitude' towards homosexuality difficult. Local gay and lesbian activists argue that these state actions are evidence of an enduring sexual conservatism, and anti-homosexual attitudes in general. This perspective, however, assumes that Thai society has a longstanding anti-homosexual disposition that is gradually changing into a more tolerant and accepting society of gay and lesbian sexuality. In this scenario, these scandals and controversies reveal the remnant prejudice towards homosexuals that must still be overcome.

In a post-Foucauldian world such a position is hard to maintain. The cultural categories and personal identities of gay, *tom*, *dee*, and *kathoey* are products of recent historical transformation. The medical/psychological/sociological discourses that have been produced and appropriated by the state to regulate and define homosexual men and women are products of an urbanizing, industrializing twentieth century Thailand, not leftovers of some timeless past.

Postmodern deconstructionists have made a living claiming that binary labels are semiotic strategies rather than accurate descriptions of reality. The inability of binary terms to encompass complex reality is obvious in the case of Thailand's homosexuals. Thailand is no more a 'repressive' society than it is a 'liberated' one (see Jackson 1999). In Thailand there is both a growing demand for positive self-identities as gay and lesbian, and state intrusions into defining sexual morality.

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Sinnott, Megan. The semiotics of transgendered sexual identity in the Thai print media: imagery and discourse of the sexual other; Taylor & Francis Health Sciences, part of the Taylor & Francis Group; Volume 2, Number 4 / October 1, 2000; pp. 425-440

“Abstract:

This paper offers a review of the ways in which the Thai print media presents images of transgendered and/or homosexual identities or what may be termed 'gendered/transgendered sexualities'. The author argues that the varied, and at times contradictory, images of gendered sexualities used by the print media can be understood as discursive devices in broader social debates within Thai society. The paper reviews three cases recently covered by the Thai print media: the emergence of lesbian/gay youth cultures (*tom-dee*, *gay*); the Rajaphat College ban on transgendered/gay students; and sex crime cases in which the defendant is labelled as 'Tuy' or a type of homosexual male. These three cases offered particular representations of gendered sexualities that can only properly be understood within the social-political context of modern day Thailand. In particular, they operate as a kind of Thai 'Orientalism', or cultural critique, which contrasts sharply with the ironic silence of the media towards high profile individuals who are well known to be transgender/homosexual.”

Sittitrai, W. Outreach to bar workers in Bangkok; Hygiene. 1990 Dec;9(4):25-8.

“In the course of a campaign to provide AIDS education, information and related services to bar workers, outreach is a necessary strategy. This paper describes what "outreach" is, the direction it may take, who the bar workers are, where outreach is conducted, who performs the outreach, what "community preparation" or prior work is necessary, and useful tips for effective, ethical, outreach programmes.”

Sittitrai, W and Brown, T.; Levels of HIV Risk Behaviour and AIDS Knowledge in Thailand; AIDS Care, Jun 93, Vol. 5 Issue 3, p261, 11p, 5 charts

“Although many of the earliest cases of AIDS and *HIV* infection in Thailand were men who had sex with other men (MHSWM), transmission by heterosexual intercourse and needle sharing rapidly became dominant. This resulted in comparatively little attention being given to studies of *risk behaviour* and seroprevalence in groups of MHSWM with a consequent lack of information about these populations relevant to designing effective interventions. In the Partner Relations Survey, 3.3% of male Thais described their orientation as bisexual or homosexual, most probably an underestimate of the occurrence of same sex *behaviour* in Thai males. This paper briefly reviews the situation and presents results from a survey in the northeast of Thailand among men who have sex with men. Substantial *levels of risk behaviour* were found in MHSWM in the Northeast, with high rates of partner exchange and low *levels* of consistent condom use in insertive and receptive anal intercourse. Significant defects in AIDS knowledge existed implying a strong need for enhanced and expanded interventions in this community. Factors relevant to the design of interventions are highlighted and recommendations for further studies of MHSWM in Thailand are presented.”

Sittitrai, W; Brown, T; Sakondhavat, C. Levels of HIV risk behaviour and AIDS knowledge in Thai men having sex with men; AIDS Care. 1993;5(3):261-71.

“Although many of the earliest cases of AIDS and HIV infection in Thailand were men who had sex with other men (MHSWM), transmission by heterosexual intercourse and needle sharing rapidly became dominant. This resulted in comparatively little attention being given to studies of risk behaviour and seroprevalence in groups of MHSWM with a consequent lack of information about these populations relevant to designing effective interventions. In the Partner Relations Survey, 3.3% of male Thais described their orientation as bisexual or homosexual, most probably an underestimate of the occurrence of same sex behaviour in Thai males. This paper briefly reviews the situation and presents results from a survey in the northeast of Thailand among men who have sex with men. Substantial levels of risk behaviour were found in MHSWM in the Northeast, with high rates of partner exchange and low levels of consistent condom use in insertive and receptive anal intercourse. Significant defects in AIDS knowledge existed implying a strong need for enhanced and expanded interventions in this community. Factors relevant to the design of interventions are highlighted and recommendations for further studies of MHSWM in Thailand are presented.

PIP: The percentage of boys and men in Thailand which identifies itself as bisexual or homosexual is most likely larger than the 3.3% suggested by data in the Partner Relations Survey. Accordingly, this study was conducted with the purpose of examining the sexual behavior, AIDS knowledge, and networks of sexual contacts of men who have sex with men in northeast Thailand. Findings are based upon information from 157 surveyed men aged 15-57 of mean and median ages 26.4 and 24 years, respectively. 95.5% of the participants were single and 77.1% lived in the metropolitan area. Examination of the data indicates that these men have a great deal of unprotected sexual intercourse with many different partners of varying

types; partners include male and female prostitutes as well as strangers. Only low levels of consistent condom use exist during insertive and receptive anal intercourse. Moreover, most men with lovers have substantial levels of sex outside of the relationships without protection. Significant deficiencies in AIDS knowledge point clearly to the need for HIV preventive interventions in the community. These interventions should attempt to increase the levels of condom use and safer sex practice, reduce the number of partners, improve the recognition and early treatment of sexually transmitted diseases which may enhance HIV transmission, and improve the knowledge of AIDS/HIV and its prevention. While interventions could be made at the policy level or through the mass media to increase the awareness and perceptions of personal risk in the general population, interpersonal interventions are most likely to be effective. Recommendations are made for the further study of men who have sex with men in Thailand, while opening sections discuss the background of the Thai AIDS epidemic, the prevalence of male homosexual behavior, and behavioral and seroprevalence studies to date.”

Storer, Graeme. Rehearsing Gender and Sexuality in Modern Thailand: Masculinity and Male-Male Sex Behaviours. (Published in *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*: Edited by Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan; Harrington Park Press, 1999; ISBN 1-56023-119-X [pbk.]).

“Summary: In this paper I draw on a series of Interviews with gay identified Thai men, and with male bar workers and their clients in order to chart traditions, discourses, and institutional contexts contributing to the construction of gender and sexual identity in Thailand. I argue against the uncritical application of Western paradigms to the study of Thai sexuality and presents a view of gender and sexuality that is “fluid and pragmatic.” I consider difficulties associated with sexual choices and levels of acceptance and toleration, and look at examples of how sex work has been socially constructed. Finally, I discuss the attachment of Thai male bar workers to the “gay” community.”

Taywaditep, Kittiwut Jod; Coleman, Eli and Dumronggittigule, Pacharin; *Sexuality in Thailand*. (Source: <http://Sexuality%20Culture%20Culture%20Reading.htm>; downloaded on 10/16/2003)

“HOMOSEXUALITY IN MEN

A small number of studies have attempted to find the prevalence of homosexual behavior in men. In a population-based study (Sittitrai et al., 1992), only 3.1% of the men reported having had sex with men and women, and 0.2% reported with men exclusively. The authors of the study speculated that these statistics were an underestimation due to underreporting. Cohorts of military conscripts, comprised of men mostly age 21 from lower socioeconomic population, have also shown varying rates of male-male sexual experience. In the 1990 conscripts from northern Thailand, (Nopkesorn et al., 1991), 26% reported having had sex with a man, 15% reported past anal intercourse with a man, and 12% reported sexual arousal in response to male nude. In the 1992 conscript from northern Thailand (Nopkesorn, Sweat et al., 1993), 14% reported have had at least one instance of insertive anal sex with a kathoey (a transsexual or an effeminate gay man, see Section 7,) in their lifetimes, 3% with non-kathoey men, and 3% reported having had receptive anal sex. In another study of 2,047 military conscripts from northern Thailand (Beyrer et al., 1995), there were 134 men (7%) who reported having had sex with men, most of whom were also more likely to have higher numbers of female sexual partners than other men who had sex with women exclusively.

In Thai society today, men who have sex with men are either gay king and gay queen: A gay king is a man who plays the insertive role in sex, whereas a gay queen takes a passive and receptive role in sex (Allyn, 1991). Versatility in sexual behavior is obviously not a traditional

construct, and the gender dichotomy pervades the Thai conceptualization of sex between men. Gender dimorphism also necessitates that the society views homosexuality in reference to the fundamental genders of male and female. Also, cross-gendered manners and behavior are seen as indicating the essence of homosexuality in a person (other terms for male homosexuality related to cross-gendered behaviors will be discussed in Section 7). Gay queens are assumed to have feminine characteristics, and therefore, “true homosexuals.” On the other hand, gay kings, stereotyped as male-acting and male-appearing, are seen as less likely to be “permanently” homosexual. Thai people think that gay kings are simply heterosexual men going through a phase of sexual experimentation with other men. Gay kings are also variously referred to as “one-hundred percent male” (phuu-chaai roi poe-sen) and “a complete man” (phuu-chaai tem tua) (Jackson, 1989) which reflects the belief that the insertive homosexual sex act does not jeopardize one’s masculinity. The idea that gay kings are confused or adventurous heterosexual can be seen in many Thai movies and fiction about gay relationships with a tragic ending when the gay king hero leaves a devastated gay queen to marry a woman. Moreover, the Thai myth of men’s boundless sexuality states that “a real man” (i.e., real heterosexual) can derive sexual pleasure from anyone, regardless of gender. The playful term for bisexual men, suea bai (meaning “bisexual tiger”) connotes this admiration of bisexual men’s sexual vigor (Allyn, 1991). Bisexual behavior, therefore, is seen as an attribute of gay kings, bisexual men, and “indiscriminate” heterosexual men alike.”

“CROSS-GENDERED BEHAVIORS AND IDENTITY

As noted in the previous section, the traditional Thai sexuality did not reflect clear distinctions between homosexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality as explicitly drawn by Western cultures. Rather, the most salient of all sexual distinctions is the bipolarity of gender: a person is either a man or a woman. Based on these two fundamental male and female genders, the kathoey exists as another gender identity in the Thai society. Roughly equivalent to the English term “hermaphrodite,” kathoey (pronounced “kathoey”) has been defined as a “person or animal of which the sex is indeterminate” in the Thai-English dictionary (McFarland, 1982). Despite such a medical connotation, kathoey has been used at least in the last several decades to describe a biologically male person who has sex with men, the refore covering a gamut of male homosexualities.

The use of the term kathoey to describe male homosexualities, however, has slowly given way to the more contemporary gay and its derivatives. Today, kathoey mostly refers to men who have feminine social behaviors without much specific reference to their biological gender or sexual behavior. Being associated with feminine characters and other stereotypes (see below), the term is considered derogatory by Thai gay men today, many of whom adamantly distinguish themselves from kathoey. Other derogatory slang words, applied to both gay men and kathoey are **tut** and **tutsii** (the latter from the title of an American movie Toolsie, starring cross-dressed Dustin Hoffman), which, because their pronunciations are close to the derogatory Thai word for “ass,” “suggest anal intercourse”

“MALE COMMERCIAL SEX WORKERS

The number of male sex workers in Thailand has been estimated to be approximately 5,000-8,000 (Brinkmann, 1992), a number much smaller than the estimates of female sex workers. Although there are very few studies on male sex workers, a study has provided a glimpse of the demographics and sexual behavior of men who work in gay bars with commercial sex (Sittitrai, Phanuphak, Satirakorn, Wee, & Roddy, 1989). Many of these men, referred to in Thai as “business boys,” stated that their primary sexual attraction was for women; they reported that their sexual behavior outside of the bars was predominately heterosexual and many had sex

with female sex workers for sexual pleasure. Similar findings were found in the study of male commercial sex workers in northern Thailand: 58% of them described themselves as preferring female partners outside of work, and 14% of all men were married (Kunawararak et al., 1995). At the beginning of the 1990s, male sex workers' HIV seroprevalence remained comparatively low compared to the alarmingly high rates in female sex workers, and this was hypothesized to be due to the male sex workers' use of condoms from early on in the HIV epidemic. However, recent findings can no longer sustain this optimism: In a recent study (Kunawararak et al., 1995) in which male sex workers were followed prospectively from 1989 to 1994, their HIV prevalence increased from 1.4% to 20%, with an overall incidence of 11.9 per 100 person-years, a rate considerably higher than those found in any other groups of Thai men.

Most sex workers in Thailand enter the commercial sex business in their late teens or early twenties, and many others in their early teens. The phenomenon of children in commercial sex will be the focus of the following section. However, it is important to note that much of the discussions about the sociocultural factors that lead young women and men into the sex industry will be applicable to both child, adolescent, and adult sex workers as well."

Thaisri, Hansa; Lerwitworapong, John; Vongsheree, Suthon; Sawanpanyalert, Pathom; Chadbanchachai, Chanchai; Rojanawiwat, Archawin; Kongpromsook, Wichuda; Paungtubtim, Wiroj; Sri-ngam, Pongnuwat; and Jaisue, Rachaneekorn. HIV infection and risk factors among Bangkok prisoners, Thailand: a prospective cohort study; *BMC Infect Dis.* 2003; 3: 25.

“Background

The problem of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is usually approached from a perspective of risk behaviors and modes of transmission. In Thailand, this approach has been implemented since 1989 for HIV sentinel surveillance of certain high-risk people; e.g. commercial sex workers, injection drug users and male clients attending sexually transmitted diseases clinics. As far as interventions are concerned, such an approach leaves certain target groups not presenting at the usual settings unaccounted for. For instance, men who have sex with men do not have "well-defined" physical places where they usually meet and are less likely to receive targeted HIV-1 related interventions. On the other hand, certain HIV high-risk groups in well-defined but restricted settings are also left out from interventions they deserve. Inmates are an example of the left-out population. HIV-1 seroprevalence of the inmates in the United States, Brazil and Scotland have been reported at 20.3, 13.7 and 5.8%, respectively. No such data of Thai inmates have been reported so far, however. The lack of information from inmates may be due to several reasons. First, inmates are sensitive people to study and most investigators find it difficult to gain public acceptance and access to this group. Second, inmates are marginalized people and generally receive less attention than other main stream groups. Third, public health officials believe that interventions towards this group are generally less effective and, sometimes, less efficient than other groups because of their tendencies to resist interventions and/or their lack of freedom to choose healthy environments to live. Under these conditions, not only do the inmates not receive appropriate interventions they deserve, but the general public also loses the benefits they may learn from studies in the inmates. We therefore carried out a study in a prison in central Thailand. We determined factors associated with HIV seropositivity among the inmates, studied other concomitant infections, verified if there were continued uses of illegal drugs and continued homosexual practices in the prison, and explored new HIV infections in the prison.

Setting

The study was conducted in the Medical Correctional Institution of the Klong Prem Central Prison, Bangkok, Thailand. The prison is the largest one in Thailand and served 7,177 inmates in 2002. The 300-bed hospital of the prison treats approximately 250 inmates daily. Most of them seek treatments for common respiratory tract infections.”

“HIV risk behaviors before and during incarceration

.....Sexual risks of the 689 male inmates before incarceration were mainly heterosexual ones. Most of them (81.4%) visited prostitutes at least once. About 80% reported having sex with non-wife women. More than 95% reported experiences of unprotected sex. More than one quarter of the inmates reported sex with men. Among those who had sex with men, more than 80% continued into the incarceration or initiated during the incarceration. Since condom is practically unavailable in the prison, most of this kind of sex is likely to be unprotected”

“HIV-1 positivity and risk factors

The overall anti-HIV positivity was 175/689 or 25.4% (95%CI: 22.0 – 28.6%). In the univariate analysis [...], demographic characteristics, incarceration-related factors, and most sexual risk behaviors (except for unprotected sex) were not statistically associated with HIV positivity.

Strong association with HIV positivity was observed in the inmates who engaged in drugs injection, had reactive urine opiate test, attended withdrawal clinics, had tattoos and shared razor blade and had unprotected sex ($p < 0.05$). Higher HIV positivity was observed more among the inmates who initiated or continued such risks during the incarceration than those who declared no such risks at all or had risks only before incarceration.

Among the 351 injectors, HIV positivity was associated with history of sharing injection equipment, presence of injection scar(s), and injection duration more than 7 years.

After being adjusted for age in the multiple logistic regression analysis, variables found to remain statistically significant are injection history, history of attending drug withdrawal clinic, urine opiates, and body tattoos. [...]

HIV seroconversion rate

Out of the 689 inmates, 166 (25.4%) were anti-HIV positive at the enrolment. The remaining 523 inmates were followed-up for a period of 5 months. Successful follow-up rate was 98.7%. During the follow up period (2,581 person-months), 9 inmates got HIV seroconversion, corresponding to the estimated HIV-1 incidence of 4.18 per 100 person-years (95% CI: 4.11 – 4.26 per 100 person-years). All 9 HIV incident cases were injectors. When we restricted the calculation only to the injectors, the HIV-1 incidence would be 11.10 per 100 person-years (95% CI: 10.89–11.31 per 100 person-years) during 973 person-months of observation.”

Totman, Richard. *The Third sex: Kathey: Thailand’s Ladyboy*; Souvenir Press, 2003; ISBN 0-285-63668-5 (hb.)

Book Review by Wong Yingwuen

The framework of this book is well-thought out. Richard Totman frames his book into two parts – ethnographic narratives (biographies) which he had collected during his fieldwork and contextualization/analyses from secondary resources. There is a good balance between the two

and Totman's strategy is to mix both narratives and analysis in a complementary way. Many times, one would notice that certain experiences related in a narrative are substantiated by academic research in the next chapter and it is contextualized in a larger societal framework. For example, when *Lek* prostitutes herself due to temptation and monetary needs, the chapter is followed by a discussion of the sex industry in Thailand. This strategy proved to be useful as the reader is not overwhelmed by biographic details or academic analyses. It made the book easy to read, informative, analytical and entertaining all at the same time.

Richard Totman is a theatre director cum psychologist. He has written another book on *Mind, Stress and Health*. His interest in the *kathoey*s' cabaret performances and their life experiences is not unexpected. He does not seem to have been trained in anthropology, which may account for some of the short-comings of the book that are discussed in the next section. His focus was to listen to his subjects' stories, (possibly because he is a psychologist) rather than analyze his observations, and then weave these stories together with a contextualization of their position in society to produce a piece of work that has a human touch (and therefore too novel-like) .

Totman's anthropological approach seems to have been derived from the experiences of people from his fieldwork study or secondary reading. This is the dominant approach in the study of transgenderism, as it allows for an understanding of this culture through the lives and experiences of *kathoey*s themselves. However, there are some lingering questions about Totman's fieldwork and these "experiences" he included. Firstly, 8 chapters out of 15 are narratives, or based largely on fieldwork. I had explained earlier my thoughts of these narratives and the style in which they are presented. They are largely novel-like and amazingly detailed in certain ways. Although Totman had stated in his introduction that he had allowed himself "a small artistic license in reconstructing the school years of the three protagonists, and inventing dialogues", he insists that the "narrative passages in this book are faithful to the accounts of the individuals in question."

"The factual details are corroborated with the help of a senior teacher at the school and professors at Chiang Mai university. The descriptions of people and places are authentic but some of the locations and all the individuals' names have been changed for reasons of privacy. 'Interpretation' on my part has been kept to a bare minimum", he writes.

This left me somewhat bewildered.

These narratives are detailed only in a certain way and there is some key information that has been unfortunately, or conveniently, left out. There is no mention of any timeframe at all in these narratives. The author does not mention important dates or years in which significant events occur. For example, when *Daeng* won the "Miss Tiffany" contest (a prestigious national contest), no year was mentioned. I did a check on past winners in the beauty contests and none of them had the name "*Daeng*". Bearing in mind that there might have been anonymity or a change in name, I tried to match the profile of *Daeng* to performers at Simon Cabaret in Phuket. Having done my fieldwork at Simon Cabaret in 2001, I tried to look for a *kathoey* performer who had won a beauty contest on a national level. Only one of them fitted the profile, but while I was there, she was still in Phuket and working in the sex trade (according to Totman, he was living with her family in Chiang Mai in the same year). I can only provide two reasons: Totman had met *Daeng* before she headed back to Phuket or *Daeng* had omitted a huge chunk of her life story when relating her experiences to Totman (1). This is a problem with the anthropological approach that emphasizes ethnographic details that is important in constructing a context for a phenomenon. An anthropologist, having to rely heavily on past experiences related by people, is subjecting himself to certain risks. A subject may choose to omit significant information from his/her life, which may make the ethnographic account inaccurate and highly selective. The

author/researcher may also be selective in using certain narratives in his arguments. Totman has relied on related events more than his own observations as a researcher here, which may result in inaccuracy in analysis or even a distortion of actual events.

Totman relies very heavily on these ethnographic information, but it seems that he had not verified these stories with other people. Nor does Totman give any information about his fieldwork, such as location, names and time. There is in fact, no mention about fieldwork notes at all. If *Daeng's* name had been changed "for reasons of privacy", it mystifies me as to why there must be anonymity at all. Firstly, all Thai people have what they call "*chue len*" or nicknames which are common words, such as "*Daeng*" which means red and "*Muu*" which means pig. As such, there is an uncountable number of people with the name "*Daeng*" or "*Lek*" and these names, on their own would provide anonymity. It does not make much sense to replace a nickname with yet another nickname.

Also, surprisingly, nowhere in the book, not even in the acknowledgements, were real names mentioned. There were no real names for any of the *kathoeys* interviewed or the teacher at Rama V school Totman mentioned, or the professors he consulted at Chiang Mai university. From my experiences in fieldwork, none of the *kathoeys* I spoke to declined to give me their real names. In fact, when I told them it was for acknowledgement purposes, they gave their real names to me very willingly. The only difficulty was that some of them could not speak English, so their Thai names needed transcription. Even if Totman had decided to withhold the *kathoeys's* real names, there was no mention of who were the professors he consulted at Chiang Mai University. He only mentions a few names in his acknowledgements, with no reference to who these people were. Not in a single instance (not even in footnotes) were these professors referred to with names at all in the main text. There were also no photographs of these people he spoke so fervently of. Would an anthropological approach be complete without these information? I doubt so. It only made his fieldwork ambiguous, questionable, dubious and at times even unconvincing.

The amazing part was the reproduction of the live experiences of the book's three protagonists. Totman manages to write in such details that one begins to wonder if this is in fact possible. He had mentioned that he did not use a tape recorder as he found it intrusive. Yet, he could reproduce stories in colourful details. At one point, he could even elaborate 8 pages of reconstructed dialogue between Saowanee and the three friends, as a third person! Even with conscious note-taking during my fieldwork, I would not be able to construct dialogues like these. There seems to be little limitations imposed upon himself to avoid a subjective account of events. One begins to wonder if this is an academic book or a novel. This "reconstruction" of past events not only reduces Totman's credibility as a scholar, it may also lead to misinterpretations and stereotyping of the transgender culture in Thailand by the reader. It undermines the academic and scholarship values of the book and I would say that this is the greatest weakness in this piece of work.

As for sources, the bibliography is not extensive, but this does not come as a surprise because the transgender culture in Southeast Asia is seriously under-researched. However, there are some problems with citations. For example, Totman discussed extensively about "Satee Lex", the transsexual volleyball team which emerged as national champions and national heroes. But he does not acknowledge where this information came from. It seems to be based largely on the movie (by the same name), which I think to an extent is exaggerated and glorified. His references, startlingly, is not comprehensive, given that the book is one that aimed to discuss everything about the *kathoeys* culture. There were also no primary resources used (except for the introduction where he mentioned the newspaper article in *The Nation*, which caught his

attention), despite the availability of information on *kathoeyes* regularly in newspapers or magazine articles.

Compared to other scholars such as Peter Jackson (in his work of homosexuality in Thailand) (2) and Teh Yik Koon (in her work in examining the *mak nyahs* in Malaysia) (3), Totman's work seriously lacks in empirical data. Jackson's book, "Uncle Go: Male homosexuality in Thailand" is also largely anthropological with analyses drawn from collection of letters to "Uncle Go", aunt agony in a male homosexual magazine. Yik Koon's study of the *mak nyahs*, though lacking in in-depth analysis of their experiences, is supported strongly with empirical data (a total of 507 participants). This makes Totman's book and his approach seem weaker in comparison.

Nonetheless, Totman must also be given due for his contribution to the existing literature. His book is the first attempt in filling the vacuum about transgender studies in Southeast Asia and it is indeed a commendable effort. In the chapters dealing with analyses, Totman accurately interprets and collates existing academic works and manages to weave these analyses successfully into the book. Discussion of biological factors, Buddhism and information on the history of *kathoeyes* and the sex industry are enlightening and easy to read. Prior to this, most research had been isolated in parts. The layout of the arguments are well-thought out for a maximum impact and credit must be given to his attempt in making a coherent and wholesome argument about the social and historical context of the *kathoey* phenomenon in Thailand.

Conclusion

This book, I feel, has been clearly written with one goal in mind – introducing the scholarship of transgender cultures to a first-time reader in an entertaining way. Totman tries very hard to make this book entertaining and at the same time, informative. Although there are limitations to this book, I would highly recommend this book to anyone reading or trying to understand the *kathoey* phenomenon in Thailand for the first time. However, the reader must keep in mind the ambiguity of narratives presented. The book should be read with a cautious eye, but it is still somewhat valuable because it is the first book that gives a wholesome ethnographic and analytical account of the *kathoey* culture in Thailand. The analysis and arguments presented would be enlightening to any reader. For a person presumably without training in social sciences, Richard Totman is remarkably successful in producing a book that is long overdue.

There are yet many other approaches and issues that need to be addressed. Other than this ethnographic approach, one might also gain insights into the transgender culture by looking at the role of the government, its policies towards these people, the informal communal groupings of these people, power structures in society and the role of economics (in this case, tourism plays a large role) in the formation of a larger social context in which transgenderism exists. Hopefully, this book will spur more scholarly research, with different approaches, about this phenomenon, which deserves more attention than it does.

Endnotes

(1) During my fieldwork I had indeed heard of a *kathoey* performer who had won a national beauty contest, but she had left the cabaret before I got there. I never got to know her name as the performers at Simon Cabraet did not seem to like mentioning her at all. I have yet to verify the identity of this person.

(2) Peter Jackson, *Dear Uncle Go: Male Homosexuality in Thailand*, (Bua Luang Books, Thailand & USA, 1995)

(3) Yik Koon, Teh, The Mak Nyahs: Malaysian Male to Female Transsexuals, (Eastern University Press, Times Media Private Limited, Singapore, 2002).

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Traisupa, A; Wongba, C and Taylor, DN. AIDS and prevalence of antibody to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in high risk groups in Thailand; *Genitourinary Medicine*, Vol 63, Issue 2 106-108, Copyright © 1987 by Sexually Transmitted Infections.

Since September 1984, six cases of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and 11 cases of AIDS related complex (ARC) have been reported in Thailand. All people with AIDS were homosexual or bisexual men; two were Thai and the rest were European or American. Nine of the 11 people with ARC were homosexual or bisexual men, one was the female sexual partner of a man with AIDS, and one was a Thai man who had lived in the United States of America for several years, but denied having had any homosexual contact. Nine of the 11 people with ARC were Thai. In a survey in April 1985 at a resort area near Bangkok, antibodies to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (confirmed by western blot) were detected in 2.4% of 127 homosexual men and none of 77 female prostitutes. In a more extensive survey in October 1985, antibodies were detected in 0.8% of 720 homosexual men, but none of 2880 female prostitutes or 309 sexually active heterosexual men. HIV has been introduced into Thailand primarily by homosexual transmission. The public health policy of Thailand concerning AIDS is discussed.

Wangroongsarb, Y; Weniger, BG; Wasi, C; Traisupa, A; Kunasol, P; Rojanapithayakorn, W; Fucharoen, S. Prevalence of HTLV-III/LAV antibody in selected populations in Thailand; *Southeast Asian J Trop Med Public Health*. 1985 Dec;16(4):517-20

Antibody to the human T-lymphotropic virus, type III/lymphadenopathy-associated virus (HTLV-III/LAV) by ELISA test was detected in one (1%) of 101 male homosexual prostitutes (confidence limit 95%:0.03-5.4%, in two (2%) of 100 thalassemia patients, and in none (C.L. 95%:0-3.6%) of 100 female prostitutes, 99 parenteral drug abusers, 100 male VD patients, 100 consecutive blood donors in serum collected from February through June 1985. Serum from the positive homosexual subject was strongly positive on repeated ELISA testing, and was also positive by Western Blot test. The two thalassemia patients, who were repeatedly weakly-positive by ELISA, were negative by Western Blot test and presumed to be false positive reactors. Prevalence of HTLV-III/LAV virus in sexually-active homosexuals in Thailand in 1985 appears to be similar to the 1% rate among homosexuals in San Francisco in 1978 at the start of the AIDS epidemic there.

Winter, Sam. Counting Kathoey.

http://web.hku.hk/~sjwinter/TransgenderASIA/paper_counting_kathoey.htm; uploaded 17/6/2002, updated 27/8/2002

It has been reported that there are now some 10,000 kathoey living in Thailand (Ehrlich, 1996). This figure is almost certainly an underestimate. I have heard informal estimates as high as 300,000. Turning first to the more extreme end of the gender-transition continuum, there are an

indeterminate number of government and private hospitals which offer sex re-assignment surgery. The three most active surgeons in this field have together performed around 2000 operations (Fiona Kim, 2001, personal communication). At the other end of the continuum, Matzner (web resource) reports that one provincial Thai university of 15000 students boasts a 'sorority' for over 100 MtF students (most at an early stage in transition). This represents around one in 150 students overall, and a rather larger proportion of the males!

Even if the estimate of 10,000 is an accurate one, this figure would represent an incidence substantially above that estimated for transgender in many other parts of the world (for example American Psychiatric Association, 1994; Kesteren et al, 1996; Francoeur, 1997).

Individuals vary of course. However, most kathoey present outwardly as entirely female – in terms of hair (often long), dress, cosmetics, manner, gait, gestures, voice, stereotyped personality traits (Winter and Udomsak, 2002) and interests (including vocational). When they speak they employ a female tone and vocabulary, employing word-forms normally restricted to females. A very large number of them take hormones, sometimes from as early as 10 years of age. Many of those who are able to afford cosmetic surgery do so. A rather smaller number undergo sex reassignment surgery (SRS).

How can one count how many kathoey there are in Thailand? First one would have to define who one wants to count. If one is interested only in those who have had SRS then one might go to the surgeons and ask for the figures. But this method may not be so easy; first, it is difficult to ascertain how many surgeons are doing this operation; second, one suspects that not all may keep full records going back to the time that they started; third, some previously active surgeons may no longer be active in the field; and fourth, an increasing number of operations now appear to be done on foreign patients rather than Thais. Most importantly, there is the problem that this method would only give figures for the extreme end of the transgender spectrum; those who undergo SRS. Many never do, nor want to, and yet live their lives in a cross-gender identity.

An alternative method, one which is refreshingly simple but which I admit has all sorts of problems attached to it, is to adopt an approach rather like I imagine the botanist might who is interested in studying a somewhat rare species of flower on an island. First he would ensure that he can recognise the species. Second, he would go out to likely locations and count how many he can find. Third, he would try to extrapolate to a figure for the entire island.

It is this approach that we are currently taking in a research project in Thailand. We are selecting community locations at which people congregate, identifying a particular spot, and then observing and counting passers-by, making a note of each kathoey who also passes.

The approach, which we might 'tongue-in-cheek' call 'looking and counting' rests on a number of assumptions. First, that *the locations chosen, and times selected for observation, are representative ones at which an individual kathoey is no more and no less likely to be present than any other person*. Second (since we are trying to estimate the numbers of kathoey in Thailand), that *the locations are representative for the country as a whole*. Third, and very importantly, that *the observer is indeed able to read (identify) a kathoey in a passer-by encounter*. The observer should make as few false positives and false negatives as possible, but has to do so basing his or her judgment on the target's facial appearance, body shape, manner, gait and dress, without any opportunity to observe other important cues such as voice.

One way to try to test whether such a method is possible is to check the observer's ability against an expert's. Who might such an expert be? Probably the most expert in reading other kathoey are kathoey themselves. Many of them pride themselves on their ability to read others,

often giving a respectful nod or 'wai' (Thai palms-together greeting) to another in a public place, even though they may not ever have met before.

Consequently, I and independent transgender observers have conducted trial observations in middle income shopping centres in Thailand. We observed all persons passing a designated point (usually a door leading in and out of the centre). During these periods we independently observed 2237 persons pass through the door, counting the 'definite' and the possible 'kathoe' who passed by. Any individual who passed through the door more than once during the hour was counted more than once. I identified ten passers-by as 'definite' kathoe, while my assistants identified twelve to be. This was a high level of agreement. Incidentally, a much lower level of agreement occurred for 'possible' kathoe. While I identified fourteen to be, my assistants observed none. Clearly then, if one takes a kathoe's figures as the criterion by which my own observations are to be judged, then my 'possible' observations revealed far too many false positives. On the other hand, my 'definite' sightings were quite accurate, perhaps even on the conservative side.

Armed with this information, I am now collecting incidence data in different locations, on week days and weekends during the months of June and August 2002, and at various times of the afternoon, in Bangkok and Chiangmai, the two major urban centres in Thailand. So far the data is as follows:

| <u>Location</u> | <u>Duration</u> | <u>Passers-by</u> | <u>Kathoe</u> |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Siam Centre, Bangkok | 3.5 hrs | 4632 | 12 |
| Mah Boon Kongsri Centre, Bangkok | 1.0 hrs | 930 | 0 |
| Discovery Centre, Bangkok | 3.25 hrs | 6910 | 25 |
| Gat Suan Gaew Centre, Chiangmai | 2.25 hrs | 1890 | 5 |

The data represent a total of 10.00 hours and 14362 people in the nation's two largest urban centres. I should stress that all these shopping centres are middle-income locations popular with persons of both sexes (by that I mean male and female) and all ages.

Bangkok is a city with a population of around of 5,647,799 (1998) (Chulalongkorn University Population Information Center). If our observed incidence of kathoe in Bangkok is representative of Thailand's capital, then we may estimate that there are nearly 17000 kathoe in the city.

If our combined figures for Bangkok and Chiangmai are representative of Thailand in general (1998 population 61,466,178) then we have a national incidence of around 3 in every thousand people (say 6 in every thousand males), extrapolating at nearly 180,000 kathoe nationwide.

I do not want to claim too much for this method, or for the numbers it has yielded so far. The figures we are getting may be too high. After all, kathoe may be prevalent in the cities of Thailand than in the countryside. They may indeed spend more time in shopping centres than ordinary males and females do. On the other hand, we are being very strict in ignoring any 'possibles' or 'probables', counting instead only those who are judged to be certain transgenders, this on the basis of the limited time for observation (a maximum of a few seconds each individual) and the few cues available. In our view there are likely to be false negatives in this study, and very unlikely to be any false positives.

The research is continuing, and we accept that it is important that we select a wider variety of locations and collect more data, not only in Bangkok but also elsewhere in Thailand; certainly in urban areas and possibly in rural ones too. Perhaps too there is a need for triangulation with

other methods. For the present this simple study, still in its early stages, represents the only one I know that has attempted to arrive at some sort of empirically derived estimate of male transgender in Thailand. *For that reason only, I thought it worth reporting, even at this early stage.*

We will update you as the research progresses and we collect a larger (and, one hopes, more representative) corpus of data.

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Winter, Sam and Udomsak, Nuttawut; Male, Female and Transgender : Stereotypes and Self in Thailand; *The International Journal of Transgenderism*; Volume 6, Number 1, January - March 2002.

“Abstract

Two hundred and four Thai Male-to-Female (MtF) transgenders (mean age 23.0 years) completed questionnaires designed to examine self-concept (actual and ideal) and gender-trait stereotypes held towards men and women.

Findings indicated that (a) participants' gender-trait stereotypes were similar to those of non-transgenders examined in other studies (both in their own country and internationally), (b) their actual and ideal self-concepts each displayed much more consensus about traits not possessed than about those possessed, (c) their actual and ideal self-concepts were commonly discrepant, and (d) while they commonly held a stereotypically female view of themselves, they often aspired towards a broad range of traits that were less stereotyped. Indeed, (e) they commonly disowned stereotypically female traits.

These last two findings suggest that transgenders have personal growth goals that transcend, or even run counter to, gender-stereotype. They may instead conform to more fundamental ideas about favourable human qualities.”

Wiwanitkit, V. Anti-HIV serology in patients with sexual dysphoria in screening test before sex change surgery; *Sex Transm Inf* 2002;78:75

“The health and behavioural issues of homosexual men and women have recently become a focus of research and interest. A well conceived framework within which to consider the uniqueness of problems faced by homosexual youths and the role of healthcare providers is needed¹. Significant physical morbidity occurs among homosexual men and women because healthcare providers are often unaware of their actual or potential health concerns. Physical health concerns mainly include HIV disease, hepatitis, and other sexually transmitted diseases. Healthcare professionals, who are clinically competent in the care of homosexual men and

women, should have the opportunity to reduce the risk of disease, while providing unbiased, quality care which recognises the unique problems of this population². In this study, we report the prevalence of HIV infection among the homosexual men and women who visited the pre-admission clinic, King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital, Bangkok, for further sex change surgery.

A prospective study on the data concerning anti-HIV test for 35 cases (33 homosexual men and two lesbian women) with sexual dysphoria who attended the pre-admission clinic, King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital, Bangkok for further sex change surgery, during years 1999 and 2000 was performed. The demographic data about occupation, injecting drug use, previous plastic surgery, hormone injection, and abnormal sexual intercourse (as oral and anal sex) were also reviewed for each case.

For all 35 cases of sexual dysphoria, only two cases of anti-HIV seropositivity were detected. The prevalence was equal to 5.71%. These two cases were homosexual. The demographic data of HIV seronegative and HIV seropositive cases are shown in [...] [the table below].

Table: Demographic data and anti-HIV serology

| Demographic | Anti-HIV serology | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| | Positive (n=2) | Negative (n=33) |
| Sex | | |
| Male | 2 | 31 |
| Female | 0 | 2 |
| Occupation | | |
| Beauty salon workers | 1 | 17 |
| “Gay show” workers | 1 | 12 |
| Private business | 0 | 2 |
| Secretary | 0 | 1 |
| Student | 0 | 1 |
| Injecting drug use | | |
| Ever | 0 | 0 |
| Never | 0 | 33 |
| Previous plastic surgery | | |
| Ever | 1 | 5 |
| Never | 0 | 29 |
| Hormone injection | | |
| Ever | 0 | 20 |
| Never | 0 | 15 |
| Abnormal sexual intercourse | | |
| Ever | 2 | 14 |
| Never | 0 | 19 |

Currently, the two major routes of transmission of HIV are blood borne and sexual propagation. Sexual propagation also includes the abnormal sexual behaviour such as oral and anal sex found in the "gay" population³. Unique aspects of Thai culture have shaped the response of homosexual men and women to HIV infection in Thailand. Thailand is a relatively homogeneous society that has, by and large, felt invulnerable to AIDS, viewing it primarily as a Western phenomenon. This attitude has also been common in the gay community and has resulted in some homosexual men and women engaging in high risk behaviour.

In Thailand it has been argued that HIV infection is still a major health problem among homosexual men and women. The current HIV epidemic among young homosexual men and women is a major public health concern. Nevertheless, hardly any specific HIV education interventions have been designed for this population. In this study, the rather high rate of HIV infection among the homosexual men and women attending the hospital for further sex change surgery was detected. Compared with the rate in the general population in Thailand⁴, this rate is five times higher. Therefore, this population is still a target group for HIV infection, and thus, proper control for this population is necessary.

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