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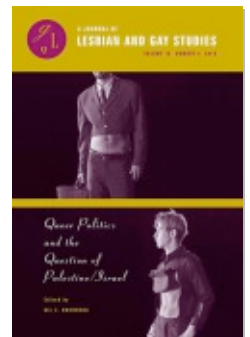
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## **Capitalism and Global Queering National Markets, Parallels Among Sexual Cultures, and Multiple Queer Modernities**

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# CAPITALISM AND GLOBAL QUEERING

## National Markets, Parallels among Sexual Cultures, and Multiple Queer Modernities

Peter A. Jackson

### Capitalism, Global Queering, and the Production of Sex-Cultural Difference

Since the early 1990s, many authors have identified the proliferation of new homosexual and transgender identities and cultures in both Western and non-Western societies as a significant instance of cultural globalization.<sup>1</sup> In 1992 Ken Plummer wrote, “The gay and lesbian movements house identities, politics, cultures, markets, and intellectual programs which nowadays quite simply know no national boundaries. Homosexualities have become globalized.”<sup>2</sup> Dennis Altman has labeled this phenomenon “global queering” and in a 1997 article, “Global Gaze/Global Gays,” observed, “What strikes me is that *within* a given country, whether Indonesia or the United States, Thailand or Italy, the *range* of constructions of homosexuality is growing.”<sup>3</sup> At the cusp of the new century, Peter Drucker noted that despite different societies’ distinctive gender and sexual cultures, their divergent relationships to the world economy, and their unique political contexts, the late twentieth century nonetheless still saw the emergence of “identifiable common elements of lesbian/gay identity in one country after another.”<sup>4</sup> More recently, Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin Manalansan have stated, “Queerness is now global. Whether in advertising, film, performance art, the Internet, or the political discourses of human rights in emerging democracies, images of queer sexualities and cultures now circulate around the globe.”<sup>5</sup> These observations have raised the question of what has produced similar gender and sex outcomes in diverse social, political, and cultural settings.

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In the article in which he coined the expression “global queering,” Altman quotes an article from the *Economist* on the internationalization of gay identity: “In effect, what McDonald’s has done for food and Disney has done for entertainment, the global emergence of ordinary gayness is doing for sexual cultures.”<sup>6</sup> The idea that, like McDonald’s and Disney, global queering began in the United States and has transformed the planet’s queer cultures by cultural borrowing, or cultural imperialism, as a result of American global hegemony has been a major influence on both popular and academic understandings of the phenomenon. Ara Wilson observes that many discussions of Asian queer subjectivities have assumed “an import-export calculus” in which new genders and sexualities beyond the West have been seen as deriving from U.S.-inflected Western modes of sexuality or from Western-based systems of modernity.<sup>7</sup> However, “Out of New York (Greenwich Village)” or “Out of San Francisco (The Castro)” accounts of global queering have been critiqued for failing to capture the full scope of the processes at work in world sexual and gender cultures, and Wilson contends that such views recapitulate Western hegemony by locating the source and agency of modern queer life solely in the West.

Barry D. Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and André Krouwel argue that while “gay” and “lesbian” have become banners for many nationwide queer activisms, use of these terms beyond the West does not mean that a single international gay and lesbian identity or culture is emerging; they note that while “parallels in the development of gay and lesbian movements are striking,” “similarities in activities, styles, symbols, institutions, language, and so on . . . do not imply the identities are the same. . . . apparent commonalities must not blind us to differences that exist in the meanings of these practices. Country-specific elements remain important, much more than is acknowledged by the postmodern rhetoric that celebrates globalization instead of emphasizing the local meanings of global tendencies.”<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Weeks observes that the many forms of local difference recognized in recent studies of cultural globalization are “helping to dissolve the idea of a single universal lesbian or gay identity.”<sup>9</sup> He concludes that “the Western gay is not seated at the top of an evolutionary tree, the only model of development, and notions of what it is to be sexually different are likely to be radically modified as the ‘perverse dynamic’ at the heart of so many cultures . . . confronts the imperatives of global interconnectedness.”<sup>10</sup> Recent research on Asia’s diverse queer cultures has increasingly revealed what Adam, Duyvendak, and Krouwel call “the local meanings of global tendencies,” presenting a picture of complex processes that produce the apparent paradox of simultaneous sex-cultural differentiation and convergence.<sup>11</sup> Benigno Sánchez-Eppeler and Cindy Patton describe the

“extraordinarily complex picture of the frictional relation between geopolitics and embodied desires” that leads to “labors of reinvention and renegotiation in new places.”<sup>12</sup> Summarizing a decade of research on Indonesian gay, male-to-female (MTF) transgender (*waria*), and lesbian (*lesbi*) cultures, Tom Boellstorff writes, “A frequent Western misunderstanding is that gay tourism or international gay organizations have played a significant role in the translocation of ‘gay’ subjectivities to Southeast Asia, an assertion commonly made without a shred of supporting evidence.”<sup>13</sup> Boellstorff maintains that Southeast Asian gay-identified men are not directly linked to Western gay movements, and he contends that “there has been a failure in queer studies (and to a lesser degree in anthropology) to set forth any theorization of the Southeast Asian gay subject that does not presume inauthenticity, complicity, or domination [by presumed Western precedents].” Boellstorff emphasizes that “in areas of Southeast Asia where English is not widely spoken, metaphors other than ‘coming out’ may predominate, with consequences for understandings of gay subjectivity.”<sup>14</sup> Fran Martin and her coauthors have drawn on theories of cultural hybridity to trace the complex intersections of local agency and foreign forms that are apparent in queer cultures across Asia.<sup>15</sup> These studies confirm that transnational queer cultural patterns are emerging yet also point out that new forms of cultural difference exist alongside international commonalities and emphasize that local forms of queer modernity have emerged from the agency of the members of each society. In summary, research on global queering in Asia confirms Arjun Appadurai’s account of cultural globalization as a multifaceted phenomenon in which new forms of difference emerge alongside convergence: “Globalization is . . . [an] uneven and even *localizing* process. Globalization does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenization or Americanization.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Capitalism and Asia’s New Male-to-Female Transgender Cultures**

While research on Asian queer cultures has critiqued “out of America” explanations of global queering, it has nonetheless confirmed Altman’s contention that capitalism has played a central role in the phenomenon. Indeed, market processes have been even more important in the proliferation of queer cultures and identities than proposed by early researchers. Early global queering studies, including my own, often presented a binary opposition between MTF transgenderism, imagined as a site of persistent, premodern, precapitalist “tradition,” and gay forms of male homosexuality, represented as a domain of transgressive, Western-influenced, commodified modernity.<sup>17</sup> This is a view I have since revised.<sup>18</sup> Recent research reveals Asia’s contemporary gay, lesbian, and MTF transgender cultures all to be

modern forms that differ from both Western queer cultures *and* the premodern gender and sex cultures of their own societies. Boellstorff criticizes the emphasis on “tradition” in accounts of transgenderism in Asia, observing that in the case of Indonesia, “although *warias* live in a postcolonial nation-state, analyses often frame them in terms of locality, tradition, and ritual.”<sup>19</sup> The contrast between modern “global gays” and putatively “traditional transgenders” overlooks the market’s role in the origins of modern MTF transgender identities. My more recent research on Thai queer genders and sexualities reveals that contemporary patterns of *kathoey* (male-to-female) transgenderism are just as different from premodern forms as Thai gay sexualities, with Thailand’s *kathoey* cultures taking their current forms as a result of a twentieth-century revolution in Thai gender norms.<sup>20</sup> In Thailand the antiquity of the term *kathoey* has masked the modernity of the identities now labeled by this word. Capitalism has also had a role in the emergence of this and other modern Asian MTF transgender cultures. Summarizing research on MTF transvestites in Southeast Asia, Boellstorff writes,

Early references suggest that these individuals [MTF transvestites] were associated with urban mercantile environments like small-scale trading, sex-work, and lower-class forms of drama, rather than with courts or rituals (Garcia 1996: 65–66; Peacock 1968; Proschan 2002: 445). . . . it appears that male transvestites in Southeast Asia are not legacies of prior “traditions.” Rather the available evidence suggests that male transvestites emerged as “commodified transgender” subject positions only in the late nineteenth century or early twentieth. As Drucker notes, such “commodified transgender [identities] differed from any [earlier] transgenderal sexuality in that [they were] largely urban, largely detached from rather than integrated into traditional kinship networks, more or less associated with prostitution for money rather than any kind of socially sanctioned marriage, and at odds with instead of sanctioned by the dominant religion.”<sup>21</sup>

In summary, new Asian transgender identities have emerged within the same context of market capitalism that Altman argues has supported the globalization of gay identities. Future historical research will need to abandon the mistaken association of transgenderism with precapitalist residues of tradition and instead trace how the market has provided a space for the modern Filipino *bakla*, Thai *kathoey*, Indonesian *waria*, and other transgender identities beyond the West to form around the commodification of modern norms of feminine beauty.<sup>22</sup>

Altman argues that “current debates around changing forms of homosexu-

ality [present] a choice between political economy, which argues for universalizing trends, and anthropology, which argues for specificities.”<sup>23</sup> This study engages both sides of the debate, arguing that market-based processes have been sources of both new forms of difference within and emergent similarities among modern queer cultures. In contrast to earlier studies that emphasized the culturally homogenizing impact of transnational capitalism, the market, not any persistent premodern tradition, is here placed at the center of modern queer cultural differentiation. I agree with Altman that “we badly need a political economy of sexuality . . . which recognizes the interrelationship of political, economic, and cultural structures.”<sup>24</sup> The political economy of global queering needs to relate the market to *both* the localizing and the transnational dimensions of cultural globalization, and explain how capitalism produces both modern forms of sex-cultural differentiation in some domains alongside convergence in others. If capitalism is the engine of cultural globalization and if, as revealed by research on queer Asia, local sex-cultural differentiation and international convergence are equally salient and coexisting trends, then the analytic task is to explain how the market produces both new local forms of sexual difference and transnational commonalities.

### **Capitalism and Queer Autonomy beyond the West**

The contributions of several lines of research may support a more complex account of queer cultural globalization in which sex-cultural differentiation *and* convergence are recognized as equally modern consequences of market-based processes. One such line of research critiques the view that capitalism is singular and monolithic by tracing local histories of the market as a culturally embedded pattern of exchange, investment, and production.<sup>25</sup> This insight may help reveal how the forms of queer cultural difference now apparent internationally are modern products of local market-based processes, not residues of a precapitalist tradition that is somehow able to persist outside the marketization and commodification that envelop the rest of social life. Capitalism finds a foothold only where it can adapt to local conditions, and the emergence of markets attuned to local consumer demands is as likely to support the production of local cultural difference as to erase it. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri observe, “Capital tends to envelop or control all forms of production and all social relations. This does not mean that capital establishes uniform relations everywhere—on the contrary, radically different formations and relations are subsumed under and even produced by capital.”<sup>26</sup> A second line of research, explored here, argues that national, not transnational, forms of capitalism have been sources of some of the commonalities

that now link gay, lesbian, and transgender cultures across borders. While recent studies have shown the extent of local agency in the emergence of new queer cultures beyond the West, this research has rarely proposed an alternative to the demonstrably inadequate cultural borrowing or import-export model to explain the transnational commonalities that are now apparent. Without an alternative account of global queering, the accumulating evidence of queer agency beyond the West risks being reappropriated to Eurocentric models of global queer history. My aim here is to begin redressing this explanatory gap by understanding the key finding of first-generation global queering studies—transnational queer similarities are emerging in the context of capitalist expansion—in terms of the central conclusion of comparative research that modern queer cultures beyond the West are expressions of local agency. The narrative of global queering presented here decouples the spread of capitalism from cultural Westernization. I do not deny the expansionist West's often destructive impact on the global stage or the importance of cross-border flows of people, images, and ideas in modern queer history. Rather, moments in the history of capitalism are highlighted where queer subjects have enhanced their autonomy vis-à-vis local heteronormative traditions by creative engagements that take advantage of opportunities provided by the growth of a national market economy.

Boellstorff points to three spatiohistorical scales for analyzing Asian queer subjectivities: (1) the local or “ethnolocal,” which anthropological studies often identify as the site of premodern transgender and homoerotic traditions; (2) the national, which historical research links with the tradition-disrupting impact of colonialism, the imposition of Western heteronormative sexual regimes, and movements for national independence; and (3) the global, which political economy and cultural studies approaches interpret as reflecting the contemporary postcolonial moment of transnational capitalism.<sup>27</sup> Of these three scales, he identifies the nation as the most important in defining the distinctiveness of modern Indonesian *gay*, *lesbi*, and *waria* identities, all of which differ from ethnolocal traditions while also failing to conform to what he terms “McGay” accounts of a homogeneous global queer culture. Boellstorff opens the way to consider the nation as a third space of global queering analysis between anthropological emphases on the “local difference” of premodern homoeroticisms and political economy approaches that assume an emerging transnational “sameness” among globalization-era (homo)sexualities and (trans)genders.

Evidence presented in the second half of this essay confirms the broader value of Boellstorff's approach and reveals the importance of the emergence of the Thai nation in modern Thai queer history. However, distinctive national orders

have developed in each Asian country, with a modern state emerging in Thailand in the absence of a colonial history, while in Indonesia the state has emerged from centuries of Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule across the archipelago. Furthermore, gay, lesbian, and transgender subjectivities in each country have somewhat different relations to their respective orders of national modernity. Boellstorff regards the postindependence nation-building ideology of Indonesia as a single “archipelago” (*nusantara*)—in particular, the post-1965 New Order regime discourse of the ideal heteronormative family that should inhabit this newly minted national space—as having had a pivotal influence on the country’s new queer sexualities. He also identifies the national mass media as important to consolidating new gay and *lesbi* subjectivities.<sup>28</sup>

### **Print Capitalism and Nation-Level Imagined Sexual Communities**

New Thai gay identities emerged a couple of decades before Indonesian gay subjectivities. Rather than a by-product of a specific political ideology of nation building, they appear to be more related to broader processes that led to a geographically bordered Thai state controlled by a centralized national bureaucracy and imagined through the discursive lens of a single national language. More specifically, modern Thai queer identities appear to be related to the development of a national market and the rise of vernacular print capitalism, which Benedict Anderson identified as a key source of modern ideas of nationhood.<sup>29</sup> From the early 1960s, nationally distributed newspapers published in the national Thai language based on the Bangkok dialect were central to the rapid dissemination of evolving notions of gay and *kathoe*y identity.<sup>30</sup> From the 1970s, mass-circulation popular magazines helped consolidate the meanings of new identities in regular columns on *kathoe*y, gay, and *tom-dee* (“butch-femme” female same-sex) issues, while, as discussed below, gay-identified men began taking control of discursive representations of homosexuality with nationally distributed commercial gay magazines in the early 1980s.<sup>31</sup> Modern Thai queer subjectivities can thus be seen as constituting a nation-level, “imagined sexual community,” as facilitated by both mainstream and community-based forms of Thai print capitalism.

The case studies from twentieth-century Thai gay and *kathoe*y history detailed below support the view that to a significant extent global queering has emerged from parallel processes of nation-level, market-based sex-cultural differentiation. Local commercial conditions in the urban mass market of Bangkok produced commodified cultural forms of gay magazines and male sex work. Only *after* these market-based sex-cultural forms appeared locally did they subse-

quently come into contact with similar phenomena in the West. (This historical sequence is the same for female sex work, with heterosexual prostitution for Thai male clients emerging as a major local industry over a half century before the era of international sex tourism.) The fragmentary record of early modern Thai gay history shows how national varieties of capitalism may produce novel cultural forms locally and also reveals the extent to which a market economy may enhance queer autonomy.

While the West's political and economic dominance has had an impact on all contemporary societies, I draw on the literature on multiple modernities to argue that global patterns of modernity, including queer modernities, are not uniquely Western.<sup>32</sup> The arrival of capitalism does not necessarily lead to an imposition of Western forms of cultural modernity that destroy local identities. The multiple modernities of today's world cannot be explained as the bastard children of a single, foreign Western capitalism that has overpowered and raped local traditions. These modernities have equally emerged from local capitalisms that have revolutionized local premodern cultures. Capitalism deracinates premodern traditions and produces novel cultural forms time and again in each society in which it takes root. I trace some of the transnational commonalities among contemporary gay and MTF transgender cultures to emergent parallels among these multiple queer modernities.

Empirically, this study considers Thailand's modern MTF transgender *kathoey* and male homosexual cultures. While some early accounts of global queering spoke of a singular international "lesbian/gay identity," most studies have in fact dealt with the globalization of gay identities.<sup>33</sup> I have shown elsewhere that Thailand's gay, *kathoey*, and *tom-dee* cultures each has a distinctive relation to contemporary international discourses of homosexuality.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, it is necessary to envision capitalism, both nationally and transnationally, as gendered and as providing quite different opportunities and restrictions to men, women, and transgenders.<sup>35</sup> Global queer historiography first needs to disaggregate the separate histories of gay, lesbian, and transgender cultures before attempting a summary generalization of common patterns across all queer genders and sexualities. We need to await the results of future research on Thailand's highly gendered *tom-dee* culture to determine whether this study's arguments for gay men and MTF transgenders also hold true for the globalization of female homosexual cultures. However, Ara Wilson's research on the place of the market in Thailand's *tom-dee* culture indicates that capitalism has been an important factor in that culture's evolution.<sup>36</sup> She points out that shopping malls are key sites of *tom-dee* socializing and that small trading

and franchise businesses provide a basis for some *tom*-identified women to attain a degree of sexual autonomy.

### Pushing Back the History of Global Queering

The Thai sources summarized below span four decades, from the 1930s to the 1970s, and show the need to push the history of the market's role in global queering back before the beginning of the most recent wave of globalizing influences that intensified after the end of the Cold War. Global queering has a considerably deeper history than is represented in most accounts of the phenomenon. New forms of sexual subjectivity have been apparent in Thailand since at least the early 1960s. Public gay and modern transgender *kathoey* cultures emerged in Bangkok decades before the Internet era, and the word *gay* was being used by masculine homosexual men in that city some years before the June 1969 Stonewall uprising in New York City's Greenwich Village saw the establishment of the modern gay liberation movement in the West.<sup>37</sup> Gay identities were already in place in Bangkok before American servicemen were based in Thailand during the Vietnam War and before international mass tourism began in the 1970s. This means we need to question accounts that position all modern non-Western queer cultures as after-effects of transformations assumed to have taken place first in the United States in the 1960s.

George Chauncey maintains that gender role rather than sexuality was the prime determinant of male identities in the United States until very recently, arguing that "the hetero-homosexual binarism, the sexual regime now hegemonic in American culture, is a stunningly recent creation."<sup>38</sup> He states that before the mid-twentieth century the labeling and self-identification of men as "queer" was based on "their ascribed gender status by assuming the sexual and other cultural roles ascribed to women."<sup>39</sup> Chauncey identifies the mid-twentieth century as the period when modern American ideas of homosexuality emerged. This chronology of sex-cultural shifts in the United States is very close to the periodization revealed in research on Thailand, where contemporary understandings of both *kathoey* and gay emerged in the decades after World War II.<sup>40</sup> If major sex-cultural changes in Bangkok were broadly contemporaneous with those in America and elsewhere in the West, the question then is not how Asian societies such as Thailand borrowed "preexisting" Western queer cultural patterns but why sexual cultures in parts of Asia and the West *both* underwent dramatic transformations in similar, but also distinctive, ways over much the same period of the twentieth century. Answers to this question will need to abandon assumptions that the West was the originary

site of all modern queer identities and cultures and instead seek to identify *common processes* that affected both Asian and Western sexual cultures.

### **Japan and Thailand in the History of Global Queering**

#### ***Self-Modernization and the Enhancement of Noncolonized Asian Agency***

What Wilson terms the “import-export calculus” of global queering renders the non-West a largely passive recipient of foreign cultural forms and the West a site of homosexual innovation and agency.<sup>41</sup> This assumes that the West is a hegemonic cultural power that imposes its form of modernity—whether by imperialism in the colonial era or economic neo-imperialism after World War II—or whose mere presence in global networks overwhelms non-Western cultures. However, not all market-based modernization in Asia resulted from colonial rule or neocolonial expansionism. It is true that the modern world-system emerged as a consequence of Western expansion and that, even with the recent rise of Asian economies, European and American players still largely set the rules of transnational capitalism. However, this does not mean that the historical spread of the market always led to a loss of local political and cultural autonomy, even at the height of Euro-American power from the nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries.

The current prominence of postcolonial approaches to Asian history means that it is often overlooked that the West did not colonize all of Asia. Japan and Siam both remained independent throughout the colonial era.<sup>42</sup> Significantly, it is in these two countries, which escaped direct colonization and self-modernized, that Asia’s first modern homosexual communities emerged.<sup>43</sup> Asia’s first modern gay cultures did not develop in former Western colonies but in countries that were *not* colonized and where Western cultural contact was mediated by local elites. The import-export model of global queering does not explain why Tokyo and Bangkok emerged as Asia’s first “gay capitals” rather than metropolitan centers of former colonies such as Jakarta, Bombay, and Saigon, where direct rule by Europeans extended over many decades, if not centuries. The import-export model does not explain why modern homosexualities emerged first in Asian societies that suffered the *least* direct impact from Western imperialism or why centuries of British and Dutch colonial rule in India and Indonesia, respectively, did not lead to those societies becoming the first in Asia with modern gay communities. Contact with the West, at least in its imperialist colonizing form, appears to have retarded rather than assisted the development of modern gay cultures in Asia in many situations.

In Japan and Siam, modernity was appropriated as an empowering tool in local conflicts. In the nineteenth century, elites in the strategic trading ports of

Bangkok and Tokyo achieved national dominance over political rivals in regional areas of each country by using connections with the West to their advantage. While retaining political independence and a high degree of cultural and linguistic autonomy through the period of Euro-American imperialism, since the 1850s Thailand's elites have nonetheless actively appropriated Western models of scientific education, public administration, and governance in locally controlled efforts at market-based modernization, in the process dramatically transforming the kingdom's economic, social, and cultural landscapes. Tamara Loos argues that Siam's nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century absolute monarchs adapted European patterns of colonial rule to entrench and extend their control over the country.<sup>44</sup> While Siam occupied a subordinate place in the European-dominated imperial world order, the domestic authority of local ruling elites was ultimately strengthened, not diminished, during the era of high imperialism.

Like Japan, Thailand has a noncolonial—or, strictly, semicolonial—history, in which modernity emerged from a locally managed engagement with the expansionist West. This makes it an important site for investigating global queering without relying on simplistic paradigms of cultural borrowing.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to the view that global queering in Asia emerges from the region's domination by the West, the relative *autonomy* of Thailand and Japan in their respective engagements with the West was central to the early emergence of modern gay cultures in both countries.

John D'Emilio's seminal work on the place of the market in the emergence of modern American homosexualities is important for rethinking the role of national forms of capitalism in global queering.<sup>46</sup> Drucker's reformulation of D'Emilio's ideas and his argument that urbanization in Asian market economies may produce similar sex-cultural outcomes independent of cultural borrowing from the West also provides a starting point for this research.<sup>47</sup> I turn to D'Emilio because of the need to consider the market's role in the emergence of preglobalization-era modern queer cultures in Thailand. In contrast to recent accounts of cultural globalization that emphasize the transnational impact of capitalism, electronic communications technologies, and mass human movements, D'Emilio considered American capitalism in an earlier, national phase. I first summarize D'Emilio's arguments on capitalism's role in the emergence of modern American homosexualities, then outline the relevance of his ideas in exploring the history of global queering in Thailand.

### ***The Capitalist Metropolis and American Homosexual Cultures***

D'Emilio argues that in the second half of the nineteenth century the emergence of wage labor in the United States broke down the heteronormative restrictions of family-based subsistence farming communities, while urbanization provided spaces for new sex-cultural networks to emerge. He maintains that there was no social space in the premodern system of production that provided homosexually inclined men and women sufficient autonomy to assume gay or lesbian identities: "Only when *individuals* began to make their living through wage labor, instead of as parts of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity—an identity based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family and to construct a personal life based on attraction to one's own sex."<sup>48</sup> According to D'Emilio, it was American capitalism's replacement of both the self-sufficient rural household and slave production with wage labor that "gave individuals a relative autonomy, which was the necessary material condition for the making of lesbianism and gayness."<sup>49</sup> He identified the free labor system as a key factor "that has allowed large numbers of men and women in the late twentieth century to call themselves gay, to see themselves as part of a community of similar men and women, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity."<sup>50</sup> D'Emilio's analysis was originally published in 1983, before globalization studies or queer studies in the 1990s. However, his argument can be reformulated in the idiom of queer studies as the proposition that *a body of national capital precedes the emergence of modern queer bodies*.

### ***National Capitalism and Local Sex-Cultural Differentiation in Asia***

D'Emilio's account of modern American homosexualities as indigenous forms of sex-cultural differentiation produced by market processes within the United States provides a model for understanding new homosexual and transgender cultures beyond the West as equally local consequences of the rise of national varieties of capitalism. That is, processes identified by D'Emilio in his local history of American homosexualities have been repeated in society after society as market economies have become established. Drawing on D'Emilio, Drucker argues that common experiences of capitalist industrialization, urbanization, and transnational similarities in regimes of medical and police power are the likely sources of the cross-cultural similarities observed in global queering: "Involvement in a market economy and a certain minimum income level seem essential in allowing people to become part of lesbian/gay communities in the Third World."<sup>51</sup> Drucker also points to the gendering of capitalism and the differential effects of the market economy on homosexual women, arguing that "economics can also help explain why lesbian

communities are smaller than gay male ones; women participate less in the waged work force and earn lower wages when they do. When lesbian organising does emerge, it seems to a large extent to happen in regions where women are entering the waged work force and thus achieving a measure of economic independence—in East and Southeast Asia in the late 1980s and 1990s, for instance.”<sup>52</sup> These observations are particularly relevant for Thailand, which saw some of the earliest examples of lesbian activism in Asia and is also a society recognized for women’s comparatively high rates of participation in the market economy. Nonetheless, Wilson contends that D’Emilio’s argument that capitalism provides a basis for gay autonomy needs to be modified in the case of Thailand’s masculine-gendered homosexual women: “Most tom—like most unmarried women from Bangkok—do not earn enough to rent their own apartments and so continue to live at home. They therefore do not enjoy the autonomy D’Emilio describes for America, particularly for forming households with their lovers. But . . . just as . . . consumption is critical to heterosexual femininity, it is also important for the tom role, and in ways that remain gendered.”<sup>53</sup> The idea that similarities among modern gay cultures developed in parallel has not received much of a hearing in queer historiography. While raising this as a possible source of global queering, Drucker believes that methodological problems prevent it from being explored: “The effects of European and North American cultural influence are admittedly hard to disentangle from those of domestic capitalist development and modernisation. But one could hypothesise—through an improbable thought experiment—that even if outside cultural influence were zero, economic development, modernisation, and political openings might lead to the rise of lesbian/gay identity anyway.”<sup>54</sup> The following examples from Bangkok gay and *kathoey* history show that Drucker’s “improbable thought experiment” is in fact open to empirical investigation and constitutes a potentially important line of future research in comparative queer historiography.

### **Historical Parallels between Western and Asian “Gay Capitals”**

In describing the origins of modern American homosexual cultures, D’Emilio also highlights the importance of urbanization and notes the findings of the Kinsey group: “Among men in the rural West [of the United States] in the 1940s, Kinsey found extensive incidence of homosexual behavior, but in contrast with men in large cities, little consciousness of gay identity.”<sup>55</sup> These observations suggest that the dual influences of capitalist labor relations in the context of life in an industrial metropolis together provide conditions for the emergence of modern male homosexual identities. It is not the city per se but capitalist-driven urbaniza-

tion that provides sites for new homosexual possibilities. It is no coincidence that research on global queering has concentrated on cities that, in popular gay parlance, are called “gay capitals”—Amsterdam, London, Paris, Berlin, New York, San Francisco, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Bangkok, and Tokyo—all of which are in countries with long histories of market economies. A gay capital is a metropolis commonly regarded to be the first site of the emergence of new male homosexual identities and cultures in a particular region. It is a city with the largest commercial gay scene in a region, a site for homosexual in-migration, a major destination for national and international gay and lesbian tourism, and it often has an iconic status as a place of imagined sexual tolerance and liberality. According to these criteria, Shanghai in China and some Eastern European cities may be emerging as new gay capitals, but they have attained this status in gay consciousness only since the end of the Cold War and the adoption of market-based economies.

Comparing the histories of Western and non-Western gay capitals reveals a range of structural commonalities largely independent of historical cultural differences. The material similarities among gay capitals in culturally distinct societies constitute a matrix from which similar queer cultures have emerged by local market-based processes of sex-cultural differentiation. Here I make preliminary comparisons of New York and Bangkok as a prelude to future research. New York has an iconic place in anglophone gay historiography. The 1969 Stonewall riots are the starting point of many modern political histories of homosexuality, and Chauncey’s influential *Gay New York* cemented the pivotal place of this city in homosexual historiography by tracing its male queer cultures back to the early twentieth century.<sup>56</sup> Thailand’s capital and largest city, Bangkok, has been the undisputed gay capital of Southeast Asia since the 1970s. Home to almost one-sixth of the Thai population of 63 million, the city is also the site of the largest and most visible transgender and male and female homosexual cultures in Southeast Asia. Despite the many cultural, linguistic, religious, and other differences between the United States and Thailand, New York and Bangkok nonetheless share many similarities. In addition to being key sites for the emergence of new queer identities and cultures in their respective hemispheres, both cities are ports and nodes of regional and international transport and communications in societies with a historical commitment to capitalism. Each city was a focal site of its respective country’s industrialization, supporting the growth of a large urban proletariat and an expanding bourgeoisie. Politically independent Siam entered the imperial world economy in the 1850s as the “rice bowl” of Southeast Asia, marketizing rice production for export to European colonies such as Malaya and Java, where colonial rule often directed local labor away from food production to

export-oriented plantation crops such as coffee, tea, and spices. Industrialization followed in Thailand after World War II, and the country's ruling royalist and military elites remained staunchly anticommunist and procapitalist throughout the Cold War. Both New York and Bangkok were the focus of large-scale international migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from Europe in the case of New York and from Southeast China and India in the case of Bangkok. Migrants took similar jobs in both cities, initially as labor for new industries and infrastructure developments, and subsequently forming the basis of each city's modern middle classes and merchant and industrialist groups. The two cities have also been destinations for large numbers of internal migrants from their rural hinterlands.

Bangkok and New York's similarities are shared by nearly all of the world cities popularly called gay capitals. While not providing direct evidence that new homosexual identities emerged semi-independently in different capitalist metropolises, the existence of these commonalities nonetheless indicates that gay capitals do share many similarities that may have provided the material conditions from which similar modern queer cultures could have emerged.

### ***New York "Wolves" and Bangkok "Bi-Tigers"***

To date, the existence of parallels between geographically separated early modern queer cultures has constituted only a footnote in gay historiography. These anecdotes nonetheless provide possibilities for future research. In his history of gay Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, James Green remarks on parallels between gay New York and Brazil's male homosexual cultures in the early twentieth century. Green suggests that these parallels did not result from contact between gay New York and gay Rio in the 1920s, but emerged from the agency of effeminate Brazilian men who independently drew on a similar stock of then fashionable European images of feminine beauty "to express their own notion of what was aesthetic and seductive."<sup>57</sup>

Parallels between the queer cultures of early-twentieth-century New York and mid-century Bangkok extend to a similar subcultural argot. Chauncey describes men called "wolves" who occupied an ambiguous position in the sexual culture of early-twentieth-century New York. These men combined homosexual interest with marked masculinity, and the appellation *wolf* evoked "the image of the predatory man-about-town."<sup>58</sup> Chauncey says that wolves were men "who were attracted to womanlike men or interested in sexual activity defined not by the gender of their partner but by the kind of bodily pleasures that partner could provide."<sup>59</sup> For some decades, masculine Thai men who are attracted to both women

and men have been called *seua bai*, literally “bi-tigers.” *Seua Bai* was the name of a famous 1950s gangster. Mid-twentieth-century Thai gangsters commonly used “tiger” (*seua*) as a title before their name, apparently because they sported tiger tattoos that were believed to be magically empowered and to protect them from harm. Coincidentally, the second element of *Seua Bai*’s name is a homonym of the Thai abbreviation of the post–World War II English loan word *bisexual*, that is, *bai*. In some circles *seua bai* is also the name given to a double-edged knife that can “cut both ways.” The usage *seua bai* also draws on an older expression, *seua phu-ying*—“a tiger [interested in] women,” which had the sense of a lady-killer or Don Juan. The figure of a tiger also appears in a 1937 Thai cartoon (fig. 3) of a sexually predatory man tempting a boy with a sweet, suggesting that *seua* was used in pre–World War II Bangkok to refer to men who had sex with boys and youths. In the Thai imagination, the expressions *seua* and *seua bai* combine notions of male penetrative ambisexuality with the memory of a powerful and violent masculine figure from recent history.

While separated by time and space, New York’s “wolves” and Bangkok’s “tigers” and “bi-tigers” filled similar niches in the sex-gender ecologies of their respective cities. In both cities, homosexually active masculine men came to be labeled by zoomorphic metaphors deriving from each culture’s respective stereotype of predatory male sexuality. The wolf and tiger are dangerous forest carnivores that occupy similar places in the cultural imaginaries of Western and Southeast Asian societies, respectively. While the homoerotic figure of the werewolf is important in European mythology, the were-tiger (*seua saming*) occupies the imagination of Thai mythmakers. The transformation of a male character into a tiger is a central motif in the Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s award-winning 2004 homoerotic film *Tropical Malady*, which was released in Thailand under the title *Sat pralat*, or “A Queer Animal.” The New York usage of *wolf* had no influence on the coining of the Thai expression *seua bai*. Each term arose independently to describe men who, nonetheless, had similar gender roles and sexual interests in each society. While perhaps constituting only a footnote in a global history of sexuality, this example nonetheless shows that similar processes may independently produce similar outcomes in geographically separated queer cultures. In the following sections, I show that the commodified queer cultural forms of gay magazines and male sex work also emerged in Bangkok through largely local processes when Thai entrepreneurs provided services to an emerging homosexual market in the city. These local forms *only subsequently* came into contact with similar Western gay products and services.

## Capitalism and Queer Cultural Parallels in Bangkok

### *The Local Origins of Mithuna Junior*

Since the early 1980s, a wide range of Thai-language magazines, novels, and other publications have catered to the local gay market.<sup>60</sup> In November 1996 I interviewed Chaiwat, the former owner-editor of *Mithuna Junior*, Thailand's first commercially successful magazine produced by and for gay men.<sup>61</sup> Born in 1961, Chaiwat is from a Vietnamese Catholic family that has resided in Bangkok for several generations. After graduating from a local university in 1983, he borrowed funds from his mother and, with a male school friend as coinvestor, started publishing a monthly magazine called *Mithuna*.<sup>62</sup> *Mithuna* imitated an existing successful publication, *Num-Sao* (*Young Man–Young Woman*). In 1982 *Num-Sao* had been the first Thai magazine to publish both male and female nude centerfolds, earlier erotic publications in the country having included only female centerfolds (fig. 1). Positive feedback from gay readers to *Mithuna*'s male nude centerfolds led Chaiwat to decide that a sufficient market likely existed to support a magazine oriented exclusively toward gay men. Chaiwat launched this second publication, called *Mithuna Junior*, in June 1984, beginning production with three thousand issues per month, which were distributed to magazine outlets nationally. *Mithuna* ceased publication after several further issues, and Chaiwat then concentrated solely on producing the gay-oriented *Mithuna Junior* (fig. 2).

The influences that led Chaiwat to establish *Mithuna Junior* reflect the strength of local factors in the expansion of gay culture and identity in early 1980s Thailand. When he established *Mithuna Junior* at the age of twenty-two, Chaiwat did have a small circle of Thai gay friends, but he had poor English and had never met a Western gay man, seen a Western gay publication, or traveled outside Thailand. He believed there was likely a market for gay magazine content in Thailand because a friend working at *Num-Sao* had told him about the flood of letters to the magazine's editor from gay readers in appreciation of its male nude centerfolds. At the time, no other nationally distributed Thai magazine included male centerfolds, and no Western gay publication had yet been marketed in the country.

Chaiwat was also aware of the already well-established gay advice column of *Aa Go*, or Uncle Go, in the popular fortnightly magazine *Plaek* (lit. "strange"), with the success of this column further convincing him that there was a market for a regular gay publication. Chaiwat said that in deciding to publish *Mithuna Junior* he envisioned the magazine as combining the male nudes of *Num-Sao*'s centerfolds and the gay-positive support and gossip of Uncle Go's column in *Plaek*. In other words, he saw *Mithuna Junior* as combining gay-relevant features that had already

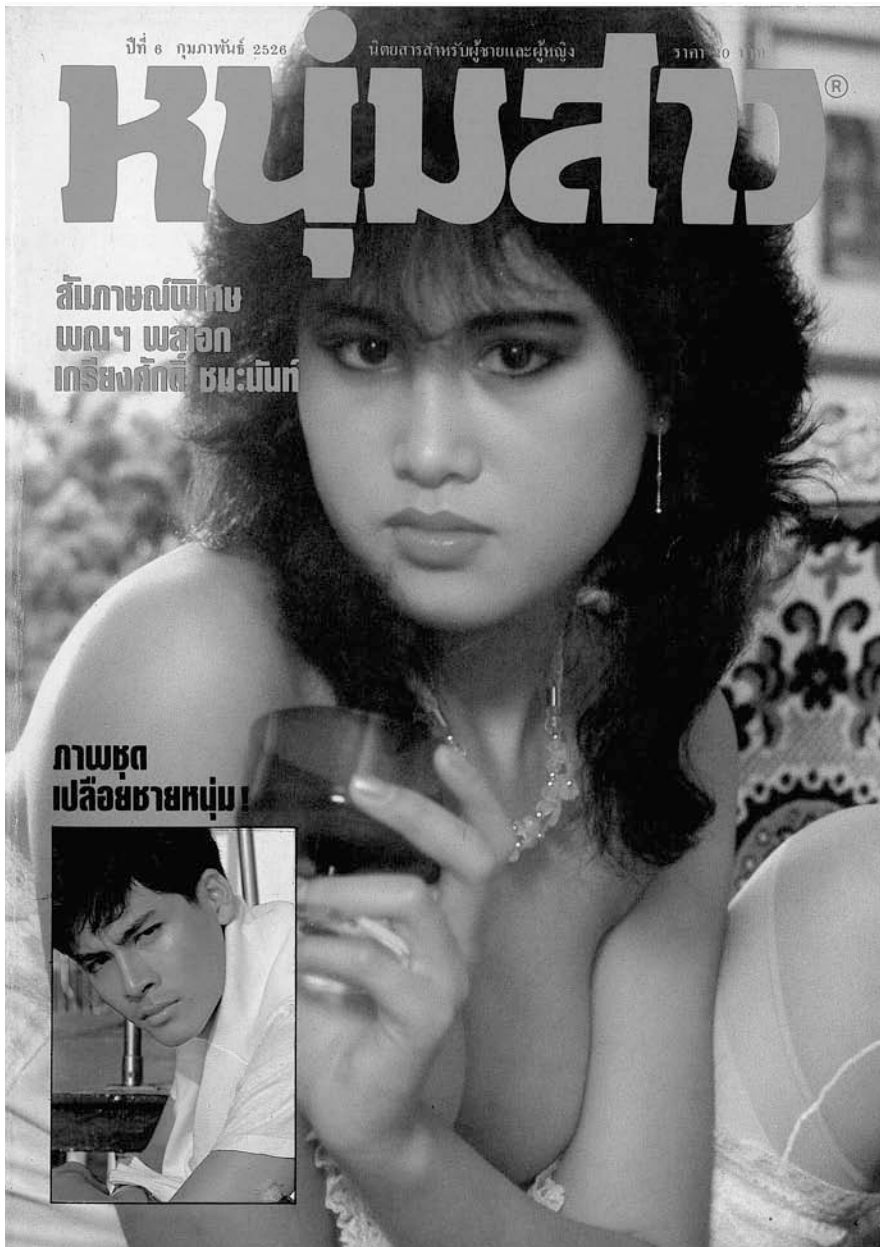


Figure 1. Source: Cover of *Num-Sao* 6 (February 1983). Cover text: (heading) “*Num-Sao*: A magazine for men and women, 20 baht”; (top left) “Special interview with His Excellency General Kriangsak Chommanand”; (bottom left) “Photo set: naked guy!”

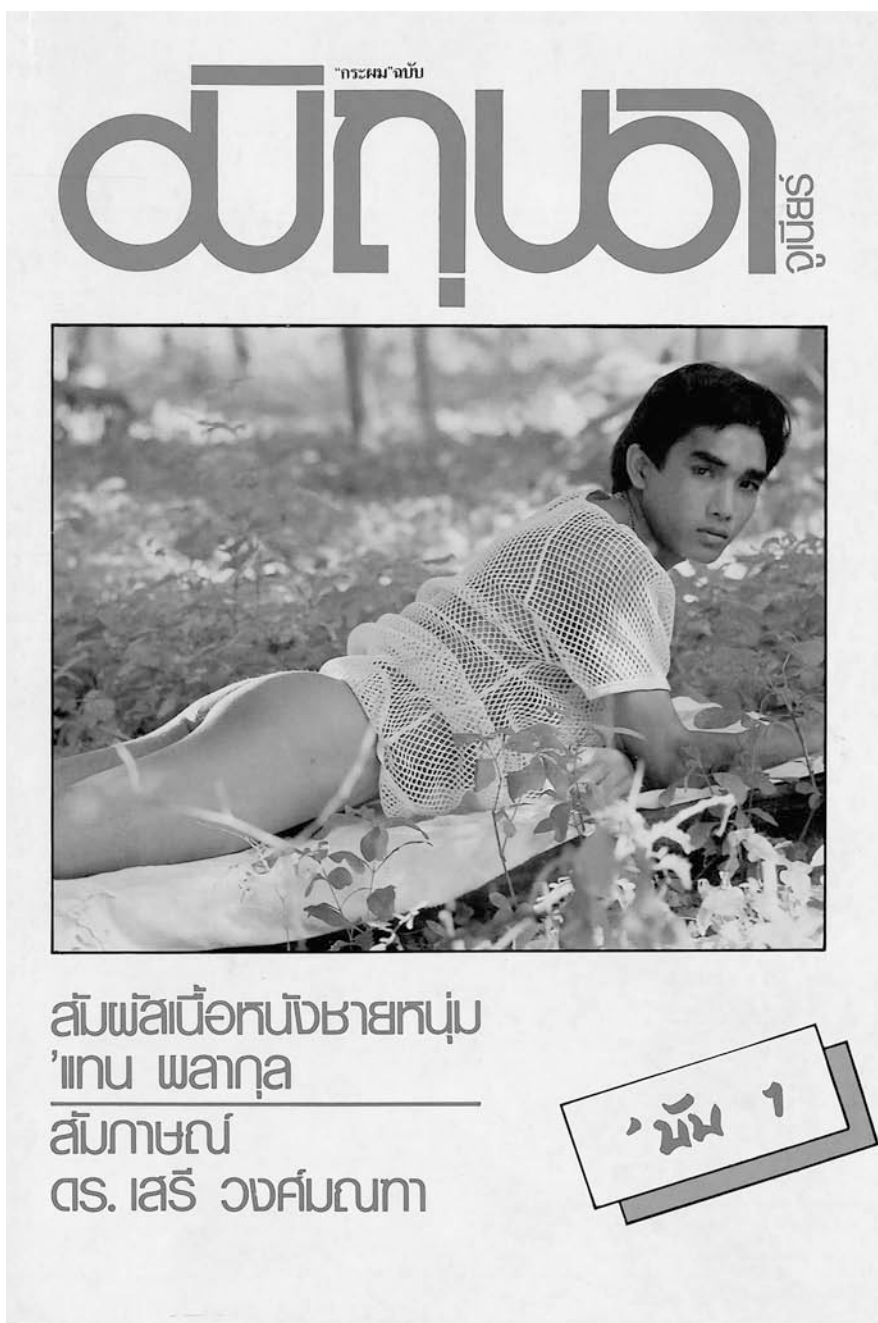


Figure 2. Source: Cover of *Mithuna Junior*, no. 1 (June 1984). Cover text: (bottom left) “Get a feel for this guy, Thaen Phalakul/Interview: Dr Seri Wongmontha.” Dr Seri Wongmontha, former dean of Thammasat University’s Faculty of Mass Communications, achieved fame in Thailand in the 1980s as an advocate for gay and *kathoey* rights. He adapted Mart Crowley’s play *The Boys in the Band* for the Bangkok stage in 1985 under the title *Chan Phu-chai Na Ya* (*But Darling, I’m a Man!*).

demonstrated commercial success in the Thai publishing market. Chaiwat's market savvy was borne out by the fact that within a few months *Mithuna Junior* had a copycat competitor called *Neon*, published by none other than the heterosexual owners of *Num-Sao*, whose male centerfolds Chaiwat had imitated for his own publication. In the following fifteen years, Thai gay publishing expanded rapidly, mirroring the extended economic boom from 1987 until the Asian economic crisis of 1997. By the mid-1990s, more than fifteen monthly and bimonthly Thai-language gay magazines competed on the country's newsstands. *Mithuna Junior* subsequently changed hands several times, and the magazine ceased publication in the mid-1990s after almost one hundred issues.

Uncle Go's column in *Plaek* also had a local origin. Pratchaya Phanthathorn, who wrote under the pen name Uncle Go, started the sensationalist fortnightly magazine *Plaek* in 1976. Among early articles was a series of interviews with transgender and transsexual *kathoey*, who initially were represented as another strange phenomenon beside the many oddities portrayed in *Plaek*. However, positive reader feedback about the *kathoey* stories led to the interview series being turned into a regular column for *kathoey*, gay men, and lesbians. This column also included a *kathoey*-gay scene gossip section by a well-known Bangkok *kathoey*, Pa (aunty) Pic Jup-jip, as well as gay, lesbian, and *kathoey* personal classifieds.<sup>63</sup>

While following the appearance of gay magazines in Western countries, *Mithuna Junior* was modeled not on a Western publication but on Thai precedents. Only after he started his commercial enterprise did Chaiwat come into contact with Western gay men and Western gay culture. Indeed, it was *Mithuna Junior* that provided him an entrée to foreign gay worlds. Gay magazines are not merely products of a preexisting gay identity but also affirmations and even incitements of identity. For Chaiwat, the entrepreneurial activity of publishing *Mithuna Junior* at a young age can be seen as contributing to his becoming a gay-identified man just as much as it was an expression of his emerging sense of sexual selfhood. Chaiwat stated that publishing *Mithuna Junior* had been integral to his coming out and that he had known very little about Thailand's already well-established gay world before starting the magazine. He insisted that he been too shy and ashamed to participate in Bangkok's gay scene before 1983, knowing of it only secondhand from newspaper reports. Publishing *Mithuna Junior* gave him a "reason" to meet other Thai gay men when he had to approach them for stories for his magazine. In summary, Thai gay publications emerged in the early 1980s when publishers responded to, and also incited demand from, an emerging local gay market.

While this commodified gay cultural form has parallels in the West, it nonetheless emerged as a largely independent phenomenon in a similar environment of market capitalism.

### ***Male Sex Work in Twentieth-Century Bangkok***

Thai sources from three decades of the twentieth century—the 1930s, 1950s, and 1970s—give insight into the origins of male sex work in Bangkok, for male as well as for *kathoey* and female clients. These reports indicate that entrepreneurial Thai men and youths took advantage of opportunities offered by the market economy to provide sexual services for a local clientele. These accounts counter common stereotypes that Thailand's sex industries date from the stationing of American combat troops in the country during the 1960s and 1970s. Even notable Western historians of sexuality such as Jeffrey Weeks continue to repeat empirically unfounded claims such as “The early stages of the Thai economic miracle were fuelled by its role as a ‘rest and recuperation’ centre for US troops in the Vietnam War.”<sup>64</sup> The American military presence has become a much repeated and mythicized origin story that in different tellings traces both the “exploitative” sex trade and “liberative” gay identity in Thailand to American influences. Paradoxically, America is credited with being the source of both the “good” and “bad” features of modern Thai sexual cultures. In contrast, Altman correctly observes that “the indignation at the widespread sex industry in modern cities such as Bangkok or Rio is often uninformed by any historical sense.”<sup>65</sup> Bangkok's heterosexual sex industry emerged in the early twentieth century, long before the Cold War and the era of mass tourism, as one outcome of the abolition of slavery in Siam in the late nineteenth century. Loos states that “brothels absorbed many of the former slave women who had no means of subsistence. In addition, the new salaried bureaucracy contributed to an increased demand for commercial sex. . . . Siam's full integration into global trading networks and the resulting monetization of the economy had helped produce circumstances in which women, with few other employment options, were channeled into sex work.”<sup>66</sup> Scot Barmé observes that “by the 1920s it was no exaggeration to say that . . . prostitution was one of the most ubiquitous features of [Bangkok's] urban landscape.”<sup>67</sup> The reports here counter narratives that equate sex work in Thailand with the exploitation of subordinated Thai bodies to the dictates of foreign men and transnational capital. While exploitation is not absent from these accounts, overall they reflect how the local market has enhanced, not restricted, the sexual autonomy of Thai gay men and *kathoey*s.

### Press Exposé of Male Prostitution in 1930s Bangkok

On June 20, 1935, the *Srikrung* newspaper published a front-page story titled “Degenerate Illegal Brothel Set Up, Uses Boys as Employees to Perform Illicit Sex.” The paper reported that one Mr. Karun (no surname), nicknamed Thua Dam, had been arrested after large numbers of teenage boys had been reported entering and leaving a shop house he rented in Bangkok’s Pormprap district. The newspaper reported that

Mr. Thua Dam, or Karun, has no wife and has encouraged boys aged ten to sixteen years to go with him to movies, bought them toys and sweets, and taken them to his place of residence, where he has had sexual relations with them. After Mr. Thua Dam has had sex with the boys, he has arranged for them to have sex with Indians, rich Chinese men, and other perverts. Those who have sexual relations with the boys have to remunerate Mr. Karun, or Thua Dam, for services rendered, as is the case with female prostitutes.<sup>68</sup>

On the day that police arrested Karun, they also found two boys at the shop house, twelve-year-old Tong-heng (a Chinese name) and sixteen-year-old Bunsom (a Thai name). “The two boys testified that Mr. Thua Dam had encouraged them to visit him to have sexual relations with him,” the newspaper account continued. “Both were sent to a doctor for a medical examination, and it was found that both Master Tong-heng and Master Bunsom had lesions in the area of the anus.” A second report on the arrest of Karun published on the front-page of the *Prachachat* newspaper, described the male brothel, located in a small wooden house on Worajak Road in Bangkok’s Chinatown, as a place of degenerate (*witthan phitsadan*) conduct. This report stated that the brothel manager, Karun, was himself only seventeen years old and that the two other youths involved were fourteen and fifteen. The owner of the property, who leased it to Karun, told the newspaper that he had become suspicious when he observed that the shop house always seemed to have many “good looking youths” (*dek num na-ta sala-saluay*) hanging around who had no visible means of support. The youths were “employed to provide sexual pleasure” (*phu-rap-jang bamrer kamarom*), with the cost of sexual services being up to 2 baht. The newspaper regarded this to be a considerable amount, noting that the price of a daily newspaper in 1935 was only 5 satang (100 satang equal 1 baht). The male clients were identified as being mostly Indian (*khaek*) and Chinese (*jin*), presumably immigrant laborers. The report concluded with the statement “This

news is extremely distressing because no-one had thought such a thing existed [in Siam].”<sup>69</sup>

Looking beyond the sensationalism of the press reports, we can conclude that Karun was an enterprising ethnic Thai teenager who organized other youths into a male prostitution group to service migrant laborers in Bangkok. It is noteworthy that while the teenagers who worked at Karun’s brothel are said to be “good looking,” neither Karun nor the other youths are identified as *kathoey*, that is, effeminate or transgender. Neither press report specifies the precise charges against Karun, and the outcome of the case is unknown. However, the term “illicit sex” (*chamrao*) in the title of the *Srikrung* news item is a legal expression used in statutes dealing with improper sex of any form, whether consensual or nonconsensual. It is likely that Karun’s crime was operating an unregistered brothel and procuring children for prostitution. The age of consent in 1930s Siam was fifteen, and at that time prostitution was legal, provided brothels and prostitutes were registered with the police. In describing the history of female sex work in twentieth-century Bangkok, Penny Van Esterik notes that “in 1930, there were 151 licensed [female] brothels in Bangkok—126 Chinese, 22 Siamese, and 3 Vietnamese—the Trafficking of Women and Children Act of 1928 outlawed procuring women and children for the purposes of prostitution and the Prostitution Suppression Act of 1960 made brothels illegal.”<sup>70</sup> We can assume that this case aroused considerable public interest, because Karun’s nickname, Thua Dam, literally “black beans,” passed into Thai slang as an expression for anal sex between males. Black beans are an ingredient in a number of Thai sweets made with coconut cream, palm sugar, sago, and agar-agar jelly. The idiom *kin thua dam*, “to eat black beans,” is now a euphemism for anal sex between males of any age and may derive from the report that Karun lured boys into having sex with him, and subsequently into working for him, by plying them with sweets. Related expressions are *len thua dam*, “to play [with] black beans,” and *at thua dam*, “to stuff black beans,” this last expression being considered crude and often suggesting male rape.

The Karun/Thua Dam story appears to be the subject of a cartoon from the cover of the June 21, 1937, (BE 2480) issue of the *Siam Review* weekly (fig. 3). This cartoon shows a smiling man holding a Thai jelly sweet made from layers of white coconut cream (*kathi*) and sweet black beans. The man is placating a crying, naked boy, saying, “Keep still sonny (*ai nu*), I’ve got a sweet for you.” The beckoning man is dressed in the clothes of a middle-class Thai civil servant of the period, and his looming shadow is not human but in the shape of a roaring tiger with its fangs exposed. The crying boy has a finger of one hand in his mouth



Figure 3. Source: Cover from *Siam Review*, June 21, 1937 (BE 2480).

in a pose of childlike innocence, with a finger of his other hand gesturing behind his backside, a possible reference to anal sex or “eating black beans.” While the boy is naked, this was not unusual at the time. Until recent decades, prepubescent Thai boys often played naked in public. No text in the magazine explains the cover cartoon. It was not uncommon for the cover cartoon of the *Siam Review* to satirize a well-known event of the time, but not to refer to the event in the text of the magazine. This cartoon suggests that the prostitution of boys and youths had become an issue of public concern in Bangkok after the Karun/Thua Dam sensation and that the idiomatic association of black beans and anal sex had become established by the time this cartoon was published, two years after Karun’s arrest. The fact that the man’s shadow is a roaring tiger also suggests that the contemporary idiom for bisexual men, “bi-tiger,” is based on a considerable history that links the image of the tiger with predatory male sexuality.

### ***A World War II–Era Kathoey Sex Worker***

In 1951 a pseudonymous editor, Phrommet, published a sixty-four-page pamphlet dedicated to “male friends” (*mit chai*) and “men who frequent prostitutes.”<sup>71</sup> Phrommet states that the publication’s purpose is to introduce these men to Peo, who is described as an important madam, literally “a big-time whore agent” (*eyen kari yai*), who is both bighearted and widemouthed, the latter attribute presumably an asset in performing oral sex. Peo is said to be well known all over Bangkok by men who frequent prostitutes (variously called *nak-thiaw*, *nak-thiaw sopheri*, *nak-thiaw chorkkari*) for running a female brothel located to the east of Pratumnam toward the city’s Makkasan area. The back cover advertises the booklet as “an adventurous journey (below the navel)” (*thorng-thiaw phajonphai [tai sadeu]*), adding that “Phrommet, the author of this documentary on the lives of *sadeu*, will take you on a tour of Bangkok’s dark corners.” *Sadeu* means “the navel,” but in this text refers to men who have sex with either *kathoey* or female prostitutes. In this sense, *sadeu* seems to be an obsolete variant of the now-common idiom *nak-thiaw*, which in turn may be an abbreviation of *nak-thiaw tai sadeu*, “those who have a good time traveling below the navel.” The booklet is essentially an extended advertisement for Peo’s brothel.

Peo is said to be a madam who has lovers (*faen*) all over Bangkok and is described as “a chief star *kathoey*” (*yort dao kathoey*).<sup>72</sup> Phrommet writes, “While his body is entirely that of a man, his mind and demeanour are those of a woman.”<sup>73</sup> Peo appears to have come from a well-off Thai family, being born sometime in the 1920s in Thonburi, the urban area immediately across the Chao Phraya River from Bangkok. Phrommet says that Peo’s parents initially sent him to a good boys’ school where “upper-class Thai people liked to send their sons.” Here Peo became the “school’s ‘male’ heroine” (*nang-ek ‘fai-chai’ prajam rong-rian*), and he found pleasure in letting his schoolmates embrace, kiss, and squeeze him, sometimes letting them practice unspecified “degenerate” (*witthan*) activities. When Peo became increasingly “affected” (*dat-jarit*), that is, effeminate, at school, his male classmates felt disgusted (*sa-it-sa-ian*) and bullied him. He then left his first school, and his parents subsequently enrolled him in what is described as a well-known Western-run (*farang*) school on Silom Road in Bangkok’s downtown commercial district, whose international student body of Chinese, Indian, European, and Thai students was sent there by their parents to learn English. At this school Peo developed an intimate friendship with Singh, an older Sikh boy, and he says that after this affair he could not tolerate the pent-up sexual desire that the sexual encounter had aroused in him.

Peo then left his second school and ran away from home to live by himself in a small rented house in an undisclosed part of Bangkok with a plan to “engage in the [sex] trade in a big way” (*damnern kan-kha khrang yai*), deciding on this course after thinking over how women who had no money made a living. He was elated by the freedom of living on his own and describes how soon after setting up house he met a young Thai man who took him to Sanam Luang, a large open field opposite the Grand Palace in the royal quarter of the old city of Bangkok, ostensibly to watch men and boys flying kites. The two ended up having sex and “tasting the flavor of black beans” (*lorng lim rot thua dam*). This young man then told his friends about Peo’s sexual availability, and soon Peo was regularly entertaining large numbers of men at his house, “sating them with the food he cooked, and boiling delicious black beans” for them as well.<sup>74</sup> Peo boasts that “sweet boiled sago flooded the house the whole day.” Just as one Thai dessert, black beans, is used to refer to anal sex, Phrommet here euphemistically uses reference to another Thai sweet, sweet boiled sago, to describe Peo and his visitors’ frequent orgasms. Food and taste metaphors are often used in Thai to refer to sex. Peo was delighted by the constant stream of male visitors, and “his door (*thawan*) oozed with *sadeu*.” The formal term *thawan* can mean either a doorway or a bodily orifice, and here refers to the large number of men who had anal sex with Peo at his rented house.

The events recounted in the booklet’s first section appear to have taken place in the 1930s, the same period as the Karun/Thua Dam controversy. However, Peo’s partners were Thai rather than the immigrant Indian and Chinese men reported to have been the clients at Karun’s brothel. Significantly, Peo’s story indicates the existence in the 1930s of a network of homosexually active Thai men who cruised Sanam Luang, the largest public park in Bangkok’s old quarter, which was, and remains, a popular place for kite-flying contests in the windy months of the Thai dry season from late February to May. Sanam Luang’s iconic place in the history of gay cruising in Bangkok is reflected in Thai idiomatic usage. The expression for kite flying, the park’s main leisure activity, *chak wao*, literally “to pull a kite [string],” is also the most common idiom for male masturbation. The expression *chak wao*, sometimes reduced to *chak* (“to pull [oneself or another]”), now has such strong resonances of male masturbation that it is often avoided in polite conversation and replaced by the more neutral *len wao*, “to play with a kite,” when actual kite flying is intended. The idiom “to go to Sanam Luang to fly a kite” (*pai Sanam Luang chak wao*), often abbreviated “to go to Sanam Luang,” came to mean to cruise another man to engage in mutual masturbation.

Chauncey notes that in early-twentieth-century New York, the busy Forty-second Street and Times Square areas became cruising spots, as well as locales

for male sex workers and transvestite prostitutes: “It was a heavily trafficked street and transportation hub, where men loitering would not draw particular notice—it was, in other words, the sort of place where a man who was cruising could quip that he was just waiting for a bus to anyone who inquired about his purpose.”<sup>75</sup> The parallels with Sanam Luang are many. Sanam Luang was a place where men could loiter on the pretext that they were merely watching other men and boys “fly kites” (*chak wao*).

Peo’s idyllic life in 1930s Bangkok did not survive the onset of war. He recounts that during the difficult years of World War II many people became financially desperate and were reduced to itinerant beggars: “This changed the minds and morality of Thai people all over the country for the worse.” Phrommet says that prostitution became rampant during the Japanese occupation in the early 1940s, and to survive Peo began sleeping with Japanese soldiers based in Bangkok: “Peo boiled black beans to sell to the Nip bastards (*ai Yun*), and he also became a pimp, finding women for them.” In addition to the derogatory idiom “Nip bastards,” the use of the pronoun *it* (*man*) throughout the original text to refer to the Japanese men Peo had sex with and pimped for shows the extent to which they were detested.

After the war, Peo went to Sichang Island southeast of Bangkok, then a major port, where he befriended Western sailors on the ships that docked there. He found it easy to make a living from male prostitution, boasting that he was so popular with the ships’ crews that his customers lined the gunwales queuing for his services. Peo’s story also gives some insight into how Western sexual cultures have affected Thailand. Peo says that he masturbated and had anal sex with the sailors, but had never engaged in oral sex until one ship captain taught him how to give a blow job. The captain then told his crew that Peo gave a great blow job, and this subsequently became his specialty. The fact that fellatio is a recent addition to Thai sexual culture is suggested by the use of the English-derived term *samok* (from “to smoke”) for oral sex.<sup>76</sup> Even today *samok* remains a common Thai slang term for fellatio. This contrasts with the fact that Thai has richly evocative local idioms for both male masturbation (*chak wao*) and homosexual anal sex (*kin thua dam*). Phrommet claims that it was Peo himself who introduced oral sex, as well as the idiom *samok*, to Bangkok sexual culture in the late 1940s. Phrommet also claims that the idiom *samok* derives from the ship captain who encouraged Peo to fellate him. This man smoked cigars and euphemistically urged Peo to come and “smoke” his “big cigar.” True or not, Phrommet nonetheless relates an interesting Thai urban myth that points to the way that elements of sexual cultures may at times move across borders.

However, after a period at Sichang Island, Peo was forced to reconsider his future when he discovered that his sailor customers were becoming “bored with this type of flavor,” that is, the taste for homosexual sex, because “the butterflies of the night (*phi-seu ratri*), low class [female] whores from Bangkok, had started to get a whiff in the direction of Sichang. A lot of them had already started flying to Sichang.” As Peo’s marketability among the sailors declined, his income shrank, “because the real thing [i.e., women] got a higher price than the imitation thing [*khorng plorm*].” Peo then moved back to Bangkok, and with money saved from prostitution and pickpocketing his sailor clients he rented a house on Petchburi Road for 300 baht a month and set up a brothel. He then found young women to service his customers, who were mostly well-off, well-connected Thai men (*phu-di mi ngerm*). Peo observes that it was easy to find women to work for him, because, “after the Second World War, a prostitution (*chorkkari*) mentality became widespread, entering the hearts of women over almost all the city.” Peo said that female prostitutes trusted him because, “being a *kathoey*, my personality was already that of a woman’s.”

Like Karun, Peo was an enterprising homosexual man who drew on opportunities provided by Bangkok’s emerging labor market to use the proceeds derived from male prostitution to avoid the traditional cultural expectation to marry, instead living an independent homosexual or *kathoey* lifestyle. Two elements of Peo’s biography are especially interesting for comparative queer historiography. First, Peo identifies the social disruptions of World War II and the wartime presence of foreign, Japanese soldiers as major influences on postwar Thai sexual culture. Histories of gay Britain have also identified World War II, and particularly the foreign American military presence, as a major transition moment in that country’s queer cultures.<sup>77</sup> Second, Peo describes Western merchant seamen as key agents in the spread of new sexual understandings. The dock areas of Western gay capitals such as London were also important sites for the emergence of early modern male homosexual cultures. For example, the now all-but-obsolete English homosexual argot of Polari is believed to have emerged from interactions with foreign sailors in London’s dock area.<sup>78</sup> In summary, in the earlier decades of the twentieth century, the queer cultures of both London and Bangkok changed in response to several structurally similar but also locally distinctive formative influences.

### **Sex Work in 1970s Bangkok**

Male sex work for female clients emerged in Bangkok several decades after prostitution for male clients, but nevertheless also arose in response to local market

opportunities. In June 1974 *Thai Rath* newspaper, the country's most popular mass circulation daily, ran a front-page exposé about young male actors and university graduates who had turned to sex work to earn a living. These men, variously labeled “male prostitutes” (*sopheni phu-chai*), “male hustlers” (*phu-chai khai tua*), and “he-whores” (*ai tua*), were said to “sport moustaches to mark their ‘brand’” (*yi-hor*, or line of work).<sup>79</sup> *Thai Rath* reported that one hundred Thai men, mostly lesser-known movie stars and support actors who “have high class characters and tastes,” were engaged in this occupation, using the upmarket Ratchdamri Shopping Arcade, Bangkok's first air-conditioned shopping arcade, and especially the Noguchi Coffee Shop in that arcade, as the main locale for meeting customers.<sup>80</sup> Customers were identified as married women whose husbands could no longer satisfy their sexual needs; minor wives (*mia noi*) or mistresses whose husbands could not spare time from their main family to see them frequently; lonely older women and widows; female foreign tourists; and local *kathoey*s. *Thai Rath* provided a statistical breakdown of the men's customers: 60 percent Thai women, 30 percent female tourists, and 10 percent “people with perverted sexual desire [*arom thang-phet wiparit*], especially *kathoey*.”<sup>81</sup> A follow-up article published a week later was illustrated with a photo of a group of Thai youths humorously captioned “Youngsters (*ai nu*) trying to grow moustaches in order to make a living like their elders.”<sup>82</sup>

One male sex worker interviewed, a twenty-five-year-old man called Pat, said the group had originally hung out in Bangkok's Patpong entertainment district, where they had engaged in occasional sex work “for fun” (*sanuk*). However, in the previous couple of years this part-time hobby had grown into a full-time occupation. Another man said to be a Thai TV personality claimed that the group had started working from the tea room of the upmarket Erawan Hotel in 1972, with customers being female tourists and Thai widows, but that the men's main hangouts were now at the Ratchdamri Arcade and the cinemas at the equally upscale Siam Square shopping precinct. Statements by members of the network that the men had initially engaged in sex work for fun reflect a similar history to that narrated decades earlier by Peo, who had initially sought out sexual partners for his own pleasure as well as to support himself financially.

Filmmakers capitalized quickly on the public fascination with the press exposés of male sex work, and in September 1974 the first Thai movie about male prostitution, “Rented Husband” (*phua chao*), was released, portraying a rich woman who buys her live-in male lover (fig. 4).<sup>83</sup> The expression “rented husband” was a neologism based on an existing idiom “rented wife” (*mia chao*), which described the live-in female partners of U.S. servicemen posted to Thailand during the Vietnam War.



Figure 4. Source: Advertisement for the 1974 film *Rented Husband* (*Phua chao*). The text reads: (top left) “Money built her palace of endless sensuality. Love lost its value, becoming lust”; (right) “She was happy to have me as just her rented husband.” In the drawing the male lead, Sombat Methanee, reclines naked on a tiger-skin rug, with the image of a tiger once again denoting male sexual prowess.

## Conclusion

Intensifying cross-border flows of finance, goods, people, images, and ideas symbolize the contemporary world of globally interconnected societies and cultures. However, these flows should not blind us to the local processes that are equally central to the histories of cultural globalization. The emergence of market-based cultures has indeed been important in global queering, but the processes behind this are more complicated than initially proposed. Transnational capitalism leads

not only to Westernizing homogenization but also produces hybridizations in which local agency is as important as subordination to foreign influences.

Capitalism is also a national phenomenon that has a local impact, producing both new forms of local cultural difference and cultural parallels to the West. The findings presented here suggest that global queering can be seen as the sum of the many local transformations that have emerged from the intersecting influences of both national and transnational forms of capitalism. Fully understanding global queering requires further empirical and theoretical work. The empirical task is to incorporate the histories of more queer cultures beyond the West into an expanded archive. With this more inclusive archive, we can assess whether the propositions of Western queer theory reflect local conditions specific to the West or describe general conditions of transnational, perhaps even global, import.

## Notes

1. See Neil Miller, *Out in the World: Gay and Lesbian Life from Buenos Aires to Bangkok* (London: Penguin, 1992); Ken Plummer, "Speaking Its Name: Inventing a Gay and Lesbian Studies," in *Modern Homosexualities: Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experience*, ed. Ken Plummer (London: Routledge, 1992), 3–28; Dennis Altman, "The New World of 'Gay' Asia," in *Asian and Pacific Inscriptions*, ed. Suvendrini Perera (Melbourne: Meridien, 1995), 121–38; Gerard Sullivan and Laurence Leong, *Gays and Lesbians in Asia and the Pacific: Social and Human Services* (New York: Harrington Park, 1995); Dennis Altman, "On Global Queering," *Australian Humanities Review*, July 1996, [www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-July-1996/altman.html#1](http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-July-1996/altman.html#1) (accessed June 17, 2007); Dennis Altman, "Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities," *Social Text*, no. 48 (1996): 77–94; Peter Drucker, "'In the Tropics There Is No Sin': Sexuality and Gay-Lesbian Movements in the Third World," *New Left Review* 218 (1996): 75–101; Dennis Altman, "Global Gaze/Global Gays," *GLQ* 3 (1997): 417–36; Altman, "The Emergence of Gay Identities in Southeast Asia," in *Different Rainbows*, ed. Peter Drucker (London: Gay Men's, 2000), 137–56; Peter Drucker, "Introduction: Remapping Sexualities," in *Different Rainbows*, 9–42; Peter A. Jackson, "An Explosion of Thai Identities: Global Queering and Reimagining Queer Theory," *Culture, Health, and Sexuality* 2 (2000): 405–24; Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2001).
2. Plummer, "Speaking Its Name," 17.
3. See Altman, "On Global Queering"; Altman, "Global Gaze/Global Gays," 424; emphases in original. While convenient to refer collectively to diverse LGBT genders and sexualities, the English term *queer* is not used locally in all societies. Barry D. Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and André Krouwel note that at the same time that

Western queer theorists began critiquing notions of gay and lesbian identity in the 1990s, groups were “coming together under the gay, lesbian, and sometimes transgender banner in such places as the Philippines, Korea, Ecuador, El Salvador, Bulgaria, and Turkey, even though homosexual interests have traditionally found quite different expressions in these cultures” (Barry D. Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and André Krouwel, “Gay and Lesbian Movements beyond Borders? National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement,” in *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*, ed. Barry D. Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and André Krouwel [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999], 8). In 2000 Altman noted “the apparent lack of interest in ‘queer’ theory in most of the non-Western world, and the continued usage by emerging movements of the terminology ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’” (“Emergence of Gay Identities in Southeast Asia,” 138). While these comments were broadly accurate at the time, more recently queer theory has become increasingly prominent in studies of Asian transgender and homosexual cultures, both in Asia and in the West. The rising influence of queer studies in Asia was reflected in the more than 160 papers presented at the First International Conference of Asian Queer Studies convened by the AsiaPacifiQueer Network in Bangkok in July 2005. A conference report including an archive of some conference papers is at [bangkok2005.anu.edu.au/](http://bangkok2005.anu.edu.au/). Other conference papers are published in “Of Queer Import(s): Sexualities, Genders, and Rights in Asia,” ed. James Welker and Lucetta Kam, special issue, *Intersections: Gender, History, and Culture in the Asian Context*, no. 14 (2006), [www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue14\\_contents.htm](http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue14_contents.htm).

4. Drucker, “Introduction: Remapping Sexualities,” 15.
5. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV, “Introduction: Dissident Sexualities/Alternative Globalisms,” in *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*, ed. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 1.
6. “Let Them Wed,” *Economist*, January 6, 1996, 84 (cited in Altman, “On Global Queering”).
7. Ara Wilson, “Queering Asia,” *Intersections: Gender, History, and Culture in the Asian Context*, no. 14 (November 2006), [intersections.anu.edu.au/issue14/wilson.html](http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue14/wilson.html) (accessed August 27, 2008).
8. Adam, Duyvendak, and Krouwel, “Gay and Lesbian Movements,” 344, 348.
9. Jeffrey Weeks, *The World We Have Won: The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life* (London: Routledge, 2007), 219.
10. Weeks, *World We Have Won*, 218.
11. See Peter A. Jackson, *Male Homosexuality in Thailand—an Interpretation of Contemporary Thai Sources* (New York: Global Academic, 1989); Rosalind Morris, “Three Sexes and Four Sexualities: Redressing the Discourses on Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Thailand,” *positions* 2, no. 1 (1994): 15–43; J. Neil Garcia, *Philippine*

- Gay Culture, the Last Thirty Years: Binabai to Bakla, Silahis to MSM* (Diliman: University of the Philippines Press, 1996); Megan Sinnott, "Masculinity and Tom Identity in Thailand," in *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent Boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*, ed. Peter Jackson and Gerard Sullivan (New York: Haworth, 1999), 97–119; Mark McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000); Peter A. Jackson, "Gay Adaptation, Tom-Dee Resistance, and Kathoey Indifference: Thailand's Gender/Sex Minorities and the Episodic Allure of Queer English," in *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalisation and Gay Desire*, ed. William L. Leap and Tom Boellstorff (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 202–30; Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film, and Public Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004); Megan Sinnott, *Toms and Dees: Transgender Identity and Female Same-Sex Relationships in Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); LeeRay M. Costa and Andrew Matzner, *Male Bodies, Women's Souls: Personal Narratives of Thailand's Transgendered Youth* (New York: Haworth, 2007); Sharyn Graham Davies, *Challenging Gender Norms: Five Genders among the Bugis in Indonesia* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007).
12. Benigno Sánchez-Eppeler and Cindy Patton, "Introduction: With a Passport out of Eden," in *Queer Diasporas*, ed. Benigno Sánchez-Eppeler and Cindy Patton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 3.
  13. Tom Boellstorff, *A Coincidence of Desires: Anthropology, Queer Studies, Indonesia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 198.
  14. Boellstorff, *Coincidence of Desires*, 198, 199.
  15. Fran Martin, Peter Jackson, Mark McLelland, and Audrey Yue, *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Gender and Sexuality in the Asia-Pacific* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).
  16. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 17, emphasis in original.
  17. Jackson, *Male Homosexuality in Thailand*.
  18. See Peter A. Jackson, "Performative Genders, Perverse Desires: A Bio-History of Thailand's Same-Sex and Transgender Cultures," *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, no. 9 (2003), [intersections.anu.edu.au/issue9/jackson.html](http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue9/jackson.html).
  19. Boellstorff, *Coincidence of Desires*, 81. Boellstorff cites Leonard Andaya, "The Bissu: Study of a Third Gender in Indonesia," in *Other Pasts: Women, Gender, and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. Barbara W. Andaya (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 27–46; David Plummer and Doug Porter, "The Use and Abuse of Epidemiological Categories," in *No Place for Borders: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic and Development in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Godfrey Linge and Doug Porter (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1997), 43.

20. Jackson, "Performative Genders."
21. Boellstorff, *Coincidence of Desires*, 192. Boellstorff's references here are to Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture*; James L. Peacock, *Rites of Modernization: Symbolic and Social Aspects of Indonesian Proletarian Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Frank Proschan, "Eunuch Mandarins, Soldats Mamzelles, Effeminate Boys, and Graceless Women: French Colonial Constructions of Vietnamese Genders," *GLQ* 8 (2002): 435–67; Drucker, "In the Tropics There Is No Sin."
22. Walter Irvine provides insight into the formation of today's commodified *kathoey* culture from fieldwork in northern Thailand in the 1970s: "Kathooi [*kathoey*] may be seen as successful salesmen [*sic*] at village or town markets where women dominate and where men are present as casual buyers. In one case, a self-made entrepreneur of poor, unlanded, peasant origin, was said to owe his prosperity to the kathooi salesmen whom he employed to distribute and sell his stock of cosmetics. The man operated in several towns of Northern, North Eastern, and Central Thailand, carrying his merchandise and his eight kathooi in the back of his van, with his wife sitting by him in the front. At each town, he would stay for several days, sending off the kathooi to the market by five in the morning with large cardboard boxes of goods. This businessman had tried to employ females as saleswomen without success, and was only able to make his sales shoot up when he decided to employ kathooi instead. He reported that their success was partly related to their hard work, but also to their entertainment value, for dressed up and made up as women, the young kathooi looked, he said, better than most women, thus providing unbeatable advertisements for his products, while attracting clients by the very fact of being kathooi, and their ability to ape the dabble of women and entertain. However, when off the job, and although enjoying their work and success, individual members of this group of salesmen spoke of the stigma attached to the kathooi role. Some put particular stress on the subordinate and derided identity which was given to them in their own villages and even in their families, this attitude explaining the fact that many called at their villages as seldom as possible, perhaps only at New Years, when they honour their parents by performing the dam huua ritual. It can be concluded that these men, who were excluded except as clown-like figures from their village communities, had found an alternative grouping with others like themselves. Within the bounds of this grouping, stigma could be kept at bay and outside it could also be transformed by means of their acting skills into the basis for a kind of success" ("The Thai-Yuan 'Madman,' and the Modernising, Developing Thai Nation as Bounded Entities under Threat: A Study in the Replication of a Single Image" [PhD diss., University of London, 1982], 476n, cited in Matzner, "Transgenderism and Northern Thai Spirit Mediumship," [web.hku.hk/~sjwinter/TransgenderASIA/TGinThailandSpirit.htm](http://web.hku.hk/~sjwinter/TransgenderASIA/TGinThailandSpirit.htm) [accessed September 10, 2007]).
23. Altman, "Rupture or Continuity?" 87.
24. Altman, *Global Sex*, 157.

25. J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).
26. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri Interviewed by Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman, The Global Coliseum: On *Empire*," *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 177–92.
27. Tom Boellstorff, *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 219.
28. Boellstorff, *Gay Archipelago*, 216.
29. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
30. Jackson, "Explosion of Thai Identities."
31. Jackson, *Male Homosexuality in Thailand*.
32. See, for example, Dominic Sachsenmaier, Jens Riedel, and Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, eds., *Reflections on Multiple Modernities: European, Chinese, and Other Interpretations* (Boston: Brill, 2002); Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, ed., *Multiple Modernities: Cinemas and Popular Media in Transcultural Asia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).
33. Drucker, "Introduction: Remapping Sexualities," 15; Altman, *Global Sex*, 86.
34. Jackson, "Gay Adaptation, Tom-Dee Resistance, and Kathoey Indifference."
35. I wish to thank the reader who emphasized the gendering of capitalism when commenting on an earlier version of this essay.
36. Ara Wilson, *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok: Tomboys, Tycoons, and Avon Ladies in the Global City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
37. Peter A. Jackson, "An American Death in Bangkok: The Murder of Darrell Berrihan and the Hybrid Origins of Gay Identity in 1960s Bangkok," *GLQ* 5 (1999): 361–411.
38. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 13.
39. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 13.
40. See Jackson, "American Death in Bangkok"; Jackson, "Explosion of Thai Identities."
41. Wilson, "Queering Asia."
42. The country was called Siam until 1939, when the name was changed to Thailand.
43. For accounts of the modern history of male homosexuality in Japan, see Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan*; Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).
44. Tamara Loos, *Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).
45. See Peter A. Jackson, "The Performative State: Semicoloniality and the Tyranny

- of Images in Modern Thailand,” *Sojourn: Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 19, no. 2 (2004): 40–74; Jackson, “Autonomy and Subordination in Thai History: The Case for Semicolonial Analysis,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8 (2007): 329–48.
46. John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 467–76.
  47. Drucker, “Introduction: Remapping Sexualities.”
  48. D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” 470, emphasis in original.
  49. D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” 467.
  50. D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” 468.
  51. Drucker, “Introduction: Remapping Sexualities,” 17.
  52. Drucker, “Introduction: Remapping Sexualities,” 17.
  53. Wilson, *Intimate Economies of Bangkok*, 120.
  54. Drucker, “Introduction: Remapping Sexualities,” 16.
  55. D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” 471. Others have also pointed to the metropolitan origins of modern homosexualities. Henning Bech states, “I have pointed to the importance of the *urban* in the constitution of the modern homosexual—and notably, the importance of studying him as an existence *of* the city and not merely as someone existing *in* the city. . . . the urban permeates practically *all* dimensions of his existence. Further, I have emphasized the overall importance of spatiality, i.e. of *life spaces*, as a background for the homosexual form of existence” (*When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity*, trans. Teresa Mesquit and Tim Davies [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 262n121, emphases in original). Stephen O. Murray emphasizes the importance of the urban commercial gay scene for the emergence of gay identities: “Diversification of gay types . . . cannot occur without numbers, and the aggregation of those with gay interests only occurs in cities. . . . In large cities, at least since early in the twentieth century, there were small-scale entrepreneurs seeking to profit from those seeking same-sex sexual partners and safe spaces for socializing with like-minded others” (*Homosexualities* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 392).
  56. Chauncey, *Gay New York*.
  57. James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 50.
  58. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 87.
  59. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 96.
  60. In Asia commercial male homoerotic magazines appeared first in Japan in the 1950s (see McLelland, *Queer Japan*), followed by Thailand a couple of decades later. Local gay magazines are now widespread in Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, and Indonesia, but in these former colonies gay publishing began some years

after the first commercial gay magazines appeared in noncolonized Japan and Thailand.

61. Chaiwat is a pseudonym.
62. *Mithuna* is the Thai name of the astrological sign Gemini, whose symbol is “The Twins.” Chaiwat chose this name for the magazine because, to his mind, symbolic representations of “The Twins” had homoerotic resonances and because the word *mithuna* sounds similar to a formal Thai term for sexual intercourse, *methun*. *Mithuna* and *methun* are in fact derived from the same Sanskrit source.
63. I have described the history of Uncle Go’s column in detail in *Dear Uncle Go*.
64. Weeks, *World We Have Won*, 210.
65. Altman, *Global Sex*, 12.
66. Loos, *Subject Siam*, 144.
67. Scot Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 81.
68. “Tang sorng sopeni theuan yang wittan doi chai dek-chai pen phu-rap-jang kratham chamrao” (“Degenerate Illegal Brothel Set Up, Uses Boys as Employees to Perform Illicit Sex”), *Srikrung*, June 20, 1935 (BE 2478). This item was reprinted in Piyakanit Hongthong, *Siam Sanuk Khao (Amusing Stories from the Siamese News)* (Bangkok: Samnak-phim Kanya, 1988 [BE 2531]), 146–47. Note: Thailand uses the Buddhist Era (BE) calendar, which begins in 543 BCE. Publication dates for Thai books and newspapers are here provided first in the equivalent Common Era (CE) year, followed by the BE year in parentheses.
69. “Tamruat thamlai sorng bamrer seung chai dek-chai thaen ying khanat 14 kwa 15 yorn jao samnak kor dek num” (“Police Destroy Brothel That Uses Fourteen- and Fifteen-Year-Old Boys instead of Women: Owner Is Himself a Youth”), *Prachachat*, June 20, 1935 (BE 2478).
70. Penny Van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 174.
71. Phrommet, *Phoey chiwit dao kathoey yort kari: Poet prawat chiwit phajonphai khong krathoey (Revealing the Life of a Star Kathoey and Top-Notch Whore: Revealing the Adventurous Life History of a Krathoey)* (Bangkok: Odeon/Chaiyan Khehathat, 1951 [BE 2492]). (Note: *kathoey* and *krathoey* are variant spellings of the same term). *Phrommet* is the Thai rendering of the Sanskrit *brahmesvara*, “the Lord Brahma.” The significance of the editor taking the name of a Hindu deity is not clear. Thanks to Scot Barmé for bringing this rare source to my attention. While doing fieldwork in Bangkok in the mid-1990s for his PhD on Thai social history under my academic supervision (published as Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*), Scot came across this booklet in the collection of a secondhand book dealer. The collector valued the pamphlet highly and unfortunately refused to either sell it or permit it to be photocopied in total. However, he did let Scot photocopy the cover and to transcribe manually

notes from the text. The account here is my translation of Scot's handwritten notes in Thai summarizing the pamphlet's contents.

72. This 1951 text uses the borrowed English term *faen* ("fan") to mean a regular sexual partner.
73. At places Peo is called *phor yort krathoey*, "a male acme of *kathoey* [beauty]." *Phor*, literally "father," is also an affectionate title used before the names of males who are younger than the speaker. The use of *phor* suggests that while Peo was regarded as being a *kathoey*, he may not have cross-dressed in everyday life. If Peo had lived as a woman, it is probable that Phrommet would have used a feminine title such as *mae* ("mother"), *nang-sao* ("Miss"), or *nang* ("Mrs.") to describe him. Perhaps if Peo had been born forty years later he would have been called gay or a gay queen rather than a *kathoey*. Significantly, Peo's male partners are not called *kathoey* but labeled as *sadeu* or occasionally *dao sadeu*, literally "star navel," but here meaning "a star [at having a good time below] the navel." The use of the masculine term *phor* to qualify Peo's status as a *kathoey* also shows that this term covered a range of different types of homosexual men, with qualifying gender terms to distinguish different types of *kathoey*. My research on the Thai press of the early 1960s (see Jackson, "American Death in Bangkok"), a decade after the publication of Peo's biography, shows that before the emergence of the label gay and its differentiation from the effeminate, cross-dressing *kathoey* in the mid-1960s, there was already a popular awareness in Bangkok of differentiations within the category of *kathoey*, and various linguistic strategies were used to mark these differences. Given the rich variety of Thai gender terms, including titles, pronouns, and sentence particles, and the Thai flair for playful and poetic uses of language, speakers were able to convey detailed gender nuances depending on how feminine or masculine a particular *kathoey* was perceived to be.
74. Here *tom thua dam* ("to boil black beans") describes the sexual behavior of a man who lets other men penetrate him. This source indicates the extent to which Karun's nickname, Thua Dam, had become a popular idiom for anal sex between men by the early 1950s.
75. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 18n.
76. Fellatio is not the only novel activity to be added to the repertoire of modern Thai sexual practices. Kissing, called *jup pak* ("mouth kissing") or usually simply *jup*, is another recently introduced sexual activity. Until the modern period, Thai sexual partners did not kiss but placed cheek (*kaem*) against cheek and sniffed (*horm*), a sexual practice called *horm kaem* or simply *horm*. Even today, some Thai couples do not kiss. *Jup*, the word now used to refer to lip kissing, also originally meant "cheek sniffing." In his popular Thai-language dictionary, Manit Manitcharoen's first definition of *jup* is "to sniff" (*sut dom*), and in addition to the contemporary idiom *jup pak*, "lip kissing," he also lists *jup kaem*, defined as "to place one's nose against another's cheek (*kaem*) and sniff (*sut dom*)" (Manit Manitcharoen, *Photjananukrom Thai [Thai*

- Dictionary*] [Bangkok: Ruamsan, 1983 (BE 2526)], 267). Manit defines *horm* as “to sniff an aroma” and lists *jup* as a synonym. The late Khukrit Pramoj, a prime minister in the 1970s as well as an author and journalist well known for his witticisms, reflected many older Thais’ dismissive attitudes toward the newfangled practice of lip kissing when he satirically defined *jup* as “to sniff (*sut dom*) [a lover’s] cheek, but which now seems to be old hat. Nowadays we have to suck each other’s mouths to be satisfied” (Khukrit Pramoj, *Photjananukrom Chabap Khukrit [The Khukrit Edition Dictionary]* [Bangkok: Samnak-phim Siam Rath, 1996 (BE 2539)], 37). The recentness of lip kissing as an erotic practice provides further evidence that the mouth has become an erogenous zone in Thailand only in modern times.
77. See Matt Cook, Robert Mills, Randolph Trumbach, and H. G. Cocks, *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex between Men since the Middle Ages* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2007).
  78. See Cook et al., *Gay History of Britain*.
  79. “Phoey laeng ‘phu-chai khai tua’, mi dara nr. nork ‘hun di’ ‘borikan’ phu-ying arom pliw” (“Den of Men Who Sell Themselves Exposed, Well-Built Stars and Overseas Graduates ‘Service’ Wild-Mooded Women”), *Thai Rath*, June 17, 1974.
  80. “Phoey laeng ‘phu-chai khai tua.’”
  81. Santi Sawetwimon, “Sopheni mi nuat” (“Prostitutes with Moustaches”), *Thai Rath*, June 23, 1974.
  82. Sawetwimon, “Sopheni mi nuat.”
  83. *Thai Rath*, September 3, 1974. This film was produced by Adul Green, scripted by Raphiphorn, and starred Sombat Methanee and Aranya Phusit in the male and female leads, respectively. For details on the public controversy surrounding this and another 1974 film on male sex work, *The Male Prostitutes (Phu-chai khai tua)*, see Peter A. Jackson, “Offending Images: Gender and Sexual Minorities, and State Control of the Media in Thailand,” in *Media Fortunes, Changing Times: ASEAN States in Transition*, ed. Russell H. K. Heng (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), 201–30.