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Byung'chu Dredge Käng   Date

White Asians Wanted: Queer Racialization in Thailand

By

Byung'chu Dredge Käng

Doctor of Philosophy
Anthropology

_____
Peter J. Brown
Advisor

_____
Chikako Ozawa-de Silva
Committee Member

_____
Michael Peletz
Committee Member

_____
Megan Sinott
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____
Date

White Asians Wanted: Queer Racialization in Thailand

By

Byung'chu Dredge Käng
M.A., Emory University, 2009

Advisor: Peter J. Brown, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

White Asians Wanted: Queer Racialization in Thailand
By Byung'chu Dredge Käng

Scholarly and popular literature often asserts that Caucasian partners are the most desirable, given the political and economic dominance of the West, its media, and beauty ideals. However, based on five years of ethnographic fieldwork in Thailand between 2004 to 2014, I contend that middle class gay men in contemporary Thailand profess preferential desires for "white Asian" partners (i.e. Northeast Asians, Sino-Thais, and Chinese diasporans in Southeast Asia), who are, like Caucasians, associated with light skin color, high economic development, and cosmopolitan modernity. New Asian regionalisms and racializations facilitate such preferences. Thais are increasingly thinking of themselves as "Asian," belonging to a common geography and race. In this context, desires for future social mobility are projected eastward onto newly idealized white Asian partners from economically and culturally powerful countries such as Japan and Korea. Thailand's geopolitical position, situated between wealthier and poorer countries in the region and globally, shapes romantic partner preferences.

Thai middle class gay men imagine, embody, and use partnerships with white Asians to instantiate their middle class position. Bourdieu's theory of distinction helps to explain why middle class Thais are avoiding relationships with Caucasians. Thais stigmatize visibly interracial relationships because they are often associated with prostitution. Thai preferential desires for white Asian partners occurs in the context of middle class distinction making in a middle income country with an international reputation for sex tourism. While the poor typically consider any relationships with foreigners beneficial, and the wealthy often consider themselves to be above such concerns, the middle classes are particularly anxious about establishing, elevating, and maintaining their precarious status position. Romantic partnership patterns are one means to manage status concerns. These middle class attitudes and practices, however, are complicit in the ongoing marginalization of sex workers, migrant laborers, and poor or rural Thais. This study demonstrates that development and globalization do not replicate Westernization, but rather locally engage transnational forces and capitalism in an increasingly multi-polar world.

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Notes on Transliteration and Monetary Conversion

There is no standardized academic transliteration of Thai into the Roman alphabet. Nor do any of the common systems provide a means to accurately reproduce the sounds of Thai. This text follows the Royal Thai General System (RTGS) by the Royal Institute with some modifications for clarity unless a common or preferred rendering exists. For example, I use "*kathoey*" rather than the RTGS "*kathoei*." The RTGS does not differentiate between short and long vowels. Furthermore, it does not represent tones. I follow the modifications made by Peter Jackson and Rachel Harrison for the journals *Asian Studies Review* and *South East Asia Research* in distinguishing between a "j" and "ch," the vowel ordering of some diphthongs (i.e. "eu", "eua", "euay" rather than "ue", "uea", "ueay"), and use of dashes to separate units of compound expressions (e.g. *khwam-pen-thai* for "Thainess"). If an existing Romanization of a name exists, that version is respected. In Thai Studies, Thai authors who write in English are cited by their surnames while those who write in Thai are cited by given name, following Thai practice. However, for the ease of non-specialists, all citations follow the Western practice of using surnames. Similarly, East Asian authors who write their surname first without a comma are listed in Western style in the bibliography. In general, when Thai word choice matters, I include the Thai, its transliteration and translation on initial use, e.g. *kathoey* (กะเทย: transgender, third gender, other gender). Hence, only the transliteration is used. When a quote or passage is long, only a translation is provided, except when diction makes a difference in connotation or is used irregularly, in which case I also provide additional information or commentary. Nouns from Thai are not

modified to express plural form. That is, like the English word "sheep," which variously denotes both singular and plural forms, the plural of "*kathoey*" is "*kathoey*." I do not italicize the word "gay," when used as a Thai word, even though its meaning is not equivalent with the English term except when quoting a passage that does or specifically referring to a particular Thai use of the word.

The name (Kingdom of) Thailand was adopted in 1939. Prior to that the country is referred to as Siam or by the names of various kingdoms and eras (e.g. Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, Lanna) staring from the fourteenth century. The official Thai Buddhist Era (BE) calendar was revised in 1940 to align January 1, 1941 CE with January 1, 2484 BE. The Thai BE calendar is thus currently 543 years ahead of the Christian or Common Era (CE) calendar. For example, the year 2000 CE is 2543 BE.

The official currency of Thailand is the Thai Baht, abbreviated as THB. Monetary conversions are generally made at 30 Thai Baht (THB) to the US dollar (USD), with some rounding to make the figure easier to interpret. Thus 300 THB is $10 while 100 THB is $3.50 rather than $3.33. During my fieldwork, THB fluctuated between 28-34 to the US Dollar, however, it was most often around 31.

A Note on the Use of "Queer"

I use the reclaimed term "queer" as it is often used in American academic discourse, referring to queer theory, queer studies, and gender/sexual non-normativity or oppositional politics more broadly as well as its racial and transnational iterations in "quare" (Johnson 2001) and "kuaer" (Lee 2003). The term is also used by activist-oriented and young people as an affirming and more inclusive substitute for the generic

term "gay" referring to gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, but also intersex, transsexual, transgender, genderqueer, androgynous, polyamorous, pansexual, autosexual, asexual, aromantic, "questioning," non-normative heterosexual (e.g. BDSM), and other identity categories as well as ethnic-specific conceptualizations such as two-spirit and same gender loving. That is, "queer," following its prior English usage, refers to whatever is strange, illegitimate, and at odds with "normality," but with special attention to gender and sexuality (see, for example, Butler 1993, Sedgewick 1993, and Halperin 1995). In this sense, "queer" is considered a general umbrella term for non-normative sex, gender presentation, and same-sex erotic categories where "gay" is considered more limited, referring primarily to white gay middle-class Euro-American male norms.

In Thai, *kwia* (เควียร์ queer) is an abstract concept rather than a concrete phenomenon. The term "queer" is commonly used in Thai academic discourse, following its usage in the US (see, for example, Jackson 2001 and Sinnott 2010). Thus, it can refer to conceptual domains such as "queer theory" or "queer society." However, it is generally not used by activists, who tend to use terms such as *khwam-laklai thang-phet* ("gender and sexual diversity"). *Kwia* can be used as a shorthand, however, such as in *thetsakan kwia* (queer festival). Thais do not use *kwia* as a term of self-identification. Rather, Thais use a specific reference, generally treated as a noun, that denotes their gender and sexual identity such as *gay* (gay man, never a woman), *kathoey* (transgender, typically a transgender woman), *tom* (masculine lesbian), *dee* (female partner of *tom*), *tom-gay* (*tom* who partners with other *tom*), *letbian* (lesbian), *let-king* (masculine lesbian partner of a *let-kwin*), *let-kwin* (feminine lesbian partner of a *let-king*), *tut* (gay sissy or queen), *maen* (masculine gay man), *bai* (bisexual), *sao-praphet-song* (second category woman), *phu-*

ying kham-phet (transsexual woman), *lediboi* (ladyboy), or other term. I documented twenty-three self-identity terms by the end of 2010, not including labels used to designate other people (e.g. *ap-ai* closeted gay man, *metrosekchuan* euphemism for closeted gay man, *seua bai* masculine bisexual man, *taew* sissy or queen, *kathoey-noi* sissy or male transitioning into womanhood, *sao thi-ji* transgender woman, *cheri* heterosexual woman interested in *gay* or *kathoey*, *adam* heterosexual man interested in *tom*, *intoesek* intersex). These terms continue to proliferate. Thus, one may encounter the use of an abbreviated English loan such as "GLBT" in activist literature, but never encounters seemingly inclusive abbreviations such as the Audre Lorde Project's LGBTSTGNC (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, Trans and Gender Non Conforming). Such agglutinating abbreviations are avoided and there is no Thai equivalent. The HIV-related abbreviations MSM (men who have sex with men, see Boellstorff 2011) and TG (transgender) occur in Thai NGO discourse but are generally not understood outside that context. While I specify gay, *kathoey*, *tom*, or other specific categories when relevant, if I am referring to several categories simultaneously or the overall grouping of non-normative genders and sexualities as a whole, I use the umbrella term "queer."

A Note on the Use of "Caucasian" and Other Racial Terminology

Anthropologists generally agree that biological races do not exist, but that the social organization of race has material force. The US government defines "white" for federal statistical purposes as "a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa" (OMB 1997). In its last revision of racial and ethnic categories, the Office of Management and Budget rejected proposals for separating

those with origins in the Middle East and North Africa into a new category. At the same time, the Asian or Pacific Islander designation was separated into two categories: 1) "Asian," and "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander." The ethnic designation of "Latino" was appended to "Hispanic," which modifies any racial category. These contestations and changes continue to demonstrate the shifting organization of race and its terminology in the US. Racial classifications change over time and between groups.

All racial terminology that is commonly used is simplistic and flawed in that racial and ethnic categories are fluid rather than fixed. These categories shift over time, vary between groups, and are not tied to a set of objective criteria that is definitive (e.g. genetics, phenotypic traits, geography, culture) but rather loose notions of ancestry, lineage, or heritage. Thus, anthropologists deny the existence of biological races but must contend with both human biological variation and the socially-specific organization and use of race as a social concept that distinguishes certain groups of people. A discussion of race using common terms can simultaneously deconstruct the concept biologically, historically, and culturally while reifying the concept of race by demonstrating its social utility.

In this dissertation, I use shorthand terms such as "Caucasian," "Asian," "South Asian," "African-American," "white," "Thai," etc. to refer to those groups in a simple manner with the acknowledgement that such terms conceal a great deal of internal differences and ambiguity. Who, for example, counts as white or Thai are highly debatable and fraught with tension. These terms are, however, commonly, if simplistically, understood in US American, Thai, and other conceptualizations of racial difference. In particular, I often use the term "Caucasian" to reference individuals who

would be identified as having European descent or any other number of factors clustered into the concept of Caucasianness and its boundaries. For example, I discuss some of the changes in the "Asian" and "Caucasian" racial categories in the USA in Chapter 5. These commonly used terms derive from Euro-centric notions of white European racial normality and superiority. While Caucasian is once again increasing in popularity among white US Americans who do not want to identify with the label "white" (as "African American" has increasingly replaced "black"), it can sound antiquated because of its history in Euro-American racial thinking linked to other terms such as "Aryan" and "Indo-European." Caucasian as a racial term has been used by those proposing different evolutionary trajectories for various human groups. Specifically, it points to polygenist ideas that outlined races as separate divine creations rather than divergent variations of natural history (Sanjek 1994). Caucasians were considered superior to other groups such as Africans and Asians. Europe was the crucible for humanity. Within this framework, white Europeans were considered the progeny of original stock from the Caucasus region of Southeast Europe and Southwestern Asia, which endowed them with intelligence, beauty, and civilization exceeding that of other racial lineages. This is not to say that other cultural traditions do not have racist beliefs and attitudes about their inherent superiority. Nonetheless, the Euro-American racial system has become more or less globally hegemonic following the colonization of the rest of the world.

Thus, I use the term "Caucasian," acknowledging its limitations and racist, misguided history, as a convenient shorthand to refer to white people of recent European ancestry (e.g. white Germans, Canadians, Australians, Argentinians, South Africans, Russians, Jewish Israelis) more or less interchangeably with how most US Americans use

the term "white" or "Caucasian" and how Thais would use the term "*farang*." In the US hypodescent system, "Caucasian" also precludes any kind of racial mixing, as an exclusive category of descent in which both parents must be Caucasian or pass as such. I have chosen not to use the term "European" as it is not commonly understood to refer to European ancestry the way that "Asian" is. I also do not use the more recent academic term "Europid" as it is not commonly understood. I specifically use "Caucasian" to differentiate it from a category of "white" that need not be exclusive or isomorphic with Caucasianness. As Bonnett (1998) contends, whiteness becomes the exclusive quality of Europeans only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prior identities of Chinese and Middle Eastern whiteness have been marginalized and erased. He states: "Today, with certain limited, and increasingly residual, exceptions, the term 'white' is equated with the term 'European'. No other interpretation is deemed possible (not, at least, within the literature of the West)" (1036). However, there is growing acknowledgement of self-identification as "white" in the non-West. I thus use "Caucasian" as a placeholder for those of European descent, acknowledging that I reduce much more complicated phenomena into readily understandable concepts.

Asia

Central Bangkok
Gay Venues
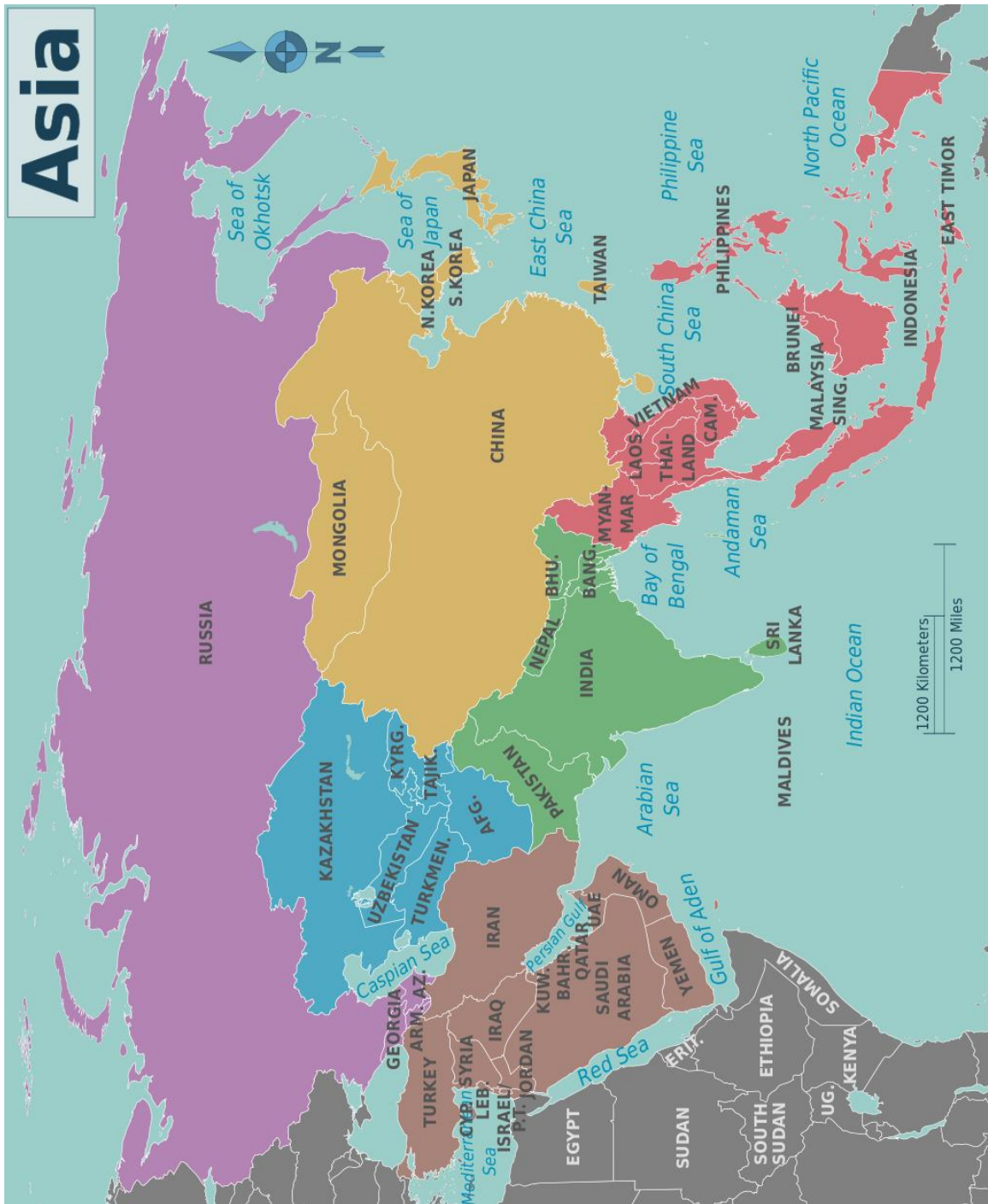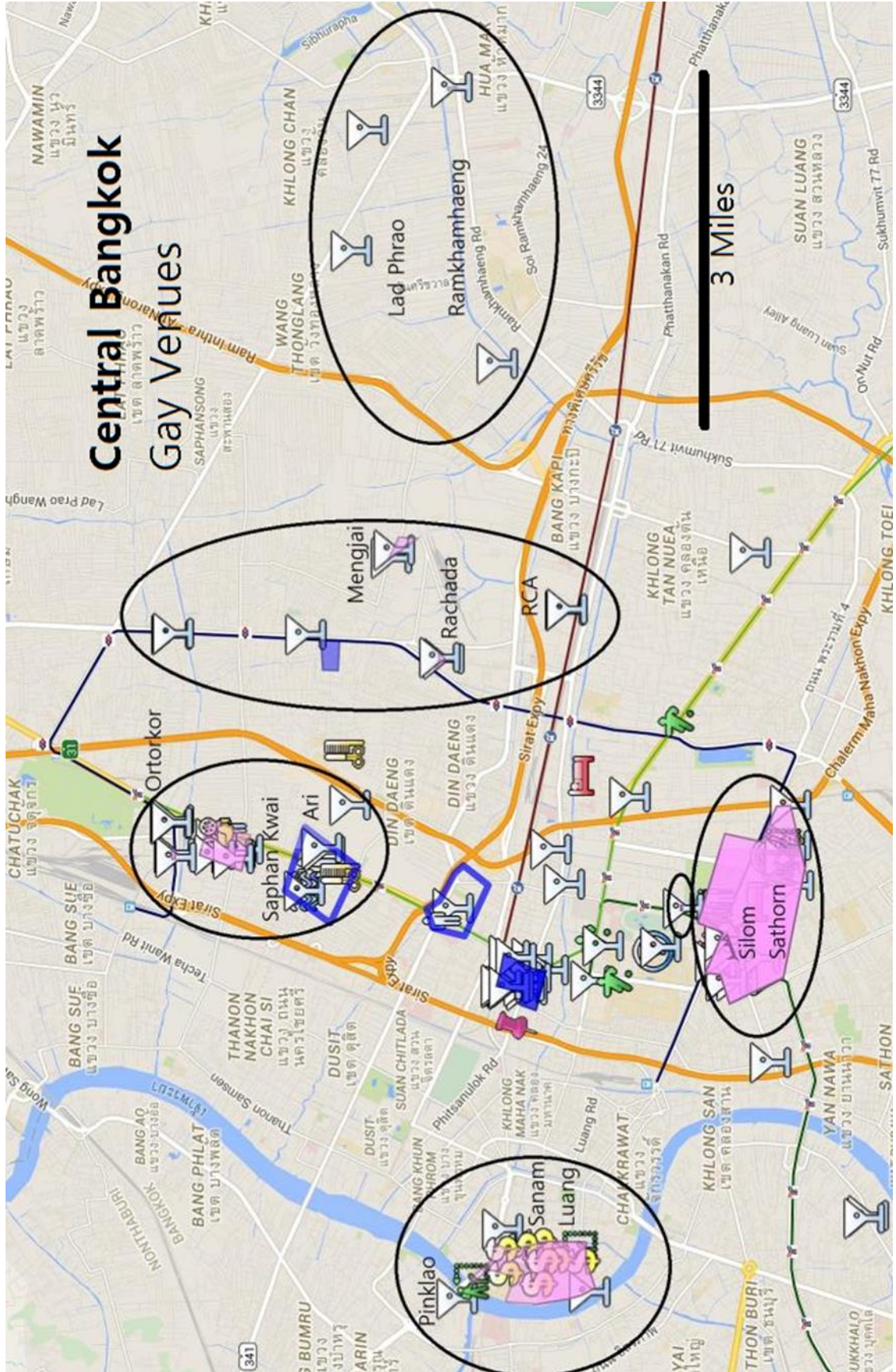
Key Events in Thai History

1238-1438	Sukhothai Kingdom (founding date of Kingdom of Thailand)
1351-1767	Ayutthaya Kingdom
1516	Portuguese Treaty (first trade treaty)
1575-1650	Trade Expansion with Europe, Middle East, Asia
1768-1782	Thonburi Kingdom
1782	Founding of Rattanakosin Kingdom and Chakri Dynasty
1862-1909	Siam's period of territorial loss to French and British colonies
1896	British-French Agreement (mutually recognizing extant colonial territory)
1905	Slave Abolition Act
1932	Revolution of 1932 (end of absolute monarchy)
1939	Siam becomes Thailand
1939-1945	World War II
1941	Japan invades Thailand
1947-1973	Period of Military Dictatorships
1965-1975	American War in Mainland Southeast Asia
1976	Thammasat University Massacre (massacre of protesters)
1992	Bloody May (massacre of protesters)
1997	"People's Constitution" of Thailand (institutionalization of democratic participation and stabilization of government)
1997-1998	Asian Financial Crisis (a.k.a IMF Crisis in Asia)
2001-2006	Thaksin Shinawatra Prime Minister / Social Order Campaign
2006	Coup of Thaksin Shinawatra Government

2007-2008   Military and People's Power Party Rule

2007-2009   Global Financial Crisis

2008   People's Aliance for Democracy Protests Close Bangkok Airports

2008-2011   Abhisit Vejjajiva Prime Minister

2010   Suppression of United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship Protest at Ratchaprasong

2011-2014   Yingluck Shinawatra Prime Minister (first female Prime Minister)

2014   Coup of Yingluck Shinawatra Government

Preface

I came to this topic through earlier research on US "rice queens," or gay men, typically coded as white, who have a strong and persistent attraction to Asian men. In earlier work, I triangulated data from participant observations, text sources such as online personal ads, and in-depth interviews to show how young rice queens portrayed themselves in idealized ways inconsistent with their behavior (Käng 2005a, 2005b, 2006). I was particularly interested in young white men's disavowal of being a typical rice queen, which incorporated economic, age, and gendered power differentials as the basis for these interracial relationships. Most importantly for them, young rice queens actively differentiated themselves from the stereotype of a rice queen, which typically referenced old, fat, bald men (Gawthrop 2005) caricatured as sex tourists, pedophiles, and predators of young immigrant men. Manalansan (2003) adds that rice queens are often economically well off, and have racist, Orientalist, and patronizing attitudes. In distinguishing themselves from the stereotype, young white men often denied power differentials in their relationships with their Asian partners by conceptualizing power in terms of equity in beauty. Equivalences of beauty were the standard by which equivalence of power were naturalized. Partnerships of equal attractiveness were considered egalitarian in contrast to couples where white partners were considered significantly older or less attractive by prevailing gay standards. Yet these young rice queens failed to account for the fact that being Caucasian made them more desirable in the broader gay sexual marketplace than their Asian partners. In the US, Asian and

Pacific Islander men are lowest on the racial gay sexual hierarchy compared to white, Latino, and African American men (Paul et al. 2010).

Given the stereotype of rice queens as sex tourists and the popular gay literature on Bangkok, I started to do research on sexpatriates, those rice queens who were so dedicated to their love of Asian men that they moved to Thailand to fulfill their fantasies. An early assumption of mine was that Thai gay men would desire relationships with white foreigners, as is often reported in popular literature and the personal accounts of rice queens themselves, Gawthrop's (2005) *Rice Queen Diaries* being a prime example. This is the dominant representation outside of Thailand: Thai men flocking to fight over a new Caucasian lover. However, this proved not to be the case. Middle class Thai men often stated preferences for Asians, as partnership with Caucasians can mark them as low status (i.e. they are publicly viewed as paid companions), while East Asian partners are associated with high economic status, new forms of Asian modernity, and regional similarity without engendering the stigma associated with sex work. I thus began to refocus my research on class differences and how concerns about social status mediate racialized partner preferences.

My project thus evolved to focuses on how gay men and *kathoey* in Bangkok, Thailand, experience and negotiate romantic partner preferences in a globalizing, and increasingly multipolar, world. While there is a body of scholarship that addresses Western influences on Thai gender and sexuality, the impact of East Asia is rarely explored. I investigate how Thailand's geopolitical position, situated between wealthier and poorer countries in the region, constrains and enables new partner preferences. The project examines how desires for white Asian partners are created and how Thai-Asian

partnerships affect local ways of thinking about and experiencing the self amidst regional

economic, social, and political change. I argue that middle class gay men in Thailand

imagine and engage transnational relationships to mark class distinctions.

A Reflection on Fieldwork

This dissertation is based on five years of ethnographic research in Thailand,

regional Asian countries (e.g. Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan,

Korea, and Japan), and other sites with large Thai queer migrant populations, such as

Berlin, Germany between the years of 2004 and 2014 (see Methods in the appendix).

Overall, I have sought to understand the management of stigma related to homosexuality

and transgenderism, life opportunities, and social status concerns in relation to the

increasing regionalization of Asia. Participant observation focused on gay men,

transgender women, and male sex workers in commercial and leisure sites such as bars,

saunas, gyms, hair salons, shopping malls, massage parlors, parks, community

organizations, and online. Sex work venues, which are often integrated with other

commercial activities, focus on the desires of clients, which are performed and enacted

by the workers. Most gay and *kathoey* spaces are entertainment venues clustered in urban

areas and structured around desires. Cruising, or looking for sexual or romantic partners,

is the primary raison d'etre for saunas and a major one for bars, dance clubs, or even

going to the gym. Indeed, finding partners is arguably the primary motivation for gay

spaces, which places a high emphasis on making onself attractive to attract the attention

of others.

I have split my time between three populations (i.e. gay men, *kathoey*, male sex workers) and investigated numerous subcultural scenes and networks (e.g. Western retirees, Japanese expats, Asian gay circuit parties, *mor lam* clubs, military personnel, ritual specialists), including those with which I find little affinity or enjoyment. Between January 2009 and August 2014, I profiled 343 gay and *kathoey* Thais, their families and friends, and foreign partners. I interviewed 72 Thai *kathoey*, gay, and bisexual men, their foreign partners, families and friends, and specialists in queer Thai or Asian gender and sexuality. I have focused interviews on populations that are the least accessible and understood by me or to address specific issues that I want more information about (e.g. bisexually identified men, gay monks, the pornography industry). All my requests for interviews from the heterosexually identified partners of transgender women were turned down. In addition, I conducted pile sort exercises on gender categories with 37 participants and spent two weeks conducing archival research in Los Angeles to compare how Asian American gay men have discussed interracial relationships in community newsletters. I also volunteered and consulted for a number of gay, transgender, and sex worker NGO projects.

My long-term involvement has allowed me to develop deep friendships and kinship networks. I openly share intimate details of my life, as others share with me. I have remained friends with some individuals for a decade, seeing them change over time. Yet the kinds of friends I have in Thailand are often quite different from those that I have in the USA. In the field, I am less wary and judgmental about who I allow to surround me, and indeed, need a wide variety of interlocutors to make sense of and generalize about what is going on in the world. At the same time, fieldwork in Thailand made me

feel normal and appreciated. For the first time in my concious life, I was not a

"minority." There was life outside the constraints and injury of being a sissy Chinaboy in

the USA. Because I pass as Thai and normatively masculine by Thai standards, I was not

constantly contending with how I perceived other people perceiving me as Asian and not

masculine enough. Furthermore, when Thais found out I was Korean, my status was

typically given an instant boost. This was something I had never experienced before and

imagined this is what it must be like to be white in the USA and when traveling abroad:

being perceived of as normal or better. About a year after living in Thailand, my friends

were making statements such as "you are Thai now." I often caused offence when I

responded that I am not, that I love the country and the people, but do not identify as

such. When asked why I do not stay forever, I responded that my family and my home is

in the USA.

Approximately a third of my time in the field, I was accompanied by my partner

of 18 years (in 2015). He is also an academic and focuses on gay Asian American

masculinity. In both of our work, we are interested in issues related to the marginalization

of queer Asians and the promotion of contemporary feminist, transnational, queer of

color analysis and activism. His ongoing personal support and our conversations about

our work enrich my perspective and analysis. His extra pair of eyes and ears and

background in photography and video have also been instrumental in documenting many

of our experiences. In particular, his Vietnamese and my Korean ethnicity have been a

sounding board for some of the issues I have been investigating in regards to the

evaluation of other Asian nationalities.

During one of my undergraduate classes, Erve Chambers gave a brief lecture on how cultural anthropology had been moving from a perspective of "difference" to one of "identification." As a gay Korean American man who had previously worked with and run health education programs for Asian & Pacific Islander gay men, transgender women, and sex workers, these were populations I already felt affinity for. This opened up new possibilities for me in terms of theoretical orientation and fieldwork practice. Yet, critical ethnographic work makes the key assumption that the researcher's understanding of the world, informed by a greater penetration of what is hidden in everyday life and deeper understanding of macro-social machinations, is superior to that of the local actors. Something I continue to grapple with. I also know that I am not writing with the idea that my interlocuters are unable to read or otherwise engage with my work. Indeed, they started to comment in online forums during my fieldwork. This ranged from statements such as "I really want him to come do research on me" to "hi, thx for adding, i'm glad to know you, and hope that we are not [just] one object in your research eiei."

In cultural anthropology, the body of the ethnographer is the primary tool to gather data. This is often invoked in highly gender-segregated arenas but is also related to race in the context I describe, as a Korean, who typically passed for Thai. Standing out and blending in both provide different optics on the situation at hand. Besides my own body and aesthetics of presentation, the peer groups through which I moved also influenced both how others responded to us and whom I had access to. The popularity of Koreans certainly altered the nature of my fieldwork. At the same time, my partner's Vietnameseness was also enriching, since people reacted to our ethnicities very differently. I very early switched from saying I was *kaoli-amerikan* (Korean American)

during introductions to simply stating that I was *kaoli*. While there is clearly a sense that there is a Thai diaspora in the USA (Los Angeles was commonly joked about being the 77th province of Thailand, when Thailand had only 76 provinces), there was no hyphenated identity. Saying I was Korean American, Thais assumed my father must be Caucasian. Ethnicity and nationality were collapsed. Unless I had a longer discussion to explain that I was born in Korea but grew up in the USA, I simply stated that I was Korean. This often incited a discussion about contemporary Korean pop music, television, and film, which I had to learn about and follow in Thailand in order to engage friendly small talk.

The power of the fieldworker is not just about prestige for the ethnographer, but also those who seek to increase their own status through such relationships. When I conducted interviews in apartments, I experienced how I could be used as a specimen for others. During interviews, neighbors would often open the door, poke in their heads to say "Hello," giggle, and then retreat. As the "Korean," I was an object on display and a specimen of Thai gazes that conferred status. At the same time, the "lack" of privacy and the speed at which word of mouth spread in an apartment building sometimes astounded me. But it was not my place to lock the door. Furthermore, it reminded me of working with young people in settings where open doors protected me as much as someone I was counseling.

I appeared on a popular television show not due to any talent that I have, but simply because they desperately needed a "Korean or Japanese." The show's producer noted that there was an excess of Caucasians looking to be on television, but that it was extremely difficult to find Koreans and Japanese because they typically worked during

the day, when shooting occurred. Even while there was something "special" (somewhat rare, exotic, and the new beauty ideal) about being Korean in Thailand, there was also a sense of racial equality. Many Thais expressed a putative ability to have an equal relationship with an East Asian, which was often considered impossible with a Caucasian partner. Many informants were clearly concerned that relationships with Caucasians, even though of lower status, would be interpreted by other Thais as a relationship based on patronage, in which the Thai would be seen as the recipient. Another oft repeated difference was in language and the power of English. In my experience, it is much more common for Japanese and Korean expats in Thailand to learn Thai, and many learn the language on their own. Thais generally say this is because Japanaese and Koreans are *khayan mak* (very diligent). I would also offer, however, that Japanese and Korean corporations often required their staff to take Thai language courses. In part, this was because English is the "international" language of Thailand, and East Asian companies were disadvantaged in this regard. This also played out at the level of interpersonal relationships. As Top stated, "I don't want to date a *farang* [Caucasian] because my English is very poor." I replied that he also could not speak Chinese, Japanese, or Korean. "Yes but when I speak English with *khon echia* [Asian person] we both have to struggle, so it is more equal. If I speak to a *farang* [Caucasian person] I will be at a disadvantage, because he will be better at the language."

The fact that I spoke Thai was immediately endearing to most Thais, who appreciated the effort to learn their language, which does not have international cache. This often played out in mundane discussions. Thai merchants would jokingly suggest I make up stories to get a "Thai" price. For example, I should say I am Thai but have lived

abroad for a long time or that I am a recent Chinese immigrant living in Yaowarat. There was a way in which I could be incorporated into Thainess and quirks like my accent could be explained. Indeed, I was most often thought of as *dek nok*, a Thai person who was educated overseas and thus had an accent when speaking Thai.

I have always been aware of my "Asianness" and ability to more or less pass as Thai in the field. My first summer in Thailand in 2004, Bee took me to a sauna and said: "Don't say anything." It was his ploy to get me in for the local price. Once my Thai was good enough, I could buy tickets on my own. I would often see a dual price system posted where a Thai price is listed in Thai numbers and a foreigner price is listed in Arabic numbers. I would simply ask for the number of tickets I wanted (e.g. two adults) and would know whether the vendor thought I was Thai or not based on how much she charged. An unintended test of my passability occurred when I was in Satun province on the Thai-Malaysian border. I had gone with friends to get away from Bangkok during the political unrest of May 2010. When we arrived from a daylong journey and got to our destination, the images on the television screen were of Central World burning. It reminded me of the replay of planes crashing into the Twin Towers. As we had to extend our stay, my companions suggested we cross the border into Malaysia for a day trip. Not having anticipated crossing international borders, I did not bring my passport with me. My Thai friends assured me that the border police would think I am local and let us cross without any documents. I told them that my concern was not getting into Malaysia, but getting back into Thailand. I feared that my platinum blond hair, pink cowboy shirt, and skinny jeans (the most conservative outfit I brought for what was supposed to be a two day trip) would be a beacon of ostentatiousness in an area where brown and blue hued

sarongs were the male norm. Riding three to a motorcycle, we crossed the border in both directions, stopping to be examined by the border police, and then beckoned in with a smile.

Passing, however, is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, in many situations, it provided me a certain degree of access to interior spaces and sentiments of cultural intimacy. I was allowed to help clothe highly sacred Buddhist relics, stay in homes where Muslim women were unveiled, or roam around army barracks without being questioned. On the other hand, when I pass as Thai, my Koreanness or foreignness has no extra value, especially in public venues. More than one Thai person has suggested to me that I should tattoo "Korean" on my forehead because I passed too well as Thai. After I received a traditional Thai tattoo, a friend of mine at the gym noted that I should supplement it with a Korean one, or others would just assume that I was Thai. I noted that there is no tradition of Korean tattooing and that it could exclude me from places such as bath houses in Korea. As a compromise, I wrote my name in Korean on my gym towel. I also started to behave in more foreign ways. For example, I would change in front of my locker without using a towel to cover myself, something that was technically against gym rules (nudity is not allowed) and marked one as a foreigner. One night I was at a bar with my partner when one of the servers asked if I am Korean or Japanese. I replied that I am Korean. He then asked if I had lost a wallet, as the staff had found a wallet. The server said he asked us first because as foreigners, we were greater at risk for losing things and less likely to take advantage of someone else's loss. As my friends noted, there are benefits to being perceived as a foreigner in Thailand. Indeed, they also used strategies such as speaking English at high end hotels and other tourist venues to get better service.

This ability to "pass" was a mixed blessing in other ways as well. I have, on many occasions, been mistaken for a Thai sex worker and noticed subtle differences in my treatment thereafter. This highlighted for me the symbolic struggles over social status and morality, where differences of real economics where less important than face. Surfaces created interpersonal and social validity without needing to point to any interior truth. No Thai person I've explained my project to has disagreed with my basic premise that partnership with Caucasians can lead others to interpret the Thai as a sex worker. However, I have gotten feedback from Caucasians that my work does not represent their experiences. At one extreme, I still meet Caucasian male tourists who feel that every Thai person they meet is in love with him or soon will be. When I gave a paper on Thai middle class gay desires for Asian partners in Hong Kong, a local researcher responded that there, everyone wanted white partners. Another researcher from Jakarta basically said the same thing. But that is part of my argument, that something unique is happening in Bangkok and that it is related to local histories of involvement with the sex industry, the politics of interracial relationships, and the way that Bangkok has been transformed and is transforming the imaginary space of "gay Asia."

Space is very important to my work. Gay Caucasians rarely leave the Silom area. But the tremendous growth in Bangkok's gay scene has occurred elsewhere, in places like Ortorkor, Ratchada, and Lamsalee. Throughout my primary fieldwork, there were over thirty gay saunas in Bangkok. However, very few of these exist on foreigner maps, and even fewer on those catering to Westerners. Indeed, Caucasians are often advised to avoid the local Thai and Thai-Asian scenes, where they will likely be ignored. This, however, works differently in various spaces. I have, for example, seen a dynamic of the

ocean parting when a Caucasian walks down the halls of a local sauna, where Thais make

a visible effort to distance themselves and then readjust in the wake. And yet, there will

often be a curious soul who courageously follows, gently taps the hand, and slides into an

open room. In other Asian spaces, I'm more likely to hear Chinese and Vietnamese than

Thai. I also found myself speaking, quite frequently, in Thai with Japanese people who

did not feel comfortable using English. One of my gay Japanese neighbors and another

Japanese man who dated one of my gay Thai neighbors would always stay on the Thai

side when we were in mixed language groups. I was envious of one of my Korean friends

who spoke Korean, Japanese, Mandarin, Thai, and English. It seemed like he could speak

to everyone we met.

Language was a central issue to socializing with Thais and the main reason I

changed my research question. Initially, when I spoke English with Thais and other

foreigners in tourist zones, nothing challenged the idea that Caucasian men were

idealized partners. In fact, what was observable confirmed this idea (though as the global

financial crisis of 2008 had spread beyond the USA, shifts were appearing). Additionally,

as I became fluent, I was also judged differently. At a large dinner of queer academics

and activists in 2009, one of the most vocal made a comment that I'm always writing

everything down. A practice that I had adopted as a language learner, taking down

vocabulary but also field jottings, had become like spying. I gave up my note cards,

though by then, it became easy enough to make quick notes in a Blackberry or iPhone.

But what I want to emphasize is that it was only when I started speaking to Thais in Thai,

both in and out of contact zones, that other modes of desire became apparent. While I do

not hide the extent of sex work that does go on, I clearly show that sex workers constitute

a small minority of individuals in Thailand and the profession remains highly

stigmatized. This was especially true among Thais who disidentified with sex tourism

and the stereotype of Thailand as a brothel to the world.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"Hello! Welcome! Please welcome! Welcome to Paradise! Mister! Mister! You can sit here and relax." Three *kathoey* (transgender women) called out to me in unison. As I was walking past, I could read the sign over the bar, it was indeed named Paradise. I thought it fitting and continued to walk when one of the women grabbed my arm and dragged me into the bar, which was easy enough as it had no walls. "My new boyfriend" she giggled as she presented me to the other staff. "Please sit down. You want drink?" A laminated menu, printed in color but bleeding from the humidity, was immediately placed in front of me. "I will have the large Chang." "OK. One moment please." While Ek was going behind the bar to get my beer, Pancake and Hnung sat next to and across from me at a small table with a bench on either side. They started a barrage of questions: "What your name? Where you come from? Where you stay? You like Thailand? You like me? You like boy [her hand making a sweeping gesture to the bar]?" As I was the only customer in the bar, which had five staff, including two men who were initially behind the counter, I was immediately surrounded. Every time a foreigner walked near the bar, the three women would erupt into "Hello! Welcome! Please welcome!" Young male staff from the neighboring bars would come over and visit. Besides me, there seemed to be only two other customers in the area, which was like a food court of seven open air gay bars blending into each other. After finishing my beer, I walked about twenty steps over to the Cupid and introduced myself to the two foreigners there, a Dutch man named Fritz and an Australian named Ben. Both were expats living in Chiang Mai. Fritz operated tours for primarily Dutch and German groups while Ben published a series of gay maps

for holiday destinations. Ben, who appeared to be in his late fifties was dating Mint, a twenty-one year old bartender at Cupid, so this was his regular spot. As I was interested in comparing gay male and transgender women's experiences with foreigners, I thought Paradise would be a good place to start.

In this chapter I describe my entry into the study of gender and sexuality in Thailand. I note the shift in my perspective based on switching languages from English to Thai and how that opened up new avenues of inquiry. In particular, I also share some of my initial assumptions about Thailand and interracial desire and how those changed after shifting languages and interacting with Thais whose work is not focusing on serving tourists. I also contrast interracial relationships in Thailand with those in the US and Korea. I introduce the ideas of friction and interracial optics, or the ways in which interracial relationships with Caucasians are highlighted and can lead to local cultural change. Finally, I address some of the ethics of this research and why gay men make a good case study to explore these issues.

Entering the Field

I was that guy, the anthropology graduate student trying to prove himself by living on a 200 Baht ($6) a day budget for rent, food, and other necessities (not including tuition and health insurance). One place I skimped was on transportation. I declined renting a motorcycle and opted for a bicycle instead. I had arrived a week before classes, and found a guesthouse room on Loi Kroh Road Soi 1 with a fan for 3000 THB ($90) per month through a Thai friend. One of the sons who ran the guesthouse had studied engineering at Payap University, a private Christian university that charged tuition on a

decreasing scale by year. The first year was the most expensive, and each subsequent year cheaper, though most students dropped out before graduation. When I asked why he was not working as an engineer, he replied matter-of-factly: In Thailand, "an old woman on the street selling noodles makes more than an engineer." He felt that it was more lucrative and easier for him to run a guesthouse with his brother than to follow his professional training. One day, before classes, we biked together to the university so that I would know the way. He lent me one of their bikes for free and showed me the back route, on small roads that avoided the main highway that he considered too dangerous. Little did I know that he himself had rarely bicycled to school, preferring to drive instead.

Payap was off of Somphot Chiang Mai 700 Pi Road, 7.5 kilometers from where I was staying. My first day of Thai language class, I bicycled forty minutes in monsoon weather. Drenched in rain, run off the road by numerous trucks, covered in mud, and apologetic, I arrived in class and declared: "Dear teacher, I'm sorry, but I need to go to the restroom and clean myself." I stuck my head under the sink to try to get the sand out of my hair. I took off my shirt and pants and put them in the sink, filling it with water, and rinsing them. I hand wrung them, put them back on, and went back to class, late, in soaking wet clothes that clung to my body. This was not a good beginning, I thought.

We were a motley crew of Thai language students: Pei, a Lao American undergrad who needed intermediate language credits to graduate; Denise, a white American anthropology graduate student doing research on tourism in Thailand, a gay Bostonian expat I will refer to as Tommy (more about him later); an evangelical Christian missionary couple from Alabama; a married French expat businessman, who we later came to learn had a Thai male lover and kept the wife abroad; an Israeli woman into new

age spirituality; and a divorced Israeli father, who we later learned was an orthodox Jew who paid for his Thai male lover's sex change so that he would not be living in sin. Language classes are intimate spaces where every personal question becomes a lesson. How old are you? What is your occupation? Are you married? What are your hobbies? Our teacher, it turned out, was also gay.

That first day of class, was one of those days in which everyone is shoring everyone else up and deciding who to sit with at lunch. I immediately had an affinity for Pei and Denise as we were all students from the US. We ate together at the student canteen, where a lunch of three dishes and rice was 20 THB ($0.65). Denise, being Caucasian, was clearly a foreigner. But Pei and I were also obviously not regular university students, because we were not wearing uniforms, mandatory in Thai education through a bachelor's degree. After lunch, during one of our breaks, Tommy started to complain about how difficult Thai was. He had been living in Chiang Mai for over two years and still could not distinguish any tones, which meant that he could not communicate. I asked him what he did and Tommy stated that he owned a bar near the Night Bazaar. "What is it called?" I asked. "Paradise" Tommy replied. I realized that I had a connection with Tommy. I had already gone to the bar that he owned and he probably was gay.

My first summer in Chiang Mai in 2004, I spent a part of almost every night at Paradise. Tommy made a clear distinction between the "money boy bars" and the "gay bars." He owned one of the latter, a legitimate business. The staff at the gay bars were not allowed to "trick," sell sexual services to customers. However, many of them had patron boyfriends, sometimes multiple patron boyfriends, who helped provide support. Tommy

paid his staff 100 Baht per night of work ($3) with fines for arriving late. The gay expats in the area generally made the same distinction between money boys (most of whom were not gay, nor Thai) and gay boys, with whom they could have relationships. The most common issue among expats, gay or straight, was ensuring that their romantic relationships with Thais were authentic, motivated by physical attraction and emotional intimacy rather than money. More on this later.

This was not always the case however. One of my neighbors, Dean, an Australian expat living on a government pension, thought of his relationships with Thai women as a kind of mutually beneficial charity work. "I can't sleep alone. I don't need sex every day, but I can't sleep alone. So I pay for a girl, you know, help her out. She needs the money." Dean was a veteran of Loi Kroh Road, he knew the system and in his words, how to "beat it." "What you do is wait until the bars close, then pick a girl when she is leaving the bar. No bar fine. And if she didn't have a customer, she will be desperate. So I will ask if she will take 100 Baht [$3] to spend the night with me. Sometimes if they are in a group leaving together, I'll take two or three home. They need the money and I can't sleep alone." Dean also always cautioned me: "Don't go for the pretty ones. The pretty ones most likely have a snake in their panties. Half of the girls on Loi Kroh are not girls. So you gotta be careful. The ones who are not so pretty, they are more likely to be real. Like that pretty girl who walks down the street and accidentally pulls her shirt in a way to show you her gorgeous breasts. I've been with her, and she is not a girl." It seemed as if every time I saw Dean he warned me about "the thieving ladyboys on Loi Kroh." Occasionally he would also remind me to "make sure you get a check-up with Dr. Dick," a medical clinic on Loi Kroh known for its treatment of sexually transmitted infections.

My first trips to Thailand in 1998 and 1999 had been short. First, a trip with Arun, a Thai activist who had been instrumental in organizing the first sex worker union in San Francisco in the 1990s and was a colleague of mine working with Vietnamese, Korean, and Thai massage parlor workers. She took me to the location of the brothel where she lost her virginity (three times) at the age of 14 to an American GI. We visited her home village, where she pointed to all the homes that had cement walls and glass windows, noting who the daughter married and where she emigrated. According to Arun, only those families with daughters who engaged in sex work and were lucky enough to marry a foreigner sent home enough remittances to rebuild modern houses. We visited many sex worker and feminist NGOs and sex venues, both gay and straight, throughout Bangkok. As a sex worker activist, she was proud to show me how open Thai society was compared to the US. Before leaving the US, we had collected computers, unused anti-retroviral prescriptions, syringes and other medical supplies, and money from the Bay Area Thai community and local HIV organizations. We went to an area of the North where it was estimated that 25% of the population was HIV infected. There we gave all the materials to a local V-shaped hospital that had two wards: one for HIV and one for dengue fever and other tropical diseases. All the cash we took was given to the caretakers of AIDS orphans. Once we arrived in the village, a steady stream of them came to visit us. Each was given an envelope of cash and a toy. We also visited families with parents too ill to visit us. I wrote about one such family for "Lek's Story" (Käng 2009).

The following year, 1999, I was part of a San Francisco sponsored delegation to the 5th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. As San Francisco is one of Kuala Lumpur's sister cities and highly committed

to stopping the AIDS epidemic, the city sent a ten person delegation of local activists. As a Co-Chair of the HIV Prevention Planning Council for the city, I was chosen as one of the delegates. Most of us were gay men, and most of us travelled north to Bangkok, as the following week was its first ever gay pride parade. Again, my primary encounters were with sex workers and the gay tourist scene, all in English. There were, however, by then, some differentiations in the tourist scene between Asian and Caucasian visitors, such as the split between patrons of DJ Station and Freeman (now closed), which attracted more Asians, especially Chinese Singaporeans. Thus, my initial introduction to Thailand was through sex work, tourism, and HIV. At this point, nothing contrasted the image that Thailand was a dream destination for sex tourists, and especially, Caucasian men.

Money Matters and Bar Boys

Heading east on Loi Kroh Road, just before reaching Chang Klan Road, one can turn left onto Thapae Road Soi 1. Behind the Night Bazaar to the left was a *trok*, an alley too small for vehicular traffic. This secluded, semi-private but open space, is where half-a-dozen host or "money boy" bars were located, meaning the place where one could go to have a drink, mingle with a number of young men, and pick one to take home or to a hotel, paying a set fee to the bar to release the worker and then negotiating one with the young man for his services. Local gay *farang* (Caucasians) referred to it as the "Snake Pit," "Sleaze Alley," or "Gutter Alley." Though I wandered in and out of this alley often, I never spent much time there. I did not have any personal connections to the staff there and the prices for drinks were higher than at the gay bars nearby. This area from 1997 to 2002 was the basis for Thomas Sulich's 2009 ethnography, *Love in the Time of Money:*

Intimate and Economic Affiliations between Men in Chiangmai, Thailand. Sulich (2009) notes that the bars had been closed in the 2002 Thaksin "social order" campaign, but they had reopened by the time I arrived in 2004. The bars, however, did not fare well as the local economy developed and the gay scene, primarily oriented to middle class Thais rather than foreigners, took off. Indeed the Thai workers in these bars had long left, being staffed by Shan, other Burmese, and Thai "hill tribe" men (see also Ferguson 2014). For a number of reasons, these ethnic "others" often spoke English better than ethnic Thais, so their interface with Westerners was often more smooth. The last bar in this alley closed in January 2013. The area has been gentrifying in relation to more upscale tourism with a sanitized experience. At the same time, foreign tourism is no longer central to the survival of gay venues, which have sprung up in Chang Phuak, Nimmanhaemin, and other areas of Chiang Mai. One of the most gay popular venues in Chang Phuak is run by a Chinese Singaporean and Thai couple I met that summer through Bee, one of my first Thai friends.

About 100 meters further down Thapae Road Soi 1 on the right, one reaches the back of the Peak Climbing Wall, the largest in Southeast Asia, which is located in Chiang Mai's famous Night Market area. The market sells silver jewelry, watches, clothing, Burmese-style Buddha statues (as it is sacrilegious and illegal to sell authentic Thai statues), teak wood carvings, hill tribe paraphernalia, and other goods aimed specifically at tourists. Just in front of the Peak climbing wall is the Thai Elephant Conservation Center, a small shop that sells paper made from 100% elephant dung to support elephant welfare. Directly in front of this center is a small stage that nightly hosts classical Thai dance and *kathoey* or "ladyboy" lip-synch performances. On both sides of the Peak

climbing wall, there were a number of bars. There were six gay bars and three "girlie bars." The gay bars, mostly open air and clustered together, with names like Chez Nous, Cupid, Friendship, MTVee, and Paradise. Almost all of them were owned by expats and geared towards tourists. Only one, M2M, was enclosed with air conditioning, the only one in which I ever saw Thai customers. The area was referred to as "The Peak."

Tommy, the owner of Paradise Bar, claimed that it was the first of the gay bars that opened at the Peak. A neighboring bar owner described the area.

> "The Peak" bars are not like the "Snake Pit." These are regular gay bars where Thais and *farangs* of all ages mix freely and have fun. Although there are always a few money boys, freelancers, around and some bar staff are more commercial [available for sexual services] than others, it's a good place to meet gay Thai guys who aren't prostitutes. Although, in Thailand, particularly in tourist areas, that is possibly a relative concept. If you want that, it's more expensive at a go-go bar or karaoke, but you have recourse if something goes wrong. And you know they are over 18. Probably 90% of the guys you will meet in Chiang Mai's host bars come from the Shan State, as well as guys from other hill tribe minorities, so they don't always have ID.

Paradise is located just to the right of the Peak climbing wall and is the largest of the gay bars. Half of the bar is shielded by a roof. Under the roof is the bar itself with a couple shelves of liquor, a small glass fronted refrigerator, and an ice chest. There are two televisions in cages hanging from the roof. A stereo system sits on the bar. The largest

proportion of this covered space is taken up by a billiard table. Two picnic style tables with benches and about 6 stools around the bar provide seating protected from the rain. Several other picnic tables and small round tables with chairs are exposed. When the bar closes, it is locked up by pulling metal gates down in front the the bar itself, protecting the refrigerator, stereo, and alcohol.

The Peak Climbing Wall burned down in 2008 and the area was closed for redevelopment in November 2009. If this microcosm of Chiang Mai was your only lens onto gay life there, which it was for most gay tourists to the area, you would think that gay life in the city was dominated by 50-plus year old European and Australian white men being served drinks by 25-and under Thai men and *kathoey*. They often left together at the end of the night. According to Tommy, the owners of the bars at the Peak had a policy not to hire money boys. They talked about the other cluster of nearby bars in the *trok* as "The Snake Pit" and wanted to differentiate themselves as reputable gay "non-commercial" establishments. At its height this small area had nearly twenty gay bars.

I spent most of my evenings at Paradise bar, which was about a ten minute walk from where I lived. If you did not own a motorcycle, 10-40 Thai Baht ($0.30 to $1.20) could get you pretty much anywhere within the Outer Ring Road in a *songthaew* (*song* means "two," *thaew* means "line or row," a modified pick-up truck with two rows of seats in the back, usually semi-enclosed in a steel hood). In Chiang Mai, local *songthaew* are red. A short trip on a fixed route cost 10 Baht in 2004 (the fare doubled by 2010 after increases in oil prices). Longer distances and deviation from fixed routes increase the fare, as did asking the price in English.

I had already "discovered" Paradise before I met its owner in my language class. One of the reasons that it stood out for me was that three of the five staff were transgender women. No other bar in the area had any transgender staff. Indeed, Tommy complained to me that his Thai manager, an ex-boyfriend, was hiring too many transgender women. For Tommy, this made his bar seem more like a heterosexual or sex worker bar, when he was trying to attract gay clientele who would prefer attractive "boy" staff. At the same time, these employees were part of his new Thai family. Tommy lived in a gated suburban development where all the houses were of five models. He lived with his mother, a frail woman. I would specifically cook steak, imported frozen peas, and mashed potatoes with lots of butter for her as those where the American foods she missed the most. She consistently complained that Thai food cooked by the maid or Tommy's employees did not agree with her. Tommy's house was a queer place indeed. Besides his mother, who adamantly defended her gay son against any shame from other Westerners, and the maid, he lived with his current Thai boyfriend Kung, his Thai ex-boyfriend Pop (who managed the bar), and numerous gay and transgender staff from his bar who needed a place to stay. The house was also a hub of activity for the staff of other bars at the Peak.

My identity was heavily allied to Tommy because I was regularly coming to the Peak bars with him. This was not all positive. Tommy was a brash, balding, Bostonian whose large body made him walk with a bit of a wobble. Many of the other bar owners felt he was loud, unduly rude, and a poor businessman. One told me that he expected Paradise to fail, like Tommy's last venture, an internet cafe. I was initially struck by how little material was necessary to construct a bar. Paradise was the largest bar in the area and distinguished itself by having a pool table. This brought in customers, gay and

straight, who wanted to prove their masculinity. They played against each other or the

transgender staff. But the bar itself consisted of five bottles of international branded

liquor (vodka, gin, whiskey, rum, tequila), several mixers, and an ice chest with Chang,

Singha, and Heineken beer. I often observed many of the staff from neighboring bars,

coming over to borrow beer as they had run out for the night. Bottles would be returned

the next day.

Paradise was managed by Tommy's ex-boyfriend, Pop, a diminutive Thai who

was less than half his age, less than a quarter of his weight, and just as bubbly. The

friendliness of staff was important as the bar made most of its money by getting *farang*

guests to buy drinks for their staff as there were typically more staff than customers.

When a guest came to the bar and ordered a drink, he would be asked if he wanted to buy

a drink for one or more of the staff who would keep him company. The transgender staff

would also use the pool table to get clients to buy more drinks. They would challenge

clients to a game of pool for drinks. Unfortunately for the male clients trying to prove

their prowess, the transgender staff have had hours of experience playing pool while

working at the bar every day, so I never saw them lose. The bar also made a very small

premium on food. The bar charged 25 THB ($0.75) for food that cost 20 THB (about a

$0.15 premium) from a *kathoey* food stall in the area.

Tommy, though concerned about his reputation for having too many transgender

staff, also felt safe in having them. Bars in the Peak area often closed early, if all the

employees had found foreign men who would pay them for sex or take them on a date.

This was not likely at Paradise, since clientele were generally not interested in *kathoey*

partners. Pancake already had a Thai boyfriend who would drop her off and pick her up

from work every night. Ek had a German boyfriend who visited once a year and she professed her loyalty to him. I spent a lot of my free time with Tommy, his mother, Kung, Pop, and other bar staff both at his house, Paradise, and doing everyday errands. Tommy eventually dropped out of Thai classes. But we maintained an ongoing relationship. I would see him whenever I visited Chiang Mai or he visited Bangkok. We would also go on trips to the beach together in Pattaya.

Shift in Language, Shift in Perception: Reframing the Question

Learning the Thai language shifted my perceptions about the interactions I was participating in and observing. It also shifted how I was being perceived by others. I went to Paradise almost every night to do my Thai homework. The staff would giggle as I followed the patterns of Thai letters they had studied years before. I would also practice chatting with the staff in Thai. So my relationships with the staff evolved. One day, they explained to me how we would drink on a budget. They asked me to bring a flask of Thai whisky, a cheap local brand the bar did not carry. Once a customer had requested a drink like a rum and Coke, the leftover mixer was available for staff. So we would drink together by combining the alcohol I brought with leftover mixers. I also became a draw for the bar. As a person who spoke English fluently, and a foreigner from a developed country: meaning that I was not going to ask for money, expats and tourists (from countries like Australia, Germany, Israel, South Africa, and Japan) would come to talk to me, often describing their encounters with Thai men whose motives they questioned as financial rather than genuine and asking for advice.

As my Thai improved, I also began to realize that without Thai language skills, Tommy missed simple details. For example, prices are sometimes different when written in Thai numerals, a simple way to have a different price for foreigners without offending them. When bargaining in the market, I witnessed both his boyfriend Kung and his ex-boyfriend Pop bargaining for him, and settling on prices that were higher than they would pay themselves. When I asked about this, Kung stated that he was not getting Tommy the best price but a "fair" one. According to Kung, everyone should not pay the same price, the price should reflect one's wealth. Since Tommy was relatively wealthy as a foreign expat, he should pay more. Pop also settled on higher prices than he would pay himself. When I asked him about it, Pop noted that he did not have a stable future like Tommy, who was receiving social security from the US. Getting a fair price, which was higher than what locals would pay, was also a kind of social insurance for him. Pop counted on being able to be receive a better deal for himself in the future with the same vendor, if he needed it. Pop also always gave money to street beggars. I asked if it was good karma for him. Pop had a much more practical answer. "One day, I might be the beggar. And if I am, I hope there will be people who give me money." Sometimes, Pop and Kung would jointly work out what a fair price to pay was. They both agreed that Thai merchants should be fairly compensated and that they wanted to maintain good social relationships with other people in their community. Tommy, however, always felt he was getting the best price, because it was negotiated for him by locals.

After about a month of interacting primarily with expats and Thai service workers in Loi Kroh and the Peak bar scene, I started expanding my Thai speaking networks. Bee was one of the first middle class Thai gay men I befriended. I met him at the largest

bookstore in the downtown area, when we were both reaching for the same book *Thai for Gay Tourists: A Language Guide to the Gay Culture of Thailand* (Saksit Pakdeesiam 2001). We started chatting. I wanted the book because I needed to learn gay Thai slang. Bee wanted the book because he wanted to know the English equivalent of phrases he used when chatting with foreigners, "Asians," he emphatically emphasized. After making our purchases, he offered to give me a ride home. I lived about a ten minute walk away, which by Thai middle class standards is unbearably far. I got onto his bike and then realized and stated out loud: "There are no traffic lights." This was a vocabulary word I had just learned so was happy and proud to use it. Bee replied. "There are traffic lights," pointing to the dark black metal boxes, "they are just broken." He dropped me off and we exchanged phone numbers and email addresses. In 2004, I had arrived with my Verizon Motorola flip phone, which I then discovered could not be used in Thailand because US CDMA phones do not use global sim cards. Bee also seemed to change his phone number every month, with every new promotion. This made communication and coordination difficult. Bee did not have a computer at home. So we often emailed each other while I was at school and he was at work.

Bee was a teacher at a prestigious private school and tutored in the evenings to make extra money. One day, Bee was supposed to pick me up by the Thapae Gate to go to dinner. Unable to communicate to me that he had to work late, he sent his friend to pick me up and keep me company until he arrived. Bee's friend arrived on a motorcycle, and called out "Tress! Tress!" I realized that he was referring to me and walked over. He explained that Bee would be late and had sent him to bring me to dinner. I got on his motorcycle and we drove off. He immediately rattled off a slew of questions. "Bee tells

me that you are Korean, is that true? I heard that it is not possible to be gay in Korea, is that true? Who is your favorite soap opera star?" I replied that it is difficult to talk on the motorbike and that we could talk when we arrived at our destination. We went to a restaurant and a dozen Thai men and women slowly trickled in, one of the men and one of the women came with a Chinese Singaporean boyfriend. After ordering, people were talking in a mix of Thai and English about a Korean singer named Rain, his acting in the Korean drama *Full House*, how that compared to the Korean series *Winter Sonata*. They all wanted to know what my opinion was as the Korean. I shamefully stated that I was from America and did not follow Korean dramas. This was clearly disappointing for many of them, but understandable. Later on the way home, we made a stop a Bee's apartment, which was on the route. The first thing Bee showed me was his coveted collection of Korean soap operas and music. They sat on the shelf incorporated into his headboard. He had a modest studio with no sink, only a squat toilet and a couple water hoses. His kichen corner consisted of a small refrigerator and a small microwave oven. "This is what I eat everyday for dinner." He pulled out a small frozen meal of basil chicken and rice priced at 20 Baht ($0.70) from 7-11. "Oh," I noted, "that's the same price as street food. Why don't you eat on the street?" "I'm lazy," he replied, "this is more convenient." He then showed me an advertisement for the computer he planned to buy. Once he had a computer he could stop buying international phone cards. He told me about the Singaporeans, Koreans, and Taiwanese he had dated. He was currently dating a Korean. They each called the other once a week. Bee showed me a bright orange phone card with a black map of Korea on it. "This is the current promotion. It is 3 Baht per minute but only 1 Baht at night and on weekends. But I won't need it so much soon,

because I'm buying a computer." He showed me an advertisement for a desktop. "When I get this, we can chat online."

Bee introduced me to his network of friends and I occasionally went to see him at work. He was a second grade teacher at the most elite private school in Chiang Mai. It was an all boy's school, though he would point out the sissies to me when they were engaged in feminine activities like cheerleading. "Look," he would point, "they are so cute." I asked, "What percent of your students do you think are gay?" He replied: "I think that 10 percent will be *kathoey*. I don't know how many will be gay. They don't show me [display feminine bodily comportment]." He introduced me to one of the other teachers who was *kathoey* but had to dress as a man at school. She wore a bob down to the chin and bright red nail polish. I was surprised she was allowed to dress in such a feminine manner.

Bee and his friends took me to "mixed" gay venues (meaning primarily heterosexual), where middle class Thai gay men, *kathoey*, and *tom* went. These were very different than the venues that Pop and other staff from Paradise had taken me to. Pop and the other Paradise staff often went to Bubbles, a foreigner disco a few minutes walk from Paradise. They all got in for free. Pop proudly pointed out a "nasty *farang*" he was having thrown out of the club. I asked what the matter was and Pop stated that he was giving unseemly looks to our group of gay men and transgender women dancing together. Pop was friends with the bouncer, so had the tourist thrown out for being "disrespectful to Thais." Pop also took me to other clubs like BKK, because he knew the owners, who were Caucasian friends that would often comp or discount our bottle service.

Bee, on the other hand, specifically avoided any venues where Caucasians gathered. His favorite bars and clubs, at that time, were in the Nimmanhaemin area, where we would encounter Chinese Singaporean, Japanese, and Koreans, but rarely any *farang*. There was always an unofficial corner where the gay, *tom*, *kathoey*, and women who preferred the company of queers, sometimes with boyfriends alongside, congregated. Bee was also clear about his identity and his desires. He was gay but *maen* (masculine). He was professional. This meant that he had no interest in and actively disassociated with Caucasian men. One night when he was driving me home on the back of his motorcycle, we passed Paradise. I asked him, "how come you never come to this area?" He replied: "I can not. It is a gay area. What if one of my coworkers sees me there?" What initially puzzled me about his reply was that his coworkers already knew that he was gay (and one of them was *kathoey*), and they often went out to dinner and bars together. When I asked him later why he did not want a Caucasian boyfriend, he replied that he already had a job, and thus he did not need a Caucasian partner. I thus came to interpret these statements as meaning that he considered the area around Paradise as a sex worker area, and that being seen there would potentially mark Bee as a money boy, or at least a Thai relying on the financial generosity of foreign, and specifically Caucasian, men. The high degree of Thai homosociality masks homosexuality, but this interpretive frame is disrupted by racial difference, which makes the pairing stand out. The sexualization of Thais by Caucasian foreigners also had the consequence of sexualizing Caucasian men. These kinds of transnational encounters made me re-evaluate my research and turn it around.

Initially, I was interested in Caucasian men's "deviant" desires for Asian partners within the context of Western gay cultures that emasculated and devalued Asian bodies. My research was about understanding the motivations Caucasian men had for preferring Asian partners. In part, I was interested in rescuing "rice queens" from gay shame for their strange, abhorrent desires. But, as my Thai proficiency grew, what interested me most in these interactions, shifted. I became more interested in what Thais were saying about foreigners, and specifically about other Asians. I had initially started with the question of why Caucasians were interested in Asians, and specifically, why some white men fetishized Asian men to the point of moving to Thailand. People like Tommy were a case in point. I had hypothesized that white men were able to re-instantiate heteronormative masculinity by pairing with feminized Asian partners as a means to overcome the wounds of their own social diminishment for being gay. But this idea started to fade once I realized that many of the rice queens in Thailand were bottoms, men who were the passive partners in anal sex, who often had little interest or investment in proving their masculinity. Furthermore, as I learned the Thai language, I realized that Thais were not thinking the same way as I, a Korean American, expected. Pop, for instance, longed not for Tommy, but a prior Japanese boyfriend who he continued to idealize as the love of his life even after the boyfriend sent a letter to Pop's parents stating that he was a bad person, who traded his body for money. As my language skills improved, and I encountered more middle class Thais rather than service workers, I kept meeting Thais who specifically told me that they were not interested in Caucasian partners, but were seeking other Asian partners. Thus, I reformulated my question from why Caucasians desire Thais to why Thais desire other Asians.

Transpacific Contrasts

Coming from the USA and as an Asian American, I initially started with the question of why Caucasian men had become undesirable partners to so many of the Thais I encountered. The politics of interracial relationships in the USA were largely fought in the 1990s. Among some Asian Americans, particularly men, there was concern about the high out-marriage of Asian American women to white men. The reverse did not occur, pointing to differentially valued racialized masculinities in the USA summarized in David Eng's (2001) term "racial castration." Indeed, Asian Americans protested Conde Nast offices in April 2004 after Details magazine printed a feature called "Gay or Asian," suggesting that all Asian men were effeminate and thus appeared to be gay.

Concomitantly, within gay communities in the USA with large populations of Asians, two competing camps had emerged, glossed by the terms "potato queen" (Asian desire for white men, the white counterpart being called a "rice queen") and "sticky rice" (Asian-Asian desire), the later often invoking a stance of political resistance to white beauty hegemony. The desire for white men and the open marginalization of men of color in gay communities was dubbed "sexual racism."[1] This was particularly pernicious online dating and sex sites, where gay white men felt free to explicitly state "no blacks, no Asians" in their profiles. In 2011, when the then popular website douchebagsofgrindr launched, to expose and satirize gay men's grindr (a smartphone app) profiles, the three most frequent tag categories were arrogant, racism, and femmephobia (e.g. "no femmes," "straight acting," "masculine only"). The latter two often were joint tags for common statements such as "No fats, no femmes, no Asians." As douchebagsofgrindr was based

in Australia, the majority of racial tags specifically targeted Asian men with comments

such as:

"I block more Asians than the great wall of China!!!"

"I'm scared about getting old and having to date a young Asian ladyboy."

"Expert on picking Asian torso pics from afar."

The first statement refers to an app feature that allows users to block someone

from being able to contact them. The second suggests that as a white gay man ages, his

desirability declines to the point that he will have to resort to dating the most abject

person in terms of gay male desirability, the transgender Asian.[2] The last statement refers

to the "headless torso" tactic, the online practice of Asian men presenting their muscular

torsos (a prized gay attribute) instead of showing their faces (which identifies their race)

in order to get a foot in the door when contacting someone else.[3] This statement is thus

specifically warning Asian men not to contact the user because he can read Asian racial

attributes in pictures of the chest. These attitudes and practices continue to be prevalent,

particularly in English speaking countries.

Given this hostile environment for Asian men, both gay and straight, in the West,

I was initially confused in Thailand. The popular literature on Thailand was also

overwhelmingly focused on the idea that Thai men desired Caucasian partners. The

ultimate testimony to this was the Rice Queen Dairies (Gawthrop 2005), documenting the

travel adventures of a gay white Canadian in Thailand and Vietnam. Yet, when conducting prelimary fieldwork in 2004, I came across two major groups of Thai gay men: 1) those who wanted a foreign boyfriend from anywhere, but most likely a Caucasian and 2) those who stated they would not date Caucasian and preferred Asian partners. This was similar to the dynamics occurring in the USA, but was refracted in Thailand primarily through differences in class and association with sex work. Additionally, one striking difference I observed among Thai men, was that they often professed an aversion to each other as well as Caucasian men, citing instead a singular preference for "Asians," from a limited number of countries, namely Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan. This line of inquiry has since evolved to examine newly evolving discourses about "Asians" as a racial category and "white people" as a reference to Asians with light skin. Thus, I examine how Asians were whitened and, though not the pinnacle of economic development nor global gay culture, made more desirable than Caucasians in the Thai context.

This dissertation focuses on how middle class Thai gay men express a preference for what I refer to as "white Asian" partners. White Asians are from countries such as Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. The racialization of these individuals invokes skin color, economic development, and cultural proximity. This positive exception is facilitated by media flows, such as the Korean Wave, which shape aesthetic preferences. Simultaneously, in the context of pervasive sex tourism, Thais with Caucasian partners are often interpellated and stigmatized as sex workers. Avoiding Caucasian partners thus becomes a mark of class distinction for middle class professionals who do not need the financial resources associated with these interracial relationships. If prior accounts of

Thai gay desire for Caucasian partners is true, these desires for white Asians represent a

shift that I argue is based on the dual but uneven development of Thailand and East Asia

and a newly developing regional identity of being Asian. Indeed, I argue that the

dynamics of middle class gay communities (which heightens cross-border contacts)

makes the identity of "gay Asian" more readily detectable and visible than within the

wider population. The gay male community thus provides a case study of how political

economic changes figure in transnational relationship patterns.

Bangkok has become the central hub of gay Asia and provides the grounds where

the friction (following Tsing 2005) of variously positioned international actors come to

the fore. In particular, visibly interracial relationships are coded as unseemly among

Thais who are striving to demonstrate middle class cosmopolitan citizenship. I describe a

popular cultural biopolitics of contemporary racialization processes occurring in

Thailand, which both situates the nation within a larger East Asian sphere and develops a

positive exception for white Asian partners. Countering essentialized notions of an Asian

race as already given, I show how Asianness is being produced, contested, and used

within the Thai context. Whiteness is both a civilizational and personal achievement that

requires proper modes of citizenship and self care. Becoming "white" requires more than

physically lightening one's skin color. Whiteness adheres to the cultural, social, and

economic attributes of elite representations. It can also be partially conferred by marrying

up or belonging to the right peer group. In this sense, whiteness is about individual and

national development. This process of racialization and desire is intimately tied to

political, economic, and cultural regionalist movements in East and Southeast Asia.

This is the first study to consider how contemporary racializations of whiteness operate within a trans-Asian context and how transnational relationships intersect with local perceptions of development, morality, and face in Thailand. Bringing together the literatures on cosmopolitan whiteness, cross-border relationships, and sex tourism, I show that interracial relationships do not have to point to a hegemonic desire for Caucasian partners. Thus, the manuscript also engages the anthropology of gender and sexuality, critical race studies, and Inter-Asian / Asian regionalization studies.

Thai-Korean Coincidences

At the same time, the ties between places like Thailand and Korea with the USA have numerous parallels. For example, both experienced widespread prostitution in the service of the US military, along with other Asian nations such as Japan and the Philippines. This has led to the reading of interracial relationships that often assume sex work, current or prior, by the Asian partner. Indeed, this situation is the shameful secret of half of the Koreans in the USA, who were able to immigrate because defiled Korean women, *yanggongju* (literally "Western princess," a derogatory term for Korean women who served as military prostitutes), married US servicemen and later sponsored their families (Cho 2008). The numbers are not small. During the Korean War, more than a million Korean women labored as sex workers for US military personnel. More than 100,000 Korean women moved to the US with their military husbands, perhaps 90 percent meeting through initial contact as prostitutes (Cho 2008).

As Cho notes, Korean war brides represent the domestication of geopolitical violence that allowed Koreans to migrate to the USA. This process began during the

Korean War, before the US re-opened immigration to Asian nationalities. These women, former sex workers transformed into legitimate GI brides, helped constitute the Korean American community. However, their status as foremothers has been erased from Korean American nationalist discourse to provide a more positive image to mainstream America (Kim 1987). Indeed, there are intimate Korean-American linkages with sex work, shame, and other aspects of cultural intimacy that are frequently discussed in euphemistic terms, but relegated to a hushed past. "As much as the women who have led the way for their families to come to America have contributed to the discourse of honorary whiteness, they also occupy an unstable position in it. It is the figure of the *yanggongju* that most complicates this fantasy for Korean Americans in that she is heavily invested in the American dream, carrying the weight of a familial longing for America, yet at the same time her 'assimilation' in the United States is contingent on her severing from the past [sexual labor], a past that is always present and threatens to turn the dream into a nightmare" (Cho 2008, 131).

Women's choices in these matters were not the only factor at play. Korean economic development has been closely tied to US militarism, with sexual exploitation of women a key component of national development (Moon, S. 2005). Indeed, the Korean government, mobilizing notions of female sacrifice, fashioned sex work as a form of patriotism. Camp town prostitutes were admonished to be more like Japanese sex workers after their defeat in World War II, who, after providing sexual services, pleaded with American soldiers to help rebuild the country (Moon, K. 1997). At the same time, Korean "comfort women," who had been exploited as sexual slaves by the Japanese military, stigmatized these women for voluntarily entering into military sexual relations

at the same time they could be seen as providing a patriotic service (Moon, K. 1997, Yang 1998). Vestiges of this relationship continue in the USA. I supervised HIV outreach programs to Korean women working in massage parlors in the USA, often the former wives of GIs. One regularly hears conversations among Korean Americans about women who have been, or are suspected to have been, a sex worker with a US service member, which is considered a major blight on her character.

Thai authorities similarly mobilized women's bodies in the service of militarized economic development. While there is a long history of temporary marriages and sex work in Thailand, the World War II Japanese occupation and American War with Vietnam transformed its scale and how it operated in relation to foreigners. At a meeting of governors from all of Thailand in October 1980, Deputy Prime Minister Boonchu Rojanasathien, the first government official credited with promoting economic development in the country, proposed the following solution to the need for national cash flow from abroad:

> I ask of all governors to consider the natural scenery in your provinces, together with some forms of entertainment that some of you might consider disgusting and shameful because they are forms of sexual entertainment that attract tourists. Such forms of entertainment should not be prohibited if only because you are morally fastidious. Yet explicit obscenities that may lead to damaging moral consequences should be avoided, within a reasonable limit. We must do this because we have to consider the jobs that will be created for the people.[4]

While the Korean economy has grown much faster than that of Thailand in subsequent years, moving from a developing to an industrialized country while Thailand remains middle income, the two are both haunted by this relationship to militarized sex work. In particular, women seen in public with foreigners, who are most obviously Caucasian or African American men, are interpellated as current or former sex workers.

The two nations also experienced the IMF crisis of 1997, which led, in part, to an increase in Thai consumption of Korean media, as Korean products became relatively cheap in relation to Western ones. Both countries also expressed growing resentment towards Western markets and their global dominance. This tide of Thai consumption of Korean consumer goods increased again in the global financial crisis of 2008. The Korean Won was devalued by 48% while the Thai Baht remained stable. Among other things, this meant that middle class Thais could go to vacation in Korea relatively cheaply (Thailand and Korea have mutually favorable visa policies, Thais and Koreans can travel for 90 days to the other country, in contrast, Americans are given 30 days entry into Thailand and Thais are required to have visas for US entry).[5] Koreans, on the other hand, cancelled trips to Western countries and instead went to cheaper regional destinations like Thailand. China and Vietnam also continued to grow while the US and Europe generally contracted. This shifted the general flow of tourists to Thailand. One impact of these economic shifts was that during my primary fieldwork period from 2009-2011, gay Bangkok became very Asian. During this period, I would often try to count Thai, Asian, and *farang* attendance at bar venues. While my counting between Thai and Asian is more ambiguous, it was clear that foreign Asians clearly outnumbered *farang* by a large margin.

Intimate Frictions

One of the dangers of cultural anthropology is the promotion of stereotypes of "others." This work, deals in attitudes Thais have of others and how others see Thais, and in particular, how appearances are keyed to socio-economics and national development. In this sense, it also explores how stereotypes change over time based on changing conditions and experience. I frame this work with the concept of "friction" developed by Anna Tsing (2005) to elaborate on the cross-cultural encounters that cataylze cultural processes and culture change. Elaborating on Appadurai's conceptualization of difference and disjuncture, Tsing uses friction as a metaphor to describe how the contemporary world comes into being through conflicts and "awkward" engagements.

Global interconnections and change are partially structured by friction. Tsing's key metaphor for friction is that of travel along a road. "Roads create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in so doing, they limit where we go. The ease of travel they facilitate is also a structure of confinement. Friction inflects historical trajectories, enabling, excluding, and particularizing" (2005:6). Motion itself is "sticky," preferring well-paved paths over untrodden ones. Like Appadurai (1996), Tsing does not see flows as pervasive and free. Rather, movement is slowed and impeded, but, nevertheless, necessary to keep things going. Where Appadurai focuses on the differences that arise from the conflictual layering of different scapes, what he refers to as disjunctures, Tsing sees movement itself as inherently frictive, like tires on the road. Friction thus is not a form of resistance to hegemony but rather part and parcel of the

processes that make both compromise. In making possible certain relations, friction is simultaneously a form of coercion and frustration.

Rather than rely on older notions of culture clash between global and local actors, Tsing shows how various forces such as indigenous communities, brokers, international NGOs, activists, government bodies, transnational corporations, and others come together, compete, and create interdependent and evolving systems around the "natural" environment, its use, and protection in Indonesia. Thus, Tsing focuses on diverse and conflicting social actions that point to the messiness and misunderstandings that occur through transnational connections. She emphasizes that neither global capitalism nor universalizing claims (e.g. human rights) make things the same everywhere. The specificity of local, regional, and global connections means that transcultural encounters do not operate in the same way nor produce similar results everywhere. Differences are thus constantly being co-produced through local-global interactions. That is, globalization does not homogenize, but is contingent upon the unequal and unstable contacts that creatively remake the culture and politics of globalization. Indeed, as Clifford (1997) notes, cultures maintain their identities not through the diffusion of common elements that occurs in cross-cultural contact but in their differentiation from them.

Friction refers to the transcultural relations and synthetic localizations that result when cultures come into contact. I thus apply the notion of friction to various interactions of gender, sexuality, and race in Thailand. Though dealing with different issues, similar contests occur in conflicts over the use of space and resources, the power of naming, the creation of the margins of civilization, conceptualizations of parochialism and

cosmopolitanism, and rights movements. These practices occur unevenly and shape the

movements and penetration of capital in Kalimantan forests. One clear parrallel is in the

conceptual production of "nature." Whereas Indonesian rainforests can be represented as

uninhabited, wild spaces, similar rhethoric is used to describe ethnic minorities in

Thailand. Yet, more broadly, I am to critique the naturalization of partner preferences.

Intimate desires, while considered innate and natural, are fashioned through political

economies of the erotic. The all too common phrase: "It's just my preference" is

deployed against anyone who is undesirable, whether because they are too dark, too old,

too fat, too poor, or some other criteria. This statement is also deployed regularly in the

Thai context. People talk about their choices as being "preferences" (*sapek*), a simple

matter of choices decided upon by free will and idiosyncratic desires. Yet, I describe how

middle class gay men in Thailand imagine and use transnational relationships to elevate

their socio-economic status and produce class distinctions. I specifically argue that the

aspirations for "white Asian" partners, as opposed to Caucasian ones, is refracted through

local moral logics that shape partnership desires and their social evaluation. Gossip is a

major form of discipline that shapes what is appropriate sexuality. Shifts in partner choice

reveal how new regional alignments in Asia figure within Thailand. Thus, I contribute to

our current understanding of sexuality and globalization by focusing on the effects of

Asian development and regionalism, in which an Asian economic and political bloc is

emerging to counter the European Union and NAFTA. This regional integration,

however, also affects everyday life and popular culture (Iwabuchi 2002, Chua 2004).

This affects how Asians think about themselves as a common group, producing new

notions of Asian racialization and, in Thailand, a desire to embody and partner with white Asians.

In *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok: Tomboys, Tycoons, and Avon Ladies in the Global City*, Ara Wilson elaborates a concept of intimate economies, or "the complex interplay between these intimate social dimensions [social identities, relationships, orientations, and practices related to private lives] and plural economic systems in a context shaped by transnational capitalism" (2004, 11). Personal identity and private practices are deeply imbricated by market forces and vice versa. For Wilson, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, have been and continue to be centrally involved in the operations of global economic transformations in Thai subjectivities. Capitalist markets by necessity require a proliferation of identities as consumer styles. In the case of Bangkok, this includes the *tom*, or butch lesbian, whose consumptive practices allow her to structure new identifications around the presentation of female masculinity in public space. The intimacies of capitalism illuminates the power of and limits on the global economy's ability to recast social worlds and for individuals to remake their worlds.

Single Thais are preoccupied with finding and maintaining romantik relationships. As male same-sex relationships typically do not involve child-rearing, the implication is that they are based solely on physical and emotional attraction freed from family intervention. Yet, these partnerships remain acutely tied to kinship and status concerns. Affectional practices are situated within shifting geopolitical alignments, economic development, national and foreign media, and travel and migration patterns; they are also negotiated through local conceptualizations of "face" and family reputation.

The desirability of particular kinds of partners is constructed through established social categories and hierarchies. I examine how class-mediated interactions with foreigners (especially "inter-Asian," where the interaction is not with white Westerners but with other Southeast and East Asians) and discourses around relationships with foreigners constrain and enable new sexual subjectivities and social mobilities. Thus I ask: What are the social stakes involved in intimate same-sex relationships? What partners do middle class Thai gay men seek and to what ends?

Partner preferences in Bangkok are a key indicator of class distinctions. Symbolic struggles are one mechanism through which social status position is naturalized within the social hierarchy. Tastes, in the form of aesthetic preferences, embodied postures, and competence in the implicit codes relevant to one's social position and its trajectory, mark class distinction (Bourdieu 1984). The routinization of different practices, mapped onto social hierarchies, reproduces the relative ordering as self-evident. Thus the middle classes are particularly anxious to distinguish themselves from those below. In the Thai context, those "below" are not necessarily of a lower class, but rather those who figuratively earn their income on their backs, namely sex workers.

I use middle class gay men as an extended case that highlights larger social processes that affect Thais of various gender and sexual orientations. Thus, I argue that this is an argument about Thais and Thailand's situation in the world more broadly. Obviously, there are certain particularities to gay male communities, in Thailand and elsewhere. Gay communities, for example, tend to exist in highly urbanized sites and often have far-reaching cosmopolitan links. This, however, does not mean that they are the "same" everywhere. One of my aims is to show how Thai gay men access broader

notions of gayness at the same time they are quite unique, from both Western and East Asian perspectives. Here, the cosmopolitanness of gay communities is important. Middle class gay men are quite mobile and have specialized tourist routes, linking many of the major commercial centers of the world in a network. These are sometimes rigidified into specific "circuits."

This cosmopolitan urbanity can be coded positively. In many parts of the world, gayness is marked by class mobility. At the same time, gayness can be associated with deviance and can be stigmatized independently from homosexuality, for example, as a form of decadence or refusal of familial obligations. Hence, many gay men live a substantial part of their lives shielded from mainstream view in highly socially differentiated venues specifically designed for communal interactions. To a large extent, this has been used by social researchers, and, of course, by the authorities when homosexuality is criminal. Furthermore, the degree to which sexual cultures are important is heightened as gay men have identities that are based on sexual desires. This often gives gay venues an intensified sexual charge. Of course, it would be mistaken to think about gay men uni-dimensionally, as sexuality is but one important aspect of the self. But this type of specialization of gay sociality brings to the fore frictions around social status, interracial relationships, and stigma. My overarching argument is that class and social status concerns shape racialized romantic desires, orienting them towards certain objects and not others. Thus, my focus on gay men in Thailand increasingly orienting eastward holds for Thais in general. In this sense, I examine the self in relation to romantic desires simultaneously with their social evaluation and the marcrosocial economic, geo-political, and cultural realignments occurring in the region.

Seeing Like a Post-Colonial State through Interracial Optics

In two key texts, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (1995) and *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (2002), Ann Laura Stoler extends Foucaldian notions of the history of sexuality from Europe to the European colonial enterprise, primarily the Dutch experience in Indonesia. The European obsession with sex and the racist stereotypes it engendered legitimated European colonialism by emphasizing European civilization and superiority. By incorporating analyses of class and gender hierarchies within European spheres, Stoler shows how white femininity was essential to the constitution of white bourgeois sensibilities, not only in the colonies, but also in Europe. That is, she reverses one of the key analytic frames of history by examining how the colonies transformed Europe rather than vice versa. Race and racialized thinking is not only a European export to the colonies, the colonies are the laboratory through which race is worked out and understood in Europe. Stoler also makes a key intervention by focusing on domestic spaces rather than the institutions of governmentality. White prestige was defined by the moral, cultural, and physical well-being with which bourgeois women were responsible. Intimate domains and their classed bourgeois morality, not the public sphere, were essential to the development of Europeanness and white masculinity. Colonialism not only spreads European middle class sensibilities to the colonies, but also uses the colonies to constitute the white middle class in Europe. Race in the colonies is thus a tool to constitute the bourgeois of Europe by exacerbating the class differentiations within Europe, marginalizing the poor,

criminal, and those with mental illness or other defects of character. Crystalized distinctions between colonizer and colonized helped to harden class distinctions among European whites. Colonialism thus was not only about economic expansion, but also the legitimizing of class, race, gender, and other hierarchies within Europe. A primary contrast in the maintenance of European dominance was in the gendered treatment of interracial relationships. Sexual relations between white women and men of color were generally forbidden, but the reverse of white men having sexual relations with native women was not, though it became increasingly discouraged. The particular vulnerability of European bourgeouis women in the colonies and the sexual threat posed by native men required sanctions that limited the liberties of both groups.

American colonialism in the Philippines also relies on the protection of white womanhood and the cultivation of white masculinity via the domestic sphere. For Rafael (2000), this is couched in terms of "white love," or the paternalistic process of benevolent assimilation in which the US seeks to win the affection of its Filipino "little brown brothers," to be desired as a colonial authority. Like in the work of Stoler (1995, 2002), Mizutani (2011), Chandra (2012), and others, white womanhood was essential to the maintenance of racial, class, caste, and other hierarchies. White women are tasked with upholding middle class white respectability by preventing miscegenation and moral degeneracy. Yet, in Rafael's (2000) readings of correspondences by American women, their perspective on colonialism was more sentimental, their narratives tinged with greater affection and irony than the mastery presented in the narratives of men. In particular, white American women note that natives are essential for survival (contra men's heroic narratives in which native assistance disappears) and incorporate the

routines of native domestic labor in the descriptions of everyday life. White women create nostalgic views for the landscape and the natives that nevertheless highlight the mastery of white women over native men. This is particularly salient in the domestic sphere, where the ability to have servants, almost always men, perform effortlessly in anticipation of their desires attests to their control over them. The women also engage in a reverse mimicry, including the use of parodic pidgin English like native speech. White women thus become a benevolent overseer in which native labor that is automatic, inaudible, and invisible demonstrates white mastery in colonial rule. The fantasy of benevolent assimilation is the exchange of white love for its reciprocation in brown affection.

The colonial enterprise as presented here, nevertheless, is a history of heteronormativity and elite domination. Peletz (2009) illustrates that Stoler pays scant attention to homosexuality and transgenderism both among colonials and natives and between them. Indeed, as previously noted, the regulation of gender forms and sexuality outsides the norms of heterosexual monogamous marriage were also key to colonial justifications for civilizing natives. What is most relevant to the contemporary Thai situation I describe is Peletz's (2009) and Tamara Loos' (2005, 2006, 2009) critique of Stoler's work that privileges the perspectives of European elites, the maintenance of colonial administration, and the lack of attention to native voices and practices. In particular, Loos' (2008) elaboration on actual transnational relationships during the colonial period provides an optic to see how current interracial heterosexual relations, as well as those between gay Thai men and other Asian men, are structured and enumerated.

By examining what counts as "international" and as legitimate "marriage," Loos (2008) argues that most of the partnerships that are occurring are not recognized.

The work of Stoler and others points to the relationships between colonial Europeans and Southeast Asian women, as these were regulated by the state in order to manage white racial distinction and shore up bourgeois morality. "If we momentarily simplify what are in reality ambiguous racial categories, intra-Asian relationships were and are more numerous than more visible white European–Asian unions" (Loos 2008:28). The vast majority of international unions were not between Southeast Asian women and colonial white men, but rather relationships among Southeast Asian women with lower class Chinese and Indian men, who, in some cases, were forced to migrate for labor on plantations or mines, or facilitated to act as local traders. Colonial states encouraged or ignored intra-Asian intimacy as it did not threaten the legitimacy of rule. Relationships between Asians did not blur the line between European ruler and Asian native. That is, the management of marriage and national belonging were unevenly controlled in the service of white dominance. Loos thus argues that the recent attention to intra-Asian marriage migration (now primarily Southeast Asian women marrying East Asian men) should not be seen as a new phenomenon, but rather linked to historical shifts in demography, economy, trade, war, and governance. Critically, the legibility of what is "inter"-marriage has been highly focused on white male actors even when they constitute but a small fraction of the actual practice. What was considered international marriage was the minority case of Europeans men with Asian women. "Ultimately, an individual's race, calibrated by class, gender, and other factors, determined whether one's marriage across borders would attract the gaze of the state" (29) and thus be regulated and

documented. Focusing on colonizers and centers of power ignores native views and the more ubiquitous, if less power-laden practices, of intraregional Asian sexual liaisons. Relationships between various Asians populations are thus rendered relatively invisible in the historical archive.

In the contemporary scene, interracial relationships are not managed by the state but rather are intimacies structured by larger political economic forces and personal choice. However, I contend that the focus on relationships between Southeast Asians and Europeans continues today. The relationships between Caucasians and Thais continue to be highlighted while those between Thais and other Asians are rendered relatively invisible both to Thais as well as to foreigners. I refer to this as interracial optics. This is further exacerbated as most of the Thais and Asians participating in relationships with with each other do not use English as their primary language. Thus, Thai-Caucasian relationships both dominates the representational landscape and popular writing about interracial relationships.

Additionally, there is a queer aspect to interracial optics. Interracial relationships make homosexuality visibile and expose same sex relationships to new scrutiny. As many of my informants noted, racial differences in a relationship can recode homosociality as homosexuality. That is, due to the homosocial organization of Thai society, same sex intimacy in public is not considered inappropriate. What is vulgar is intimate contact between men and women, though this attitude is changing among young couples as they engage in practices like holding hands or stealing kisses. It is common for people of the same sex to touch and hold each other, groom each other, bathe together, or sleep together. These activities are routine in both gender segregated and gender integrated

public spaces. One can see Thai men holding hands (though this is most common for young boys), placing their hands on each others thighs, putting their arms around each other, laying in each others bodies while reclining, or sleeping together in a spooning position. These behaviors would not be viewed as sexual unless one of the individuals involved exhibited *kathoey* tendencies, and the acceptable range of dress and comportment for masculinity is quite broad. However, the introduction of racial difference switches the interpretive frame. Thus, interracial couples engaging in the same behaviors would be construed as in a sexual relationship of some kind. Racial difference makes homosexuality apparent where it otherwise might not be.

Ethics and Ethnographic Entanglements

This topic is particularly fraught for me because of the frictions that create it but also in the ways that it elicits strong emotions and ethical concerns. My interlocuters in mixed racial settings are often quick to deny the possibility that partnership with white men could be stigmatized, often accusing me of not engaging with Caucasian men, which I have throughout my research. In academic settings, I have heard people reduce the issue to the simplistic explanation that Thais are racist and classist. In Thai settings, I provoke embarrassment by bringing up an issue that is perhaps too closely tied to the cultural intimacies of shame that shape how sex work is perceived by middle class Thais and elites. Terms like "white Asians" are also offensive to many Asian American activists and academics. Interracial and transnational relationships and the forces that mold them are controversial and incite passionate responses.

Furthermore, while the cultural relativism of anthropological fieldwork brackets judgment, my focus on middle class perspectives was particularly troubling for me. It is perhaps easier to critique the elite or unequivocally support those at the bottom. Thus, my fieldwork with sex workers and their clients, though often thoroughly infused with extreme power differentials and heart-break, also provided me with the emotional scaffolding to manage those feelings. But the middle class are in a position to both denigrate those below them and perpetuate systems of inequality. My argument should not be read as a story about resistance to white hegemony, that is, Thai stigmatization of Caucasians as an oppositional politics to global political, economic, and cultural dominance in everything from beauty standards to the use of hard power in development aid. There are calls to resist all things Western in both conservative and liberal camps in Thailand. Instead, I emphasize local status concerns that incorporate geopolitical changes, including the rise of East Asia and increasing Asian regionalism and racialization.

I truly desire to be generous with my friends, hosts, informants, and others who have sustained my fieldwork. Where this is most fraught for me is in the tension this causes between my respect for the people who I have lived and worked with and a continuation of capitalist hegemonies in new places and new forms. That is, the desire for "white Asians," the fear of being viewed as a sex worker, outward expressions of class standing, and related behaviors are all complicit in reproducing forms of everyday violence, biopolitics, and governmentality that render sex workers, the poor, the dark-skinned, and others as undesirable, marginal, or excisable subjects. This remains a critical problem in Thailand, where ongoing political unrest is leading to increasingly

undemocratic practices that seek to strip the foundation of one person one vote and

replace it with an oligarchy selected by educated urban professionals, royally aligned

businesspeople, and others who claim to represent true Thai ideals.

The same can also be said of the many gay Asian men who frequent Bangkok.

They often espouse the same kind of ideals around preference for light skin and disregard

for sex workers (though they often use their services) that are mainstay in middle class

Thai discourses. Again, I have a framework to criticize and assimilate something like

"jasmine fever," or Western men's inexplicable love for Thai sex workers compounded

by their heroic desire to rescue them. Yet more subtle forms of routine violence, such as

the unwillingness to engage Thais at all, often left me baffled. Indeed, many of the

Chinese visitors I met in Bangkok specifically told me that they were not interested in

meeting Thai men who were too dark or too poor for their tastes. Rather, they came to

Bangkok to meet Chinese men from other cities in the region. On occasions like popular

gCircuit parties, it was also possible to identify who was going in advance, as member

profiles on fridae.asia are easily linked to the party page by pushing the "I'm Going"

button. Profiles of attendees get an additional "Let's meet up!" button under profile

pictures so that one can easily make advance dates. Using these kinds of features,

regardless of whether there was an event, visitors sometimes arrived in Bangkok with all

their romantic adventures pre-planned. This often involved Asian men meeting other

Asian men, though light-skinned, muscular, Sino-Thais were also popular.

I was very frequently asked by Thais of all gender identities to match make for

them. Most commonly they asked for introductions with Korean, Japanese, and tropical

Chinese partners. My approach was to send details about the Thai person with a photo to

expats and frequent visitors. Occasionally, I did set up dates between them. More typically, the response was that the Thai person was too dark. It did not matter if the person was a highly educated professional or commercially successful. One of the key criteria other Asians used was skin color. Thus, while there was a growing sense of regional and common racial identity as "Asian," that did not translate into an easy solidarity.[6] Rather, preferences for light skin were maintained, and it seems, even enhanced, in a new media and technological environment where Korean and Japanese appearances became idealized and increasingly accessible through various cosmetic treatments and surgeries. Distinction making in this vein became increasingly possible in East/Southeast Asia and in Thailand and reinforced newly circulating beauty ideas based on regionally circulating models.

Middle classness is imbricated within these fields of power and creates new desires, in particular, the need to distinguish newly crafted selves from those below. I neither hide nor dismiss this fact. Yet, in respect for my informants, I also want to keep a certain distance and perspective that suspends judgment. Critical ethnographic work commits a kind of intellectual violence when the researcher's understanding of the world is considered superior to that of local actors such as when our understanding of the situation is portrayed as more complete and educated that theirs. One way I try to limit this is to focus on the experiences and local moral worlds of those around me. One of my guiding questions I use to understand social interactions is "what is at stake?" I acknowledge that this stance partially shifts the focus from one realm to another, from critical analysis to subjective experience, and continues to reinforce the perpetuation of hegemonic forces both in Thailand and throughout the world. I ask the reader not to

simply dismiss local desires for class differentiation as necessarily duped or evil. In bracketing off these kneejerk assessments, I hope to try to understand the experiences and affective worlds of Thai people trying to make a place for themselves locally and in the world from their perspective. The perspectives of those on the ground are all too easily subordinated to a critical research agenda eager to identify racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and other forms of hierarchy and oppression. From the beginning of this research process, I knew that I had certain privileges and that they could be situationally employed for various purposes. It was also clear from the very beginning that I had little to lose in comparison with those I hoped to learn from. This was also the case in my earlier research on rice queens. While their stigmatization was partially a "courtesy stigma" (Goffman 1963) or stigma in their association with Asian men, they were also stereotyped as old, fat, ugly sex tourists and pedophiles with little to offer (like husbands of mail order brides). Part of my aim in conducting research with rice queens and potato queens was to recuperate their image, not as a perfectly tragic match, but as complex people who, regardless of their motivations, still deserved respect.

On that note, I go back to the beginning of the introduction, to the notion of racialized desires and rejection. There is something to be said for feeling loved. But there is also something to be said for feeling desired. While we focus much of our attention on the former, we forget the latter is also meaningfully powerful. Masculinist, Marxist, and other interpretations in particular trivialize feeling desired to the margins of aesthetics, beauty, and superficiality. Women who are forever failing fad diets or men who get addicted to muscle building are socially mocked at the same time, the obese and the scrawny are shunned. Westerners following Christian traditions in particular stigmatize

"cosmetic" surgeries. Feeling loved is not a substitute for feeling desired. Indeed, this is one of the areas where long-term "modern" relationships seem to fail, when we love the other, but do not desire them, when companionate love can no longer compensate for passionate love. Or, as the American saying goes: "I love you, but I'm not in love with you anymore." That is, I love you, but I no longer desire you.

I am not interested in writing about the frictions and interactions between different cultural groups. Rather, I am interested in how individuals, who are always already enculturated, live their lives, reflect on their actions and those of others, make choices, and dream about the future. In particular, I focus on what people do in regards to sex, romance, love, and intimacy. The two realms of ideation and practice are not isomorphic, they are not perfectly aligned, yet they form a relatively incoherent "structure of feeling" or unrealized possibilities and aspirations (Williams 1977) that informs future action. And these actions are always constrained by circumstance, but also acted on by people making their way through the world and in turn sometimes transforming the little bit of world that surrounds them. One's ability to rework the environment, of course, is related to power, whether it be in the form of our actual bodies (including their strength and attractiveness), education, kinship/family ties, social status/cultural capital, or monetary resources. So when I write about Bangkok as a contact zone, I am not writing about a place where different cultural groups intermingle like teams at a competition but rather as individuals and small groups that have different capacities to remake the little bit of world around them and that sometimes mobilize into masses that create more fundamental change in punctuated bursts that may or may not produce lasting change.

Indeed, there has been and continues to be great friction in Bangkok, among political parties, economic classes, and various regional and ethnic groups and foreigners. Yet day to day life is quite harmonious, sometimes surprisingly so. Even after major unrest, such as when much of the shopping district was burned and looted in May 2010, soon after, residents got together to clean up the area. Except for the skeletal remains of buildings and the gaping spaces where buildings once had been, the area returned to normal, filled with hawkers vying for a spot while the land managers were placing large planters on the sidewalk to prevent their return. Of course the resourceful hawkers created new stall arrangements that either used the planters as a structural base or simply laid their goods on top of them. Wit, who reappears in chapter seven, pointed to a red mail box. "See that mailbox. It's red isn't it, [the color of mailboxes in Thailand]? It was charred black, it took me three hours to clean it so that it was red again." He smiled proudly. There was no outward animosity towards those who created the fires, nor towards those others who those who created the fires blamed for compelling them to resort to violence. Yet resentments were clearly simmering under the surface. Much of the sequence of events and responsibility for the 2010 showdown that lead to the deaths of over 100 people is still contested, and while a few continue to press for the "truth," the vast majority in the city have moved on with their lives. One could say that this is a particularly Thai way of dealing with conflict. But I have also witnessed a young man pick up and swing a plastic chair at an old woman he felt was disrespecting him. I've seen a bar girl who felt she had been wronged pick up a wooden club and chase a Middle Eastern man twice her size down the road. Culture provides guides for action and a range of possibilities but does not produce the action itself. In this regard, I question the

anthropological typecasting of Thais as people without conflict, who do not express

strong emotions as Wikan (1990) has shown for Balinese.

The Trendy Canary in the Mine

　　In Thailand, like elsewhere, gay men are considered to be trend setters. Indeed,

many Thai women lamented that gay men would be the perfect partners, if only they

were not gay (Käng 2012). I believe that my argument applies to middle class Thais more

broadly, but middle class gay men provide a special vantage point to see these issues in

play. As Boellstorff (2005) notes, *gay* and *lesbi* can exemplify, rather than exceptionalize,

emergent patterns of national culture. Many heterosexual women and men as well as

kathoey in Thailand have also expressed to me a preference for a white Asian partner

over a Thai. But the gay community provides a highly charged field where the frictions of

transnational relationship dynamics and class are highlighted. Here, I offer three reasons

why gay men provide an optic to examine class-based transnational relationship patterns

in Thailand. 1) The geographic space of gay communities are more concentrated and

focused on several key institutions such as bars, saunas, and other gay oriented

businesses. Though these spaces are often hidden from mainstream view, they are very

public to those who access them. Online spaces and smartphone apps are also focused

and provide broader access. 2) Gay spaces are more integrated with sex work, both in

terms of co-location and in terms of the availability of sex workers within nightlife

venues. 3) Gay men tend to be more mobile, both domestically and internationally, and

tend to be more willing to engage in relationships without the expectation of permanence

or cohabitation. Part of this rests on male privilege, which both provides men with greater

incomes and freedom of movement, especially at night and in regards to sexual liaisons. Gay Thai men also imagine themselves as part of a wider international community of gay men. This is not as strongly felt among Thai *tom* or *kathoey*, even though there are clear similarities to other masculine women and transgender women in the region. These groups tend to think of themselves as more unique and national. Thus, middle class gay men provide a lens through which transnational processes are more pronounced.

The history of gay commercial spatial development in Bangkok is intimately linked to sex work and transnational mobility. Although there are older gay cruising areas and bars that were frequented by gay and *kathoey* patrons, the origin of the Thai gay bar is a host bar (Allyn 1999). That is, gay commercial space was initially sex work space, specifically the go-go bars of the Surawongse Road area, now most concentrated in Soi Duangthawee (Twilight) and neighboring Soi Anuman Ratchathon, Soi Patpong 2, Soi Tanthawan, and Silom Soi 6. While attended by both Thais and foreigners, they clearly set up class distinctions among Thais, between patrons and workers, as well as between Thai workers and foreign customers. As recounted to me by Esmond, a long time *farang* expatriate in Bangkok, the next stage in the development of gay commercial space is the addition of the open air gay cruising bars in Silom Soi 4.[7] The first bar, Telephone Pub, was opened by an American in 1987. An Australian partner opened the competing Balcony Pub directly across the alley the following year. Since then, these two bars have attracted a primarily foreign clientele and the bar scene has expanded greatly, both in this soi, which is now almost entirely comprised of gay oriented businesses, in the surrounding Silom area, and throughout many neighborhoods in Bangkok. Yet this area

remains the heart of gay Bangkok, where Thais and foreigners inhabit a small geographic area that can shift from alley to alley.

The gay area of Silom is sandwiched between the infamous red light districts of Patpong and Soi Thaniya, a primarily Japanese-oriented red light district which Japanese women often refer to as Soi Hentai ("pervert lane"). This arrangement, of sex workers, gay bars, and foreigners occupying the same geography is not uncommon. Seoul's Itaewon District has a similar collocation of entertainment nightlife for foreigners (including a US military base and immigrants), hostess bars, and gay bars. The alleys on which the latter two types of bars are clustered are referred to as "Hooker Hill" and "Homo Hill" respectively. This also creates similar dynamics to what is seen in Silom. Korean women seen with a foreign man are often assumed to be sex workers, though this is changing as the Itaewon neighborhood gentrifies and attracts middle class heterosexual nightlife. The ways in which one is evaluated can shift dramatically with the turn of a corner. In Bangkok, female sex workers experience an oscillation of their status between different fields as cultural capital is differentially evaluated when moving between spaces where they are perceived as sex workers or not (Askew 1998).

There is currently no academic documentation of the expansion of Thai gay bars and clubs where foreigners are not the dominant group.[8] Since the early 2000s, there has been an explosion of Thai middle class and "local" (lower middle class, predominantly service workers and students) gay bars and clubs, first in the Silom area and nearby Soi Sarasin, and then expanding through areas of Bangkok farther out such as Pinklao, Sanam Luang/Khao Sarn, Ramkhamhaeng/Lamsalee/Lad Phrao, Rachada/RCA, Siam/Sukhumvit, and Saphan Kwai/Ortorkor. The number of venues reached their peak

around 2009-2010. At that time, there were over a dozen gay bars and clubs in a small

stretch of Ortorkor, where the number of patrons rivaled that of the Silom area. The same

could be said for Lamsalee, where half a dozen large bars and clubs in a single complex

could also easily rival Silom in patronage. The most popular gay club was G-Star in

Rachada Soi 8 (now G-Star Pavillion close to the Mengjai Intersection).

Foreign gay men are generally limited to what is sometimes called the "golden

triangle" or the "pink/purple triangle." This area, focused around the three streets of

Surawongse, Silom, and Sathorn is roughly bounded by three major public transportation

stops: BTS Siam station, BTS Chong Nonsi station, and MRT Khlong Toei station.

Western gay tourists rarely need to leave this zone and Western gay expats are likely to

live in the area as well. Gay Asian tourists and expats, however, cover a wider range of

Bangkok. Indeed, Caucasian men are often warned by other Caucasian men to avoid

certain gay areas and venues, such as the bars on Soi Sarasin and Chakran or Mania

saunas, because they are not *farang* friendly. The Chinese language gay guidebook for

Bangkok, the only Asian language guide of its kind, does not dissuade visitors from

going to other gay areas.

Furthermore, all the bars outside of the Silom area use a Thai table system of

bottle service (typically whisky) oriented to groups rather than individuals. Indeed a

person who buys a bottle of beer is not entitled to a table and thus would automatically be

spatially marginalized. Asian tourists and expats are more accustomed to this style of bar

and the necessity to attend in groups. Additionally, the staff in these areas likely do not

speak English and cannot explain the rules. So these spaces are generally inaccessible if

one does not know the language or come with someone who speaks Thai or is already

familiar with the system. As Peter Jackson (2011) notes, the "international" sector of Bangkok's gay life most frequented by Westerners has remained relatively stable. However, the great expansion of the Bangkok gay scene in the last decade was oriented towards Thais and other Asians and generally required knowledge of the Thai language or access to local networks. This meant that the recent boom in Bangkok's gay scene was not apparent to most Caucasian expats or visitors who did not experience the great expansion. Again, similar dynamics would play out in a city like Seoul, where foreigners would generally be limited to the thirty or so gay bars in Itaewon and be unable to linguistically and socially navigate the more than two-hundred gay bars in the Jongno 3-ga area. Gay *farang* in Bangkok are highly concentrated in the Silom area and almost completely absent in all other gay areas.

The colocation of sex venues, gay bars, foreigners, and relative wealth (Silom used to be the financial center of Bangkok), makes Silom a highly charged field for middle class gay Thai men. For Bourdieu (1984), a field is the setting with "magnetic pull, in which different agent's habituated dispositions are evaluated in regards to social, economic, and cultural capital. The evaluation criteria of class standing shifts in different fields such that the same behavior has different meanings in different settings. Even within the area of Silom, sub-fields exist such that Fuji, a Sino-Thai with a *farang* boyfriend, will enter Silom Soi 2 with his boyfriend but will not go to Silom Soi 4. As Fuji notes, it is possible for the couple to be regarded as boyfriends in Silom Soi 2 as there are many middle class interracial couples there. But if he went into Soi 4, others would suspect that he is a money boy.

Even within a Soi 2 bar, various spaces are differently charged. The three floors of DJ Station are variously populated and coded. Thais and Asians dominate the first floor, which is primarily a dance area and stage. Closer to the entrance, the area is dominated by muscular Thai and other Asian men. Younger *farang* tend to stay on this floor as well. The second floor mezzanine is known for Thai sex workers and older *farang* who watch the dancing on the first floor. Behind this area, there is a lounge where the music is not overwhelming so that one can actually talk and a smoking area. The third floor mezzanine is for people who are "desperate" to find a partner or want privacy with someone they have met. Thais will pay attention to things like who goes upstairs and this can be the subject of gossip. For the most part, Thais ascending the stairs points to sex work or lascivious behavior considered inappropriate in a public setting.

As DJ Station is also open later than the nearby go-go bars off Surawongse Road and many local massage parlors, many of the sex workers will come here for a last opportunity to meet a customer in freelance style (direct negotiation with the customer rather than working through an institution like a bar or massage parlor). This makes DJ Station a particularly frictive environment where various populations come into contact. This also means that middle class Thais generally behave more conservatively than other Asians on the first floor. Taking off a shirt might suggest to others than one is a sex worker. So while the muscular visitor from Hong Kong or Singapore, feeling liberated in this foreign place, is happy to do so, his Thai friend might be much more hesitant. The stakes associated with the behavior have different ramifications based on different nationality and local circumstances.

There are also tensions between Thais with Asian groups and between various Asian and Thai groups. This map (see Figure 1) was created by a member of the BlackBerry Gang to reinforce their symbolic dominance at the Expresso Bar. When I told him about my research, another member of this "in" group suggested that I look at the map to understand inter-Asian dynamics in this space. Expresso is one of six bars in Silom Soi 2 and the second busiest. During their weekend shows, it is not possible to walk through the bar. One must squeeze through. Expresso has a reputation as a "sticky" bar (an English metaphor that references rice kernels sticking to other rice kernels instead of potatoes), one in which Asians would not desire relationships with or pay attention to *farang*.[9] It is unique in the soi for having a *kathoey* DJ and playing K-pop music, which gives it a more "Asian" feel (the only other bar that plays non-Western music is a live music venue, where professional Thais sing in English, Thai, Mandarin, Korean, and Japanese). The map was posted online and circulated through sites such as postjung and facebook, where this image is from.
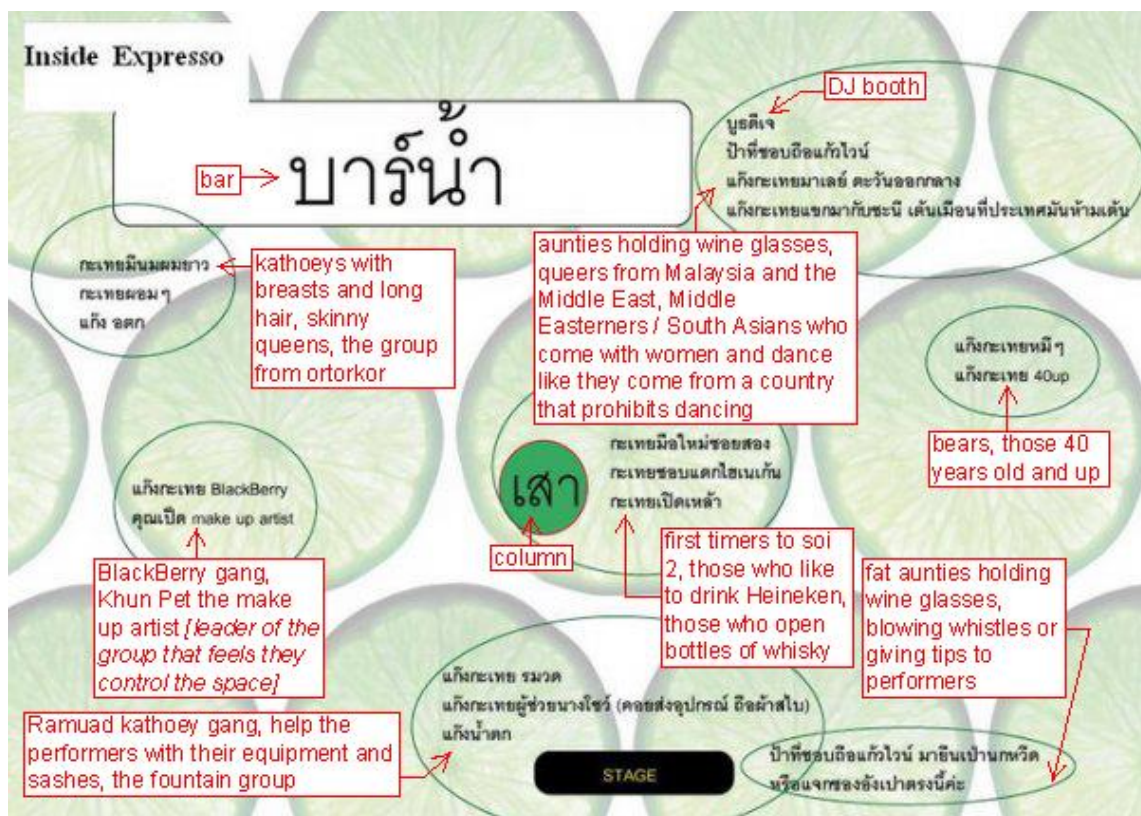
Figure 1: Map of Expresso Bar. A map of Expresso Bar in Silom Soi 2 made by a member of the BlackBerry Gang, the "cool" group here. This is from 2009, when BlackBerry devices were considered desirable and often referred to as CrackBerry because of their addictive nature. The red text boxes are my translations. The term *kathoey* is used repeatedly in the text but primarily refers to "queens" or "sissies" in a cheeky, sarcastic manner rather than to transgender people.

The map breaks out the bar patrons into seven main groups. In the center left is the BlackBerry Gang, the "cool" group which is comprised mostly of young Thai gay men and *kathoey* (here used more like "queen") who work in creative professions and entertainment. Their leader is a make-up artist. There may be about ten to twenty of them on a weekend night. Because of their professional background, the members of the group are expert at contemporary Asian style, with particularly exhaustive knowledge of

Korean media and fashion. Clockwise from the BlackBerry gang, would be *kathoey* who have had breast implants (here used more like "transsexual") and other young Thai gay men who would be the peers of the BlackBerry Gang, though irregulars in this space as they also frequent the Ortorkor bars. The next group references "aunties holding wine glasses" which would be wealthy (wine is very expensive in Bangkok), older (over 40) Chinese gay men, primarily from Singapore and Malaysia, and Malay and *khaek* (here referencing Muslims, who are religiously considered backward, and people like Indians, who are not thought of as Asian) that are noted for their closetedness (coming with women) and inability to dance. The next group of "bears" would include primarily Chinese men from Taiwan. From the perspective of the BlackBerry Gang, this group would be too old and too fat to be desirable, though they are trendy partners in other Thai circles. The next group of aunties is the group that tips performers during the shows. They stay close to the main stage. There is also a small stage next to the DJ Booth, which is where the other aunties are located. The stereotype about the tropical Chinese aunties is that they love to watch Thai *kathoey* shows because they come from repressive countries where displays of cross-dressing are rare. While some of the aunties are expats in Bangkok, many live in places like Singapore but come to Bangkok on a regular basis, for example, one weekend every month or more often. They are thus a constant fixture of the barscape. The center is occupied by a mix of people including newcomers, beer drinkers (typically a reference to foreigners), and those who open bottles of whisky, which would mean older Thais engaged in more traditional group drinking practices. The final group is of Thais who help the performers with their costumes (e.g. holding props, making a dress billow during a performance) and other Thais who position themselves in front of the

fountain just beyond the stage. They, like the Ortorkor group, would be comparable to the BlackBerry Gang, young and hip. The BlackBerry Gang themselves use a mixed drinking system, which includes whisky bottle service as well as buying pitchers of mixed cocktails. The latter makes the group membership more flexible, in that individuals do not have to commit to and share in bottle service. Western style cocktail service is something only practiced among gay bars in the Silom area. While there is no mention of *farang* in this space, all the other Asians described by the BlackBerry Gang in this map are devalued based on age, body shape, and other cultural differences. The most positively described groups are other Thais. The desirable Asians would primarily be across the soi in DJ Station. This points to a desire among the BlackBerry Gang to be around others similar to themselves. Not only racially/religiously, but also in terms of body type and age. Implicitly, they are referencing a middle class desire for partners that are more or less equals in the relationship.

Expresso mirrors DJ Station in some ways. It is a space of highly charged and differentiated groups. It is also one of the places in Bangkok, where I introduce Singaporeans to other Singaporeans they have never met before in Singapore. The gay scene in Singapore is not as extensive and more diffuse, while the localization of foreigner bars in Silom concentrates them within a tightly fixed area. Moreover, a pitcher of a cocktail can be had in Expresso for around $10, while a single cocktail might cost close to $20 in Singapore, making Bangkok a frugal destination. Indeed, Alex Au (2011), recounting the development of Singapore's gay community, notes that Bangkok was the place where it was forged. Before Singapore had a local gay scene, Bangkok was the site were Singaporean gay men met each other and developed relationships, both sexual,

political, and communitarian. Au argues that interactions in Bangkok changed

Singaporean gay men's tastes. In the 1970s and 1980s, Singaporean gay men preferred

Caucasian partners. But their "Thai experience redirected Singapore gay men's desires

from the white male to their own kind, or at least broadly, the East Asian and Southeast

Asian kind" (Au 2011, 189). The political implication of this re-orientation of desires was

that Singaporean men could conceive of their self-worth, seek egalitarian relationships

with others like them, and remain in the city state to claim their rights rather than

emigrate abroad. The use of Bangkok as a space of escape from Singapore catalyzed the

development of a local Singaporean gay scene and political activism.

On a similar note, I briefly describe the class registers of two creoles. In the

international gay context of Silom, Tinglish (colloquial Thai English) or using a

combination of English and Thai words following Thai grammar, would be demeaned by

middle class Thai men as improper. Whereas in other Thai contexts, middle class people

can deride it as "uneducated," in Silom it also references being a sex worker, and in the

gay sois, being a money boy. One exception to this would be the use of polite (e.g. -

khrap) and softening (-*na*) particles. For example: "Let's go *khrap*" or "It's good *na*." On

the other hand, it was quite common in the Silom area for middle class Thai gay men to

invoke Singlish (colloquial Singaporean English), which has similar grammatical features

to Tinglish, but is distinguished by its accent and lacing one's speech with a sprinkling of

"-*lah*" particles. For example, saying "also can *lah*" or "cannot *lah*" instead of "yes" and

"no." The use of intonation to emphasize the affective meaning of the statement was

quite similar to Tinglish, so Thais who have experience with Singaporeans can code

switch into Singlish relatively easily. This meant that when I went to an area like Silom

Soi 2, I might be greeted with: "Long time no see *lah*. How are you *lah*?" The use of Singlish among Thai gay men, however, was clearly a tactic to register cosmopolitan English use in a developed Asian context. It demonstrated that one had substantial experience with Singaporeans and Chinese Malaysians, among the ethnic groups representing desirable partners.

In this chapter, I introduced the idea of why desire for non-Caucasian partners seemed so strange from a gay Asian American perspective. I noted some linkages between people and places that might seem rather disparate, for example, the shared interpretation of Korean and Thai women with foreigners as being sex workers or the geographic colocation of foreign sex work with foreign gay spaces in Bangkok and Seoul. This points to the idea that interracial relationships are interpreted through the lens of national development and highly sensitized to global geopolitical sexual arrangements tied to militarism and tourism. The disapproval of such relationships by local elites is perhaps engendered by the shame of having to sacrifice the countries' women to foreign men, a sign of national weakness.

In the contemporary Thai context, I argue that gay men provide an exemplary case study that represents but more clearly crystallizes wider patterns in Thai society toward a desire for white Asian partners. This perhaps can be interpreted as a refusal to accept a diminished social position within the nation as well as a diminutive national position in the global order. These processes are brought to light by the concepts of friction and interracial optics. Friction focuses on the cross-cultural and transnational interactions that create new cultural forms out of conflict and contestation. Interracial optics point to how relationships are differentially made knowable and documented based

on the representation of interracial relationships. Interracial optics make some relationships more visible and troubling than others. While interracial relationships are not policed by the state, they carry the burden of potential social stigma and a devaluation of status. Because of this potential, certain interracial relationships and their avoidance become a possible source for social diminishment or advancement. Thus, the friction of multiple populations coming into contact makes possible new opportunities for class differentiation and distinction. In the next chapter, I will continue to explore how this relates to transnational, interracial patterns. I will also describe the ethnographic setting and the background for my argument.

CHAPTER 2

Saving Face & Making Distinctions:

Development, Morality, and Sex Work in Thailand

I'm sitting on the BTS, Bangkok's Skytrain. The doors open. An older, large-bodied *farang* (ฝรั่ง white person) enters and sits next to a young Thai woman across from me. She crinkles her nose, turns her body away from his, searches in her purse for her *ya dom* (ยาดม inhaler), and takes a deep sniff. She puts the inhaler back in her purse, tilts her body toward the Thai woman next to her, and looks down at the floor.[1]

How can we read her actions? Her turning away from the *farang* is a physical disassociation with him. She is literally repulsed, a habituated distancing to indicate her propriety. The movement shows her unwillingness to be considered by others to be his partner. When she inhales her *ya dom*, she is demonstrating her displeasure and stress in having been assaulted by the *farang*'s proximity. Additionally, the use of an inhaler can reference her dislike of his scent.[2] *Farang*, according to many Thais, exude an odor. Like South Asians, their racial difference is inassimilable in the imagined Thai national body.[3] Public contact with *farang* is polluting precisely because of its potential to mark a Thai as a sex worker, that is, to signal low status and the immodest balancing of honor and economic necessity.

The following day, I'm sitting next to the glass barrier at the end of the row of seats on the BTS. Next to me, my Japanese classmate Shinnosuke, who I met in the Thai program at Chulalongkorn, is playing a game on his iPhone, something he does almost instinctively when we get on the Skytrain. The young Thai woman next to him peers over

his shoulder and watches with interest. Shinnosuke, noticing her proximity over his shoulder, says hello to her in his Japanese accented Thai. She grins widely. "Are you Japanese?" "Yes," he responds. They start to have a brief conversation. By the time we are ready to get off at our stop, Shinnosuke has traded phone numbers with her (she had a BlackBerry). "She will meet us at Funky Villa [a night club popular with Japanese expats] this weekend," he grins.

These two scenes are perhaps exemplary of certain transnational contrasts that can be observed regularly in Bangkok. The encounter refers to an incident involving Peter, a retired white gay American expat who has been living in Bangkok for many years and Shinnosuke, a young Japanese classmate who is taking time off from work to learn Thai. Peter, as a gay man, was not interested at all in the Thai woman next to her, yet he was offended by her behavior. When I asked Peter to reflect on the experience, he was angered and related that it was another incidence of Thai racism against *farang*, as it was behavior he commonly experienced and felt was unneccesary because he is gay.[4] "I just want to be like: Look, I'm gay. You don't have to worry." In this case, he was especially offended by the Thai woman's use of the inhaler. "I know what that means. She thinks I stink." Shinnosuke's experience was received very differently. He was happy that the young Thai woman agreed to meet him for drinks over the weekend, but remained very reserved. Speaking in Thai, he stated: "I am happy that she wants to meet me, but I do not know if we will be a good couple. I am afraid she only likes me because I am Japanese. I think she is too interested in Japanese men." Shinnosuke sighed, "She could be like Apple." Apple was a mutual friend of ours who only seemed to date Japanese expats, though she claimed she was open to dating various kinds of men. Indeed, the next time

we ran into her at Route 66, a popular night club in the RCA area, she had a Korean boyfriend. Shinnosuke registered his surprise. I jokingly told him to look at her fingernails, painted in an elaborate pattern and encrusted with crystals, "she is still Japanese style."

Here, I argue that such behavior exemplifies attitudes among middle class Thais, a group striving to prove their standing within the context of a middle income country that has been labeled the "brothel to the world." On the one hand, interactions with Caucasians can be status devaluing, especially if there are significant differences in age and attractiveness, because they point to the potential of Thai sex work. On the other, interactions with white Asians generally evade this qualification and are actually positively valued. As many Thai informants noted, even older Asian partners can look like relatives instead of patrons, they generally are not marked as socially out of place.

Representations and Reputations

On alphadesigners's viral 2010 map *The World According to Americans*, Thailand is simply labeled "Brothel."[5] *Reminiscent of the Longman Dictionary of English and Culture* (1993) that defined Bangkok as a city known for temples and prostitution; this appellation comes as no surprise.[6] Alphadesigner's project is, after all, about mapping stereotypes. The range in the estimated number of sex workers in Thailand is extremely wide. The World Health Organization estimated 150,000 to 200,000 sex workers in 2001. However, Kaewkerd and Banchuen (2014), citing Professor Tinnakul of Chulalongkorn, report that from 1999 to 2001, there were 2,820,000 (2,000,000 females; 20,000 males; and 800,000 children) sex workers, freelancing and employed in 60,000 commercial

establishments. In 2006, the Ministry of Public Health counted 55,355 sex workers based

on the tracking of sexually transmitted infections (Guest et al. 2007). However the figure

is more likely between 200,000 to 300,000 sex workers, with a continuing shift in venues

from brothels to bars, karaokes, and massage parlors (Guest et al. 2007). But a map of

stereotypes that can be read as comedic in the West can be devastating to Thais. These

depictions metonymically crack Thai faces (หน้าแตก *na-taek*) and bring shame upon the

nation.

Prostitution in Thai society has been documented since at least the Ayutthaya era

(1893-2310 Thai BE; 1350-1767 CE), which taxed the prostitution of female slaves and

daughters sold to brothels by their fathers after committing adultery or other disreputable

behavior (Andaya 1998). In "From Temporary Wife to Prostitute," Andaya shows how,

in Southeast Asia, older forms of temporary wifedom or concubinage, which provided

companionship, labor, and access to local trade networks, become increasingly

marginalized into prostitution, especially through colonial contacts. The 1905 abolition of

slavery in Siam increased the number of sex workers in Bangkok, as former slave women

entered brothel work (Barmé 2002). The simultaneous growth of a middle class increased

demand for sexual services so that by the 1920s prostitution was a ubiquitous feature of

the city landscape. As Loos notes, in the early twentieth century "sex workers became

symbols of the failed family and hence a threat to the positive image of the nation"

(2006:152) at a time when Siam was trying to prove its civilized and modern status to

European powers by enacting laws enshrining monogamous heterosexual marriage and

nuclear families, or what Atkins refers to as "the new triple supremacy: romantic,

monogamous heterosexuality" (2011:13). Sex work required a strict distinction from

marital unions, which provided legal recourse to wives but branded disreputable women as unfit for marriage. This virtuous / disreputable categorization of women constructs the boundaries of modern families in Siam and continues to shape how sex work and the nation construct each other. In contemporary Thailand, the pervasiveness of the sex industry makes Thais, especially the middle classes, anxious about how they are seen by other Thais.

Thai women are also globally stigmatized by the international reputation of the sex tourism industry, which conflates Thai femininity with prostitution and inhibits Thai women's ability to travel comfortably and safely in the world (Cook and Jackson 1999, Van Esterik 2000). I met numerous middle class Thai women, with "respectable" professions such as nurse or teacher who had been interviewed and denied tourist visas to the US, even when their bank statements and other financial records were considered sufficient. They speculated that as unmarried women, they were a prostitution / human trafficking risk. They considered themselves suspect in the eyes of the US Embassy. The difficulty for Thai women to travel to the US also was used to shame me. My moral status as a gay man with US citizenship was evoked and questioned. One of my housemates asked me to marry her so that her daughter could study in the USA and have a better life. One of my best friends, Cake, an unmarried woman who managed a small hotel, explained the situation to me plainly in 2009, before same sex marriage was widespread in the US and immigration was granted to same sex partners. "You are a gay man. You can not get married to your partner. It doesn't have to be me. But why would you want to waste the opportunity to give a Thai woman the chance to go to America?"

The constraints placed on Thai women's international movements were used to admonish me for not facilitating the cirucumvention of such constraints.

Thailand's reputation for sex work, moreover, is an ongoing PR problem for the Thai state, particularly its tourism authority, and Thai people who want to distance themselves from such an image. Thailand wants to be the Riviera of Southeast Asia. Indeed, the government does not want foreigners to linger. Short-term high-end resort tourists, epitomized by the Japanese golfer, are preferred over long-term low-end backpackers, sexpatriates, criminals, and other undesirables.[7] Though tourism statistics and their associated economic impact are routine news items, Thai pundits downplay the role of tourism in the economy, focusing instead on car and electronics manufacturing, technological innovation, and creative industries. So with new heights of economic development, those who have benefited from the growth can look down and misrecognize those still working in an unseemly profession. Indeed, in Suphawong Janthawanit's 1991 study of occupational status among urban Thai respondents, "service woman, e.g. masseuse, 'partner'" ranked 89th, the lowest position (cited in Ockey 1999). But the country cannot so easily erase its intimacy with an industry redeveloped to capitalize on the American War with Vietnam. Indeed, sex tourism has been an integral component of the "Thai economic miracle" and created the infrastructure for other types of tourism (Bishop and Robinson 1998).[8] Thailand's international reputation and national identity continue to be haunted by this relationship (Jeffrey 2003). The disavowal of sex tourism as a major source of income and infrastructure development is a form of "cultural intimacy," or secret shame that constitutes national identity (Herzfeld 2005). That is, Thais are generally well aware of the extent to which sex tourism is an industry essential

to the national economy. Yet, this remains a major blight on Thailand's international reputation. Thus, there is simultaneous acknowledgment of the situation as insider knowledge and disavowal to outsiders about its importance to the economy and local interpersonal interactions. Thais are deeply ambivalent about the role of sex tourism in Thai society.

This chapter aims to understand how desire is shaped by geopolitics as they are refracted through local moral worlds, or the immediate everyday relationships that both organize experience and reproduce social structures (Kleinman 1995). Specifically, it addresses local understandings of social standing, "face," and Thailand's position in the world. The research builds on literature in gender/sexuality, transnational migration, and sex tourism that come together in the anthropology of love, which explores local constructions of sexuality through negotiations with the global.[9] Intimate desires, while naturalized, are shaped by political economies of the erotic. The relative national positions of tourist receiving and sending countries also affect the meanings and opportunities attached to sexual subjectivities and practices in those places.[10] Transnational partner preferences for East Asians among middle class gay men perform the function of maintaining face and signaling aspirations for development in a East Asian trajectory. These partner choices reveal how new political economic and socio-cultural alignments in Asia figure within Thailand.

This argument rests on the idea that status is a serious concern. Social status is the honor or prestige associated with one's subject position or standing. It encompasses more than economic class and is closely associated with consumption practices (Weber 1978). Status is also a more sensitive indicator of differential value than power, the ability to

influence other's behavior (Ortner 2006). Ethical concerns impact both the status of individuals and the legitimacy of groups. Moral evaluation is strongly linked to social status in Thailand (Mulder 1996). Furthermore, gender and sexual practices are intimately tied to status vis-à-vis stigma and the politics of appearances (Goffman 1986).

Emphasis on local moral worlds point to the normative aspects of lifestyles and their relative social value, particularly the affective valence and subsequent status effects attached to real, presumed, and imagined sexual practices. Gender and sexuality are but one set of axes through which social status is produced. Age, economic position, kinship group, and religious merit, among other factors, are also important for social ranking in Thai social hierarchies (Mulder 1996). Tom Boellstorff (2005) notes that sexuality is always defined in terms of gender, nation, race, class and other social categories and thus argues for the use of intersectional theories that place the understanding of sexuality at the conjuncture of multiple cultural logics. Gayatri Reddy (2005) shows how hijras exceed current analytical frameworks for gender and argues that hijras cultivate claims to respect through religious, sexual, kinship, class and other factors as these are the important morally evaluated differences. In particular, given Thailand's reputation for prostitution in the international media, there is great stigma attached to sex work. While Thailand is often portrayed as a country "culturally" tolerant of sexual commerce, transgenderism, and homosexuality, in actuality, the situation is much more complex. In Peter Jackson's (1999) terms, Thailand is "tolerant but not accepting" of gay men. The same can be said about transgenderism and sex work. There is thus status inconsistency and ambivalence for sex workers who earn a relatively high income but maintain a low status position (Weber 1978).

Managing Local Moral Worlds and Moral Identities

Local moral worlds are the immediate intersubjective relationships that mediate individual experience and socio-cultural structures in everyday life at the level of household, neighborhood, workplace, or other proximal spaces. These mediating worlds are similar to Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) social networks of habitus in that they both structure experience, and through social interaction, maintain or modify those very organizing features. "Yet, in practical terms, that mediating world is defined by what is vitally at stake for groups and individuals. While preservation of life, aspiration, prestige, and the like may be shared structures of relevance for human conditions across societies, that which is at stake in daily situations differs (often dramatically) owing to cultural elaboration, personal idiosyncracy, historical particularities, and the specifics of the situation [emphasis omitted]. What is at stake in life settings, then, is usually contested and indeterminate" (Kleinman 1995:97). Thus, for Kleinman, the orienting question for social action is: What is at stake?

Stigma is the extreme disapproval of individuals and groups perceived to be abnormal. It is a universal, cross-cultural occurrence. Goffman (1963) defines social stigma as a phenomenon and process that spoils "normal" identity. It is a label that identifies one with a negative stereotype and mobilizes ostracism and discrimination. Goffman (1963) also describes "courtesy stigma," or the stigma that attaches to an individual by association to another individual with traits that dishonor them (e.g. race, foreign nationality, criminality, prostitution, homosexuality, disease, deformity). Stigma need not be a permanent condition but one that is potentially "discreditable," which

operates when it is revealed to others. Link and Phelan (2001) describe stigma as the process by which people are differentiated and labeled, associated with negative stereotypes, separated into a "them" group, and subsequently experience status loss and discrimination that can lead to unequal life circumstances. That is, there are material costs in stigmatization.

Using the examples of mental illness and HIV in China, Yang (Yang et al. 2007; Yang and Kleinman 2008) relate stigma to the experience of loss of "face," which prevents one from attaining the moral status considered essential to proper adult selfhood. Stigma intensifies suffering for the stigmatized because stigmatizers are responding to a perceived threat by discriminating against and marginalizing them. In their formulation, stigma is "a fundamentally moral issue in which stigmatized conditions threaten what really matters for sufferers," their moral standing in "a real world of practical engagements and interpersonal dangers" (Yang et al. 2007: 1528). One's status as a "moral" community member requires upholding social norms and obligations such as reciprocity in gift exchange, favors, and emotions within a "commonsense" knowledge of their cultural operations (Yang and Kleinman 2008). In the Chinese context, the loss of "face" prevents an individual from being able to mobilize social resources, discredits adult moral status, and can lead to social death, or the isolation of individuals whose stigmatized position threatens to contaminate others. Reintegration into the community thus requires "remoralization," that changes how individuals see themselves and rebuilds their ability to partake in interfamilial exchange.

Jackson (1995) observes that the term "*kunla-gay*" (coined by Thai gay activist Natee Teerarojjanapongs) refers to a "'decent' or 'respectable' gay man" has been coined

to describe the "gay man who earns acceptance of his sexuality by contributing positively to his family and to the wider society." As gay men, they act better than expected in order to make up for the deficiency in being gay. Gay men can reduce the stigma of being gay through honorable action, though wider beliefs and attitudes are often left intact. This includes distinguishing themselves from more maligned *kathoey* (male-to-female transgender persons), with whom they are often associated (Jackson 1995, Sinnott 2002, Käng 2014).[11] In relation to sex work, they are both resisting their interpellation as sex workers in the global gaze as well as stigmatizing those who are sex workers or otherwise in inferior positions. That is, status and moral self-making are performed and negotiated in webs of intimate, public, and transnational relationships that both contest and collude with different sets of normative values (Kleinman 2006).[12] Thai middle class gay men occupy a medial position of struggle and complicity. Local moral worlds are keys to understanding the relationships between lived experience, patterns of social interaction, and the cultural evaluation of differences.

Thai gay men routinely stated to me the need to be "a good person" [*khon di*]. If they "came out" to their parents, they were often told: "It's OK. Just be a good person." Yet this was interpreted by gay men as having to be a better person than expected. Thai gay men generally feel a strong sense of need for social and familial approval. One way to increase the acceptance of homosexuality is to epitomize *khon di* (a good person). While this simplistically states that a person should be morally upright, it also implies that one should meet his or her obligations to family and society. This includes supporting the family, especially the mother, spiritually through prescribed ordinations (for Buddhists). Additionally, while the "traditional" division of filial labor endows

daughters with greater material inheritances, including land (Thais often state that they are traditionally a matriarchal society), this also places more financial obligation on women for elder care. However, many of my urban *kathoey* and gay informants felt great pressure to support their parents. Jackson (1995), a decade earlier, stated that "traditionally" the youngest daughter lived with and took care of parents, but unmarried gay sons have also begun to assume the role of caretaker and supporter of aged parents. Among my informants, this was rationalized as necessary because heterosexual siblings had children and were already committed to their care. Their income flowed down to the next generation. Yet, children without grandchildren were expected to remit income to their parents and extended relatives. This meant that queer children had to be first academically and then professionally successful or engage in a lucrative business, to earn surplus income to support the extended household. The retirement age in Thailand is fifty. Thus, parents retire about the time their children who go to college graduate. So, among middle class college-educated gay Thais, there was great pressure to work and make money immediately upon finishing an undergraduate education. Few fields like business offer graduate education, as programs in fields such as law and medicine are more equivalent to combined bachelor and master degree programs.

For many middle class families, college graduation marked a transition from children relying on their parents to parents relying on their children. Though not a complete reversal of general reciprocity, the monetary flow began to reverse at this moment of the life cycle. The majority of my gay informants either provided for their parents in a mutual household or remitted money (10% of income was typically considered a "good" amount), often to a provincial home via bank transfers, post office

service, or cash during home visits. If the family was in Bangkok, children generally continued to live with their parents until marriage, which meant that queer children remained in the household after heterosexual ones left. Often, young workers who had migrated from the provinces would share studio accommodations with friends, including the bed, to save on expenses. Sometimes parents in the provinces would move to a joint house with their children in Bangkok. Many *kathoey* and gay men noted that the responsibility of financially providing for their parents was logically theirs because heterosexual (and bisexual) siblings had children to support. In this sense, *kathoey* and gay men disproportionately provided both spiritual and material support for their parents. There was a feeling that an extra burden adhered to them because they had to make up for the deficit of their homosexuality and transgenderism, which was sometimes understood by Thais, including *kathoey* and gay men themselves, as arising from previous karmic infractions in a previous life, commonly assumed to be commission of adultery (Jackson 1998). Thus, gay men and *kathoey* often felt compelled to be *khon di*.

Personal Face & National Cultural Intimacy

Sex work is the filter through which many Westerners, and particularly tourists, see Thailand. This has thus become the gaze through which Thais see themselves in the eyes of others. Thai society, like any other, is based on the presentation of positive images of the self. Yet there is particular importance on producing an appropriate "face." Producing and maintaining a positive image in what are often hierarchically sensitive spaces is of the utmost importance. The combination of the hierarchical nature of Thai society and the high value placed on smooth social interactions, require people to assess

each other's relative status and provide the appropriate level of respect due in social interactions (Mulder 1997). While these can be contradictory, for example, having a younger boss, in institutionalized situations the rankings is relatively clear. However, without an institutional framework to structure relations, they must be evaluated based on other status markers such as relative age and wealth. Westerners are often surprised and offended when, in small talk introductions, they are asked questions like their age and income. Social presentation is critical in this context, as one's status is presumed based on surface presentations. The truth of the situation may be irrelevant as stereotypes have already been mobilized to place a person within the hierarchy of respect. Self-presentation is thus a primary means through which an individual makes claims to status and places herself in relative rankings. This also comes, however, with reciprocal obligations of beneficence and generosity.

Appearances are critical to Thai notions of moral propriety (van Esterik 2000; Mulder 1997). Morris (1997) posits that multiple gender/sexuality systems can coexist in Thailand based on a fundamental respect for private behavior as long as it is not manifested in the public sphere. Penny van Esterik (2000) thus suggests that social interactions are based on surfaces, appearance, face, mask, and disguise. Rather than pointing to an inherent truth, the focus on appearances reinforces Buddhist notions of the non-self, in which the body and self are actually nothing but a superficial illusion. Thus, one's social position, regardless of its truth value, is interpreted through dress, language, manner, and other factors that point to the presentation of what might as well be true. The judgment of action is not keyed to abstract notions of morality (e.g. good and evil) but contextual specific circumstances and expectations in order to avoid shame (Jackson

1995). This situation thus places a great deal of emphasis on the positive presentation of self. Indeed, "beauty can override family connections, money or class, as well as other ascribed and achieved attributes of women, and to a lesser degree, men" (van Esterik 2000, 129). Thus, the presentation of self can demonstrate one's position in the status hierarchy and has real effects.

Face is a social achievement of respectable, moral presentation. Face is how the self relates to a larger group identity or position in a given context. Losing face goes beyond embarrassment; it is about the loss of esteem in the presence of others and the diminishment of self-image. A broken face is a personal tragedy. The Thai language possesses a large vocabulary about face in relation to shame. Besides being enculturated in everyday practices, the construction of face and of a larger moral society is the primary emphasis of Thai elementary school education (Mulder 1998). This means that a national face is produced, one that corresponds to a heightened sensitivity to insult and criticism of the country.

Herzfeld (2005) has described the centrality of cultural intimacy to nations such as Thailand and Greece. Where Greece can proudly claim to be the source of Western civilization, it currently exists on the periphery of Europe, and possibly could lead to the downfall of the Eurozone. In this sense, cultural intimacy is about a national identity based on common group shame, an acknowledgment of a country's reputation for something undesirable. Cultural intimacy points to "the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of

creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation…[They are] self-stereotypes that insiders express ostensibly at their own collective expense" to shore up national attachments (Herzfeld 2005: 3). Cultural intimacy is thus a "national quintessence" (5). What is important here, however, is not the content of the stereotypes but how they are mobilized for nationalistic efforts and used in everyday life to create a sense of being a homogenized group. Humiliating traits can thus be the basis for connection within the private spaces of national culture, a "fellowship of the flawed" (29). Perhaps the key shame for Thais is their reputation for sex work. Wilson (2004) among others notes that the public visibility of sex work is a blight on the image of Thais and thus produces an affective orientation to avoid the appearance of sex work. Additionally, there is an additional cultural shame in the high prevalence of gender variant individuals in Thailand, especially sissies and *kathoey*, who represent failed masculinity and Thailand's inability to produce "real men."

Orientations

I situate this argument within several key frameworks. This project looks at the confluence of biopolitics, desire, and development. Biopolitics provides one optic to look at the positive exception for whiteness, where some racialized bodies become more valued than others. I address the labor of achieving whiteness both physically as well as culturally, as a process of self-care and transformation. I place this work within the anthropology of love, which deals with love as emotion and affect. Importantly, love, as elusive as it is, is contextualized by social inequalities, neoliberal economics, and biopolitical regulation. Finally, I also locate this work within the emerging inter-Asian

studies, which attempts to break out of both a Western styled area studies model and denaturalizes the West as the standard of comparison. My argument is that Thai desire for class distinction and status presentation reorients desires eastward, in a proximal trajectory of future rise, in contrast to the West, which has been accused of global bullying and a morally degenerate modernity.

In using the term "orientation," I am obviously referencing the term "sexual orientation." However, I am also referring to a more generalized social orientation. Orientation in this sense is not deterministic, but rather more like a guide or scaffolding. That is, orientations give us bearing in the world and help point us in certain directions rather than others. I am guided by the phenomenological and experiential work of social theorists such as Bourdieu and Giddens. In his formulation of the theory of structuration, Giddens (1984) argues that human agency and social structure are in an intimate relationship such that the interaction between actors and the repetition of specific acts reproduces the structure, or the rules and resources, which shape future action. This relationship between micro and macro levels allows for social change. Thus for Giddens, there is a "duality of structure" such that social structures are both "the medium and outcome it recursively organizes," the means through which action is organized and the product of that action (1984: 374). In this sense, Gidden's structuration theory follows Bourdieu's practice theory. Bourdieu laid out many similar concepts, for example the duality of "structured structures" which function as "structuring structures" (1977: 72). In both Bourdieu and Giddens, there is a power to the force of historical institutions, traditions, and moral codes, but they can be reproduced differently, replaced, or ignored. Individuals have the ability to rehabituate themselves, but it often comes at the cost of

suffering social sanctions for not meeting routinized expectations. In this sense, we are subjects, both in terms of being active agents and being the product of disciplinary social practices.

Bourdieu, however, provides a more detailed analysis of how symbolic processes are linked to social distinctions, everyday experience, and the justification of the social order. For Bourdieu habituated ways of thinking and acting reinforce social hierarchies. Habitus, or the unconscious bodily dispositions and mental schemes of individuals and groups that are acquired through everyday practices, are inculcated through class-based institutions, and fields such as education and the arts. Class systems reproduce themselves by instilling cultural capital as forms of class distinction which maintain and justify social stratification (Bourdieu 1984). Thus, tastes and preferences, naturalized to one's social position, function as a "social orientation, a 'sense of one's place', guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or good which befit the occupation of that position" (1984, 466). That is, one's habituated predispositions orient an individual to the social position that befits those predispositions. Simply put, class position is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The conformity between tastes and position make those who desire a life course with a rising social trajectory particularly anxious to differentiate themselves from those below. In Bangkok, there are plenty of opportunities for residents, even the not so well to do, to ridicule rural and poor people who have not mastered bodily techniques in riding escalators, using elevators, or boarding subway trains.

More recently, Sarah Ahmed (2006) has conceived of a "queer phenomenology" that incorporates Bourdieu's practice theory, emotion and affect theory, and queer theory.

In so doing, she posits the concept of "orientations." Orientations shape how we inhabit space, who and what we direct our attention and energy toward, and who and what we make proximal and familiar. These are not only givens in the environment, but structured around previous life course choices an individual has made, based on the prior contexts of her inheritances and actions. Orientations thus "expose how life gets directed in some ways rather than others, through the very requirement that we follow what is already given to us" (21). This also means that a change of habits or reorientations, though not necessarily cognized, are a form of emotional work that requires rehabituation. Ahmed argues that lesbians, for example, are not essentially queer, even if they have always felt so. Rather, lesbians must become lesbian through the work of orientation to specific social and sexual forms of lesbianism. That is, lesbians must learn the social codes and norms of their group in order to properly inhabit lesbianism. Ahmed argues that "bodies are shaped by what they tend toward, and that the repetition of that 'tending toward' produces certain tendencies. We can redescribe this process in the following terms: the repetition of the tending *toward* is what identity 'coheres' *around* (= tendencies). We do not, then, inherit our tendencies; instead, we *acquire* our tendencies from what we inherit" (129, emphasis in original). That is, for Ahmed, identities are built around orientations, which we do not inherit directly, but rather, the dispositions we inherit, which then structure our orientations to the world around us.

The Stakes of Broken Faces

I start this next section with some moments of shame and failure. This is not a self-loathing exercise, but helps to expose my orientation to the world around me. I also

want to highlight the stakes involved for differently privileged actors in highly charged fields of interaction, in which friction not only creates challenges, but new possibilities for cultural change and exchange. During my fieldwork, I had what I considered my "Dorinne Kondo moment." I call it that because what came to mind when it happened was the time, in *Crafting Selves*, where Kondo (1990) sees her reflection in a glass case while shopping and realizes that she looks like a Japanese housewife. She has perhaps gone too native.

One of my friends from Vietnam, Thanh, was visiting Bangkok with two of his friends and I had made plans to meet them at their hotel for dinner, which was on Surawongse Road, the epicenter of sex work for foreign gay men in Thailand. I arrived before they returned to the hotel, so I told the front desk clerk that I would wait for them in the lobby. It was a middle-range hotel where the staff keep the room key, which is attached to a large keychain. When you leave your room, you deposit the key with staff and retrieve it, when you return.

When they arrived, I spoke with Thanh briefly. They had just finished their sightseeing for the day and wanted to shower and change before we went to dinner. I told them in English that it was fine, I would go to their room and wait while they got ready. The manager, a Thai woman, overhearing our conversation, became hostile towards me. She said that I could not go up with them to their room. Thanh said that they would only be changing clothes, it would just be a few minutes, she shouldn't worry, I wasn't staying the night (as they had to pay an extra fee for the third person to stay in their double room). She then looked at me and said in Thai: "Ok, then, but only ten minutes, and you need to leave your national ID card." I had already become accustomed to this practice

when visiting other friends, both Asian and *farang* in similar mid-level hotels, where Thais are required to leave their ID cards in order to protect the customer and the hotel by preventing robbery post-sex work. (I have never been with a *farang* who was asked to do this, though Thais renting a room who bring a *farang* into the room can be asked to pay a supplemental host fee.) I looked her in the eyes and slapped down my California driver's license on the counter and replied in a gruff Thai tone: "I am not Thai, here is my American ID card."

As we went up to their room, the first thing I felt was the disgust in thinking that this woman was imagining me going up to a room with three men and servicing them all. My next thought was that my retort to her would probably have been more effective in English rather than Thai, to prove that I was not Thai and thus not a sex worker. Then my heart sank and I wondered what my statement meant. As Thanh and the others were showering and changing clothes, I was thinking about what I had just done through a simple speech act and what it said about me and about Thais. In one statement, I basically said that I am not a sex worker, I am not Thai, and equated the two, like in much of the popular sex tourism literature. My self-credibility as a long time sex worker advocate felt annulled. On the one hand, this indexed how "Thai" I had become in that the staff perceived of me as a Thai sex worker, but it also pointed to how ingrained I had become in middle class Thai sensibilities that disavowed sex work. I had reacted in a similar manner to the middle class Thai sentiments I had been documenting, when I wanted to critique this very phenomenon as a nefarious class distinction. I felt both ashamed for my insensitivity to Thai sex workers and understood the palpable nature of being

interpellated as one. The stakes of a broken face, which I should be able to ignore as a foreigner, were made tangible.

This emphasized for me the stakes of avoiding interpellation as a sex worker. Broken faces are experientially immediate and had consequences in how one was perceived, which could then produce social and material impacts. It reminded me, for example, of how poor people in the USA should dress in order to receive public assistance. This is both a strategy that concedes to dominant notions of who is proper and deserving, but also a tactic of everyday life that makes certain outcomes more possible than others (de Certeau 1984). As has been demonstrated above, being interpellated as a money boy was not limited to Thais. Many Asians from other countries and the Western diaspora in Bangkok regularly made comments like: "You can't wear that, you'll look like a money boy." Or "You shouldn't do that, people will think you are a money boy." As people who could pass as Thai, there was the danger of being perceived as sex workers. Here, I focus on the experiences of an Asian American who, during a year stay in Bangkok, transformed his thinking both about his position when dating patronly Caucasian men and his feelings about being seen as a sex worker.

Darren was one of my "little brothers" in Bangkok. Of Lao-Chinese heritage, he was participating in a year-long study abroad program in Thailand from an elite American university. As Thai and Lao share about seventy percent of their vocabulary, and are more like dialects than distinct languages, it was relatively easy for him to learn Thai. I took Darren to a party at No Space, which housed an architectural design firm and an art gallery. During the evening, we came to discuss how sex workers are stereotyped. I noted that the classic type of money boys, those who work freelance or in go-go bars, are

said to be dark-skinned, small, slim, and wear flashy clothing and accessories, including tight jeans, tank tops or tight t-shirts, and spiky hair inspired by Japanese manga characters. I pointed out to Darren that his appearance epitomized the look.

Darren was shocked and did not believe me. After all, his style was a trendy look among young Asian Americans. However, in the context of Bangkok, this style was read differently. I asked our Thai host, Ink to come over and asked him if Darren looked like a money boy. Ink replied "yes." I told him that Darren was a good friend of mine. Ink stated: "Oh, that's good. I was thinking like, why did Dredge pick up some money boy from Silom and bring him to our event. That would have been inappropriate." Darren was stunned by this revelation. His face cracked. This led him to change how he appeared to others. He did not change his dress style, but he did make a conscious effort, similar to some of my Thai friends, to speak to me only in English in public. Later, when I was interviewing Darren, he stated that speaking to me in English was a way of distinguishing himself from Thais and the appearance of being a money boy. If he spoke to me in his unaccented English, people would not think that he was Thai, and therefore, not consider him a money boy. Darren also stated that he did not think I looked Thai because of my stature and skin color, being taller and lighter. So Darren felt that the risk of being seen as a money boy was something specific to his appearance, but not to mine when we were in public together. Darren felt that the stakes were greater for him because he had a more typically Thai appearance.

Appearing like a money boy was highlighted for Darren when he was visited by two of his ex-boyfriends from the USA, both older white men of financial means. They would take Darren to expensive restaurants in Bangkok. I had warned Darren that he

should expect to be treated like a money boy in these settings, the staff will make assumptions. Darren noticed patterns in how servers interacted with them as a couple. The bill, for example, was never placed in front of Darren, or between them, but always in front of his exes. Darren had no intention of paying for these meals, but the placement of the bill and the way servers interacted with him, made him feel like he was being treated like a money boy, an appendage to the patron, and not a customer in his own right. Darren, an undergraduate college student, had typically dated older professional Caucasian men, who paid for everything. He found no problem with this in the USA. However, being in Thailand, Darren felt that the context changed the interpretation of his relationships. He was not just on a date, as he might be in the USA. Now, he felt like he was on a paid date, where others suspected that he was a sex worker. He brought this up with his exes. But neither of them thought of this as an issue. Their lack of sympathy angered Darren, for he felt his feelings were not being acknowledged and trivialized. He came to reinterpret these relationships as having unbalanced power dynamics because the contrast in relative status positions was heightened in the Thai context. After making this assessment, Darren started to denounce white privilege and recast his former relationships as distasteful. Darren swore off ever dating older Caucasian men again.

As time went on, Darren's attitudes continued to evolve. His anger towards his exes subsided. He also changed his perspective about being seen as a money boy. Among other things, I had taken him to volunteer at SWING, an organization for male and transgender sex workers. Based on his experiences there, Darren stopped caring if people thought he was a money boy. He no longer thought there should be shame in being perceived as a sex worker. He also started to date one, who worked at a massage parlor

where both of us taught English for SWING as volunteers. Their relationship was very normal. For Darren, dating Beer was just like dating anyone else. Beer had a job, went to it, and afterwards would sometimes go to see Darren at his apartment as Beer lived with his family. Beer was off one day a week, when they would go on dates. They shared costs on these dates, so there was not a sense that Darren was supporting Beer or that Beer was only seeing Darren for monetary reasons. Prior to this, Darren did not think of himself as someone who was interested in dating other Asian men, though he did not rule it out. He had also previously dated other men of color in the US. But after his experiences with his Caucasian exes in Thailand, and with Beer, he came to think of Asian men as potential partners. When Darren returned to the USA, he found a long-term African American partner.

Darren's story brings into relief the setting and how the frictions in the field of gay Bangkok shapes how one is perceived, feels, and behaves. For Darren, being viewed as a sex worker brought on an existential crisis about his own value. He used strategies used by Thais, such as speaking English in public, to avoid this labeling. Yet, through regular interaction with sex workers he took on the attitude of not caring. Though sex work is stigmatized, it also can be a very normal middle class job. Indeed in the massage parlor where Beer worked, the staff had regular hours and made a salary comparable to white collar professionals. Yet there is always the threat of discovery. When I interviewed Beer's colleague Nut, who also lived with his parents, he stated that he told his parents that he worked in an office. I asked Nut if they did not ask him why he generally returns home at 2:00 AM. His reply was that his parents did not ask questions

about his work. Nut's contribution to household finances was more important than the means by which he acquired it.

Jetrosexuals and Bangkok as Home-Away-From-Home

Darren's story is not typical of Asian American visitors to Bangkok that I interacted with and interviewed, who were generally established professionals. For them, Bangkok was a reprieve from the sexual racism they dealt with in the USA. Though they did not always acknowledge the privilege of being an Asian foreigner from a Western country in Bangkok, they experienced a place where they were evaluated very differently than at home. Especially for older Asian American men, Bangkok leveled the playing field in terms of sexual access. It was a popular post for gay Asian American men working in the US federal government and a common travel destination.

As noted in the introduction, diasporic Asian gay men in the West must deal with "sexual racism" against them. So, while there is a sense that the West is more open to gay communities, which should be a refuge for Asian gay men, these very communities are also the sites of oppressive interactions. Thus, Asian gay men are left "homeless," with affinities towards multiple ethnic and queer communities but not necessarily belonging in any of them. In the early 1990s, this led to a "sticky rice" movement among politicized Asian gay men who sought to re-educate sexual desires away from the beauty standard of white-muscular masculinity (for a recent review, see Nguyen 2014). More recently, there has been a re-orientation of Asian diasporans towards Asia as a viable place to experience "authentic" Asian gay sexuality, or homosexuality without racism, what I refer to as "jetrosexuality." Thus, for both Asian gay men in Asia and Asian American gay men,

holiday trips to places like Bangkok become a source of relief from the regulatory

confines of home and provide an opportunity to experience the self as desirable to others.

When I interviewed Trevor, a Chinese American I have known for over twenty

years, he repeatedly noted that he felt "bigger" in Bangkok. There was both a literal and a

figurative sense to this enhancement. On the one hand, he noted that he had to lower his

head often when walking in Bangkok, because objects like store signs were placed in a

way that assumed a smaller height. Physically maneuvering through an environment built

for people assumed to be shorter made him experience a sense of greater stature. On the

other hand, Trevor experienced being desired by young, attractive Thai men, who do not

place as much emphasis on differentials in age. There is not as much emphasis placed on

the importance of youthfulness in Thai gay settings as in the West. These two factors, an

embodied experience of the body as larger and feeling more desired, changed the way

Trevor carried himself. As a mutual friend noted, "when Trevor is in Los Angeles, he

walks hunched down looking at the ground and is quiet. But when he is in Bangkok, he

walks around with his head high and proud, like he owns the place." That is, Trevor

experiences himself differently and alters his body comportment in response to his

environment. Indeed, many Asian American gay men living in and visiting Bangkok are

"jetrosexuals," who sometimes only have sexual relations overseas as they are unable to

find sexual partners in the USA. As Davis noted in an interview, "I haven't touched white

cock in seventeen years." The statement was said with a proud tone, but amid jokes that

pointed to the pain of routine rejection by Caucasian men in the USA. Groups of Asian

American men often went on vacation in Bangkok together. However, I routinely ran into

Asian Americans in Bangkok who were incognito, not alerting any of their friends about

their visit to hide what would be perceived of as a sexual escapade. The escape from American sexual racism to Asia was both predicated on class privilege and the mobility afforded by a passport from a wealthier nation. In a similar vein, gay men from developed Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore came to Bangkok primarily to experience sexual freedom outside the prying eyes of family, co-workers, and friends.

In this sense, Bangkok acted as a trans-Pacific home away from home for those who could afford it. Gay Asian men, both Asian American men fleeing sexual racism and Asian men fleeing homophobia sought refuge in Bangkok as a haven where they, external to their local kin and other surveillance networks, could experience relative freedom and sexual access. That is, both groups used movement in world-making efforts that allowed them to fashion new selves which they could not inhabit at home. That is, like Caucasian sex tourists, Asians from richer countries could cultivate a sense of superiority and desirability. Thus they became an increasingly significant part of Bangkok's "international" gay scene, and, at least on the heels of the global economic crisis in 2008, dramatically outnumbered Caucasians in gay entertainment venues. Even with numerical dominance, however, Asians also remained less detectable, less noticeable, as they blended in with Thai patrons when *farang* were far more likely to stand out.

The problem for many Asian gay men is that the home itself is not a safe or comfortable place. While kinship ties remain potent and sustaining, family can also be a source of psychosocial and emotional distress. As Lucetta Kam (2012) notes, for queer Chinese, family remains the primary source of regulation that queers experience. Constant surveillance, questioning about marriage plans, and other routine interactions

can lead to feelings of isolation and being out of place within the family home. This is exacerbated as mobility out of the home prior to marriage is limited in many parts of Asia. Or, marriage itself is still expected in places such as China, Indonesia, and Korea (see for example, Boellstorff 2005, Cho 2009).

When I interviewed Jefferson, a Hong Konger working in finance who was dating one of my Thai "little brothers" Em, I read him the script on my oral consent sheet. Because of my relationship with his boyfriend and his knowledge about my research, for Jefferson, the interview was as much an opportunity for him to question me about the Thai gay psyche and how to win over a Thai gay boyfriend as it was an opportunity for me to ask him about his experiences with Thai gay men. I made it clear that I would not answer any personal questions he had about Em but could respond in generalities based on my observations of Thais. I also said that I would not ask him personal questions about their relationship, as I wanted to afford Em his privacy. Afterwards, as I always did, I asked if Jefferson wanted to keep a copy of the consent script. His immediate reaction was "No, I don't want it. If I put it in my bag I will take it home. Then my maid will find it and it will say 'gay' so she will tell my mother." For Jefferson, it was easier to have relationships in faraway places that did not jeopardize his family relations. He was more likely to be caught as being gay if he dated another man in Hong Kong. At the same time, Bangkok offered a space where one could explore romance with a large pool of young, attractive, professional men who were generally more open about their sexuality than their gay counterparts in Hong Kong.

Within this context of flight from homophobia and racism, Bangkok has emerged as a home-away-from-home for non-Thai gay Asian men. The language and fantasy of

Thailand as a gay paradise is not just a Western idealization. Suganuma (2012), for example, notes how Japanese gay men started to write about Bangkok and Manila as utopias in the late 1970s. This development has been facilitated regionally by media flows, the internet, and discount airlines. Internationally distributed Thai gay media has become popular, and portrays a place that is relatively idyllic. Indeed, Thai gay film images are regularly used and circulated as magazine and guide map covers in Singaporean, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese gay media. Online sites provide practical travel information as well as a means to meet Thais and other travelers before departing. Most importantly, Bangkok's status is a product of Asia's economic development, which produces a critical mass of middle class Asian gay men in Bangkok, the base for the Asian gay party circuit. Discount airlines, led by Kuala Lumpur based Air Asia, now unite the region from India to Japan and reach as far as London and Sydney. Such connections enable emplacement via a communal co-presence, where gay commercial spaces are increasingly not labeled Thai or "international," but rather "Asian." Finally, this process of Thai Asianization, or the increasing alignment, transculturation, and identification with Asia, also produces new desires in other Asian countries. Thai theme parties, including events where Thais are brought in as entertainers, have become common events in countries such as Korea and Japan. Bangkok, then, is not only a geographic hub of gay Asian activity, but also an imagined space of gay Asian empowerment, freedom, and community. But, as the place where various constituencies meet on unequal terms, Bangkok is a place where Asian presence alters Thai gay community norms and tastes, directing it eastward.

Centering the Metropolis of Angels: A Brief Demography and Queer Geography

Krungthep (Thai shorthand for Bangkok, or the Metropolis of Angels), Thailand's capital, mediates between the "other provinces" and the world-at-large in the production of its own distinct sense of place. The city is a major tourist destination. It draws economic and queer migrants from throughout the country and Thailand's poorer neighbors as well as professional workers and retirees from the developed world. The city's multiple lane boulevards, many of which used to be canals, are clogged with traffic. Lined with shop houses, malls, office buildings, and condominiums, the roads are fed by an endless stream of *soi*, or small lanes, where most Thai people live and go about their everyday lives in highly localized, semi-private neighborhoods.[13] What makes Bangkok distinctive to those visiting for the first time are the contrasts—skyscrapers rise above the sky train, while on the asphalt below, peddlers push carts and carry baskets slung on their shoulders with a bamboo pole. Sometimes elephants cause traffic jams as they lumber down streets begging for bananas.

Bangkok is and is not Thailand. Bangkokians are fond of differentiating themselves from the rest of the country referred to as "upcountry" or "the other provinces" (ต่างจังหวัด *tang-jangwat*), and less politely as "the boonies" (บ้านนอก *ban nawk*), which has the connotation of rural, rustic, and backward. When I mistakenly assumed people were from another province, they would often show offence. Bangkok is what geographers refer to as a primate city, one that dwarfs all others in the nation. A quarter of the national population lives in the metropolitan region and another quarter are engaged in occupations that are based in or serve the city. For example, men from Isan, the northeastern region of the country, will go to Bangkok to work as taxi drivers for a

week at a time. Throughout the country, children are sent to live with relatives in Bangkok so that they can attend better schools. Most of the best government universities are based in the capital (e.g. Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Kasertsat, Mahidol) as is the open university, Ramkhamheang. While the government census records the number of residents as 9 million, this is based on household registration at birth. Thus, migrants into the city are typically registered "at home" in another province. Approximately 6 million residents are not registered in the city. Thus, for example, they must go "home" to vote during elections or to deal with official government business. During long holidays, such as Songkran, when families reunite, Bangkok becomes eerily quiet. The notorious traffic jams cease, albeit temporarily.

Bangkok is also a global cosmopolitan city in that people of many nationalities, ethnicities, and cultural groups develop communities. There are longstanding communities of Chinese, Indians, Mons, Vietnamese, and Lao. Many of these groups engage in occupational specialization. Indians engage in textile trade and tailoring, Mons in pottery, Lao in musical instrument production. There are large populations of expatriates and businesspeople from Japan, Australia, the USA, the Netherlands, the UK, Germany, France, and Korea. There are also migrant workers and refugees from the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar. This creates a diverse, highly fractious cityscape and often causes friction between various populations with competing interests.

Most of Bangkok's approximately 250 gay venues (van Griensven 2005) are found in the anonymity of a *soi* rather than on fronting streets. Yet the extensive queer scene makes it a major destination for gay tourism and guarantees its "iconic status as a place of imagined sexual tolerance and liberality" (Jackson 2009). This is especially true

for gay men from more developed and more conservative countries in Asia. When people say there are a million gays in Bangkok, that figure may not be so far from the truth. There are approximately 17,000 *kathoey* among approximately half a million Thai males who have sex with males (MSM).[14] This scale and the city's status as a cosmopolitan hub holding large populations of foreign workers, expatriates, and tourists, means that social spaces and commercial establishments are highly differentiated and segregated along the axes of gender presentation, class, nationality, and partner preferences.

In 2012, Bangkok became the most visited city in the world (MasterCard's Global Destination Cities Index) and acts as a regional hub for mainland Southeast Asia. Bangkok has the most extensive and international gay scene in Asia. Gay Bangkok is linked with Southeast and East Asian cities including Tokyo, Taipei, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur via large circuit parties attracting thousands of participants. As a hub of international NGO and HIV activities, numerous conferences bring together groups throughout the region. National holidays like Japanese Golden and Silver Week or China's Golden Week also create specific waves of tourists. These linkages are symptomatic of a greater trend toward regional integration in Southeast and East Asia most often glossed as ASEAN +3, which includes Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and Korea.[15] In Thailand, the Japanese alone invest more than double that of all European, North American, and Australasian countries combined. With Japanese restaurants supplanting American fast food chains, eating Japanese signifies middle class modernity. East Asian media is dramatically molding Thai aesthetics and fashion. The Korean Wave, in particular, has become a dominant source of television series, movies, and music.[16] At gay bars, one will typically hear more Korean than Western or Thai

songs. Cosmetic procedures and devices, like eyelash extensions or big-eye contacts imported from Korea, are popular among gay/*kathoey*. At the same time, Thailand exports media to neighboring countries and art films in particular are gaining attention internationally. Bangkok is central to a new queer Asian regionalism in which capital, media, commodity, and human flows are increasingly circumventing Western gay forms and fashioning new queer Asian subjectivities.

Bangkok is one of the gay capitals of the world, in line with San Francisco, Amsterdam, Sydney, Rio, or Tokyo. However, its place as the "gay capital" of Asia need not be taken for granted. Indeed, in the early 2000s, Singapore was well on a trajectory to become the place for gay men in Asia. The largest circuit parties in Asia were in Singapore, and sanctioned by the government. Its organizers had convincingly used a survey showing that gay tourists spent more money than their heterosexual counterparts to link the parties with economic development (Stuart Koe, personal communication 2006). Organizers also linked the circuit party to nationalism, calling it the Nation Party and holding it in honor of Singapore's Nation Day, celebrating independence. Aligning the acceptance of a gay event with nationalism and tourist income helped to provide a space for these parties (see also Yue and Zubillaga-Pow 2012 and Atkins 2011). The pink dollar, also came at a time with declining fertility and increased out-migration of citizens, especially among the educated Chinese middle class (Ong 2006). Singapore realized that economic progress and modernization was no longer the sole means to evaluate the city-state and considered livability and recreation as key factors to keep Singaporeans from leaving. The government began to invest in the "creative economy," such as the arts, design, and information technology (Atkins 2011). The climate for queer Singaporeans

had improved. However, in 2007, with a rise in HIV cases, the government again disallowed these large gay events, blaming the increase on HIV with the arrival of foreign gay tourists (Stuart Koe, personal communication 2006; Atkins 2011). The party was moved to Thailand, first Phuket, which had recently been devastated by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and was desperate to rebuild its tourism infrastructure. Subsequently the party and a rival one were held in Bangkok.

Meanwhile, Taiwan's queer scene was burgeoning. Gay bars came to dominate the courtyard area behind the Red House, the historic Japanese colonial administration building, which made Silom Soi 4 look like a small, grungy back alley in comparison. Clubs opened and expanded. An international standard sauna opened. Combined with Taiwan being a center for Chinese queer studies and activism, Taipei became a new gay Asian destination city. Stuart Koe (personal communication 2009) suggests that demographics play a major role in how Taipei and Hong Kong have developed differently. Mandatory military service for Taiwanese men means that they leave home while high rents in Hong Kong keep them at home. Additionally, gay men from Hong Kong have nowhere else to go, while men from throughout Taiwan can relocate to Taipei. The scene there has grown remarkably fast. Within a few years, Taipei boasted Asia's largest Pride march (10,000 participants in 2009; 65,000 participants in 2012), at the same time that Bangkok ended theirs.[17] Bangkok, instead, holds a human rights march for sexual diversity and incorporates many other activities around this theme in conjunction with World AIDS Day. Indeed, many middle class gay men in Bangkok now go to Taipei for the Halloween weekend, which includes both Pride and a series of circuit parties.[18] Finally, in 2011, Nepal became the first country in Asia to recognize a third

gender on official documents and has since stated a desire to attract the gay tourist

market. While India and Pakistan have also recognized "other" sexes, primarily identified

as *hijra*, they have not promoted gay tourism.

Middle Class Sex Workers: Sex Workers and the Middle Class

I use the term "middle classes" to refer to a large swath of people from lower

middle class, middle middle class, and upper middle class backgrounds. Here I will lay

out a few of the complexities. In particular, I describe sex work and relative incomes to

place it within a framework of employment, which is, to a certain extent, incomparable to

the class coding of other professions. There is no good definition of middle class in the

Thai literature, but I use income from 7,000 to 70,000 Thai Baht per month ($250 to

$2,500) as a rough estimate of income that supports middle class consumption and

lifestyles. Ockey (1999) notes that there is no clear coincidence of class position with

education, occupation, or income in Thailand. For example, the lowest status occupation

is "service woman, e.g. masseuse, 'partner'" or a sex worker (citing Suphawong 1991)

but, women in this category may make incomes greater than white collar professionals

such as professors. Clearly interrelated issues of education, family wealth, land

ownership, and cosmopolitan experience also play a major role in class standing.

Furthermore, lifestyle costs vary immensely by region in Thailand, with Phuket, not

Bangkok, being the most expensive region. Minimum wages in Thailand previously

accounted for this difference. In regards to income, 7,000 Baht per month is a low salary

in Bangkok. But it is not low outside of Bangkok. I use the lower limit of 7,000 as this is

the approximate income for an entry level government administrator position in Bangkok

with a college degree. Though this income is significantly lower than what one could expect in the private sector, it would be considered a respectable and desirable job for its security and benefits. While service workers also make similar incomes, individuals of higher qualifications, that is, white collar professionals, are the Thais most likely to profess a desire for white Asian partners.

Bank of Thailand's official statistics for Thailand place the average monthly salary in the fourth quarter of 2010 at 9,649.13.[19] However, I would suggest the figure is actually significantly lower, as many employees are not legally employed and many are not paid minimum wage. In my preliminary fieldwork from 2004-2006, bar staff generally received 100-200 THB per day, with pay being docked if they arrived late. If one left early, for example, with a bar patron, they would presumably not be available to receive any pay. Bar staff were, however, able to receive tips to supplement their income or have patrons buy them drinks, sometimes earning commissions from them. Thus there was an incentive to work in bars frequented by Caucasians, as Americans were more likely to tip, and Westerners in general were more likely to buy drinks for the staff. Miu, who operated a popular sauna paid his employees minimum wage. The workers lived at the business and slept there after it closed, which was convenient since the business had rooms set up with mattresses. None of the workers I interacted with complained about the salary. Furthermore, on numerous occasions, I saw former employees return to the sauna to chat with the owner, showing their gratitude and maintaining connections that they framed in terms of kinship relations. Though they referred to the owner being an "older brother," these relations were more like those of parents since they involved directed flows of financial resources, moral authority, and respect. In 2010, day labor rubber

tappers I met in the southern provinces, the highest paid in Thailand, claimed to receive

100 THB per day, as Burmese migrant workers were also available in the region.

Beginning January 1, 2013, Thailand adopted a new national minimum wage of 300 THB

per day. Prior to this, the minimum wage ranged in Thailand from 159 THB per day in

Phayao to 221 in Phuket. The minimum wage in Bangkok was 215 THB per day. Thus, a

worker paid minimum wage (which is a daily rate, typically for 10-12 hours) in Bangkok,

working six days a week would make under 6,000 Baht. A job at a large, modern chain

such as at 7-11 convenience stores paid 23-25 THB per hour (approximately $0.80),

which was the equivalent of a 230-250 THB per 10-hour day job, but in the comfort of air

conditioning. According to my neighbor, who worked at an NGO serving refugees and

undocumented workers, Burmese migrant construction workers could receive as little as

25 Baht per day, which included housing, but not food.

Sex work is not directly linked to class status, though sex workers are typically

assumed to be *lo-so* ("low class"). Military draftees are paid a low stipend, which meant

that some of them engaged in sex work or sought extra support, and were thus considered

easy targets for *kathoey*. The typical reason given to me by sex workers for entering sex

work was the comparably high salary. Given that a worker serving food and cleaning up

at a street stall in Bangkok might very well make less than minimum wage, being

guaranteed the same wage for sitting all day in an air conditioned room and then making

tips (typically 100 THB), commission (e.g. 15 to 50 THB off the price of a customer's

drinks), and service charges (generally 500-1500 THB) can be described as "easy" or

"fun." The majority of time in sex work was spent socializing with other sex workers.

However, sex work, regardless of the conditions and pay, can be a highly a stigmatizing

occupation. Nevertheless, Thai sex workers tend not to identify as sex workers (referring to themselves as bar workers, dancers, masseurs, etc.) and sex work is not necessarily a "master identity" (Goffman 1986) in the sense that it does not necessarily define who a person is nor absolutely spoil their identity. Indeed many sex workers think of their work as moral in that they are sacrificing for the greater good of providing monetary support for their families. They were being good people (*khon di*). Similarly, other Thais may see sex workers simply as people born into unfortunate economic circumstances. Sex workers, like gender and sexually diverse people, can be pitied for their fate, perhaps tied to improper conduct in a former life, rather than as inherently bad people.

Not counting those who are trafficked into brothels or paying off family debts and earn next to nothing (I know of no men or transgender women who fit into this category in Thailand), the "direct" prostitutes on the street constitute the lowest rung of sex workers. In Bangkok, they typically charge between 300-800 THB ($10-27), though I have heard many male patrons claim and sometimes boast of paying 200, 100, or less. Many of these individuals are also not "full-time," that is, they are often students, military personnel, and other low-wage workers looking to supplement their income with sex work. Other freelancers work out of places such as McDonalds, where they can sit and approach foreigners they may think are interested, though businesses tolerating this are now rare. Many also work out of bars, both as actual freelancers (i.e. they do not work for the bar or another sexually oriented establishment) or as after-work freelancers. For example, many of the go-go boys, coyotes, and masseurs in the Silom area will go to Silom bars after their place of work closes.

More recently, there has been a differentiation of higher end freelancers, who work only via gay internet sites, typically offering massage or escort. This is more specialized and requires both the capital investment to be online, either at home or at an internet café, and sufficient English language skills to be able to communicate with their primarily foreign clients. Some online freelancers specifically state in their profiles that they are not money boys, which they use as a tactic to negotiate higher prices. There have been a series of scandals around students selling sex in chat room platforms such as Camfrog to older Thais. Both teenage boys and girls engage in this practice, though the common trope is of girls using the money to buy luxury consumer goods like designer bags they otherwise could not afford. This is common media fodder for the decline in morals among materialist youth.

The much more elaborated system of "indirect" sex work, in which there is mediation between the sex worker and client, typically in the space of a commercial establishment, provides both financial security (having some income every day, where a worker on the street may go without a client) and higher income. Male to female transgender (pre- and post-operative) sex workers occupy a special niche within female go-go bars catering to foreigners, though they often do not disclose their transgender status. There are also establishments that only employ pre-operative transgender women, who are typically "over beauty," more beautiful than natal women. In the sphere of male sex workers there are numerous go-go bars in several neighborhoods of Bangkok, though mostly clustered in the Surawongse area. Host karaoke bars are more widely distributed. The largest, most diverse, and most geographically wide-spread system is comprised of massage parlors, which includes special services, sometimes uncompensated or

negotiated for tips, typically under 500 THB, at regular massage parlors. At male

massage parlors that specifically provide sexual services, there are both service charges

and "mandatory tips" (typically 500-1500 Baht or $17-33), whether or not any sex is

involved. At the highest end are call centers that provide elite escorts who are completely

hidden from public view and sent, for example, to a patron's hotel room. I however, have

no access to this arena. These sex workers often make more than their white collar peers.

International sex workers, by income, fall into many different classes. By my

income definition of middle class (7,000 – 70,000), sex workers working in the

international sector (i.e. not in Thai brothels, which often rely on Burmese, hill tribe, and

other ethnically non-Thai women) would primarily be considered middle class. Indeed,

one can make substantially more. However, most bar workers, especially from rural

backgrounds with little education, would not be considered middle class by other

Bangkokians, regardless of their income, because of their dress and behavior. Many

massage parlor workers, on the other hand, are able to present middle class dispositions.

Popular and upscale male massage parlors guarantee a minimum salary of 70,000 THB

($2,300) or twice the salary of an associate professor at a top state university. These

venues often focus on providing light-skinned, tall, muscular, and often educated men to

Thai and other Asian men. In a typical mid-range male massage parlor with a minimum

1,000 THB tip, a popular employee working six days per week would make at least

50,000 THB (1,000 THB/client * 2 clients/day * 25 days/month) in tips, plus whatever

they are paid for their work by the establishment (which can be less than minimum wage,

but helps to ensure that employees show up). Tips are often higher than the minimum (the

largest I have heard is 10,000; though the tip is typically under 2,000 and rarely over

4,000). Additionally, a worker can be called back, for example, if a customer comes with a specific request for that employee or if there is additional demand at the parlor.

One night, when I was at a lower-middle class bar in the Rachada area, I ran into a friend there. Stamp seemed out of place as someone who regularly went to the more upscale Ortorkor instead. More strangely, he was alone. Thais very rarely go to bars alone. He immediately recognized me and came to my table. Stamp sounded exasperated and a little frightened. I asked what he was doing and he showed me a stack of business card size flyers he had made. Stamp had just opened a massage parlor in the Silom area and was in need of more masseurs because demand was higher than he anticipated, so he was at this bar to recruit more workers. However, Stamp had a difficult time talking to strangers. I introduced Stamp to my friends and asked if he wanted to join our table. He politely declined and said he would look for other avenues to hire workers, maybe posting a message online. Stamp asked if I knew anyone interested. He was offering a minimum monthly salary of 70,000 THB, which was stated on the flyer. I said I would take a few flyers and give them to people who might be interested since I had a lot of contact with masseurs and other sex workers. The next day, when I told my "little brother" Em, he told me he had recently been offered 100,000 THB by the owner of Jock Club, a well-known business that catered to an Asian clientele in the Ari area, a relatively posh neighborhood. Overhearing our conversation, Kaew, who worked at an HIV NGO targeting sex workers laughed and quipped that "at Superman [a well-known massage parlor that catered to Asian tourists in the Nana area], the masseurs drive to work in their [Mercedes] Benz." Besides providing relatively high incomes for masseurs who are considered attractive, massage parlors also provide sex workers and patrons with a great

deal of anonymity compared to other venues such as bars, night clubs, and street work. However, regardless of income there is still stigma attached to sex and "entertainment" work. To summarize, the range of income from sex work is wide, and almost all sex workers working in international settings would fit squarely in the income range I designated as middle class. Different work environments, however, cultivate what would be seen as low class or respectable middle class affect.

Classifying Sex Work in Gay Bars

Sex work is also essential to understanding class and social dynamics within the space of Thai gay bars as sexual commerce is intimately wedded to venues, both for locals and for foreigners. This can also raise anxieties about who is and is not a sex worker or appears to be one. At one end are go-go bars in the Surawongse and Saphan Kwai areas. The majority of the patrons in these establishments are foreigners, with Asians outnumbering Caucasians during my fieldword. Go-go bars are named after their use of "a go-go" boys, who are typically skimpily dressed and appear on stage in a bikini sporting a button with a number. For the sake of Thai modesty, workers will typically wear two layers, a bikini under a bikini, which suggests they are wearing both underwear and outerwear. When and if a penis is exposed on stage during special shows that involve nudity or sex, it will typically be "clothed" in a condom. The number allows guests to make requests to the staff by number, without having to point, both providing more anonymity for patrons who so desire it and preventing shame among Thais, who point at objects and animals but not at other people. One can immediately "off" a worker, which means paying a fee to the bar for making the connection (generally around 300 to 500

THB) or ask the worker to sit with you. The worker receives a commission from any drinks you buy them (though they are generally prohibited from drinking alcohol, so they will order drinks like Coke or milk). If one does not choose to "off" the worker, the patron is generally expected to pay a tip of 100 THB or more for the short time companionship.

Once a worker is offed, he will immediately change into street clothes, even if he remains in the bar with the patron. The go-go boy thus transforms from someone who is explicitly available to another customer watching the show. Patrons negotiate directly with the workers what activities they will engage in, for how long, and for how much money. Previously, there were generally standard rates for "short time" (typically in a nearby hotel that charges by the hour) versus "all night," however, the rates sex workers expect have become more standardized, where there is a general minimum flat fee that is expected (generally 1,000 to 1,500 THB) regardless of length of time. The new focus on shorter term services also allows workers to return to the bar for a second round off, potentially doubling their income for the evening.

Three features of this "off" system are quite unusual from a Western perspective. First, the system ensures safety for the patron. As the workers are employees of a bar, a patron can go to the bar to file a complaint about the worker. This prevents petty theft and ensures that workers will provide a minimally adequate service. Complaints will get a worker fired and over time will prevent one from working in the industry. Second, prices are not negotiated firmly in advance. That is, though there are standard guidelines, the patron pays the amount he wishes based on his satisfaction and his sense of generosity. Even if a worker has a minimum in mind, particularly unsatisfied customers will show

their disapproval by paying less. Third, is the "open-ended" (Cohen 1993) nature of the system, where Thais often perform services more like temporary romantic and companionate partners rather than sex workers.[20] This means that a patron might off a worker for a week or two while he is on vacation in Thailand, and travel throughout the country together. The Thai not only provides sex, but also general companionship, and acts as tour guide, translator, and bargainer. The "low class" aspect of these bars is also fetishized by some Western and Thai men, who hold onto the fantasy that the workers are not gay, but rather "real" or heterosexual men, which many of them are.[21] The idea that their poverty leads them to sex work provides them with a masculine aura. The type of Thai men available, however, is less appealing to Asian visitors, who prefer light-skinned muscular men that approximate middle class ideals. Host bars, typically karaoke bars, follow a similar system of companionship and offing. However, host bars vary much more widely in the class presentations of workers available and workers are less sexualized, in that the hosts are fully clothed.

Within local Thai gay bar spaces oriented towards Thai customers, class marks the type of sex worker available. The major distinction among sex workers in gay bars is between that of "coyote boys" and "models." Both of these, however, occur in the context of Thai style table dance bars. That is, they are sex workers integrated into Thai dance clubs rather than bars specifically focused on sex workers as go-go bars are. In the lower middle class gay bars of Rattanakosin, Ratchada, and Ramkhamhaeng, coyote boys are on offer. Coyote boys are distinguished from go-go boys in that they dance, and are expected to dance well. Coyotes employ a specific style of fast and rhythmic dance that contrasts with the slow and sensual "macho dance" moves that go-go bars are known for.

However, coyote dance, like macho dance, also conveys a potent lower class masculinity. The aesthetics of coyotes are also similar to go-go boys. They both often style their hair based on Japanese manga characters, use make-up to whiten their faces and increase the contrast in their eyebrows, and maintain lean, fit bodies. Coyotes, however, will typically incorporate more masculine symbols in their costumes, such as arm or chest bands to highlight their muscles or wear camouflage patterns to reference masculinity in militarism, circuit parties, and Japanese pornography. Like go-go boys, coyotes wear numbers so that one can request and off them. They also engage in specific tipping rituals, such as soda shows. Patrons will send tips and a bottle of soda water to a coyote who, while dancing, will shake the bottle of soda and then pour the gushing water on himself, which highlights the outlines in his bikini similar to a wet t-shirt contest.

The coyote system, as a form of sex work, however, is not as formalized as the go-go system. After coyote boy shows, the coyotes will generally frequent the tables of patrons who sent them tips, to show their appreciation. However, as they are in dance clubs that use a bottle service system, they do not receive commissions for drinks. Rather, patrons provide them drinks from their own bottle. Thus coyotes are less committed to individual patrons but move more freely throughout the bar space, looking for potential clients. Coyotes also do not expect to be offed like go-go boys. Their primary income is as entertainers for the club, as dancers during "sexy shows." Their primary occupational identification is as "dancers" rather than bar employees. While they make more money if they are offed, it is not as essential to their income and ongoing employment as it is in a go-go bar. Furthermore, the ratios between go-go boys and coyotes are very different. In many go-go boy bars, there are as many or more go-go boys as there are patrons. Thus,

the competition among go-go boys for patrons is very high. On the other hand, a dance club with several hundred patrons may have a dozen coyotes. Coyotes thus do not feel compelled to seek a patron in as competitive a manner as go-gos. They thus have a much more casual manner in which they interact with patrons. Furthermore, as the dance bar does not control coyote boy interactions as a go-go bar would, they are able to more freely make connections and personal deals with patrons. For example, while visiting different tables, a coyote could exchange numbers with a potential patron and set up a date for another time to avoid off fees, though some bars maintain a minimum number of off fines per month, typically one per month. While making private arrangements is possible in the setting of a go-go bar, it would first require that a patron use a staff intermediary to bring a go-go boy to him. Furthermore, while the go-go boy is working in a primarily foreign environment (mostly Asian and Western tourists), the coyote boy is working in a primarily Thai environment, where he interacts with patrons in Thai, and, though not communicating as equals, can interact more on his own terms.

In contrast to the coyote boy at lower middle class gay bars, middle class gay bars in RCA, Ratchada, or Ortokor, provide what is referred to as "models." Like coyotes, models work in gay clubs that are not focused on sex work, they are an added feature and eye candy. Unlike the coyote boy, a model is not expected to dance. Rather, he must feature his model-like attractiveness, which means that he must be muscular, preferably light-skinned, and have modern, classy features such as colorful Japanese-style rather than monochromatic, religious Thai tattoos. Model shows also embody catwalk respectability. There is no vulgarity. The limit is what would be acceptable to print in a mainstream fashion magazine. The shows typically start with a runway fully dressed. As

the evening progresses, shirts come off. Further in the evening, pants are removed, so that it becomes an underwear show. Depending on the venue, there might be side shows that involve people showering. But these are always discrete, there is never any genital exposure involved. While coyotes will often bind rubber bands around their penises to maintain erections under their bikinis, this would not be considered appropriate for models. However, like coyotes, models are working in venues where their focus is on being a bar or dance club, not on selling sexual services. Thus, they have a great deal of freedom. Like coyotes, between shows and once the show is over, they visit tables of patrons who have given them tips and generally stick to those tables who have provided the most. Additionally, like coyotes, though they are on an off system, they are neither in a highly competitive off environment closely monitored by the institution nor in the situation that their primary income is from external services. So their work in socializing with bar patrons is much more free, even as they hope to find a customer.

I describe sex work extensively for three reasons. First, it is a highly charged social phenomenon in Thailand because of its history and representational value, which overdetermines all Thais as sex workers. Many tourists, especially Western men, still come to Thailand expecting that everyone is for sale. While sex work is common and thoroughly integrated into the gay scene, it is clearly a profession for but a small minority of individuals. Second, sex work is highly differentiated and thus complicates thinking about many issues such as class, emotion, intimacy, and subjectivity. The forms that sex work takes in Thailand are often quite distinct. Third, sex work is inextricably tied with gay commercial establishments and social life, both for locals and for foreigners. This heightens the tension in gay spaces about who is and is not a sex worker.

Thai gay men show heightened conern about not appearing to be sex workers because of the tight linkage between gay venues and sex workers. This is most acute in areas such as Silom, where foreigners, sex workers, and middle class Thais all come in contact. Silom is a particularly important space to navigate for Thais, because the bars do not employ distinguishable sex workers such as coyotes or models. Rather, the bars that attract foreigners are worked by freelancers. What is most important about freelancers, and those who are freelancing in their extra time, is that they are integrated with a broader population of individuals. That is, freelancers move freely through gay venues and thus are integrated with with other patrons They are not marked by uniform as employees. This provokes anxiety for Thais who do not want to appear to be freelance sex workers. While holding a beer often marks one as a foreigner, not holding a drink at all can be a sign of sex work. Sex workers freelancing in bar spaces are often alone and not buying or drinking alcohol as other bar patrons are. Within this space, not holding a drink when moving about is considered "rude" behavior. Not because of drinking minimums at venues such as DJ Station, but rather because it shows one is not purchasing drinks, which can be interpreted as a sign of "working," especially if a dark-skinned Thai.

I also want to note that contact with sex workers in gay spaces was often very differently conceived of based on race, gender, and sexuality. Thai sex workers often had a strong preference for other Asians, both as a cover for sex work (see chapter 7), but also as a personal desire. My most direct experience of this was when a transgender sex worker at a bar in the Nana area proposed to me that she would not only pay her own off fee, but that she would also pay for the short-term hotel, because she had never had sex with a Korean before and desired to. Numerous sex workers, male, female, and

transgender, either offered their services to me for free or even offered to pay me to have sex. I politely declined. This sentiment was not uncommon, and many of my Asian friends benefited from it as well when I introduced them to sex workers I knew. This was most acute among heterosexual Thai male sex workers in gay establishments. When my Vietnamese sister-in-law visited and I took her to a go-go bar, she was immediately propositioned by a go-go boy to go out on a date, outside of the bar off system. This would also occur in gay bars, where models would proposition my Asian female friends, expecting no payment. For them, being with an attractive, light-skinned Korean, Japanese, or Vietnamese women was more thrilling than the need for money. As I regularly went out with other Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Chinese friends as well as Caucasian and African American ones, clear patterns emerged in reference to who was desirable and why. What was surprising to me was the offering of "free" services, or the offering of unpaid dates, something many Western sex worker advocates I have worked with have stated was not possible in their home countries. However, the preferences of many Thai sex workers were primarily based on concerns of race and respectability. They expressed their agency by pursuing their own desires rather than what was financially more lucrative. But issues such as stereotypical physical differences also mattered. Kaew, when she referred to East Asian men, would often hold up her pinky finger. This was her way of signifying that East Asian men were too small for her tastes. On the other hand, when I went out with Dewon, an African American expat friend, on more than one occasion I witnessed Thai gay men fondling his hand and extrapolating from the length and girth of his fingers what his penis must be like. Once, when a Thai patron at a neighboring table was hesitant to leave with Dewon, our waiter placed Dewon's hand in

the Thai patron's hands. He then stated: "Feel this. This is how big it is. Do you want to give that up?"

The Politics of Visibility

It is perhaps surprising to many foreign visitors that Thailand is a conservative country in terms of the public display of sexuality. Generally, only young couples hold hands and very rarely do they kiss in public. Kissing on the mouth is not considered polite in view of others. Kate, a middle class Thai woman working in marketing pointed out a farang couple that were kissing in public at a mall. It was a brief, but decidedly romantic kiss, in which they looked each other in the eyes before placing their lips together. Kate noted how inappropriate kissing in public was and felt that foreigners did not respect Thais because they did not behave modestly, as Thais would. Rather than following Thai norms, they acted as they wanted and imposed their own standards, as children and others could see. Even the Thai "sniff kiss," where one places the nose at another's cheek and inhales to smell the other person, is generally not visible in public. This would be a domestic behavior, where for example, mothers sniff their children before leaving the house and when they return home to show affection. It is also considered a romantic kiss between lovers. So one might catch a glimpse of a young man stealing a kiss from his girlfriend in public, quickly sniffing her and pulling back, after which the girlfriend might lightly slap him in the face or knock him in the shoulder, a response that both states that she is mildly offended and yet feels close to him. But this would not be a common occurrence. Public displays of romantic affection are generally frowned upon.

In downtown Bangkok, a more common sight is a *farang* man holding a Thai woman's hand, sometimes as she remains a step or two behind him. While some *farang* men I know have interpreted this as Thai modesty and the desire for a woman to show her subservient status to the man, I more often interpret it as her unwillingness to be his partner, more akin to dragging her along. One can also see the opposite situation where a Thai woman is practically riding on the side of a *farang* man, both of her arms tightly wrapped around his trunk in a gesture of her absolute possession of him. When Thai women of higher status have *farang* husbands, this is generally not considered respectable behavior. One is expected to maintain appropriate, respectful distance.

Thais express tremendous concern over "face," public respectability, and status. Indeed, external surfaces are not expected to convey an interior truth. Rather, the surface performance stands in for and acts as the real. In Thailand, people readily identify with class status, especially the impoverished (คนจน *khon-jon*) and the wealthy (ไฮโซ *hai-so*). The labels for the poor and rich are terms of self-identity in everyday use, whereas the term for middle class (ชนชั้นกลาง *chon-chan-klang*) is more academic. However, many people will simply refer to themselves as ordinary or normal (ธรรมดา *thammada*), implying that they are typical rather than extreme. Each has a different relationship to foreigners, and *farang* in particular. For the poor, any relationship with foreigners conveys status and has the potential to provide an economic benefit. Rural people, for example, will prominently display photos with foreigners and pass them around in social gatherings. Having foreigners attend large celebrations such as weddings is considered auspicious. Foreigner presence points to the wider social connections one has, which can possibly be mobilized into financial resources during times of need. Foreigner men are often offered

daughters for marriage, to seal such relationships and ensure regular support. This is predicated on the fact that foreigners are rare in such environments (though this is becoming less the case, especially in areas of the Northeast, referred to as *muban farang*, or foreigner villages, where many rural Thai women have married *farang*, often retirees).

In contrast, wealthy Thais, particularly in urban areas, are expected to have many foreign connections. Race/nationality of the connection is of little concern, though their individual respectability and ethnic distinctions are made. Indeed, Lucas, a *hai-so* Thai, referred to *farang* as "necessary accessories like a handbag" for any large size gathering, and noted that "some brands are better than others." It is, for example, more elite to be speaking French than English, the common tongue for international gatherings. Furthermore, *hai-so* Thais are very perceptive to class distinctions. While they will accept middle class foreigners, they will clearly be dismayed by foreigners who dress and groom inappropriately for the situation. Wealthy Thais have the elite cultural capital to differentiate international brand name products from copies, different status valences in English accents, the relative importance of foreign cities, and other cosmopolitan references that are not readily legible to those without extensive international experience. Rich Thais typically have traveled extensively and are often educated abroad. Thus, they have extensive experiences with foreigners, most often in Western countries, and are used to the company of *farang*. Moreover, they are, for the most part, "above" status concerns. Being driven by one's chauffer to a high end hotel restaurant in a Mercedes with a well-dressed *farang* friend or partner creates an impression that insulates one from questions about status. The same is not true for middle class people who arrive in a taxi.

Middle class Thais are obviously situated between poor and wealthy ones. However, their position, which needs to be differentiated from the poor, makes them particularly anxious about their status. Furthermore, the relative positioning of the country coupled with anxiety about the legitimacy of sexual commerce mediates the desire for *farang* among the middle classes. Thais have been engaging in sexual relations with foreigners at least since the early modern period. As the Thai economic "miracle" was built on sex (R&R) sold to the US military during the American war with Vietnam and, subsequently, to tourists, sexual commerce continues to shape national ideologies of gender, sexuality, and individual agency (Bishop and Robinson 1997, Jeffrey 2003).[22] This type of interaction is racialized such that companionship with *farang* (and *farang-dam*) is often interpellated as sex work or paid companionship. Thus, one means for middle class individuals to simultaneously seek higher status partners and avoid such stigma is to focus their desires on white Asians.

The Invisibility of Asian Sex Tourists in Thailand

Thailand has a fraught relationship with foreigners and tourism in general. People who have the easiest time are investors (many of whom do not invest in Thai businesses but have large Thai bank accounts), business people, and retirees (anyone over 50 years of age). Otherwise long term entry into the country can be complicated. Once inside, foreigners must report their residence every 90 days. Some visa holders are "fined" for not leaving the country every 90 days, even when on year-long visas, typically the longest visas for foreigners. These practices promote the idea that Thailand is not welcoming to foreign workers. On the other hand, Thailand is renowned for the

hospitality of its tourism sector. According to government statistics, Thailand's GNP is

only 5% based on tourism. However, the impact that tourism has on the overall economy

is much greater. The government is regularly promoting tourism (though increasingly just

a short-term high end resort type vacation) and developing new markets. Tourist oriented

businesses routinely request government intervention when tourism slumps, as has

happened during recent economic downturns, political unrest, and emerging epidemics.

Percent Change in Tourism from Major Tourist Sending Countries (1997-2011)

	1997-2001	2002-2006	2007-2011	**Overall 1997-2011**
Indonesia	72.52	31.99	58.51	**316.11**
Laos	205.43	199.79	71.18	**3051.66**
Malaysia	11.04	21.66	61.10	**139.03**
Philippines	69.67	41.12	34.95	**249.78**
Singapore	35.98	18.92	-14.61	**38.67**
Vietnam	186.01	155.79	95.38	**1666.47**
China	58.11	35.30	71.59	**291.37**
Hong Kong	12.49	-13.20	-8.08	**-12.81**
Japan	22.14	4.87	-9.67	**16.83**
Korea	34.63	53.55	-6.44	**144.79**
Taiwan	62.61	-30.31	4.82	**-0.15**
India	52.86	69.54	80.74	**577.15**
France	17.72	25.65	46.61	**154.42**
Germany	18.99	23.00	15.25	**80.86**
Netherlands	78.99	22.27	8.48	**157.31**
Russia	21.61	176.49	276.80	**2072.86**
Sweden	125.69	38.32	-0.12	**276.23**
United Kingdom	81.50	29.88	13.20	**193.74**
Australia	56.76	50.16	30.05	**254.97**
U.S.A.	59.10	23.29	9.32	**119.15**

Table 1: Tourism in Thailand is linked to both the economies of sending countries and

prices in Thailand. The greatest surge is among developing and post-Socialist countries in

Asia and Russia [Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand].

While the 1997 IMF bailout marks a particularly critical year in the Thai imagination, and heralded anti-Western sentiments, the US's 2007 subprime mortgage crisis and subsequent 2008 global recession affected Thailand in other ways that led to greater Asianification. An analysis of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) statistics reveals that the mix of tourists entering Thailand has changed significantly since the IMF crisis.[23] The relative proportion of East Asian tourists had been declining in the last fifteen years, from 38% to 25% of all international arrivals. However, economic malaise in wealthier countries like Japan and Korea combined with the continued growth of Mainland China and Vietnam, meant that arrivals from the region dramatically increased. For example, Vietnamese tourism has increased an amazing 3052% during this period. Tourism from Indonesia, the Philippines, and China have tripled. India has increased 577% while Russia has increased 2073%.

Tourism to Thailand is keyed to economic changes. East Asian tourism exemplifies the trend as it is related to economic development and periodic fluctuations. For example, there is an overall 145% increase in tourism to Thailand from Korea in this 15 year period, however, during the last 5 years, more travel is dedicated to locations farther away in places such as Europe. Thus, the effect of East Asian development is that those consumers who can afford it seek travel destinations further afield and in more expensive countries, such as in Australia, the USA, or Europe. However, with the global financial crisis, many East Asian tourists from developed countries have been staying closer and traveling to less expensive countries such as Thailand. Thus, there has been a return to Southeast Asian tourism. Yet, among gay Asian men, there still remains a special draw to Thailand as a regional gay travel destination. The TAT has also been

promoting Thailand as a gay destination to Westerners over the last decade. In 2013, TAT's New York Office launched a major campaign targeting gay men and lesbians, called "Go Thai. Be Free." TAT promotions have included VIP fast-track access through immigration for gay and lesbian couples. These campaigns specifically capitalize on Thailand's reputation for being tolerant of homosexuality.

Overall, the majority of tourists to Thailand are coming from Asia. I would suggest that this also means the majority of sex tourists are from Asia, though they may not be as visible in international red light districts. The TAT classifies the world into the following regions: 1) East Asia, which includes ASEAN (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam), China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Others; 2) Europe, which includes Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, East Europe, and Others; 3) The Americas, which includes Argentina, Brazil, Canada, USA, and Others; 4) South Asia, which includes Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Others; 5) Oceania, which includes Australia, New Zealand, and Others; 6) Middle East, which includes Egypt, Israel, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., and Others; and 7) Africa, which includes South Africa and Others. As shown in Table 1, contrary to public perceptions about tourists to Thailand being white Westerners, the majority actually come from Asian neighbors. Throughout the period since the 1997 IMF crisis, the majority of tourists have been from East and Southeast Asian countries, not from Western countries, as is often assumed, in both the tourism and sex tourism literature.
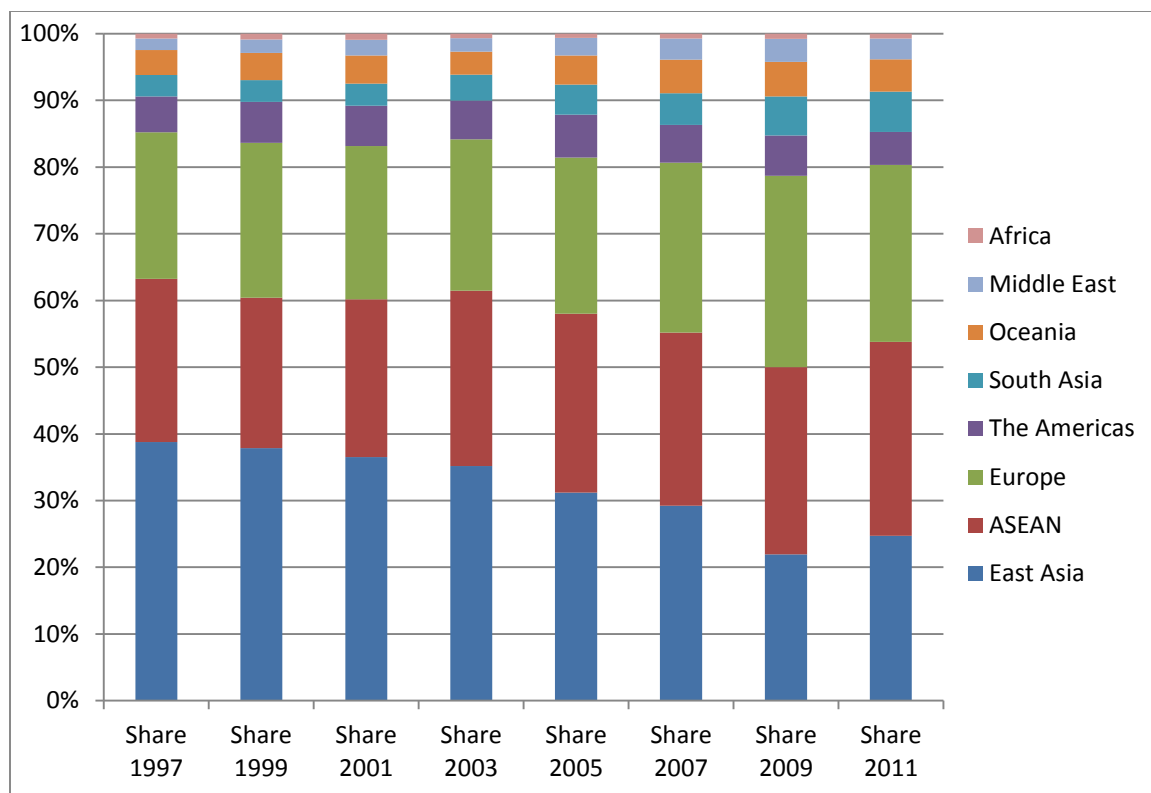
Figure 2: Proportion of International Arrivals to Thailand by Region (1997-2011)

If one assumes that sex tourists arrive in the same proportion as other nationals, this means that the majority of sex tourists in Thailand are from Asia. This is most evident and also most invisible in southern Thailand, where Malaysians cross the border to visit Thai brothels. However, these individuals would not "count" in the number of tourists, as they can cross the border by land. "International" arrivals refer to those at airports, and to a lesser extent, seaports. As I noted in the preface, I was able to cross the Thai Malaysian border without documents because it was assumed by the border patrol that I was Thai. This kind of border crossing is prevalent but not documented.

The various forms of sex work also contribute to the invisibility of Asians as sex tourists. As Bao (2000) notes, the commercial sex scene is highly varied in Thailand,

catering to local Thai needs, providing the same type of services that Japanese men would expect in Japan, providing "virgins" to Chinese who believe that it will improve their youthful vigor, and providing dark-skinned workers that engage in romantic relationships with Westerners.[24] Stereotypes shape how we understand Thailand as a transnational contact zone, especially in relation to sex work. The majority of sex tourists in Thailand are other Asians. However, this is not made legible in that other Asian partners of Thais tend to use sexual services that are not visible to the public, typically at massage parlors. There are large concentrations of Thai sex work venues targeted towards Japanese men in the Sukhumvit and Ratchada areas, which are well known by Japanese women critical of their use. These venues now increasingly cater to Korean and Chinese men as well. Yet, except for Soi Thaniya, located near Patpong, they generally do not register in the conceptualization of Thai red light districts, perhaps because they do not cater to Westerners and some venues may even refuse Caucasian customers. Japanese oriented-venues are generally considered to have younger and more attractive workers and charge a higher premium than those oriented to Westerners. Japanese and other Asian men also tend not to take sex workers out in public. That is, all their activities occur respectably behind closed doors. Additionally, Japanese men with cosmopolitan credibility would generally not consider marrying a Thai met through sex work. Thus, there is not a prevalent stereotype of the old Japanese businessman with the young Thai woman as occurs with Western men who are more open to these types of relationships. The sex work system that Asian men tend to access is simply not as public as venues such as go-go bars catering to Westerners. Additionally, when Asians are in the same

spaces as Westerners in venues such as bars, they are still less visible than Westerners are. Asians do not stand out in relation to Thais and thus become relatively invisible.

Thailand remains a relatively inexpensive travel destination, especially for those in the Asian region, where flight costs are relatively low. According to the 2011 US government per diem rates for major cities, only Rangoon, Ulaanbaatar, and Vientiane are cheaper travel destinations in Asia than those in Thailand.

Country	Location	Per Diem	Country	Location	Per Diem
BURMA	Rangoon	159	VIETNAM	Hanoi	278
MONGOLIA	Ulaanbaatar	166	THAILAND	Phuket	281
THAILAND	Chiang Mai	188	TAIWAN	Taipei	294
THAILAND	Pattaya City	193	VIETNAM	Ho Chi Minh	306
LAOS	Vientiane	194	CHINA	Shanghai	310
THAILAND	**Bangkok**	**218**	KOREA	Seoul	350
CAMBODIA	Phnom Penh	227	CHINA	Beijing	370
THAILAND	Samui Island	232	MACAU	Macau	441
INDONESIA	Jakarta	233	SINGAPORE	Singapore	490
PHILIPPINES	Manila	237	HONG KONG	Hong Kong	497
MALAYSIA	Kuala Lumpur	246	JAPAN	Tokyo City	522

Figure 3: US Government Per Diem (2011). These rates estimate the cost of traveling in various major Asian cities relative to others.

This means that not only Westerners, but others Asians, see Thailand as a bargain travel destination. For middle class Asian gay men throughout the region, this makes Bangkok not only easily accessible as a transportation hub, but affordable for extended vacations

or routine weekend getaways. Indeed, many gay Asian men, particularly from nearby cities with easy and low cost connections such as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Ho Chi Minh City, travel to Bangkok frequently and will often maintain an apartment unit to reduce their housing costs during regular visits.

Global Hypergamy and Racial Gaypergamy

Macro-social change produces varying sexual subjectivities and desires in disparate locations. In Brazil, internal migrations, interaction with tourists, and foreign travel enabled by economic development provide the means to experience homosexual life and to reconstruct the self (Parker 1999). New self-making opportunities and the desire to escape local gender constraints also motivate Japanese women to travel overseas and to seek Caucasian partners both at home and abroad (Kelsky 2001). Women's "occidental longings" are simultaneously shaped by resistance to local gender hierarchies and a recognition of global white male hegemony. Yet desire for white male partners is not uniform. Chinese gay men in the mainland avoid Caucasian partners to demonstrate a belonging to the nation (Rofel 2007). One way this project moves the literature forward is by accounting for class difference, as the social positioning of actors shapes the habitus and trajectories of their desires (Bourdieu 1984).

Partner selection and choice are fundamental to developing kinship ties and building social status. While gay men may be outside formal systems of marriage such that their alliances are not as policed by family, and the class structure of gay communities is more condensed than heterosexual society, their partner selections still have social value. This is particularly true as gay men in Thailand face the challenges of a

transforming economy and global restructuring. In this light, it is important to understand how gay men meet these challenges through the pursuit of desirable partners. Gay men strive to develop satisfying relationships that also improve economic and social standing. Partner selection integrates these tasks.

Padilla et. al. (2007) conceptualize an approach to love and globalization they refer to as the "political economy of love." This framework traces "large-scale shifts in political economy to the lived experiences and practices of love and intimacy, while continually listening to the voices of the people themselves, their subjective understandings of intimate relationships and interactions, and their struggles to establish and maintain intimacy within the shifting terrain of globalizing processes" (xii). This requires examining the two way process whereby political-economic transformations shape cultural and psychosocial meanings of love, intimacy, and sexuality and the local organization of these on the ground practices that reciprocally influence resources, power, and hierarchies at the macro level.

Hypergamy is the general practice of women marrying up. That is, marrying male partners of a higher social status than her natal family or lineage. This often structures relationships on the trading of female beauty, youth, and fertility to older, less desirable men from a higher class, who do not find brides of similar standing. The practice need not be restricted to a given society, as transnational marriage markets have been long established (e.g. picture brides, mail order brides, and contemporary internet brides). In the Introduction to her 2005 edited volume, *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, Nicole Constable describes the phenomenon of "marriage-scapes" or "global hypergamy" (based on what William Lavely in 1991

referred to as "spatial hypergamy"), or the upward mobility for women when marrying across borders in a hierarchy of geographic locations. That is, women tend to marry men from wealthier nations. More recent work on these practices shows how the move is not simply a linear one to a better position in life. The situation is more complicated as women might migrate to a highly valued country, but she may actually experience a decrease in class standing or lifestyle. For example, wealthy educated Vietnamese women might find themselves in marriages to Vietnamese American men of relatively low standing (Thai 2005). Furthermore, this trend is no longer just about movement to the West but also, increasingly, to Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and other parts of developed Asia.

These marriage-scapes are shaped by the relative power of states and various institutions and brokers that direct certain flows of women across national boundaries. Constable (2005), however, cautions against assuming female passivity or the desperation of foreign brides. Indeed their actions and motivations are complex. Nor should one assume that the pragmatic and material considerations of cross-border marriages preclude love and other desires. These kinds of assumptions are also liberally applied to sex workers in developing countries (see, for example, Brennan's 2004 conceptualization of "sexscapes" in the Dominican Republic) and to gay men, including in the developed world. Indeed, gay men are perhaps more sensitized to "global gay" imaginaries that posit modern gay cultures epitomized in Western liberal democracies as the model. Western gay men and their bodies are thus both the dominant image associated with modern ways of being gay and the symbolic bearers of homosexual freedom. Beyond white hegemonic beauty standards, this produces a stronger orientation toward white male bodies. In this vein, I refer to "transnational gaypergamy"[25] as the pattern in which

gay men in the developing world, regardless of masculine or feminine identification, seek partners from higher status countries. Similar to the "raced hypergamy" (Ong 2003, Peletz 2009) described in much of the literature on interracial Asian American partnership patterns since the 1970s, there is a tendency for Asian American women and especially gay Asian American men to partner with Caucasian men. Throughout the globe, when crossing national and racial border, Caucasian partners tend to be the most attractive and desirable. In Thailand, however, I argue that middle class gay men, in their desire to distance themselves from sex workers, re-orient to white Asian partners.

Thai-Japanese Connections

Thai studies is often focused on its exceptionalism, or the idea that.Thailand's unique status as an uncolonized nation in Southeast Asia renders it more or less incomparable to other nations, including its neighbors. There are, however, useful comparisons with Thailand that have emerged in regards to gender difference and sex work in the Philippines, Indonesia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. As I have previously noted, there are also parallels with Korea. There, a complex system of post-US military sex work, economic development, and recruitment of migrant laborers and wives creates a dynamic new field of interracial and interethnic regional relations. Japan also provides numerous examples of multi-layered regional migration for work, sex work, and marriage. The major differences are based on their former colonial relationship, relatively higher economic development in Japan, and Japan's greater distance from US military intervention in recent years.

Furthermore, there are numerous comparisons between Thailand and Japan, most notably, as the only two countries in Asia that were not formally colonized. Both also "self-modernized" by borrowing ideas and technologies from the West. However, Thailand is a middle income country, while Japan is a high income one in the global political economic order. In her examination of Japanese women's desires for Caucasian male partners, Karen Kelsky (2001) notes that travel and partner choice are used by middle class Japanese women to participate in an imagined international sphere, where Japanese are the only non-white participants. However, Japanese women's "occidental desires" are not simply about wanting Caucasian partners. Rather, it is one means through which Japanese women can express their dissatisfaction with Japanese men, patriarchal family structures and employment practices, and other gendered relations that limit their life opportunities. That is, idealized desires for the West were not necessarily based on actual circumstances, but rather a means to escape gender oppression in Japan. "Their agency in 'choosing' [white men] is always mediated by larger forces of attraction and repulsion that increasingly operate through the mechanisms of the global marketplace," advertising, media, women's personal narratives, discourses on the inadequacy of Asian men, experiences of local gender oppression, and desires for social advancement (Kelsky 2001: 10). As Kelsky astutely notes, Japanese women evaluated partners based on the valuation of their race and nationality, such that white men represented success, black men were not an option, and Chinese, Korean, Southeast Asian, and South Asian men were rejected (152-153). This placed Japanese women in the problematic position of reinforcing global hegemonic racial partner preferences. While Japanese women who could be satisfied with a Japanese man could marry one, many attractive, talented, and

sophisticated Japanese women saw their only option in romance and marriage with Western male partners. Thus, those Japanese men who could not find Japanese marriage partners, sought other less valuable partners, particularly Southeast Asian women. Indeed, the number of Southeast Asian women marrying Japanese men has increased dramatically.

In a similar vein to Kelsky, Mark McLelland (2003) argues that Japanese women's desires for Caucasian and gay men is not about the actual practice of being in relationships with these types of men, but a rhetorical foil for the undesirability of heterosexual Japanese men. That is, the discourse around such desires provides an avenue for complaint about the deficiencies of Japanese men and women's roles in the patriarchal family. McLelland also argues that the Japanese women's use of popular cultural forms allows for broad engagement with the criticism of Japanese men, which would not be permissible through conventionally feminist modes of engagement. That is, Japanese women express their dissatisfaction through popular culture forms, such as manga (genres of Japanese comics and animation), rather than in outright political protest. In so doing, they are able to subversively critique Japanese masculinity and patriarchy without invoking the feminist politics that would delegitimize their complaint. Thus, Japanese women's use of popular culture registers as resistance in Scott's (1985) formulation of weapons of the weak, whereby peasants engage their interests in small commonplace acts such as petty theft, noncompliance, or sabotage rather than the relatively rare collectively organized public revolt.

Following on these observations, Leiba Faier (2009) shows how Filipinas are integrating into rural Japan and redefining what it is to be a proper Japanese wife. As the

eligibility pool of Japanese women has decreased, particularly for rural men tied to family land and obligated to care for their parents, there has been an increasing reliance on overseas brides. There is an extensive network of Filipina hostess bars throughout Japan, including in rural areas. While Filipinas were previously considered "prostitutes" and therefore undesirable marriage partners for Japanese men, their image has shifted within the context of Japanese female urban migration and desire for upward mobility. As Filipinas came from a less developed country as migrant workers, they were viewed as more submissive and, from the perspective of rural Japanese men and their parents, preserved the "good qualities that Japanese women have lost" (76). For Faier, this indicated Japanese rural men had come to understand their marginalized position compared to urban professionals. Marriages between Japanese men and Filipinas, though not on equal terms, allowed both parties to benefit in substantial ways. Japanese men were able to have children, romantic companions, partners in farm and sometimes other paid labor, and help with elder care. At the same time, Filipinas were able to remit money to their families in the Philippines and craft identities as good mothers and productive immigrants. In the process of adopting Japanese ways, Filipinas became locally integrated as proper *oyomesan*, wives and daughter-in-laws. Through actions that showed deference and obedience to her husband and his parents, a Filipina bride could be regarded as more traditionally Japanese than a Japanese woman would have been.

Perhaps the latest evolution in this scenario that contrasts the desires of Japanese women and men, is Japanese urban women's new penchant for Korean partners. Since the early 2000s, the popularity of Korean media has re-oriented Japanese women's desires westward to Korea. Korean men, previously viewed as inferior to Caucasian and

Japanese men, are now desirable partners. As Millie Creighton (2009) notes, this new

phenomenon is an extraordinary feat given that Koreans have historically been seen as

inferior and discriminated against by the Japanese, both under colonial rule and as a

minority in Japan. Following the introduction of *Winter Sonata* on NHK in 2003, Korean

dramas have become immensely popular in Japan and now constitute the majority of

televised dramas there. The representation of contemporary lifestyles in these dramas led

Japanese to see Korea "as highly developed, sophisticated, and modern as Japan"

(Creighton 2009, 27), with Korean men becoming symbolic of the nice and wealthy

position previously reserved for Caucasian men (32). Indeed, in a 2006 *Washington Post*

article, Anthony Faiola[26] begins his story:

> TOKYO--Thin and gorgeous in a slinky black dress, Mikimoto
>
> pearls and a low-slung diamond Tiffany pendant, 26-year-old Kazumi
>
> Yoshimura already has looks, cash and accessories. There's only one more
>
> thing this single Japanese woman says she needs to find eternal bliss--a
>
> Korean man.
>
> She may just have to take a number and get in line. In recent years,
>
> the wild success of male celebrities from South Korea--sensitive men but
>
> totally ripped--has redefined what Asian women want, from Bangkok to
>
> Beijing, from Taipei to Tokyo. Gone are the martial arts movie heroes and
>
> the stereotypical macho men of mainstream Asian television. Today,
>
> South Korea's trend-setting screen stars and singers dictate everything

from what hair gels people use in Vietnam to what jeans are bought in China.

Yet for thousands of smitten Japanese women like Yoshimura, collecting the odd poster or DVD is no longer enough. They've set their sights far higher--settling for nothing less than a real Seoulmate.

Cliches aside, this framing of the article points to the power of capitalism, popular culture, and celebrity in setting trends and creating desires. The Korean Wave, as Chua and Iwabuchi (2008) point out, has created a common framework for East Asian popular culture that allows cosmopolitan identification across national boundaries in the East/Southeast Asian region. Korean popular culture has become "Asian" popular culture. At the same time, rural Korean men, under similar pressures to their Japanese counterparts, are also increasingly resorting to Vietnamese, Chinese, and Filipina brides. Similarly, the extensive network of US military camp town hostess bars has shifted from employing Korean women to Filipinas (Cheng 2011, Choo 2013), as Japanese hostess bars increasingly employ Filipina entertainers (Parreñas 2011).

Public culture becomes internalized as private desires. As Lisa Rofel (2007) notes in *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*, desire is central to the formation of contemporary Chinese citizens. She argues that yearnings, longings, aspirations, and related concepts are one of the primary means through which Mainland Chinese construct inner selves vis-a-vis public allegories. In this process, desires also normalize and in so doing, mark the non-normative and constitute who are stigmatized and excluded. What one desires places one within social frameworks, and in

the Chinese case, respectable post-socialist strivings. In Rofel's (2007) study, many

Mainland Chinese gay men avoid relationships with Westerners, believing that it is

impossible to have equal or deep relationships with them and to demonstrate their

attachment to the nation. Furthermore, relationships with foreigners can be marked as

unrespectable and allude to sex work. This is often a struggle over class status and

"quality" (*suzhi*). Rofel (2007) also notes that *suzhi* is most commonly referenced by

Chinese gay men to express anxieties and displeasure with sex workers, who, like in

Thailand, are referred to as money boys. For Chinese gay men, the disassociation from

money boys works to mark their status through a rejection of stereotypical money boy

characteristics: rural, effeminate, and unwilling to engage in productive labor. There is

also a political motivation to disassociating with sex workers. To promote the acceptance

of homosexuality, one must prevent the mainstream association of homosexuality with

male prostitution. Thus, avoidance of foreigners and money boys shores up class identity

and aligns gay men with appropriate Chinese desires.

Again, there are parallels and contrasts between heterosexual and homosexual

relationships. Farrer (2008), focusing on the global capital center of Shanghai, notes that

economic confidence has diminished the social resistance to Chinese women marrying

foreigners. Prior to the stellar rise of the Chinese economy in past few decades, Chinese

women marrying white European and American men was stigmatized. Before, such

marriages represented the extraction of Chinese women from the country, a sign of its

lowly status in relation to the West. However, in the contemporary scene, there is a

recoding of "airplane tickets" and "passports" to "joint venture" marriage (11). That is,

Chinese women's marriage to foreign husbands of similar class and educational

background is no longer seen as her escape from the country. Rather, intermarriage benefits each other's local and transnational connections. These couples maximize each other's "cultural, economic and social resources in negotiating the larger transnational terrain of migratory and transnational business opportunities" (26). Specifically, foreigners marrying Chinese women, and living in China, are afforded greater access to networks and resources in China.

Farrer (2008) claims that unlike Kelsky's (2001) research on Japanese women, the Chinese women did not seek to critique or escape Chinese masculinity. However, he notes that the Chinese women in these marriages with Caucasian men were often from outside Shanghai, divorced, or had other characteristics that marginalized them in the local marriage market and that their foreign husbands might be devalued in their home countries for their poor social skills and past divorces. That is, the participants in intermarriage are still negotiating patriarchal, metropolitan, and other social marginalization. Nevertheless, Chinese women expected their foreign husbands to accommodate a Chinese lifestyle (Farrer 2008). Within the context of a cosmopolitan Chinese city, Caucasian men were finding business and life partners rather than submissive housewives or mistresses. Clearly, the mutuality of class standing and relatively desirable business positioning of nation-states make these marriages "joint ventures" rather than another case of female extraction in manufacturing of global hypergamy.

The Asianification of Queer Bangkok

As Megan Sinnott (2010) argues, recent scholarship on queer Asia focuses on transnational, diasporic, and inter-Asian connections rather than on the Westernization of queer identities in the region. This is contra what might be expected from a "global gay" or homogenization / Americanization model as was initially put forth by Altman (1997) and thoroughly critiqued. This has been especially true of Southeast Asian scholarship (see, for example, Manalansan 2003, Sinnott 2004, Boellstorff 2005, Blackwood 2010). The focus on gender variation rather than sexuality, coexistence of gay and transgender identities, and recuperation of traditional forms such as Filipino *bakla* as modern in the diaspora, all point to the notion that the West need not be the anchor of comparisons. There is an increasing body of scholarship on the influence of Asians on queer Thailand. Peter Jackson (2011) refers to this as the "Asianization" of queer Bangkok. Indeed, many of the contributions to the edited volume *Queer Bangkok* specifically address this phenomenon. Bangkok lies at the heart of a regional network of interconnected Asian queer cultures, and, as Jackson (2011) notes, Asianization and Asian regionalism are now the dominant directions of queer cultural change among Thais. As Jackson notes, in the first decade of this century, the Bangkok gay scene frequented by Western gay men has remained stable. However, there has been an explosion of venues catering to Thais and other Asians. This great expansion in the gay scene has remained, for the most part, out of view and inaccessible to Caucasian men. Thus, I suggest that most Caucasian men do not sense that their relative status has diminished within the larger Bangkok gay scene.

In Nikos Dacanay's (2011) study of Bablylon Sauna,[27] which is often characterized as a venue catering to Western men, by far the majority of patrons are Thai and other Asian men who seek to meet Asian rather than Western partners. Western

patrons mistake its international ambiance as catering to them. Indeed, in Dacanay's interview with Keen, a Thai patron of Babylon, Keen notes that Caucasian men are often attracted to him because of his dark features. But he did not pursue Caucasian men because of the negative attitude associated with Thai men who seek *farang* as being money boys. Instead, like many other Thai gay men, Keen sought other Asian partners, generally "Chinese-looking" men (Dacanay 2011:111). This points to the main argument of this manuscript, that Thai desires orient toward East or white Asian men, while the negative associations of being with a *farang* can dissuade Thais from entering into such relationships.

This is a relatively new Asianized "structure of feeling," or a felt, experienced, but emergent, and not yet fully articulated condition (Williams 1977). Williams uses a chemical metaphor to define structure of feeling as "social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available" (133-134). I first documented it in my fieldnotes in 2004, when middle class Thai gay men pointed to their desires for Asian partners. There are a few scholarly and popular works that point to the formation of this new queer affect and comparable heterosexual situations. In her work on internet use and language creolization, Jillana Enteen (2010) points to an "Asianification" of Thai gay identity. Enteen's research from 1998 to 2008 has charted a reduction in Thai gay men's reliance on Western internet sites and the use of English, both on- and offline. During the latter period from 2004 to 2008, she also documents an increasing use of the term "Asian" and a desire for Chinese, Japanese, and Thai partners. New online activities converged with bar going and other forms of sociality to facilitate crafting a new style of

Thai gay identity that included a sense of Asianness, being "gay Asian," that are in dialogue with, but differ from, Western style "global gay" identity (Enteen 2010, 151). During the period of her research, there is an increasing disidentification with the West. Thus, Enteen notes that "a gay identity for a Thai man on Silom Road in 1997 and 1998 included desiring a relationship with a western man, in 2004 this was not the case. The men who habituated the same locales no longer directly associated being 'gay' with the desire for romantic engagement with a westerner. In fact, several men described their quest for Asian or specifically Thai partners and expressed clear disinterest in western men" (Enteen 2010, 143). That is, romantic partner preferences were shifting from *farang* toward Asian partners.

Sour Relationships: The Class Status of Thai Women and their Caucasian Partners

The decrease in desirability of Caucasian partners, perhaps, had already taken place among heterosexual middle class Thai women as they bear the brunt of stereotypes about the availability of sex work in Thailand and the sexual availability of Thais to foreigners. As Annette Hamilton (1997) notes, the patterning of heterosexual relationships between Thai women and *farang* men means that middle class urban Thai women fear that marrying a Caucasian will tarnish their reputations. I have identified a number of references where Caucasian men also acknowledge class differences among Thai women's attitudes towards *farang*, warning other Caucasian men that they should not think of themselves as essentially desirable in Thailand. For example, in the *Fielding's Guide to Thailand* from 1996, a section regarding sex tourism is devoted to the "The Master Race Myth."[28] In this section, Dulles (1996) notes that "most Western men

are under the illusion that all Thai ladies are dying to meet and marry foreign (i.e.,

American and European) men--the Adonis Ambassadors. Not so." He goes on to explain

the rationale based on class differences and notions of respectability. Dulles states that

"farangs [men] in Thailand carry a preordained stigma. Quite simply, it is reflexively

assumed by the 'respectable' women of Thailand that you are in their country solely for

sex. You are treated accordingly….There are decidedly two different tiers of Thai

females. By virtue of your intentions in Thailand, and by the behavior of your forbearers,

you've been condemned to the lower tier [i.e. lower class women]. And, even on this

level, don't be fooled" (1996, 90-91). Here, Dulles clearly assumes that the reader of this

guide book will be a *farang* male who has "intentions." That is, he frames his advice

around what Western men should expect sexually from Thai women. The crucial

difference is in the bifurcation of "respectable" and "lower tier" women. Dulles suggests

that *farang*, at least those on holiday, are resigned to the latter.

Such pronouncements are not isolated events. Addressing foreign, presumably

white male, survival in Thailand, Cooper (2008) casts the whore : virgin dichotomy in the

Thai context as the *prio* : *wan* one.

> Thai girls are either prio (sour) or wan (sweet); unlike Thai cooking, the two
>
> tastes should not be combined (although in reality there is always a bit of prio in
>
> all women). Thai men have a distinct preference for the wan. Foreigners,
>
> however, seem to find the prio more interesting. Thus the foreigners, particularly
>
> the farang (white foreigners), usually end up with the sour…The prio/wan
>
> dichotomy, when applied to women is understandable in Thailand and is almost a

class thing. Middle class, or aspiring middle class, parents insist their daughters be sweet and passive. Working class girls, or village girls, are more likely to be prio…And sour girls are still regarded as inferior in the sense of not knowing or caring how to behave. The dichotomy is not precisely whore/virgin, but at times Thai male thinking seems to come close to an equation…Thai women escorted by farang should take extra care if they want to be thought of as something other than what a Thai boy would anyway reject. If you are a foreign man, and you want your girlfriend to dress within the wide limits of respectability, but your girlfriend thinks it cool to go braless and show off her legs up to the crotch, you might want to tell her that you would prefer her to dress differently, as you want everybody to respect her. (131-132)

That is, there is a class differentiation between sour and sweet Thai women. Caucasians are more likely to partner with sour women. Such differences create experiences that, often unknowingly, relegate *farang* to lower class partners. This also means that these foreign men tend to believe that all Thai women are sour and behave in a similar way.

Thai women in relationships with Caucasian men are often labeled prostitutes and provoke suspicions about their moral character (Esara 2009). The assumption that Thai women who partner with *farang* are sex workers, low class, or otherwise of disrepute is made evident in "no Thai," "no Thai lady," "no entry for *kathoey*" (see Figure 7), and similar policies at low- to mid-range hotels in Thailand. Signs in Thai, English, or both stating that hotel guests are not allowed to bring Thai guests, that Thai guests of hotel guests must leave their national ID card at the front desk, or that the hotel charges a fine

for Thai guests to enter one's room all point to the presumption that the Thai guest is a sex worker. The photo in Figure 7 was taken in 2009, when I travelled with Prempreeda Pramoj Na Ayutthaya to Phuket, to assist her with focus groups and interviews of *kathoey* there. Prempreeda's primary finding in Phuket was that the police assumed all transgender women were sex workers, which is also true in places such as Pattaya. Various NGOs such as SWING estimate that approximately half of kathoey are sex workers. However, *kathoey* were identified as sex workers by the police when they appeared in public with a Caucasian man (e.g. walking down the street or sharing a motorcycle). If this pairing was seen by the authorities, the *kathoey* would be arrested and fined 500 Baht ($17) for prostitution. Typically, she paid the fine on the spot as a bribe in order to avoid legal documentation and the inconvenience of going to the police station. For sex workers, this drastically reduced their income while others referred to it as an expensive violation of their human rights.

Middle class Thai women refer to pairings of Caucasian men with "sour" Thai women in public euphemistically as "inappropriate" (*kiriya mai di*), "impolite" (*mai suphap*), or "lacking in manners" (*mai mi marayat*). Yet, even "sweet" Thai women who have married Caucasian men have told me that they have been stopped and questioned when entering a hotel lobby together in Thailand. They must then explain that they are married and the proof is that they registered together upon arrival. Policies to deter prostition in neighboring Loas and Vietnam require Caucasian men to produce a marriage license in order to stay in a hotel with a local woman. In general, the Thai female and transgender partners of *farang* are assumed to be sex workers, former sex workers, or from lower class, rural backgrounds, though this is not always the case. Similar class

dynamics occur in gay relationships. Caucasian men often partner with lower class Thais. At the same time, if they are linguistically or socially isolated from a broader range of Thais, they do not experience a sense of exclusion from more middle class environments and partners.

In her study of women in a Bangkok slum, Esara (2009) notes that Thai women's desire for a Caucasian husband was predicated on their undesirability to Thai men. Being "dark," which referenced their skin color, rural background, and poverty, meant that neither Sino-Thais nor Thais would find them attractive. Only Caucasians were understood to desire their dark skin. Thus some women in the slum actively pursued finding Caucasian husbands with the hopes of being financially supported and extending that support to kin. Esara notes that this partnership strategy was mediated by the women's skin color, low financial standing, and relationally marginal status (e.g. being seen as immodest, separated, or divorced). These Thai women had little to lose in becoming partners of Caucasian men, but dreamed of the benefits of being with a sexually faithful and financially secure partner that could lead to migration abroad.

In Sunanta's (2013) study of *mia farang* (wife/girlfriend of a Caucasian) in Northeast Thailand, more than half the Thai women met their Caucasian husbands through night entertainment venues in foreign tourist destinations. Urban middle class Thais perceive of *mia farang* as bar girls with a bold, loud, and overly sexualized and inappropriate style. Middle class dispositions code the phenomenon of Thai women marrying Caucasian men as materialistic, immoral, and a threat to Thainess, as rural women in particular are responsible for preserving Thai tradition and reproducing Thai society. Thai media and governmental policy debates portray *mia farang* as victims of

Caucasian men's domestic violence and sex trafficking. Thus, these women "need to be rescued" and other Thais should be dissuaded from such partnerships. Yet, for poor women, marriage to a Caucasian man was a form of classed and gendered agency to transcend their social disadvantage. However, these women were often unsatisfied with their relationships, and complained that their husbands were too old, too poor, or too stingy. Sunanta (2013) argues that the victimization discourse adopted by privileged Thais is a mechanism to curb "misguided" agency and excessive aspirations on the part of rural Thai women.

The relationship between sex tourism and marriage to *farang* simultaneously conflate *mia farang* as wife/mistress/girlfriend and bargirl/prostitute. Yet, their roles as "good daughter" and "generous community member" mitigate the stigma of their marriages within the context of agricultural communities faring poorly in the global market (Sunanta and Angeles 2013:706). However, *mia farang* can exacerbate local hierarchies and financial difficulties. Sunanta (2013) notes that in some rural areas, the return migration of Thai women with Caucasian husbands has doubled real estate values, making it more difficult for other locals without external sources of capital. Interestingly, Sunanta and Angeles (2013) refer to *farang* as Westerners, yet the statistics they provide are more complex. While the majority of foreign husbands are from Western countries, and thus presumably Caucasian, they fail to consider that the foreigners Thai women are married to include not only Caucasians, but Japanese, Korean, Hong Kongese, Singaporean, Malaysian, and other Asians. It is likey that these Asians, like their counterparts in their home countries, are disproportionately from rural and working class backgrounds.

The lower class status of Thai women with foreign partners is also complicated by the fact that many of the men in these relationships are also from relatively working class backgrounds in their home countries. Maher and Lafferty (2014a, 2014b) studied *farang* who were not professional expatriates in urban centers but rather migrated to live with their Thai wives' in the rural Northeast. They note that the men's working class standing at home, often retired and living on pension, could be reforumulated in Thailand. In the poor region of Isan, Caucasian men were regarded as modern and wealthy. Thus, the Northeast was a place of masculine transformation where migrants could construct themselves as ideal white men because of the relative value of Western currency (Maher and Lafferty 2014a). Western men thus initially experienced an increase in relative status and sense of empowerment as financial providers. Caucasian men could engage the "White Knight" discourse of saving Thai women from poverty and cheating Thai men, while ignoring other cheating *farang* (Maher and Lafferty 2014a:319). They also cast Thai men as effeminate. This allowed *farang* to contrast their masculinity as "not just 'real men' but also as racially superior white men" in a way that could not have been realized back home (Maher and Lafferty 2014b:436). The relative value of their large white bodies and foreign incomes permitted a positive reconstitution of masculine and racialized selves.

The initial sense of privilege Caucasian men felt, however, was highly spatialized, contingent upon context, and eroded over time. Western expatriate men of modest means in Isan must negotiate their status as marginal in their home countries and relatively privileged but perpetual outsiders in Thailand (Maher and Lafferty 2014a, 2014b). As the *farang* men were almost always linguistically isolated, they did not understand local

norms and their fragile status. Ironically, the very bases of their privilege also undermined their incorporation into Thai society, trust and intimacy in their personal relationships, and their ability to move back home. The financial status that *farang* were associated with in Isan created obligations with partners and their families based on patronage, which Caucasian men felt were opportunistic compared to Western notions of romance, mutual friendship, and emotional affection. "Remaining a western outsider instead of attempting to assimilate within Thai society may have helped buy them freedom from the discipline of social expectations, but it also left them without a place to fit in other than in a superficial role as a *farang*. Their ability to provide financial security to lower-class Thai women and their families bought them status and access to younger women than might have been possible back home; however, the role of money in the relationship sat in awkward and anxiety-producing tension with their own western notions of marriages grounded in romantic love" (Maher and Lafferty 2014a:325). Caucasian wealth also did not translate to urban areas, where middle and upper class Thais and professional migrants disparaged their relatively poor status as cheap, low quality foreigners. Furthermore, free-wheeling *farang* men's actions outside of tourist zones were also criticized. Caucasian privilege for these men was thus limited to rural and touristic zones of interaction.

Over time, Caucasian men married to Thai women felt a loss of control over their lives (Maher and Lafferty 2014b). By Thai law, property such a land has to be registered in the name of a Thai national. This meant that their most valuable assets were controlled by their wives. *Farang* lack of Thai language skills also meant an everyday reliance on partners for even simple errands. Such conditions deflated the gains in masculinity

Caucasian men initially experienced. Further, foreign men were always under the threat of potentially losing their Thai wives, and thus their assets and the related social fabric of their new lives. At the same time, the possibility of return to their countries of origin was tinged by the knowledge that they would lose what privilege they had gained in rural Thailand. Returnees could also encounter stigma for needing to go abroad to attract women in the first place, and then failing at that. Thus, over the long term, Caucasian men married to Isan women felt a sense of disillusionment, vulnerability, and immobility. Their privileged status as white foreigners was limited to particular spaces in Thailand: rural, poor, and catering to tourists.

Inter-Asian Studies & Critical Queer Asian Regionalism

Inter-Asian studies (also inter-Asia and intra-Asian) is a new field (since the late 1990s) of humanistic and cultural studies research that addresses relationships within the Asian region rather than making connections between Asia and the West. Inter-Asian studies works in a mode of provincializing the West as another place as opposed to the standard of comparison (Chakrabarty 2008). The journal *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, based in Taiwan, has been publishing since 2000 and has produced a reader (Chen & Chua 2007). The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society was formed in 2004. Numerous conferences, including the Japan-based Cultural Typhoon, have been organized in Istanbul, Dhaka, Hiroshima, and places in between. Numerous books, such as *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Chen 2010) have been published, with the idea of promoting Asian studies in Asia, foregoing comparison to the West, and establishing a framework for conducting studies between Asian nations.

At the same time, there is also a burgeoning political science and international relations literature on Asian regionalism, or the political and economic integration (primarily focused on trade) occurring in East and Southeast Asia (see for example, Beeson and Stubbs 2012). In 2003, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) passed the Bali Concord II at the 9th ASEAN Summit in Bali, a declaration creating an ASEAN Community based upon political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation. In particular, member states agreed to pursue closer economic integration, including a free trade area, by 2020. During the same summit, China, Japan, and Korea issued a Joint Declaration on economic, political, military, security, cultural, educational, and environmental cooperation in what has come to be called the ASEAN +3, a grouping whose member states include all nations of Southeast and East Asia with the exception of East Timor, Taiwan, and North Korea. The Asian Development Bank supports this integration as a means to ensure peace and stability, increase economic growth and trade, and inter-cultural exchange. But the regionalism of Asia has been described as a growing challenge to the USA, Europe, and Australia (Stubbs 2002), or as a "third bloc" to counter European Union and the North America Free Trade Agreement built on shared anti-Western sentiments (Ravenhill 2002). Beeson (2003), however, sees a weak coalition with ongoing tensions between nations, whose glue is based on external threats rather than internal cohesion. East Asian nations continue to compete with each other, developing individual trade agreements with pragmatic terms based on national interests. Beeson thus refers to ASEAN +3 as a form of "reactionary regionalism." Rather than develop along an EU model of common fiscal policies and monetary instruments, East Asia will continue to pivot around relationships

with non-regional players, such as the USA. Indeed, a persistent question is the rapid rise

of China and its increasingly central role as the largest economy in the region.

A third, though now outdated coneptualization of an Asian region, occurs in the

literature on "Asian values." The term has been used both by commentators in Asia and

the West to explain the rapid economic development of East and Southeast Asian before

the 1997 IMF crisis. While the term has a longer history, 1995 marked a critical point. It

was the first meeting of ASEAN with China, Japan, and Korea. The same year,

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir and Governor of Tokyo Ishihara co-authored a book

titled *The Voice of Asia* on "Asian values." While Mahathir had previoiusly authored

similar works, the joint authorship pointed to new and expanding, though not long lived,

collaborations among Asian politicians to differentiate themselves from the West, a

process exacerbated by the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Indeed, "Asian values" was an

extension of Mahathir's 1981 "Look East" policy, which specifically modeled itself after

Japan and Korea models, or a version of Western development as indigenized by these

two East Asian nations (Peletz 2009). The discourse on Asian values, which has also

been advocated by Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, Suharto's "New Order" Indonesia, and

by party leaders in China, suggests that Asia need not follow in the path of the West, nor

adhere to the same values. The discourse assumes a unitary pan-Asian identity

(sometimes founded on Chinese Confucianism alone and at other times inclusive of

Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism) in opposition to the West. "Asian values" pits

communitarianism vs. individualism, traditional patriarchal family values vs. personal

freedom, religious austerity vs. secular hedonism, and economic development vs. social

advancement. In particular, proponents of "Asian values" critique the idea of human

rights as universal and democractic government as the most desirable. This idea was fiercely critiqued at the time by former Korean President, dissident, and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Kim Dae Jung. Ironically, the anti-Western discourse on "Asian values" is firmly based in a neo-liberal Western tradition of maximizing economic performance (Ong 1999, Peletz 2009). Ong (1999) has thus characterized these discourses as essentialist and self-orientalizing, and has noted their short life, at least in Singapore (2006).

"Asian values" discourse was also heavily critiqued within Inter-Asian studies, which juxtapose tensions between pan-Asian identifications and national cultural pride (Iwabuchi et al. 2004). A key area of study in this regard has been popular culture and transnational media flows. Iwabuchi's (2002) landmark book, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*, inaugurated a literature on the influence of Japanese popular culture in East and Southeast Asia and beyond in the 1990s. Since then, a subfield has developed in relation to media and commodity circulation, both historical and in the present. One of the particular contributions of Iwabuchi is his explication of "Japanization." Japanization functions to orientalize American popular culture so that it is consumable and acceptable in Asia. That is, Japan functions as a filter that hybridizes Western forms, repackages them as Asian, and redistributes them to East and Southeast Asia. Western forms are pre-digested for Asian appetites. This process both points to Japanese cultural power in the region as well as the Japanese "return to Asia" (Iwabuchi 2002: 5), in which Japan engages its neighbors as modern nations and invests in the development of Southeast Asia. In Kuan-Hsing Chen's (2010: 1) *Asia as Method*, he calls for a "geocolonial historical materialism" that links

postcolonial and globalization studies with the practice of Asian studies in Asia. This can too easily be misunderstood as an anti-Western gesture. But he makes clear that "The West," like all places, is already plural and contested, even with its universalist tendencies that point to its dominance. He thus reiterates the call for "provincializing Europe" and "inter-referencing" or making comparisons with other parts of Asia and the world (223). That is, a multiplication and shifting of reference points for what counts as a model of comparison or legitimate knowledge.

In *The Gay Archipelago*, Tom Boellstorff (2005) shows how *gay* and *lesbi* can be ideal Indonesian citizens. Their imagined identifications with other *gay* and *lesbi* like them, on different islands, is able to acknowledge local traditions while enabling the self to be Indonesian, rather than say, of a particular ethnic group. This represents the greatest success of postcolonial Indonesian nationalism. The archipelagic imagination allows for the flexible incorporation and activation of similarities and differences that shape various subjectivities and socialites while instilling a sense of belonging as Indonesian on a national scale, the concept of unity in diversity. In a similar vein, through recent processes of Asian regionalism, an increasingly "Asian" identity is emerging, and one of its front runners is "gay Asian" identification. I am not evoking the discourse on "Asian values" or the "Asian way" that reactionary and conservative Asian leaders have employed. Nor am I invoking the essentially political economic ties that are the concern of political scientists and economists in the numerous treaties on Asian regionalism, the "rise of Asia," the "Pacific Century," and other discourses. Indeed, while these accounts often focus on political collaborations and economic linkages, especially in regards to increasing trade, they often ignore the continued national animosities prevalent in public

discourse. This includes ongoing regional hostilities over their various claims to numerous groups of islands, Japanese ministerial visits to war shrines and continued denial of WW II attrocities, and increasing competitions over new markets such as Myanmar.

As numerous scholars have noted (Chua 2004, Chua & Iwabuchi 2008, Berry et al. 2009), where East and Southeast Asian sentiments are converging is not in political debates and economic integration but rather in a shared popular culture that creates a cosmopolitan Asian imaginary, a sense of Asianness that is already hybridized through the West but generates relationships between Asian nations rather than a series of relationships centered on the USA. In describing the popularity of Japanese media in Asia, Iwabuchi (2002) elaborates on the concept of "cultural proximity," which is used to explain the development of regional media markets in areas such as Latin America. Cultural proximity suggests that regional convergence in media tastes occurs because of cultural and linguistic similarities between neighboring countries. However, Iwabuchi cautions against an essentialized and ahistorical notion of cultural similarity, but instead, using the example of Taiwanese fans of Japanese tv dramas, focuses on "coevalness" or being temporally contemporaneous, sharing similar economic circumstances (i.e. level of development), and interacting in ways that activate a sense of closeness. Indeed, Iwabuchi suggests that proximity is not prior to or causes attachments to regional media but rather is an affiliation identified after the fact. That is, labeling something as "proximate" activates a sense of cultural proximity.

In an earlier version of his work, Iwabuchi notes that Japanese cultural proximity is about Taiwanese becoming more like the Japanese as media offers "a concrete model

of what it means to be modern in east [*sic*] Asia, something which American popular cultures can never do" (2001:73). The fact that this statement disappears from the version published the following year suggests he or his editors felt this assertion was untenable. For example, what explains the continued popularity of American media in Asia or the popularity of Korean media in Latin America? Iwabuchi (2002) later contends that the popularity of Japanese and Korean media in Asia rests on cultural proximity as well as similarities in middle class consumerist lifestyles, physiognomy, and generic media conventions common in the region. That is, media that represents similar people and contexts in narrative forms that are easily understood. This in turn creates a sense of wider identification with "Asianness."

Boellstorff notes that "gay and lesbian Indonesians *understand their social worlds in national rather than simply global terms*—in surprising but often implicit accordance with the government's "archipelago concept," which represents Indonesia as an archipelago of diversity in unity" (2005:7 emphasis in original). Boellstorff uses the metaphor "dubbing" to describe how Indonesian *gay* and *lesbi* subjectivities are not simply mimicking Western gay and lesbian forms, but also not inventing these based on Indonesian traditions. "To 'dub' a discourse is neither to parrot it verbatim nor to compose an entirely new script. It is to hold together cultural logics without resolving them into a unitary whole" (58). That is, dubbing illuminates how mass media make *gay* and *lesbi* subjectivities resembling Western gays and lesbians possible without determining them outright. They are not merely "accented." Dubbing holds at bay questions of authenticity and invention, but rather focuses on the local bricolage filtered through an Indonesian lens. The process is inherently queer as there is no presumption of

a faithful translation, no synchronization between the speech acts and the movement of lips. Yet this allows Indonesians *gay* and *lesbi* to think of themselves as authentically Indonesian.

In the case of Thailand, local, national, regional, and global senses of dubbing are at play. Thais are not only mimicking Euro-American queer styles, but also, East Asian ones, which are also already hybrid. For middle class urban Thais, these translations are held up in contrast to "local" rural Thai forms of gender and sexual difference and Thai sex workers who serve foreign clients. These are bases of status diminishment, and representations that middle class Thais distance themselves from.

The collocation of gay social and sex work spaces make the differentiation between those who are, and are not, sex workers all the more prescient for middle class professionals. Thailand is also prized by foreigners as a place of respite from homophobia, racism, classism, ageism and other forms of marginalization at home. The fact that Bangkok is a regional gay hub for Asia and that there are highly differentiated spaces catering to various foreigners means that the desire for partners from higher status countries does not focus on those from the West. Indeed, the greatest increase in gay venues focuses on local Thais and other Asians (Jackson 2010), and in the majority of these spaces, *farang* are linguistically isolated and socially excluded. This diversity in spaces and foreign populations is what makes class distinction possible as a matter of friction. Furthermore, because of the recent desirability of embodying Asianness and the optics of Thai-Asian partnerships, middle class gay men can orient their desires eastward, both to resist the hailing of being a sex worker and to embody being cosmopolitan Asian. These factors structure Thai middle class desires. That is, environmental constraints do

not determine desires or experiences but shape their possibilities. As in Tsing's (2005) metaphor of the road, certain actions are facilitated over others and new paths that become well trodden will encourage travel along that route.

The management of one's face and appropriate moral action, which are closely tied to status concerns, are of upmost import. Comparing the situation of gay men in Thailand to women and *kathoey* as well as to other places such as Japan and China reveals both overall patterns in the structuring of interracial relationships and the vicissitudes of local contexts. For example, the tendency for women to marry up the social latter remains a general pattern. Yet, changing circumstances allow for new forumulations of desired partners. Japanese women have come to idealize Korean men because of new representational regimes. Chinese women can marry Caucasian men without being thought of as national traitors trying to escape their local circumstances because of the economic development that has occurred in recent decades. Overall patterns and particularities coexist. Any analysis of these patterns, however, must account for how the local context interacts with larger transnational forces.

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CHAPTER 3

Paradise Lost and Found in Translation:

Frictions in Queer Media and the Public Performance of Sexuality

It's summer 2009 in Bangkok, the newsstands at Silom Complex are carrying *Slim Up*, with *kathoey* supermodel Ornapa Krisadee semi-nude on the cover as the main feature, offering to share her beauty secrets.[1] On a different rack one finds Worapoj Petchkoom, an Olympic silver medal-winning boxer, as the centerfold model of *Stage*, one of several magazines in the gay soft core section.[2] *@tom act*, a "tomboy lifestyle magazine," can be seen close by on another rack. On the wall of one of the many tourist agencies lining Silom Road, just down the block and across the street from the newsstand, images from Calypso, the most famous of the "ladyboy" cabarets in Bangkok, are juxtaposed next to glossy posters of the Grand Palace. Alongside temples, snakes, crocodiles, elephants, and beaches, *kathoey* have come to represent one of the natural, scenic, and "amazing" wonders of Thailand.[3] Just a little further down the street, the gay bars in Soi 4 offer a number of free magazines with local information, event listings, maps, puff pieces, and event photos. The covers are adorned with male models, mostly local sex workers, in Speedos lounging at the beach, pool, or spa.

At the Telephone Bar, a group of Singaporeans sits down and orders a beer tower, a tall three-liter beer tap made to look like five by filling the core with ice. The appearance of excess is delightful and they squeal when it arrives. All around are groups of men and male couples. Single men are often greeted by a young Thai man who would like to sit with them. No one needs to stay alone for very long. Drop an ice cube in your

glass of whisky-soda and you can almost hear the carbonation say "Ahh! Welcome to (gay) paradise!"

I take a photo of Jack, my Thai friend visiting home from college in the UK. One of the Singaporeans snidely comments, "Tourists, I wish they would go home!" and his group toasts him. A grey-haired *farang* walks up to the bar. He plops down onto a stool and waits for the bartender to turn around. "Thailand, this is paradise!" he exclaims. The bartender squints his eyes. "Really? This life more hell than heaven." The *farang* frowns: "What do you mean?" The bartender pauses, then replies: "What you like drink?" What is lost in translation is the idea of "paradise" from a Theravadan Buddhist perspective, which is not of this world, but freedom from the existence of this world, its sensuality, and materiality.[4] Furthermore, what may be idyllic to a tourist is labor to those who make the pleasures of this world possible.

This is a glimpse into representations and experiences that construct and contest Thailand as a gay and transgender paradise. These scenarios beg the question: paradise for whom, in what manner, and to what extent? A survey of media and analysis of select cases will demonstrate how Thailand is portrayed as a gay paradise by foreigners and the limits of such a representation for local discourse and experience. The contrast between English and Thai language media will highlight differing perspectives between foreign and variously positioned Thai actors. Additionally, political tensions and national controversies will also tease out some of the tension among various groups of Thais. These cases, from approximately one year, illuminate the nature and magnitude of friction (Tsing 2004) in queer spaces and representations. They help to contextualize recent shifts in Thai queer experiences of subjectivity and transnational encounters.

Finally, I aim to make the case for why popular culture, here used synonymously with popular media, is important. Benedict Anderson's (2006) conception of "imagined communities" remains the seminal work on the processes of nationalism. In particular, he focuses on how print capitalism creates a sense of national identity. Following his incorporation of materials from Southeast Asia, Anderson revised his work to incorporate features of colonial rule such as the map, census, and museum. Yet this approach still privileges occulocentricity, and particularly, literacy. In *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture*, Ziad Fahmy (2011) expands print capitalism into "media capitalism" to describe how nationalism develops among everyday people, many of whom are not literate. Fahmy argues that popular culture not only is a form of entertainment, but also allowed Egyptians to create a national identity beyond elites. Sound, and its incorporation with visuals, was particularly important, as it provided a sense of immediacy. The interplay between different media, such as print, broadcast, and theatre, fulfilled both commercial and social needs. Practices such as reading the newspaper aloud for others to hear, popular music, and comedic sketches created a platform for mediations that were embodied, performative, public, and crossed class identifications. Thus, multimedia was instrumental in the ability for Egyptians to identify a common sense of being Egyptians across differences such as class.

Popular media is also instrumental to Thai identity formation and the concept of "Thainess" (*kwam-pen-thai*). In particular, there is strong anti-English sentiment, which Thais commonly point to as a sign of having never been colonized.[5] Thai film has an over century long history of use tied to national identity and nationalism (Hamilton 1994, Morris 2008, Sungsri 2008, Tiebtienrat 2011). In *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and*

Popular Culture in Thailand, Scot Barmé (2002) provides a social history of the development of middle class gender and sexuality norms in early twentieth century Bangkok through the then "new" media such as cartoons, magazines, novels, and the cinema. Jim Ockey (1999) argues that television was the key medium in the creation of middle class Thai lifestyles based on advertising that instrumentalized consumption. During times of great political, social, and economic change, including the end of the absolute monarchy, the development of a middle class, and the formal institution of binary sex by the government, popular media provides a previously ignored documentation of moral and ideological debates of the time. This continues into the present, with ongoing state censorship of film and controversies around the popularity of Korean media.

Fahmy, Barmé, and others have specifically relied on popular culture sources to understand non-elite perspectives in the formation of identities. Here, I hope to demonstrate how these are currently playing out in queer media in Thailand. I do so while focusing both on the friction between foreign and domestic representations of Thailand as a gay/transgender paradise and as a means to highlight the sub-cultural differentiations and ideological contestations within contemporary Thai society.[6] First I will contrast representations by gay foreigners, especially rice queens, of Thailand with domestic representations.[7] I highlight the growth in inter-Asian interaction and note that while many Caucasian gay men experience Bangkok as a space in decline, Asian gay men often experience Bangkok as a metropolis in ascendance. I describe internal differences and frictions among Thais, and a recent resurgence in the expunging of queer representations in popular media. In particular, I highlight the varying racial, class, and other social

positions that shape how different actors perceive and experience Thailand as a "gay paradise."

Imagining Paradise: Queer Mediascapes in and of Thailand

Bangkok is saturated with gay, *kathoey*, and *tom* representations that come to construct what we see as queer Thailand. Intended local or foreign audience differentiates this media through language, producing multiple competing representations of this place. In the Western popular imagination, Thailand is a "gay paradise," and specifically a country that affords cheap and easy access to exotic "boys."[8] This reputation for sex tourism and a social tolerance for homosexuality/transgenderism is a common representation of queer Thailand in English language media. In *Imagining Gay Paradise: Bali, Bangkok, and Cyber-Singapore*, Gary Atkins (2011) provides a history of Western constructions of Southeast Asia as a gay paradise. While showing the constraints imposed by colonial intervention and administration that continue to the present day, for instance, in the Singaporean recourse to Chinese tradition based on its Victorian British heritage to outlaw the promotion of homosexuality, Southeast Asia does appear relatively edenic. Atkins notes that by the 1979 edition of the *Spartacus International Gay Guide*, Bangkok is referred to as a "mecca" for gay men, even with its caveats about the potential dangers for travellers and the reduction of the go-go bar system to sexual slavery. Even with the ominous police crackdown of Babylon Sauna on December 27, 2002, during former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's Social and Moral Order Campaign, Atkins' climactic moment in the story of gay Bangkok, a reader is more likely to remember the lush descriptions of what is often considered the best gay sauna in the world.[9] Atkins

idealized rendition of Babylon's social milieu, where everyone (old, young; masculine, feminine; Caucasian, Asian) is welcome and wanted, especially as relayed by its proprieter Khun Toc, is a sharp contrast to Nikos Dacanay's (2011) analysis of Thai class identity and the operations of power within the sauna. After all, Atkins' notes that at "the paradise on Soi Nantha [Babylon's location]…the male feast would continue to unfold at the boomerang-shaped banquet table in the 'best fishbowl in the world'" (2011:228).

Western accounts of Thai encounters, such as *The Rice Queen Diaries* (Gawthrop 2005), even when self-reflexive, conform to this general trope of paradise. Yet Thai media imagery eclipses this one-dimensional portrayal. Here, I present several gay and *kathoey* articulations within the queer mediascapes of Thailand, ranging from blogs, film and television, YouTube videos, and political demonstrations to re-contextualize the foreign gaze that constructs Thailand as a gay paradise. Focusing on media's relationship to macrosocial changes and everyday experience builds on previous work on Thai and Asian transgenderism and same-sex eroticism by showing the diversity of depictions and the complex forces that shape the competing ways through which queer male-bodied Thais live and imagine themselves.

I underscore my limitations in only dealing with and analyzing written text in English and Thai. Thus my use of "Western" is reduced to English, which serves as a lingua franca of tourist and expatriate life in Thailand, but clearly excludes a more nuanced understanding of German, French, or other linguistic communities. At the same time, English is not isomorphic with "Western," as it is also a primary languge used by Singaporean, Malaysian, Filipino, Indian, and other expatriate communities in Thailand. Any analysis I include of Korean perspectives is based on my oral communication with

friends and other visitors. I rely solely on written English sources and dialogue in English or Thai with informants in reference to Japanese and Chinese linguistic communities. While much of the gay travel literature from places such as Singapore are written in English, there is, for example, a gay guide to Bangkok written in Chinese, printed in Taiwan. I was fortunate enough to contact the author for his perspective and able to read the names of recommended venues, which are listed in English. However, there is a vast amount of information I do not have linguistic access to. Asian foreigners I encountered in gay venues outside the international zone either learned about the establishment from a Thai friend or read about it online, often on Chinese language websites.

The "Perfect Match": Isan Boys and *Farang* Men

I start with an image and performance by Thai artist Maitree Siriboon from his 2009 photo series, installation, and performance "Isarn Boy Soi 4" (Isarn and Isaan are variations on the Romanization of Isan, the Northeast region of Thailand). At the WhiteSp-ce Gallery opening on December 11, Maitree opens by performing as an Isan boy-angel. He sits calmly, meditatively, on a red pedestal, wearing only pink underwear, a set of white feather wings, sunglasses, and, importantly, an excessive amount of gold jewelry reminiscent of Thai classical dance. Sporting blond hair, Maitree signifies that the Isan boy, located in Silom Soi 4, is now thoroughly urbanized and globalized, living in Bangkok and interacting with foreigners. When the angel moves, he reaches up and out, as if aspiring to something higher. In this live performance, the body slithers and slinks, but in expansive and powerful gestures, almost always reaching with a calm but positive affect. This was a striking contrast to the photos on the wall and the installation

pieces. In the key still image on the back wall, the boy's body is sitting on a pedestal in a red room filled with red fabric and rose petals, his head rests on his knees, wrapped by his arms. His face being obscured, we cannot see if he is crying, but his posture shows some type of distress, and being alone in the room, there is an atmosphere of isolation. Perhaps the boy has just lost his sponsor? In another part of the gallery, a light box shows the same image, but just the boy's body magnified and out of context, and thus more confrontational in its portrayal of dis-ease. There is also a series of photos with groups of *farang*, all but one significantly older. This leads to the signature piece in the collection. The Isan boy is dead, his wings crushed, his body is being supported by two older *farang* in a scene that elicits Michelangelo's Pietà (see Figure 4). In an installation piece, the Isan boy body is prone, his eyes closed, parts of his body strewn across numerous backlit photographs, somewhat obscured by cut braches and surrounded by rose petals. The setting simultaneously elicits a wedding and a funeral.

How are we to read the narrative of this series? Is the winged boy, like Icarus, someone who has gone too high, reached too far? Does his lustful and unbridled aspiration lead to his demise? How are we to read his death? Can we expect a resurrection? How are we to read the performance and images against each other? What temporal order should we ascribe to them? The only clue we are given, is Maitree's hair color. In the photographs it is completely blonde. During his performance, which comes later, he has mostly black hair with blond tips. Does this suggest that the boy is resurrected and again striving for something higher? Will this become a Buddhist narrative of reincarnation that requires an intervention which will pull the Isan boy out of

the cycle of rebirths? I do not provide a definitive exegesis but rather suggest some questions that point to the possibilities for interpreting this work.

Following his performance, Maitree described his inspiration for the body of work: the "perfect match" of the *farang* and the Isan boy in Silom Soi 4. The match plays on numerous complementary pairings: foreign and native, white and Thai, old and young. While making associations with sex work, Isarn Boy explicitly avoids this appellation. Rather, like some expats prefer, the term "sponsor" refers to foreign men in their relationships with Thai boyfriends. But here, in the eyes of an Isan boy, Maitree is providing a different perspective, that of the "boy." His work thus talks back to representations of Isan boys by white men. Maitree forcefully marks his presence and point of view within a larger context of the spellbinding dyad of "white man/native boy" that is naturalized as "a compulsory love for the white man in contrast to the oblivion of native boys" in transcolonial borderzones (Lim 2013:72). The Isan boy is neither a victim of his circumstances, nor a deceitful money boy. He is a young man finding his way in the world and trying to improve his circumstances given the conditions that constrain and enable his rise.

Figure 4: Isarn Boy Soi 4. An image and description of the "Isarn Boy Soi 4" photo series by Maitree Siriboon.[10]

I start with this image, because it immediately complicates the representation of Thai contact zones familiar to many Western readers while acknowledging the constraints of Thai agency in this context. Maitree's personal biography, from Isan boy with an established white American boyfriend to an internationally curated artist, points to different routes available to the native. One thing that is clear within scenes like Soi 4, is that Thais are exerting agency that often relies on the generosity of foreign sponsors, but producing something that exceeds external expectations. Whether or not they are sex

workers, Thais often capitalize on their patronage to change their circumstances, including leaving sex work.

The imagery of angels also connects to the Western metaphor of a gay Thai paradise and Thai metaphors of gender transformation (transgender women often refer to themselves as "angels"). Here, I highlight some of the racialized, gendered, and imperialist dynamics involved in these intercultural relationships. I also bring Thai class into the analysis. To do so, I provide a brief excursion into one of the most important Western texts on gay Thai-Caucasian relationships, *The Rice Queen Diaries* (Gawthrop 2005). As noted earlier, I define "rice queen" as a non-Asian man who has a strong and persistent attraction for East or Southeast Asian male partners ("curry queen" refers to those interested in South Asian men). I begin with Gawthrop's extensive definition and explication of the "rice queen" from his influential book.

The term "Rice Queen" is a product of contemporary western gay vernacular. It refers to a man, usually Caucasian, who is sexually attracted to men of Far East – including Southeast – Asian origins. Like his heterosexual equivalent, the Rice Queen is drawn to youthful, androgynous features typical of the "Oriental" look: smooth brown skin, black hair, and broad faces with high cheekbones, elongated ("slanted") [he also refers to them as "almond"] eyes, and porcelain-perfect lips. Along with the physical attraction is an obsession with all things Asian: from cuisine and home decor to history, culture, religion, and spirituality…For some white men, the appeal is transgressive: Asian guys are a turn-on because their boyish looks, regardless of their age, allow for paedophilic fantasies that can be

acted upon with exhilarating results – but without breaking the law. For others,

the appeal is rooted in culturally determined, essentialist notions of Asian

passivity or femininity. Asian guys are seen as more "gentle" or agreeable than

white guys, so an interracial match is seen as complimentary…Not surprisingly,

"Rice Queen" is heavily burdened with political baggage. It's most often a

pejorative label that denotes ethnic fetishism and a preference for relationships

based on inequality. Those saddled with the label are often charged with neo-

colonial racism. The stereotypical Rice Queen is middle-aged or older, wealthy,

and overweight; his Asian lover is young, sleek, feminine, servile, and passive in

bed. [Gawthrop 2005:9-10]

Gawthrop's definition of a rice queen, like that of most rice queens I have met and

interviewed, is stereotypical and ends with a self-exception.[11] He notes, after all, that he

is not "'UFO': ugly, fat, and old" himself (11). (Other popular variations of this include

BFO and BFU, where the B stands for "bald".) Nor is he a sex tourist, though, as his

alter-ego "Traveling White Boy" (122), his circumstances change, and he becomes a sex

tourist and later a sexpatriate. After all, "the constant fussing by so many beautiful young

men was hard to resist – even when motivated by the expectation of cash" (111). Thus,

Gawthrop falls into the role of sponsor who finds his slice of paradise.

The friendliness of the Thais and the imperatives of the tourist economy are a

potent mixture when sexual attraction rears its head. For a western traveller

unaccustomed to such lack of inhibition toward bodily pleasures, the possibility of

meeting someone new every day becomes an endless source of temptation that is hard to resist. In the real world, there's no such thing as "heaven." But on this trip, one angel after another kept fluttering his wings in my direction. These glittery illusions, which began with Toy, would turn out to be the spark that transformed a three-month journey into something more significant. [Gawthrop 2005:114]

Gawthrop's own account is littered with notes about class differences among Thais, and how this affects his relationship to Thai men. One observation he makes is the relationship between class and being "out." On his first visit to Bangkok, he is confronted with a number of potential partners, including one middle class Thai academic he has been emailing from Canada. "Despite his many acts of kindness, at no point was I invited to see him in his own environment. Partly due to closetry, and partly to a middle-class cultural stigma that precludes involvement with westerners, he shyly deflected my requests to visit him on campus or at home" (110). That is, Gawthrop early on confronts and associates the idea that middle class gay men are less likely to be forthcoming about their sexuality and about their relationships with Caucasians. However, he provides no analysis of why this might be so.

Gawthrop comes to identify his own desires in contrast to those he has in Canada and Thai middle class ones. In Canada, he states that he was more likely to have relationships with Asian men of a professional class similar to himself. He also notes, for example, that Thais found light skin more beautiful. But he preferred dark skin. "The kind of guys I found hot [in Thailand] were quite often farm boys from Isaan or the Golden Triangle – this made them, automatically, much poorer than my objects of desire

back home [in Canada]. The fact that the Thai upper- and middle-classes were a significant minority, combined with my attraction to younger "out" guys, amounted to a high probability that my Thai lovers would be involved, to some degree, with [sex] trade (149)." Supporting someone also allowed him to maintain his "houseboy/sex slave fantasy. Having Tong stark naked in the condo every day, ready to hop into bed at a moment's notice, was intoxicating" (212).

Ironically, Gawthrop states that all the relationships he starts with Thai men in this skewed situation are doomed to failure compared to the potential relationships he could have with men of a similar social standing or that were more Westernized, but these are both traits he finds distasteful. Rather, he continues to desire the relationships in which he plays the role of the benevolent rice queen patron. After a couple of years living in Thailand post the IMF crisis, Gawthrop comes to find Thai nationalism and anti-Westernism increasingly stifling. Yet, he notes that being *farang* in Thailand is still preferable to being *gaijin* (Caucasian foreigner) in Japan. For many rice queens, developed Asian countries are particularly specious. While they find themselves attracted to many men in places such as Japan, Korea, or Singapore, the desire is often not returned or shunned. Without the vast income differentials that make rice queens regal in poorer contexts, the sexual and romantic marketplace is no longer tilted in their favor and often resisted as a form of nationalist pride. At the same time, men from developed Asia can become competitors in countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, or the Philippines. Gawthrop, for example, expresses anxiety over being replaced in the life of his Thai lovers by a sponsor who could now be a "succession of Mr Japans or Mr Singapores" (2005:216). That is, Westerners are no longer the only potential sponsors for young Thai

men looking for foreign partners. Heaven was closing its doors to Caucasian exceptionality. Paradise lasts only as long as one is desired and made to feel special.

Sexpatriatism: Sex, Expatriates, Advice

A variety of media, inside and outside of Thailand, create the image of Thailand as a gay friendly tourist destination. The advent of online media has provided a new vehicle for the dissemination of information and advice. Blogs, YouTube, and other new media have become major sources for the imagining of Thai queerness from afar and the construction of local queer subjectivities. Such resources are more current and accessible than traditional print or moving image media, allow a greater amount of interaction in its co-production, circulation, and consumption, and can provide a sense of camaraderie, confidence, and intimacy. Web sources are highly trusted by tourists coming to Thailand as they are easily compared and because a wide range of participants on sites will provide their own commentary, giving them the appearance of greater objectivity.

In foreign online blogs and forums, what especially distinguishes Thailand's interpenetration of the cultural and the sexual is the fact that media objects tend to reduce the local populace to the status of potential sexual partners. A fifty-something white American man living in Bangkok writes the "Rice Queen Diary" (RQD) blog[12] to offer his "experiences and perspectives [to] those considering a long or short-term stay in Thailand." The blog, initially focused overwhelmingly on the topic of sex, now covers broader issues such as "culture and communication."

At first, sex in Thailand was a prominent topic of my blog. One of the great things about this place, particularly at my age, is the sex. On arrival I had more sex here, in one month, than in the previous 10 years! While my earlier posts read more like a kid in a candy store, I think the blog has evolved, as I have. The sex is still an important topic, but I believe my focus has shifted more to culture and communication, particularly as it relates to interacting with the boys.[13]

That is, for the blogger, the topics of culture and communication are employed in the service of obtaining and maintaining sex and companionship. The RQD blogger distinguishes his blog from other tourist sources that "sugar-coat" Thai life and fail to provide a "street wise" perspective on living in Thailand. He notes, for example, that his "experiences are predominantly with lower class boys." As the blogger points out, most Westerners initially do not realize that the Thais they are interacting with in sexualized settings generally come from poor rural backgrounds, and are thus not representative of Thais at large. This is particularly acute in a metropolis like Bankok, where a large middle class exists, and often differentiates itself from the poor through the avoidance of romantic relationships with *farang*.

It is clear, however, that while claiming to demystify Thailand as a gay paradise, RQD reinforces the idea that sex is easily obtained, even for those who would only be competitive in specialized sexual markets at home (e.g. rice queens, daddies, bears). In an entry entitled, "Show No Interest," he writes, "The difference is age and looks are not a huge factor in Thailand. A lot of Thais have a daddy

complex. Some will even call you daddy in bed. ... Similarly, a lot of Thais are into

Bears, including the younger 20's guys." Such an assessment portrays young Thai

men as non-subscribers to gay North American beauty standards centered on an

aversion to those who are older, large-bodied, or hairy. In the rhetoric of foreign

observers, a "cultural difference" is identified. Yet intergenerational partnership

and patronage are nothing new to either queer Western male or Thai cultures. Their

taken-for-granted status, however, generally fail to engage the social and economic

factors that make pairings between older white men and younger Thai men both

feasible and desirable, the "perfect match."

While the blog has changed its focus to "culture and communication… as it

relates to interacting with the boys," miscommunication continues to occur. In a post

titled "Thai English," the blogger describes Tinglish (Thai English) with the goal of

helping foreign gay men interpret it for both relationship and everyday life purposes. [14]

What is highlighted is the inadequacy of the Thai language and the difficulties Thais have

with English, a marker of their inferiority. Such pronouncements, however, also point to

the blogger's limited understanding of the Thai language. Problems occur because most

sexpatriates expect all their communication in Thailand to be conducted in English—

which is an assertion of their privilege in sexual negotiations, where their needs are

accommodated first and foremost. The communicative mishaps and agency of sex

workers is reduced to deception. Boyfriends' love motives are often questioned and

reduced to financial transactions.

Thailand's largest expatriate Web site (Thaivisa.com) hosts a "Gay People in

Thailand" forum. Posts frequently complain about Thai men, their inscrutability, and the

difficulties of living as a foreigner in Thailand. Regardless of domain, any inexplicable difference can be reduced to a few pat phrases such as "This is Thailand" (TIT for short) or "welcome to the LOS" (an abbreviation for "land of smiles"). Yet, posts generally come to the conclusion that regardless of the difficulties of living in a country where one does not know the language, does not understand the cultural norms of relationships (especially kinship), and does not read emotions successfully, the situation is still better than in the poster's home country.[15] Furthermore, a *farang*'s verbal dismissal of "paradise" is often contradicted by his action of staying put. Expatriate Websites, blogs, and forum threads thus promote and reinforce the image of Bangkok as a place of sexual plenitude.

On August 30, 2009, a Thai poster using the name yimsiam (meaning "Thai smile") posted on the forum regarding his mistreatment by security guards at Silom Complex mall.[16] The title of the post was: "Be Aware Of Rude Security Guards At Silom Complex." In the post (all mistakes retained), yimsiam states:

> I am a well respected Thai businessman in Bangkok with my own restaurants. Recently my farang friend and I were waiting for another friend in Silom Complex at the bottom of the moving stairs to go to Powerbuy. Before our other friend could join us a security guard came up to me and told me to move away…the second one [security guard] did not listen to my reason and said : "why don't you go and discuss the price for your services somewhere else".

I asked him " Why do you think I am a money boy? Please be polite and pay

respect to people"…I was so shocked…

In this post, yimsiam, a "well respected Thai businessman in Bangkok" is claiming that

he was harassed by security guards because he was simply in the presence of a *farang*,

which made their interaction look like a sexual transaction. Silom Complex mall is

directly across the street from the international gay bar scene of Silom Soi 2 and Soi 4.

The poster notes that one of his friends was entrapped in the restroom, which indicates

that the mall is aware of gay cruising and sex work that is negotiated on the premises and

actively deterring it. What is of particular note here is that the mere presence of a Thai,

even a well-respected businessman, being with a *farang* male in this highly charged

international setting elicits the suspicion of being a sex worker (the same is also true

when *farang* men are with Thai women and *kathoey*, but not the case in female same sex

couplings). Thus, being with a *farang* in public is connected to a public performance of

sexuality. That is, the assumption of sex work with *farang* creates an interpretive

framework in which being together interracially in public space is an open performance

of sexuality or sexual transactions, something that should remain hidden to be proper.

The perception of all Thais being sex workers also translates onto the numerous

online cruising sites for Thai gay men, and to a lesser extent, *kathoey*. These sites

differentiate audiences along the lines of age, race, ethnicity, geography, and language. In

so doing, they allow most Westerners to feel central to Thai desire, as *farang* illiterate in

Thai are often excluded from sites in which they are not sought. Camfrog is a Webcam

chat site immensely popular with Thai gay youth who chat with each other in Thai online

slang. Sites, such as gayromeo.com, provide avenues for Thai-Thai, Thai-*farang*, and

Thai-Asian interaction while the Hong Kong/Singapore-based fridae.asia is used

primarily by Thais to interact with East Asians and Chinese diasporans in Southeast Asia.

Gayromeo, in particular, is a contentious site for Thais in relation to sex work. Many Thai

profiles start off with a statement such as "I am not a money boy" while expat profiles

will state "no money boys." All of these sites featured prominently in my interviews of

Thais and their partners, Gayromeo being particularly salient for *farang* and fridae for

Asians. Middle class Thai men in particular expressed great distress over the assumption

made by many Caucasian men that they were, by nature of being Thai, sex workers.

In contrast to foreigner sites that focus on Thais, the Thai queer online world

(Thai language gay cruising sites and bulletin boards) renders tourists and expats

relatively invisible. As Jilliana Enteen (2010) notes, the use of English decreased and the

Thai queer internet became locally Thai and Asian identified from 1998 to 2008. I would

suggest that this process has been continuing. Thais generally express little interest in

reading *farang* forums and Thai forums rarely discuss issues related to foreigners. And

while Chinese, Korean, and Japanese language are increasingly popular in Thailand,

English remains the de facto international language. Thais focus their discussion on

music (especially K-Pop), celebrity and porn pics, relationship problems (with other

locals), places to cruise men, and gossip about who was seen where doing what. *Kathoey*

forums also focus on body modification, beauty contests, and issues related to their civil

rights. These sites are usually inaccessible to foreigners as they require Thai literacy. This

lack of Thai interest in *farang* de-centers the Western gaze, particularly in representations

that construct Bangkok as a sexual haven. That is, while Western tourists and expatriates

in Thailand obsess in the online world about their relationships with Thais, the reverse does not occur.

As part of this research, I conducted regular searches on Thai gay forums using the search terms "ฝรั่ง," "เกาหลี," "ญี่ปุ่น" (*farang*, *kaoli* or Korea/Korean, *yipun* or Japan/Japanese) to see how these groups were discussed. I did not use the term "Chinese" as there are so many Sino-Thais that the references are mostly not to foreigners. Overall, the posts tended to be about media, such as Hollywood movies or K-pop music. However, when related to people, *farang* were generally negatively viewed while Koreans (I even found posts about myself) and Japanese were generally positively regarded. In particular, there were many negative posts related to English teachers, many of which referenced the John Mark Karr (now Alexis Reich) affair. Numerous posts warned that *farang* teachers were low-paid (compared to foreign businessmen, making around 30,000 THB/$1000 per month, or the salary of a mid-level Thai professional) pedophiles in Thailand. In August 2006, Karr, a US citizen from Atlanta, being investigated in a child pornography case, falsely claimed that he had murdered JonBenét Ramsey. He was extradited to the USA, though all charges were later dropped. The case was highly publicized and criticized in Thailand. Thais feared that Thailand had become a haven for Western delinquents. Subsequently, it had a major impact for *farang* expatriates, especially English language instructors. The suspicion of criminality spread to Westerners in general and new rules were established regarding visa requirements for entrance, use of the visa waiver for re-entry into the country, and criminal checks for employment. The heroic status many *farang* experienced in Thailand did not translate to how they were being portrayed in the media and in immigration policy debates.

While the view of *farang* was declining in the Thai imagination, so was the status of Thailand among *farang*. One striking difference I encountered in my fieldwork between long-term *farang* and Asian expats and tourists who visited Thailand regularly was in their contrasting views of how Thailand was evolving as a gay "paradise." Among Asians I met, primarily from East Asia, Thailand was "improving." The first time I met Min, a designer from Korea, I asked if he was familiar with Bangkok. "Oh no, he replied, I don't have the chance to go often." "How many times have you been here" I asked. He responded: "only five times in the last two years." I replied that I would consider his visits quite frequent. However, in contrast to the Singaporeans who came every month, and sometimes maintained a local residence, I could see why he perceived his trips as infrequent. For Asians, Thailand was improving because of its economic development. There were more light-skinned middle class men to date, the food offerings were diversifying (Italian, French, Mexican etc.) yet affordable and much cheaper than back home, malls were expanding and becoming more luxurious, public rail transportation was improving, and the Thai gay scene was expanding rapidly, both in the local Thai scene and the international party circuit. For many Asians, paradise was expanding. On the other hand, many *farang* I knew who were long term residents or had been coming to Thailand for many years, thought of the gay scene in terms of decline and decay. They often pined for an earlier golden era before Thaksin's social order campaign, when Thailand was cheaper, the scene was seedier, and sex was easier. While Thailand was still better than where they were from, they felt that their foreign money did not go as far, their influence was not as strong (e.g. Thais did not go out of their way to help them anymore), and their partner pool in the internationalized Thai scene was shrinking. In

particular, there was an increase in non-Atlantic people in the gay scene, primarily East

Asians, but also other groups such as Russians and other Eastern Europeans, who have a

marginally *farang* status. Thus, Thai development represented a decrease in Caucasian

access to what is paradisical: favorable currency exchange, being held in high esteem,

and sexual availability.

An Excess of Sissies: Stereotypical Representation and the Disciplining of

Normative Masculinity

Examination of Thai television and film reveals the complexity of queer

representations and their local contestations. Thai television is awash in male-bodied

effeminacy. In 2004, the visibility prompted former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's

Minister of Education to call for a reduction in queer characters on television, as they

were believed to provide poor role models for children. The rationale was that any

representation on television, because of its glamorous associations, would be emulated.

This positions queerness as simultaneously fashionable and contagious. However, North

Americans or Europeans would not consider these representations "positive" portrayals.

Typically, *kathoey* and effeminate gay men are cast as comic relief characters or as

criminals with lives mired in tragedy, not unlike historical American images of sissies,

drag queens, and other queers (Russo 1981, Waugh 2000). While contemporary Thai

images of queers on television should not be read "as if" in the past, such imagery

counters any claims often made by gay Western expats from places such as the US,

Australia, or Switzerland that Thais express no negative sentiment around homosexuality

and transgenderism. This sentiment is strong in the popular literature, though refuted or

complicated by scholars working on queer gender and sexuality in Thailand (see, for example, Jackson 1999b, Sanders 2002).

Thai representations of male effeminacy, however, are relatively commonplace and affirmative in comparison to its Asian neighbors. Television and film producers are creating complex and varied representations of gay and *kathoey*. In the summer of 2009, the Rainbow Moon (*phrachantha sirung*) drama series focused on a storyline in which a *kathoey* raises a child. In order to give the son a better life, she sacrifices her transgender identity by reverting to living as an effeminate man, thus demonstrating personal sacrifice and moral character. Thai commercial stations and public television (Thai PBS) have entertainment programs and talk shows hosted by gay men and *kathoey*. *Kathoey* increasingly participate as guests on talk shows, not as entertainers, but as activists, researchers, and transgender rights advocates. The transsexual celebrity and activist Nok Yollada is the spokesperson for diamond jewelry on cable television's most popular shopping network. This is in contrast to the relative suppression of homosexual and transgender representations in nearby countries such as Malaysia and Singapore (Peletz 2009, Atkins 2011).

Thai television and print news frequently incorporate content about *kathoey*, gay men, and *tom*, typically controversies about the excesses of effeminate male behavior, *kathoey* criminality, or something else considered really "queer," as in *plaek* (strange, weird, curious) or *pralat* (bizarre, wonderful, marvelous). Most commonly, when *kathoey* appear in the news, the theme is generally about crime or the peculiar. These stories act to promote heteronormativity, discipline gender and sexual difference, and warn the general population about its dangers (Morris 1997; Sinnott 2000; Jackson 2001, 2004; Yep 2003).

The year 2009 produced controversies about inappropriate sexual behavior and sex work between monk novices and older monks and *kathoey*, effeminate ROTC students who lure their peers into unseemly acts, and flamboyant monk novices.[17] The novice monk behaviors deemed inappropriate included wearing false eyelashes, using blush and lipstick, and tying monk's robes to produce empire and kimono-style waistlines. As the monk Luang Phi Chai Waradhammo (personal communication 2010) noted, showing me photographs of famous monks from Thai history, the syle of dress of these novices is not out of the range of that for respectable monks in the past (though cosmetic use is). What is different now is how the current state legitimizes only certain schools of Thai Buddhism and how the social media frenzy is exploited by mass media to reinforce "traditional" gender norms that are themselves a recent invention. Such controversies produce national identity (*khwam-pen-thai*) via articulations of traditionalized religion and morality, policing gender expression and sexuality based on a heteronormative standard created to appease the West. Thailand's history of "civilizing" gender and sexuality were initially efforts to prevent European colonization included the transformation of Thai gender to meet the Western expectations as enlightening barbaric gender and sexual practices were one of the justifications for colonization (see for example, van Esterik 2000 and Jackson 2003b). In the contemporary era, efforts to manage Thai gender and sexuality continue not only prove national modernity, but also quell the loss of face from Thailand's international reputation for male effeminacy, a continuing legacy from the colonial period.

Yet from outside the country, the appearance is one of unbridled gender and sexual diversity. As the US market for international gay films has grown in the past

decade, Thai films are one of the vehicles through which many queer North Americans have come into contact with representations of Thai gay men and *kathoey*. These films are generally understood to mean that Thailand is highly tolerant of homosexuality and transgenderism. Yet the stories often mask the complexity of the films' local reception and queer Thai lived experiences. With films such as *Iron Ladies* (2000), *Beautiful Boxer* (2003), and *Tropical Malady* (2003) playing in art cinemas in the US and others, such as *Bangkok Love Story* (2007) and *Love of Siam* (2007), available on DVD, one sees Thailand as a fantastic place where even transgender women are able to become national men's sports champions. The teen romance, *Love of Siam,* won Best Picture in all major Thai awards that year and was submitted by Thailand for consideration at the 2009 Academy Awards. These critical accolades, however, are attenuated by the film's popular reception. Many Thai viewers took offence at the boy-boy love story. Advertisements for the movie featured two heterosexual couples with no hint that the boys would become paired. When *Love of Siam* was broadcast on Thai cable television, the kissing scene between the boys was cut, but subsequently, the censored scene proliferated via many postings on YouTube. Many Thai gay men relate specifically to *Love of Siam* because they consider its ending realistic: family takes precedence over a romantic relationship. The boys are not coupled in the end. Even the feel good, wildly-popular, "based on a true story," *Iron Ladies*, the 2nd highest grossing movie of all time in Thailand at the time of its release, occludes the eventual outcome in real life. Stating that they would have to prove that they were really men, the Secretary-General of the Volleyball Association of Thailand disqualified team members who were not deemed masculine enough from international competition, as this would embarrass the nation. Gender and sexuality

continue to be objects of governmental and media control and discipline. The

representation of Thai masculinity, and the national pride associated with it, is what is at

stake in these controversies.

Additionally, overseas audiences are only seeing those Thai films that are

exported abroad. The queer Thai films US audiences see are already filtered through

international art and queer cinematic lenses. Approximately 10% of commercially

released Thai films are queer-themed or primarily feature gay, *kathoey*, *tom*, and other

gender variant characters. The vast majority are never distributed abroad. Many of these,

such as 2009's *Sassy Players* (*Taew Te Teen Rabert*: literally, sissies kicking with

explosive feet) about a group of queeny boys who play soccer (a high school version of

the *Iron Ladies*) or *Haunting Me* (*Hor Taew Taek Haek Krajerng*: literally, sissy dorm

shattered, sissies scattered), both directed by Poj Arnon, would be considered

stereotypical and offensive by Western standards. However, they are popular both with

both Thai mainstream and queer audiences.[18] Thus, while there is an extensive range of

queer media, the sheer volume masks both the complexity of the content, its reception,

and the varied discourses around its circulation. Portrayals that seem socially enlightened

from afar can actually be either mundane or controversial. Male-bodied effeminacy can

be displayed on screen for a laugh, but such characters should not come to represent the

nation.

Wonder Gay: We're Already Too Gay

The production, consumption, and contestation over queer representation in

Thailand shows the regulatory pressure placed on gender expression and same-sex

eroticism. Thais, including those who are queer, are keenly sensitive about being seen as "too gay" to the rest of the world. Wonder Gay provides a particularly salient example from 2009 that exemplifies the limited acceptability of male effeminacy in popular Thai discourse and how Thai national identity is articulated through discourses of gender and sexuality (see Käng n.d.).

The Wonder Girls are an award-winning South Korean girl group that swept the charts in many Asian countries. They were the first Korean band listed on *Billboard*'s Hot 100. The Wonder Gay is a group of five Thai high school students whose impersonation of the Wonder Girls catapulted them to celebrity status in Thailand. In their viral YouTube video, the Wonder Gay cover dance to the Wonder Girls song "Nobody." Each member of Wonder Gay copies the movements and takes on the persona of one of the Wonder Girls. Garnering approximately a third as many hits as the official Wonder Girls' "Nobody" YouTube video, the Wonder Gay's "Nobody - Ouz Wonder Girls (cover)" video was the most popular YouTube video from Thailand in 2009. Wonder Gay discussions are prevalent on many Thai Web discussion boards, both mainstream and queer. In general, Web forum threads tend to start positively, with early adopter fans posting enthusiastic comments. But as the threads progress and the audience grows, the comments become more critical. My analysis[19] now focuses on two sources: the Thai television interview of the Wonder Gay on *Jao Khaow Den* (Breaking News) on June 2, 2009 and YouTube comments. I elaborate on the comments written by Thais on YouTube because they specifically address an international audience as opposed to a national one.[20]

The Breaking News interview, which was widely cited in subsequent newspaper articles, starts with opening text scrolling onto the screen. Wonder Gay are referred to as the "Third Gender Wave" (*krasae phet-thi-3*) using terminology reminiscent of the "Korean Wave" (*krasae kaoli*). The host then begins the program by noting Wonder Gay "wore their school uniforms and used a school stage to perform a dance." After noting that 1,300,000 people have seen the "Nobody" video, and that the Wonder Gay have already been signed by a major record label, he ends his opening monologue with the following:

> So some people accept this hot topic [gayness/kathoeyness], others are against it. They are good students and have good exam scores. Society is already more open but some people ask why they behave this [feminine] way. And this may lead others to copy them.

The host highlights the social concerns of Wonder Gay critics, namely that they are inappropriately representing Thainess (i.e. performing in school uniform on a school stage in front of a flagpole, all symbols of the nation) and that their popularity will encourage other boys to become effeminate like them. The interview itself focuses on their moral character. All of the Wonder Gay members are good students and are not addicted to drugs or involved in other deviant behavior. The host then concludes with the statement: "They just get together and do what they like, and now it depends on society whether to accept them or not."

Online, however, reception of the Wonder Gay video follows a specific logic. In Thai forums the response increasingly shifts from congratulatory to disapproving as the audience broadens. The same pattern is observed on YouTube. By October 14, 2009, there were 2,949 YouTube comments on the Wonder Gay's initial "Nobody" clip. It is important to note here that these comments are overwhelmingly favorable (the clip has a 4.5 out of 5 rating based on 2,754 ratings), yet the critical comments, as might be expected, stand out. Wonder Gay's dancing and singing ability, their gender presentation, and their appropriateness as representatives of Thailand constitute the main issues. However, it is also important to note that they are, as a queer phenomenon, attractive because of their difference, which is often interpreted as humorous and entertaining. Their "strange" behavior is what garners attention. In this sense, they commodify the novelty of Thai gender difference to sell their music.[21]

Thais constitute the early consumers of the "Nobody" video clip. As the clip's popularity increases, the audience becomes more global. Internationalization of the audience brings to the fore issues of national representation, and Wonder Gay's sissiness is the primary concern. Much of the YouTube commentary points to the reputation of Thailand as a country with an exceedingly large gay/transgender population. The following exchange from YouTube comments discusses Thailand's reputation for being gay and the role of queers as entertainers. IHyRaXI a non-Thai states "yeah thai kids are known to be gay. did you know there the tranny capital of the world? i mean come on how could these boys actually do this?? for a girl ok, but highschool biys?? just wow..." ThaiSouljaBoi responds by saying "but anyway, these kinda people r like jukebox for us, so its good to have them around, just something to laugh at."[22] ThaiSouljaBoy defends

the Wonder Gay because they are Thai. While acknowledging their queer presence, he nominally accepts them for their entertainment value, as objects of ridicule.

The representation of gay and *kathoey* in media that are accessible abroad, such as film and online sources, influences how Thais come to see their country as well as its status for outsiders. For example labchaeong states: "after watching this vid i realise why thailand never develop."[23] That is, excessive male effeminacy and/or the lack of talent of the performers is associated with an inability to progress as a nation. Wonder Gay are controversial not only as sissies, young effeminate gay men, but also as Korean imitators.[24] Thai popular music and other media borrow heavily from the West. However, copying the East, and in such a wide-scale fashion, re-ignites anxieties about the loss of Thainess (*khwam-pen-thai*). Because the Wonder Gay are situated as a Thai sissy group, they come to represent a nation that is already overly gay, and one that can only mimic others without producing anything original. They become a source of national shame.

The Politics of Pride: The Censure and Contest over Visible Evidence

While the Wonder Gay case exemplifies the limits of acceptable representation on the Web, the contestation of queer visibility also occurs in everyday life. Again, the important issue here is that sexuality, which should be hidden to be proper, is being made public. One example of such anxiety erupting in the political arena is in Red Shirt (National United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship or UDD) politics, when queers became a target of Red Shirt protest.[25] Chiang Mai's second gay pride march in 2009 was violently disrupted by Red Shirt protesters and others, who claimed that Lanna (Northern Thai) culture does not support such displays. Red Shirt rhetoric excises

queerness from local tradition, even though some *kathoey* trace their origins to the Lanna tradition. Red Shirt propaganda also portrays current Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and other political leaders as *kathoey* to discredit them (see, for example, Figure 5 and 6). Such moves do not deny the existence of gay/*kathoey* in UDD politics. Gay/*kathoey* were active protesters in the rallies and *kathoey* entertainers performed at the main stage at Ratchaprasong during the encampment of that area in March to May of 2010.[26] Rather, the Red Shirts use homosexuality/transgenderism as a tactic of political shaming. That is, while individuals are allowed to act out their gender and sexual difference, the concept of queerness, that which is not heterosexual male or female, is still considered illegitimate. English-language news reports generally portray the Red Shirts as the rural poor, ignoring the complexity of the UDD constituency. These reports did not cover the political use of queer imagery and therefore do not impinge on foreigners' views of gay/*kathoey* representation, preserving the image of unequivocal Thai acceptance of homosexuality and transgenderism.

Figure 5. Red Shirt protest march in Pattaya, February 22, 2009; photo by Käng. Sign

portrays the prime minister as a kathoey: "I [pronoun used by girls] want to be Prime

Minister. Suthep [the Deputy Prime Minister] is my husband."

Figure 6. Red Shirt protest encampment in Bangkok, April 18, 2010; photo by Käng.

Poster, in a series displayed as an art exhibit satirizing Thai politicians as queer, portrays

the prime minister as a *kathoey* sex worker: "Daddy [slang for an old, fat, rich man who

likes to have sex with young girls/boys; probably a reference to General Prem

Tinsulanonda, 16th Prime Minister of Thailand who is widely rumored to be gay and the

mastermind of the 2006 coup] come, help Mark [Abhisit's English name]!! It'll slip

through the prime minister's fingers soon." This idiomatically means the prime minister

will lose his position soon. The sticker reads: "Abhisit Murderer."

The UDD protests are not the only venue in which queerness is made politically

visible. In Bangkok, clashes among activists, community organizations, and commercial

interests have put the "pride" march, which incorporates Thais and foreigners, on hiatus. Yet there is an annual "human rights" march and related events focusing on the Thai gender and sexual diversity community that take place during the last weekend in November. In 2009, the march occurred in Siam Square, in the heart of Bangkok's shopping district on a Saturday afternoon. Simultaneously, male and transgender sex workers staged a condom fashion show at Hua Lamphong, Bangkok's central train station. Earlier that same morning, a forum including a former Human Rights Commission officer on the topic of *Kathoey Ham Khao* (No Entry for *Kathoey*) was attended by approximately 200 participants (see Figure 7).[27] The following day, a festival commemorating World AIDS Day and human rights for sexual minorities brought all these groups and other organizations together in Chatuchak Park. This festival occurred on the footpath between the sky train station and Chatuchak Weekend Market, perhaps the busiest area in Bangkok on a Sunday afternoon. Although gay pride events have ended in Bangkok and were disrupted in Chiang Mai in 2009, they still continue in Pattaya and Phuket. Expressions of queer pride are both suppressed and supported, contingent on local politics and circumstances. Yet the UDD use of transgender imagery for political defamation clearly points to the disgrace that can be evoked by gender non-conformity. As Jackson argues, the Thai situation can be described as "tolerant but not accepting" (Jackson 1999).

Figure 7: Phuket 9/9/2009, photo by Kang, used with permission of Prem and Luk-Yi. Photo portrays Prem, a *kathoey* researcher and activist, and Luk-Yi, a former *kathoey*, in front of a hotel sign. The sign reads: "Prohibited From Entry: *Kathoey*, *Tut* [effeminate gay], Bar Girls. Entry Only For Those with Proper Manners."

Paradise: Lost, Found, and Re-Imagined

The nomenclature of a prelapsarian "gay paradise" in Bangkok is clearly limited but not entirely unfounded. The complex situation of queer representation in Bangkok points to how thoroughly portrayals of Thai gender/sexuality have been constructed through the sometimes contradictory forces of anti-colonial rhetoric, politics, tourism, commodity flows, and other forms of transculturation. Thai gender and sexuality are, like

all other systems of gender and sexuality, products of relationships that align and differentiate with other cultural groups. Analysis of Thai media shows that there are intense social anxieties about sex work and gender/sexual nonnormativity and its relationship to the national body. There is great concern, as a country overdetermined by sex tourism and male-bodied effeminacy, about how the nation appears to non-Thais. Thus, foreign portrayals of Thailand as a "gay paradise" may unintentionally incite animosity toward effeminate gay/*kathoey*, who, in their excessive sexualization, are seen to defame the nation. Ironically, the portrayal of "gay paradise" may indeed call for the suppression of the very groups that supposedly make Thailand paradisiacal. Nevertheless, queer Thais themselves refer to the situation as "better here than elsewhere." If you ask Thais why there are so many gay/*kathoey*, the typical answer is that "we accept them."[28] After all, why do so many Western and East Asian gay men come here? Why has Bangkok become the capital of gender transformation surgery? The economic situation that makes Thailand a bargain is key. However, tolerance toward homosexuality and transgenderism is clearly another primary factor for gay and transgender travelers. The visibility of gay men, *kathoey*, and *tom* is high and rarely, in and of itself, attracts negative attention. Non-normativity is stigmatized, but queer people often find legitimacy in being *khon di* (a good person), whether based on occupational prestige, fulfillment of moral obligations to family, or other personal achievements. Though there are few legal rights granted to non-heterosexuals (e.g. *kathoey* cannot change their sex on national identity cards), Thai tolerance for them makes life relatively easy compared to the situation in other countries. Transgenderism and effeminacy are seen as more humorous and "cute" than "sick" or deranged. Compared to East Asian cultures, in Thailand there is

less pressure to marry and have sons. Even if one cannot be "open" or "reveal" oneself verbally (*poetphoei*), one can "show" (*sadaeng ok*) oneself visually with little condemnation and live a queer life relatively comfortably.[29] Thai gay men, *kathoey*, and *tom* say that their situation is better than that of their Asian neighbors.

New geopolitical alignments are also structuring queer subjectivities and cultural trajectories. With increasing economic development and Asian regionalism, there is an increasing shift away from the West. Rather than being a unifying teleological force, globalization and modernization also produce local difference. For example, new non-Western sexual subjectivities in Bangkok, such as "*tom*" and "*dee*," are produced through the same market mechanisms that create "global gays" (Altman 1997). Indeed, a gender-based model of same-sex female sexuality, which is constructed against local understandings of Western lesbianism, has developed throughout Southeast Asia and Greater China (Blackwood and Wieringa 2007, Sinnott 2004, Wilson 2007). While some critics have suggested that the situation in queer Asia is like that of the US in the past, the Thai situation is not developmentally behind but rather a different articulation of queer modernity. Indeed, Thai gay cultures evolved concurrently with the West, not after (Jackson 1999a). Contrary to global gay predictions, gender-stratified *kathoey* have proliferated alongside globally-identified gay men.[30] One major difference with the West is in the visibility of *kathoey* vs. gay men. Gay men are relatively invisible in Bangkok. Gayness is not said to "show" the way that being *kathoey* or sissy usually does. However, with the growing use of surgical procedures among *kathoey*, their visibility decreases as they increasingly pass as women. As Thai gender/sexuality work through and alongside

different cultural logics, evolutionary comparisons with the West are both inadequate and faulty.

Queer Thais themselves, especially those from the middle classes, are creating distinctive desires that are meaningful for them within the context of a middle income country striving to join the developed world.[31] New consumptive practices and partnership patterns position queer Thais as desiring subjects for whom the Western ideological framework of egalitarian homosexuality takes a backseat to neo-liberal economics and their countercurrents. Depictions of sex tourism in Bangkok have shaped how middle class Thais increasingly index cosmopolitanism vis-à-vis the avoidance of personal relationships with *farang*. The Internet, regional flows of media, and a rise in regional travel made possible by discount airlines have simultaneously made East Asians desirable and accessible romantic partners. It also means that other Asians are visiting Thailand frequently. They also encounter a situation in which they become highly valued, desirable partners. Thus, Asians are often referring to Thailand as a "gay paradise."

Travel itself is a liberating experience that situates one in certain liminal conditions. This is heightened when there are large economic differences between sending and receiving nations. Older *farang* often complain about the homophobia where they are from, whether it is the Australian outback or Switzerland. They marvel at how accepting Thai people seem to be around issues of sexuality and gender difference. Asian visitors often cite the family pressures they are under at home. What both groups of foreigners are experiencing is a lack of outright open hostility, a situation where they are out of kinship surveillance, and the heightened status they garner from being foreigners

with financial means, which makes them big men of sorts. They also usually do not know what people are saying about them behind their backs.

I want to stress that it is important to think about who is saying what, from which subject positions, and in which contexts. So, for example, Thai activists often focus on the negative aspects of their situation (that motivates their activism after all) and focus on policy changes. They do not represent typical beliefs and practices. The inability of *kathoey* to change their gender on national identification cards is, for example, an issue that activists will rally around. However, *kathoey* activists are more than willing to say that they are relatively integrated and well regarded in Thai society compared to most places where transgender people can legally change their sex, for instance, in Singapore, Iran, or the US. While the popular literature perhaps overemphasizes that Thailand is a "paradise," the activist and academic literature is likely to do the opposite, by focusing its critical lens on inequality and highlighting social suffering. If one asks again: paradise for whom, in what manner, and to what extent? The answer is that paradise itself does not exist, and paradise is relative to one's social positioning. However, for many queer Thais, expatriates, and tourists, Bangkok is as close as a place gets to being one.[32]

CHAPTER 4

Drawing New Boundaries: Contemporary Thai Racializations

"You are white," Krit said to me during an interview when discussing class

distinctions and ethnic affiliations. "What?" I asked. "You're white [คนขาว *khon khao*],

like me." When describing his Chinese heritage in Thailand, Krit talked about his skin

color and how that was a sign of class status. At that point, he pointed at me and said:

"You are white." I replied "I am not, look at the skin on my arms, it's quite tan." He

pulled up the leg of my shorts to reveal the skin of my upper thighs and pointed at them:

"This is white skin [*phio khao*]. See, you are white." "OK," I conceded. At that moment I

felt uncomfortably interpellated, exposed, and a bit violated. Besides expressing a level

of skinship I did not find appropriate given that we were not friends, Krit uncomfortably

reminded me of the times Caucasian Americans have said things to me like: "You are

more white than I am," "You might as well be white," or "You're an honorary white." I

knew that Krit was using "white person" to mean "white skin" and higher class, not as a

racial category that is the same as Caucasian in the USA, but at the same time there was a

feeling of dis-ease, in his use of the term "white person" (*khon khao*) to refer to me, a

Korean American with roots in Kent Village, Maryland, a majority African American

community where I learned that I was neither black nor white.[1] Krit further elaborated on

how he thought about himself as a Sino-Thai, ethnically Chinese but culturally more

Thai. For him, Chinese from the mainland lacked class and manners. This was

epitomized by their loudness, which Krit described as boisterous and rowdy (โวยวาย

woiwai). "They don't have manners, unlike Chinese in places like Hong Kong,

Singapore, or Taiwan." The Mainland Chinese are not like "us" (as I did not ask for clarification on who "us" referred to, here Krit could be denoting Sino-Thais, the Chinese diaspora, Krit and I, or some other configuration). Another sign of their lack of class standing was that Mainland Chinese were not openly gay (which I discuss further in the section on contemporary Mainland Chinese below). So there was a way in which being "white" had this dual aspect of both phenotypical skin color and economic development that produced well-mannered and "global gay" dispositions to be open about sexuality. For Krit, white bodies that reflected both this genetic inheritance and civilizational cultivation were the most desirable bodies. I did not ask Krit where he learned the term "คนขาว" (*khon khao* white person), but this interview, conducted on January 29, 2011, was almost two months after a number of terms for white skin and people were popularized through a massive Oishi advertising campaign, which I discuss below, that erupted into major controversy in February 2011.

In this chapter, I describe the historical concepts of race and ethnicity in Thailand (especially in relation to Sino-Thais) partly to set up the next chapter on the emergent concept of what I term "white Asians" in Thailand. I situate this racialization process within contemporary regional popular cultural flows, economic development in Thailand and East Asia, and historical ideas of race in Thailand. In making comparisons, I focus on the literature of whiteness in the Asian rather than Euro-American context. Since Franz Boas, there is a large body of literature on how Irish, Jews, Eastern and Southern Europeans, and others became white in America (see, for eample: Brodkin 1998, Roediger 2007). This occurs in their encounters with Native Americans, Africans, and Asians in the "new world." Irish workers, for example, contrast themselves with African

slaves on the east coast and Chinese coolies on the west coast, to construct the idea of a white "working" class. Differences in labor practices are particularly important in shoring up notions of whiteness in America.

I use the term "white Asian" as an external, etic label. Thais themselves do not use this term. Instead, as I note below, they simply say "Asian" or "white person," which does not refer to Caucasians, who continue to be called *farang*.[2] However, which Asians count as "Asian" or "white Asian" is emergent, temporal, contested, and different than what may be perceived by foreigners. Like in the case of Thai genderscapes (Käng 2014), where perspective, social evaluation, and other factors shift the categories of salience, the categorization of race or ethnoscapes (Appadurai 1996) also is fluid but coalesces around a few key forms (i.e. Asian, *khaek*, *dam*/African, *farang*). The group "Asian," is, about being ethnically similar yet not the same, a relatively new racialization of neighboring ethnic groups. Finally, I describe a popular cultural biopolitics of contemporary racialization processes occurring in Thailand, which both situates the nation within a larger East Asian sphere and develops a positive exception for white Asian partners. Countering Western notions of an Asian race as already given, I show how Asianness is being produced, contested, and used within the Thai context. This process of racialization and desire is intimately tied to political, economic, and cultural regionalist movements in East and Southeast Asia.

Racial Classifications

In American anthropology, we take the position that biological races do not exist as there is no way to classify distinct groupings based on genetic or phenotypic

characteristics. Almost all of human variation occurs within what would be referred to as a "race," not between "races."[3] But social races, or those ideological racializations which are historically and culturally specific, do exist as a means to justify hierarchies in contexts such as slavery and colonialism. A cursory review of contemporary national censuses will show how varied racial classification can be while a survey of historical US census racial classifications demonstrates their change over time within one society. Both cross-cultural and historical assessments point to the social constructedness of race.

Like other domains of human existence, what is considered the norm or normal makes a difference. Dyer (1997), for example, critiques whiteness in its ubiquity and invisibility. That is, as "white" people are the unmarked norm in Euro-American perspective, race only applies to non-white peoples. The modest position of being "just" human also means that Caucasian people can claim to speak for all humanity as they believe they think, feel, and act universally like all people. Dyer (1997:10) thus advocates that "whiteness needs to be made strange." In a similar vein, Monahan (2011) emphasizes that racial being is an ongoing process of contestation. His recent formulation of anti-racist projects rejects the idea that equality necessitates racelessness. Monahan asserts that "it is not being racialized in itself that is pathological but rather the insistence that one is not racialized (or might at some future time cease to be racialized)… [The problem] lies in seeing oneself as not raced rather than in seeing oneself as raced" (emphasis in original, 133). That is, rather than addressing racism through racelessness, or de-racialization, by removing racial categories and identities, Monahan asserts that whiteness should not be allowed to function as an undifferentiated human universal but rather needs to be situated in particular bodies and subjectivities, in specific historical and

social contexts. I follow this path to explore how whiteness can operate in different contexts and how whiteness is differentially interpreted by Caucasians and Asians in contexts such as Thailand and Japan. I begin by describing racial and ethnic classifications in Thailand and then argue that new racializations of "white Asians" are occurring in Thailand, but that they have precedents in Asia and the Middle East.

Racial and Ethnic Classifications in Thailand

Mytho-historical Thai forms of racial classification generally follow a Hindu mandala concept incorporated into Thai Brahminist-Buddhism. The world is centered on the charismatic king, positioned on the mythological Mount Meru, with his subjects radiating outwards in all cardinal directions. Barbarians or "wild" people (i.e. hill tribes, peoples of the forest, and other non-Buddhists), in-between groups such as the Karen, and subjects of other lowland kingdoms exist at the frontiers of political power (Keyes 2002). Thus, the most important criterion for ethnic similarity is proximity to the center, the figurehead of the king. The reality, however, is more complex as there have been massive movements of populations through wars, slavery, commercial trading, labor migration, and other factors.

As Thongchai Winichakul (1994) demonstrates, the process of mapping was a major technology of governmentality and identification with the nation in Thailand. Following Anderson, Winichakul notes that mediation allows "configuring and defining the spatiotemporal axes of a field of commonness. Yet to figure out a sphere of commonness is to identify the difference between that sphere and the one beyond. An imagined identity always implies the absence of such an identity at the point beyond its

boundary." (1994: 15-16). Winichakul's historical analysis shows how Thai boundaries were constructed through contact with European colonial powers. The prior porous frontiers of Siamese kingdoms were solidified into borders by the encroachment of British and French colonial empires, which required a defined boundary for the administration of authority. National borders were concomitantly linked to symbols that created emotional attachments to "Thainess," or the state of being Thai, what is inside versus outside the geo-political boundary. Nevertheless, this is not a totalizing process. As Winichakul notes, the boundaries of Thailand and Thainess are not co-terminus. Thus, minorities can be excluded, while diasporans can simultaneously be included in the Thai geo-body. I expand on Winichakul's discussion to focus on racialializations occurring in contemporary Thailand. I ask how Thais think of themselves racially and what groups are inside and outside the racial category to which they belong. I focus on two axes of difference, one internal to the nation (Thainess) and the second based on proximate distance from the nation (Asianness).

In this section, I begin by briefly outlining a theoretical framework for ethnic boundary making and racial formation. Fredrik Barth (1969) laid out one of the earliest and still enduring accounts of ethnic constructivism in his "Introduction" to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, Barth argues that ethnic group identification, like gender or social ranking, is a primary mode of identification that significantly shapes what options are available for moral social action. Ethnic identifications are not given but are created from self-ascription, labeling individuals as a group and thus creating an organizational framework for value orientations and overt signs of membership. For Barth, the focus of analysis should not be

the contents of culture (e.g. what makes Thais different from Cambodians) but rather how ethnic boundaries are constituted and maintained over time through interaction with other groups (e.g. how do Thais and Cambodians differentiate themselves from each other). Implicit in the identification with a group, is the willingness to be judged and evaluated by its rules as opposed to those of others. Inter-group interaction means that the boundaries, while maintained, are permeable to persons who can shift ethnic affiliations. Within plural societies, groups can create complimentary relationships and not only sanction their own members, but members of other groups for ethnic role violations. At the same time, a dominant group can make another one economically dependent or accept a "minority" status. The formulation that Barth provides thus emphasizes how ethnicity is a process relating to identifications rather than an essential, pre-given condition.

Working from a US-based perspective (which they note, like all cases, is exceptional), Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986) call for a theorization of racial formation based on a review of literature on ethnic, class, and national bases for the construction of race. They argue that race is a primary means of social identification that cannot be reduced to or made a corollary of these other processes. That means that labor interactions, for example, do not precede and structure race but that race has an existence of its own, which could be used, for example, to produce a "working class" that is racially coded as white in contrast to blacks and Chinese. Like Barth (1969), they link micro- and macro-social processes in the construction of difference and the structures of power that enable discrimination. "The meaning of race is defined and contested throughout society, in both collective action and personal practice. In the process racial categories themselves are formed, transformed, destroyed and re-formed. We use the

term *racial formation* to refer to the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings" (61, emphasis in original). Additionally, they "employ the term *racialization* to signify the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group" (64, emphasis in original). I use the concept of racialization to analyze processes currently occurring in Thailand, in a different context than the US, but one where a cluster of concepts such as race and geographic regionalism are shifting notions of similarity and difference in the production of racialized boundaries.

There have been radical shifts to racialization following the American war with Vietnam and the 1997 IMF bailout of Thailand. Skin color, previously tied to ethnicity and class in agrarian settings, increasingly become associated with race and economic development in the metropole. Stigma previously associated with Sino-Thai and *luk-khreung* (persons of mixed Thai and *farang* ancestry) has evolved into new beauty ideals centering on fair skin. The *luk-khreung*, previously coded as the child of a Thai prostitute and American soldier is now more often the child of a transnational businessman (Haritaworn 2007, Chaipraditkul 2013).[4] However, following the IMF bailout, Thai society became more anti-Western, seeing the West as setting the nation up for failure. Subsequently, Japan has been heralded as the largest source of economic investment in Thailand and Korea has become the trendiest source for popular culture. Japanese and Korean imaginaries have transformed the visual- and sound-scapes of Bangkok. Additionally, economic and political alignments are changing how Thais interact with their neighbors and other nations in the region. Former Prime Minister Thaksin proposed

moving Thailand into China's time zone to foster cross-border partnerships with their largest trade partner. In sum, Thailand is increasingly aligning itself with East Asia in regional strategies for economic development, cultural exchange, and political integration. One way this plays out is in the production of newly racialized romantic desires for East Asian partners and a devaluation of *farang* partners. I provide a case study in how middle class metropolitan Thais profess desires for East Asian partners to model economic development and social mobility while *farang* partners display economic development at the expense of a perceived inequality in social status. That is, partnerships with *farang* have become stigmatized by Thais wary of their precarious middle class status in a middle income country striving to join East Asia's development trajectory.

"Race" in Thai Context

Thais do not consider race a central category of social difference. Metaphorically, all Thais are related to one another through symbolic descent from the King and Queen, the Father and Mother of the nation. The key difference is ethnic-nationality formulated as Thai vs. non-Thai (foreigner). Indeed, the most common term used for race is *chat* (ชาติ), which in contemporary usage, refers primarily to nationality.[5] Where one in the USA would expect a question about race followed by a series of designations (e.g. African American, American Indian, Asian, Latino/Hispanic, Pacific Islander, white), the question in Thailand would most likely have two responses: Thai and not-Thai. That is not to say that Thais do not think racially, nor that Thailand itself is ethnically homogenous. Indeed, the older construct of Siam was more open to ethnic difference

whereas Thailand has pursued a homogenizing national sense of "Thainess" based on central Thai ethnicity, and more recently, middle class Sino-Thai Bangkok sensibilities. By incorporating all speakers of Tai languages and all Buddhists into Thainess, prior ethnic differences were recast as regional ones (Keyes 2002). For example, the Lao in Thailand become Northeasterners. Spatial distinctions remain acutely important to the way Thais think of ethnic difference along two axes: lowland vs. upland and central / near vs. peripheral / far.

When Thais describe race, a number of common categories are produced. The three most distinct from Thais are ฝรั่ง (*farang*, Caucasian), แขก (*khaek*, Middle Eastern and South Asian),[6] คนดำ (*khon-dam*, black person). As noted above, white Westerners are generally referred to as *farang*. *Farang* not only denotes light skin, but also implies that a person comes from a developed country. This means that some *farang* are less typically *farang* than others. Most notably, Russians constitute a class of less-developed *farang*, who now are one of the most common tourists in Thailand.[7] Jewish Israelis (though there is a racialization of religion in the term คนยิว (*khon-yio* Jewish)) and white South Africans are generally considered *farang*. Those who are ละติน) *latin*, also often referred to as "South American") are more likely to be classified by their skin color into white or black categories.

Both South Asians and Middle Easterners are referred to as *khaek* (แขก, literally "visitor or guest"), which points to their continual externalized status as perpetual guests or foreigners.[8] Because of the negative valence attached to this term, some people will use national or ethnic terms like "Indian" or "Arab" instead.[9] As the assumption is that *khaek* are relatively dark like Tamils, the term แขกขาว (*khaek khao*) refers to light-skinned

Persians, Sikhs, Emiratees, Libyans, and others within the *khaek* category.[10] People of

Sub-Saharan African descent are known as African (คนแอฟริกา *khon-aefrika*, อัฟริกัน *afrikan*)

while blacks from Western countries are known as *farang-dam* (black *farang*) or "negro"

(คนนิโกร *khon-nikro*). This differentiates the relative value of their country of origin

alongside physical characteristics. Recently, African men have become associated with

the drug trade and African women in Sukhumvit are often seen as sex workers. Thus,

black Americans are sometimes barred from entering certain bars, though showing a US

passport, that is, proving one is not African, often grants entry.[11]

Race and ethnicity in Thailand is constructed against internal minority groups,

that is, those who are not ethnically "Thai" or Buddhists, and externally in relation to

foreigners. In *Subject Siam*, Tamara Loos (2006) details an early Siamese royal

proclamation issued in the 1660s and reissued in the 1770s that prohibited Thai, Mon, or

Lao women from having sexual intercourse with non-Buddhist men: *khaek*, French,

British, *khula* (Shan), Malay, and other foreigners. As Loos points out, the decree did not

single out the Chinese, who were the largest group of foreign men in Thailand but

adopted local Buddhist religious practices. The naturalization and citizenship laws of

1912 and 1913 make it especially easy for Chinese men to claim Siamese subject status.

Extended contact with European colonial administration, especially the British in

neighboring India/Burma and Malaya, Thai regulations based on religion are replaced by

the end of the nineteenth century to regulations based on racial classifications. The

British colonial government in the Straits Settlements, and later Malaya (now Malaysia

and Singapore), created a racial scheme to justify colonial rule and the hierarchies of the

local economy (Hirschman 1986). The system exacerbated existing cultural and labor

differences, naturalizing the social order into impenetrable racial boundaries. The initial

census of 1871 focuses on differentiating Europeans and Americans from all other groups

(Hirschman 1987). Over time, the classification evolved into the four race CMIO

(Chinese, Malay/Indigenous, Indian, and Other) systems employed in Singapore. Though

the system seems to be based on differences such as skin color and religion, racial

classification elided many forms of difference such as language, religion (e.g. Hindu,

Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Christian), and national origin (e.g. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)

so that numerous groups could be classified, for example, as "Indian." That is, a wide

range of physical and cultural attributes and associated putative ability were reified as

"race."

Official Thai classification creates five minority groups: Chinese, hill tribe

peoples, Vietnamese, Thai Muslim, and others such as refugees from Myanmar. These

groups represent the greatest threats to national security as they have been associated

with communist and separatist movements (Laungaramsri 2003). There are

approximately twenty to seventy ethnic minority groups in Thailand, throughout all

regions of the country but mostly concentrated in the North.[12] This includes historical and

recent populations of Mon, Burmese, Khmer, Lao, Malay, Chinese (e.g. Teochew,

Hakka, Hokkien), Indian (e.g. Punjabi, Tamil, Sikh), and Vietnamese. Thailand does not

enforce a rigidly defined racial classification system such as the CMIO categories of

Singapore and Malaysia. Nor is religious difference central to group classification. What

is most salient, is difference from the core, or imagined center of Thailand, as embodied

in the King and the capital city (Winichakul 1994). Thus, those from the North

(Lanna/Kam Mueang/Thai Yuan), Northeast (Isan/Lao), or South (Dambro and Yawi) are

differently Thai. Though classified by the government as Thai, many people from these areas are reasserting ethnic difference (Jory 2000). The resurgence in regional ethnicity has been most problematic in the deep South, where Malay Muslims are a majority in the three provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.[13] McCargo (2008) argues that separatist conflicts contest the legitimacy of Thai rule as the region was colonized by Thailand a century ago. The primary issues are longstanding political grievances, not religious ones. Groups seeking independence and foreign militant Islamists have resorted to violence in response to ongoing state efforts to Thaiize Malay Muslims while their ethnic and religious minority status continues to be marginalized. In the early 2000s, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's strong arm stance, including extrajudicial killings of those purportedly threatening national security, exacerbated tensions in the region and escalated the level of violence. Subsequent administrations have not improved the situation.

The two spatial axes of categorization create more complicated distinctions within Thailand and in East/Southeast Asia. The lowland/highland distinction works to peripheralize those who are not lowlanders within Thailand (Keyes 2002, Scott 2010). The Thai groups most culturally distant from the core are the horticultural Northern "hill tribes" (ชาวเขา *chao-khao*, คนภูเขา *khon-phukhao*, คนดอย *khon-doi*: literally "mountain people", defined by living at a high elevations) such as the Akha (อาข่า) and Hmong (ม้ง *mong* or the pejorative Meo แม้ว *maeo*) and other pre-agricultural groups such as the maritime Moken or "Sea Gypsies" and the gatherer-hunter "Negrito" Mani. There are also complex levels of hierarchy between these groups. For example, Thai, Hmong, and Mlabri ("Banana Leaf" or "Yellow Leaf" tribe) create a multi-level system of patronage

in which Thais exploit Hmong who in turn exploit Mlabri. These ethnic groups are generally considered uncivilized (อนารยะ *anaraya*) as opposed to underdeveloped (ด้อยพัฒนา *doi-phatthana*), that is, they do not even register on the development scale. Ironically, the highlanders more closely approximate the physical features of Sino-Thais and Chinese in general. Hill tribe groups are not physically distinguishable from Thais when not in ethnic clothing. Thus their fairer skin is considered enviable at the same time that their lack of civilization makes them barbaric. They have also circumvented the Buddhist hierarchy and national incorporation by primarily converting from animist religions to Christianity. Highlanders are often portrayed as dirty and idiotic in media. Alternatively, they are viewed as closer to nature and their ethnic textiles have become fashionable when integrated into modern street wear.[14] The situation becomes more complicated, however, for the growing number of refugees and migrants from Myanmar (e.g. Rohingya, Shan, Karen), who are both ethnically or religiously considered inferior and lack legal documentation and standing in Thailand.

The second axis of spatial distance and difference creates the distinction Thai national vs. other national, and more broadly, of East/Southeast Asian vs. non-Asian. Asians constitute the most complex racial category. Development, skin color, and eye shape are key factors in their classification. As noted above, the term Asian generally excludes South Asians. Most Asian groups are labeled by nationality, which is assumed to be isomorphic with ethnicity: Cambodian, Filipino, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, or Vietnamese. However, when the term Asian (ชาวเอเชีย *chao-echia* or ชาวเอเชีย *chao-esia,* คนเอเชีย *khon-echia* or คนเอเชีย *khon-esia*) is used, it most often means East Asian, specifically Japanese and Korean, and to a lesser extent Chinese from Hong Kong, Singapore,

Taiwan, China, and other areas. At other times, it refers to East and Southeast Asians

more broadly (not to be confused with ASEAN: อาเซียน *asian*), and rarely also includes

South Asians. Proximity and common religion create a categorization of neighboring

countries. These include China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), and sometimes

Vietnam, but not Muslim Malaysia. The difference is expressed semantically in the use of

the colloquial term เมือง (*meuang*) versus the more formal ประเทศ (*prathet*) to refer to

"country." Except for country nicknames (e.g. "kimchi-land" for Korea, "sushi-land" for

Japan, "beer-land" for Germany, or "perfume-land" for France), where the term *meuang*

can replace แดน (*daen*, land), *meuang* is generally reserved for neighboring Buddhist

countries or to refer to a non-capital city. The term can invoke endearment and amiable

relations through similarity and familiarity. However, in actual practice, Thai attitudes are

often most hostile to their neighbors, especially Cambodia and Myanmar. With

Cambodia, there have been ongoing conflicts around the Preah Vihear Temple, Angkor

Wat, and other aspects of heritage. Ongoing issues around refugee resettlement

exacerbates that fact that Thais are taught in school that the Burmese are Thailand's arch

enemies. There seems to be greater sympathy for Lao people, as most people from Isan

(the Northeast and most populous region) consider themselves ethnically Lao.[15] Yet in

everyday central Thai speech "Lao" is used to substitute for the word "stupid." These

three groups also constitute Thailand's largest migrant group, the migrant workers

engaged in low wage, monotonous, and dangerous labor such as domestic help, food

service, product assembly, and construction work.

     Except in matters of Brahman rituals that support the Thai monarchy and new

Hindu religious movements that younger Thais are embracing as part of their Buddhist

practice, Thais generally disassociate themselves from Indianness, in contrast to

Chineseness. Among their most consistent comments are the "smell" of Indians and their

food. A key difference here is what "curry" means to Indians and Thais. Thai curry does

not use "curry" in the Indian sense. Thai curry, or แกง (*kaeng*) is not based on spice

powders but instead on fresh ingredients including coconut milk, chilis, galangal,

lemongrass, coriander, tamarind, lime leaves, shallots, garlic, and shrimp paste, many of

which are ground together into a paste. To Thais, these are aromatic and fragrant (หอม

hom) but not pungent or stinky (เหม็น *men*). They represent Thai flavors (รสชาติ *rot-chat*, the

latter part of the word referring to the nation) that combine and balance spicy, sour,

sweet, salty, and, occasionally, bitter elements. Indian powdered curry (กะหรี่ *kari*) is used

in a number of dishes, including "Chinese" ones such as crab stir-fried with curry.

However, many Thais consider the smell offensive and the word *kari* is often used as

derogatory slang for "prostitute."

Indian behavior is considered both too confrontational and strangely ritualistic.

Even practioners of Hindu cults hold such beliefs. One gay spirit medium I have been

following over several years, Beam, noted that he nearly broke up with his ex-boyfriend

(a *farang*), because the Brit (where Beam went to college) suggested they take a trip to go

to India. Beam looked at me and Necktie with intense eyes. "You know what Thais think

of India," he stated. "Yes," I replied, "there is no reason to go except for the temples."

"Exactly," he said. That is, even as a cult leader, who channeled the spirits of Hindu

gods, he found the idea of a holiday trip to India unbearable.

Distance and Difference

The mandala concept is useful in understanding how Thais see the world around them. Literally meaning circle in Sanskrit, the political meaning of mandala is of a center from which power radiates outward. Unlike Western notions of political geography which focus on the borders between states, mandala models focused on the center of power with decreasing attention to peripheries, which can overlap with other kingdoms. If one were to map Thai spatial proximity over the globe in circles of difference, the first circle would include central Thailand, for its capital, Bangkok, the political, economic, and cultural core of the nation, and for its symbolic association with the monarchy. Thailand itself, would enclose this first circle. The next circle would include its neighbors: Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, as well as parts of Vietnam and China. The next set of circles would have two alternating formations, one eastward and one westward. The westward sphere would incorporate South Asia and the Middle East. The eastward sphere would include insular Southeast Asia and East Asia. These follow historical trading routes. In contemporary times, the western circle of East Asia would be more important. Beyond that would be the rest of the world. Within these spheres, there would also be two enchanted crescents. One would reach from Australia, incorporate the USA, and end in Europe: the developed West. Another would mirror it from Korea, to Japan, incorporating Hong Kong and Taiwan, and ending in Singapore: developed Asia. These charmed crescents represent the developed world that Thailand seeks to join.

Ethnic categorization is unstable and the processes of racial formation, racialization, and racism are currently on the move. The issue is complicated by differences in the discontinuous boundaries of phenotype, religion, and other factors that make some groups seem more proximal, more "like us" than others. Thais for example,

do not consider South Asians to belong to the category of Asia (though Northeast Indians from the Seven Sister States look more akin to Southeast Asians and would not be treated the same way as other ethnic groups such as Tamils). Most Indians are grouped in the *khaek* category with Middle Easterners and North Africans. Asia, when referring to people, is generally bounded by Myanmar to the west, Mongolia to the north, Japan to the east, and Indonesia to the south.[16] However, geopolitical categories are not the only ones that matter. Bhutanese can also be considered "Asian," since they look more Sinitic and are Buddhist (similar to Tibetans). This was made evident when then Crown Prince, now, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck visited Thailand for King Bhumibol Adulyadej's 60th Anniversary Jubilee festivities on June 12-13, 2006 in a delegation that included royals from twenty-five nations. Dubbed "Prince Charming" by the press, Prince Jigme created a sensation among Thai woman, gay men, and *kathoey*. The Thai Royal Household Bureau sanctioned Prince Jigme's photos, which were sold along with those of the Thai King. A young, light skinned, Sinitic looking man in a robe (similar to Buddhist monastic clothing) that performed *wai* gestures (the typical Thai greeting, also used in other Buddhist areas), he immediately became popular and made Bhutan a travel destination for wealthy Thais. The images of his visit to Thailand were reproduced and sold on the streets for weeks. He became a celebrity, though his status has evolved as he became king of Bhutan and married, becoming unavailable. Nevertheless, he and his queen frequently visit Bangkok and continue to make headlines during their trips.

Figure 8: Photo of HM King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck. His Royal Highness in a Buddhist greeting pose at the 60th Anniversary Celebrations of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's Accession on June 12, 2006 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The Chinese in Thailand and Mixed Race Identity

The issue of Asianness becomes more complex with the Chinese in Thailand. Chinese (จีน *jin*) can refer to ethnic Han Chinese (คนจีน *khon jin*), Mainland Chinese (คนจีน แผ่นดินใหญ่ *khon jin phaendinyai*, เมืองจีน *meuang jin*), or Chinese lineage (เชื้อสายจีน *cheua-sai jin*) in Thailand, Southeast Asia, and beyond. Thailand has the largest overseas population of Chinese in the world. Approximately a third of Bangkokians claim Chinese heritage. Indeed, it can be argued that Bangkok has historically been a Chinese city, as southern Chinese were a demographic majority during its development into a major city.[17] O'Neil (2008) refers to early Bangkok as a "Sino-Siamese city," as Chinese constituted the majority of residents from its founding in the late eighteenth century to the

early twentieth century. The new capital was also the site of trade with China, Japan, Europe, and the USA.

Chineseness has different valences depending on the development of the country of origin, with Mainland Chinese particularly maligned, unless one is from a cosmopolitan city such as Shanghai or Beijing. People from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan can be referred to as "Chinese" but are usually denoted by their passport nationality. Singaporeans likewise are referred to as Singaporean, which is assumed to be Chinese and developed. In the gay community, Malaysian is also presumed to mean Chinese, as gay Malaysian tourists tend to be Chinese Malaysians, even though they are a minority in Malaysia. Malaysia represents a country that is just a step in economic development above Thailand, but, due to its majority Muslim population, not considered similar or desirable. Ethnic Chinese and those of mixed Chinese ancestry from Laos, the Philippines, and Indonesia are also common in the gay Bangkok scene. These countries are all less developed than Thailand, but the Chinese from these places represent merchant or professional groups within their nations, as they do in Thailand. Thus, the tropical Chinese are regarded more favorably than Mainlanders. In many gay bars, particularly in the internationalized ones, the majority of Thai patrons will claim or appear to have Chinese ancestry.

In Thai discourse, Mainland Chinese are strongly differentiated from the wider category of Chinese in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Singapore, and Chinese minorities in other Southeast Asian nations. I collectively refer to the latter with the shorthand "tropical Chinese," rather than referring to them as unmarked Chinese or as non-Mainland Chinese. This is different than the grouping of "Greater China" which includes

China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan in that it excludes China and includes substantial

and economically powerful Chinese minorities of countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and

the Philippines. It also differs from the academic use of "Sinophone" to refer to all

Chinese diasporans collectively and sometimes also non-Han groups in China that have

been Sinicized. I refer to the tropical Chinese as a cluster because they are a salient

subgrouping of Asians in Thai discourse. The tropical Chinese are the preferred Chinese

in the tourism industry and broader transnational social interactions. They are proximate,

yet economically more advanced. Thus, tropical Chinese are said to have "manners" and

are subsequently treated with more respect than Mainland Chinese.

Sino-Thai (ลูกจีน *luk-jin*, Chinese child) refers to Thais of Chinese heritage. In

everyday speech, this is expressed in terms such as *thai-sai-jin* (ไทยสายจีน Thai of Chinese

lineage). This may not "show" in features such as light skin and lack of an epicanthic

fold, but the term can be invoked regardless of phenotype, especially among the middle

classes. The term is also used to reference different cultural and religious practices, such

as the avoidance of spicy Thai food, prohibition on eating beef or meat from "large

animals" such as water buffalo, the observance of the lunar New Year and Chinese

vegetarian festivals, use of a Chinese style shrine at home or work, and varying marriage,

funerary, and other rituals that follow Chinese rather than Thai customs. Importantly, *luk-

jin* does not reference being "mixed race" in the way that *luk-khreung* (ลูกครึ่ง, literally

"half-child") does. Technically, *luk-khreung* can be used for any mix, but is most often

associated with mixes that "show," e.g. with a white or black parent. Generally, those

with mixed black parentage are discriminated against, though Tiger Woods, who was

bestowed with honorary Thai citizenship, provides an example of someone who could be

successful. On the other hand, those who are half-white are now highly regarded. As Glen Lewis notes, they are considered "half-Western, half-famous" (1998:247) since they are so popular on Thai television dramas. What this fails to recognize, however, is that Sino-Thais are even more prevalent and ubiquitous. Sino-Thais have been so indigenized in the Thai national imaginary that they no longer seem different. Their pale skin and facial features, however, are clearly anomalous outside most middle and upper class urban circles.

There are many Vietnamese-Thai *luk-khreung* as a result of migrations during the American war with Vietnam. Like with Lao, Cambodian, Burmese, Chinese, and other "neighbors," the term does not make sense to Thais. I've also met many *luk-khreung* that were half Singaporean, Hong Kongese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, and Filipino. They typically refer to themselves as Thai, but, will invoke the term *luk-khreung* in a proud manner to emphasize that they have a foreign Asian father or mother. All *luk-khreung* who grow up in Thailand speaking Thai are more or less accepted as Thai without question. Those who simply state that they have a Thai parent, even if they do not "look" *luk-khreung* (e.g. those with blond hair) will also be accepted as such upon making the statement.

Language is defining but not essential to Thainess and claims of being Thai. There are Thai who grow up in Thailand speaking primarily English. This is most common when the father is a wealthy foreigner who has married a Thai woman of relatively high status, who knows English, and their children attend elite international schools where instruction is in English. This has also become a problem for elementary schools in areas such as Sukhumvit in Bangkok. Elementary school students now arrive

at public schools unable to speak Thai and must take the equivalent of Thai for speakers

of other languages, which are not standard curricula.

There are also, of course, Thais who have emigrated to the USA, Germany,

Australia, and other countries creating a more liminal state of being ethnically Thai but

perhaps not speaking Thai with native fluency or having developed a foreign (เมืองนอก

meuang-nok) accent. This includes the Thai equivalent of parachute children, referred to

as *dek-nok* (เด็กนอก external child). They are relatively privileged children sent to study

abroad in places like the USA, living with relatives, friends, or host families. There are

also low wage migrants who go abroad and return. In my routine taxi cab conversations, I

was surprised at how many of the drivers had worked abroad in Japan, Korea, Taiwan,

and the UAE, typically in construction or factory work. They spoke very fondly of the

time abroad, focusing on how much money they made, which was capitalized into

investments such as buying a taxi cab. A large proportion of sex workers I know have

lived abroad for short periods or years, sometimes saving money and at other times not,

returning to Thailand with problems like drug addiction instead. Many Thai sex workers

dream of moving abroad based on hearing stories of how much sex workers make in

developed countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Germany, or Australia (figures are

often in the $100 to $200 range). Among the sites that I have followed Thais to abroad is

Preußenpark in Berlin, locally referred to as "Thai Park." Every day, weather permitting,

the park is used by Thai residents as a local food market and place of socialization. Most

businesses are operated by Thai women who have married German men. In the evening,

Thai sex workers use the space to find customers. There is also an extensive network of

Thai massage parlors, where female, male, and *kathoey* staff are generally expected to

provide sexual services for German men. Contrary to the 150 Euro per hour figure I frequently heard in Bangkok, the Thais in Germany were more often making 30 to 50 Euro per hour.

As previously noted, the primary difference for Thais is not race but nationality, which is related to, but not synonymous with Thai nationalism (ชาตินิยม *chat-niyom*). Nevertheless, racial categories such as *farang*, *khaek*, black/African, and Asian are used in everyday speech. Racialization, however, is not solely based on the putative similarity or difference in physical characteristics, but also on geographic distance and economic development. Racism, in Thai discourse, is referred to as *kan-yiat-phio*, to despise or look down on someone's skin color. This is a common feature of Thai society, where light skin is prized. Both Thais and foreigners routinely comment on their differential treatment based on skin color. DJ Nakadia is the highest ranked Thai DJ in the world.[18] When she, a Thai woman, was chosen to play the 2006 World Cup Finals in Berlin (an event followed closely in Thailand, including in large open air projections where men drink and watch the games together), Nakadia claimed that her performance was not broadcast on Thai television because she is dark, something typical whenever a Thai is invited to an important event.[19]

Yet, more often than not, in the Thai context, associations with race and ethnicity have more to do with economic development than skin color, though the two are also linked. One way in which this plays out is in the idea that Japanese look down on other Asians, not because of a racial difference, but because of higher economic development which is racialized.[20] In a 1999 video, artist Michael Shaowanasai (a.k.a. Iron Pussy) asks a group of Japanese "Why do you look down to her? We are all Asian people." Their

response is "We are not Asian. We are Japanese. You see Japanese is not Asian. And of course, Japanese is better than Asian."[21] This interchange relates to Karen Kelsky's (2001) argument for why Japanese women avoid other Asian partners and instead seek Caucasian ones. However, with the popularity of the Korean Wave in Japan since 2004, Korean men have become idealized partners for Japanese women (Creighton 2009). This is especially surprising because it reverses patterns of historical discrimination within Japan. In the next section, I briefly review the history of Chinese in Thailand to begin a historical trajectory about Thai East Asian racializations in the present.

Sino-Thai Assimilation and Ethnic Re-Identifications

Like in the United States and other nations, the early Chinese immigrants to Thailand were predominantly males with low status in China. They were laborers, peasants, and artisans. But as landless migrants, many Chinese engaged in petty trade. Thus, they functioned as a middle man minority between the Thai peasantry and the Thai nobility. Indeed, Bangkok was originally a Chinese trading settlement. Arguably, the Sino-Thai are responsible for Thailand's modern economy. By 1850, the Chinese in Thailand had nearly complete control over interregional trade in Thailand (Ockey 1999). In addition to developing the economy, the Chinese, are also credited for the survival of Thailand. When Thais lost their capital in Ayutthaya to the Burmese, it was a half-Chinese general, Taksin, who used his Chinese trade connections in reconstituting the Siamese nation. In 1767, he was crowned King in the new capital of Thonburi (originally across the river from Bangkok, now incorporated within Bangkok). His reign provided the foundation for the Chakri Dynasty, which continues until today.

The early history of the Chinese in Thailand is based on the fundamental work of Landon (1941) and Skinner (1957). Skinner's hypothesis that the Chinese will fully assimilate and become unrecognizable from other Thais after four generations is still being debated. Chansiri (2008) argues that Sino-Thais have been assimilating as Thais in contradiction to Chee, Chan, et. al. (2001) who argue that the Chinese have been assimilating into Thailand, but that the process is not complete, and that there are alternating and positional natures of Chinese ethnic identity, allowing for a third position of not being either Chinese or Thai, but incorporating elements into a hybrid Sino-Thai identity. I support the latter camp, which acknowledges a continued Sino-Thai distinctiveness. Indeed, even while they have become ubiquitous, Sino-Thais still refer to themselves as different from the wider Thai populace. While there have been historic forces, especially in the mid-twentieth century that promoted assimilation and denigrated Chinese ethnicity, in the current situation, Sino-Thainess has reasserted its value as a social marker of class distinction, albeit integrated within wider Thai social practices. More recent scholarship, such as *Marital Acts* by Jiemin Bao (2005), also incorporates a gender and class analysis to Chinese identity.[22] She shows how marriage acts not only as a practice of ethnic assimilation through inter-marriage, but reveals the complex negotiations of identity between variously positioned actors (e.g. Chinese, Thai, Sino-Thai, husbands, wives, minor wives) who attach different meanings to such marriages. Of particular interest to this work is how Chineseness is associated with higher class standing within Thailand.

Up until about 1920, before Thai and Chinese political nationalisms, Chinese assimilated into Thai society, learned Thai language, changed their names, and

intermarried with Thai women (Landon 1941). While Chinese immigrants were considered special subjects of Siam, the children of the Chinese were given Thai citizenship and treated as if Thai. This was different than the situation in the British colonies of Southeast Asia where the Chinese were often racially excluded from citizenship, the Dutch colonies where they were distinguished from locals in a system where races were separated spatially, and the Spanish colonies of the Philippines which separated out various groups of Spanish, mestizos, Chinese, and others for special privileges. For the Chinese, becoming Thai was associated with elevation into the bureaucratic Thai elite. Ninety percent of King Rama VI's courtiers had Chinese heritage. "Indeed there are so many intermarriages between our countrymen and Chinese that even the Siamese often find it difficult to distinguish the pure Siamese from the Sino-Siamese. Many of our distinguished men in government service, education, and industry are persons of mixed blood" (Landon 1941:292). That is, the Chinese men married Thai women and their children were well assimilated into society at large. The Chinese also entered the elite bureaucracy at high rates.

With the advent of Chinese nationalism in the 1920s, Chinese men increasingly brought wives with them from China, lived separately from local Thai communities, and thought of Thais as uncivilized. Indeed, intermarriage with Thais was considered essential for Chinese ethnic assimilation (Skinner 1957). From the perspective of Thai nationalists, the Chinese were increasingly developing alien communities with financial and patriotic ties to China, a threat to national security. These communities sent their children to Chinese schools and remained inassimilable. According to Thai law, children born in Thailand were Thai unless registered with a foreign embassy. However, Thailand

and China did not have treaty relations, so all Chinese children were counted as Thai, though China also considered them Chinese. The official Thai figure for Chinese in Thailand in 1929 is one in twenty-nine persons. In 1930, a reliable observer of the time, Reginald le May, estimates it at one in twelve (Landon 1941). The Chinese Year Book 1938-9 places the figure at one in five. However, Thai officials were not concerned with documentation when identifying who was Chinese, but rather made the determination based on appearance: that is, dress, language, and self-proclamation were the determinants of Chineseness in Thailand and those who were born and raised in Thailand did not have problems being considered Thai.

The primary Chinese ethnolinguitic groups in Thailand were the Teochiew (also Teo Chiu or Teochu), Cantonese, Hainanese, Fukien, Hokien, and Hakka; all groups from southern China. By the early twentieth century, Thailand had become dependent on the Chinese for business and trade. Indeed King Rama VI, following Western conventions, refers to the Chinese in Thailand (Siam at the time) as "the Yellow Peril" fixated on extracting money and returning it to a Chinese homeland (Landon 1941). Chinese were seen as foreigners who reside in Thailand but do not maintain a racial loyalty to the Thai monarchy. They also received social benefits without obligations such as taxes and protested when taxes where imposed. Compared to Thais, Chinese also lived in relatively high density and dirty living quarters. They also engaged in vices such as gambling, opium smoking, prostitution, and homosexuality that deemed them unseemly in Thai newspaper reports and elite commentary from the period.

Thai government concern with Chinese immigration increases with the influx of Chinese women. [23] The Immigration Department started taking statistics in 1921 to

control it. Immigration of Chinese women meant that Chinese men could marry Chinese women and form ghettos of inassimilable people rather than integrate with the community at large through inter-marriage with Thai women. The Immigration Amendment Act of 1931-32 subsequently discourages the immigration of Chinese peasants and laborers and leads to discrimination against them in industries including rice, rubber, bird's nests, and tobacco. The Chinese also face new regulation of Chinese schools that must incorporate nationalistic Thai curriculum and are officially barred from engaging in politics.

Thus, a series of measures were instituted in the early and mid-twentieth century to assimilate the Chinese, to prevent extra-nationalist sentiments and to consolidate Thai national homogenization. The process stigmatized Chines ethnic identity in Thai society at large to encourage Sino-Thai integration into Thainess. Yet, within a period of approximately forty years in the mid-twentieth century, Chinese have gone from a position where Sino-Thai ethnic identity was not discursively possible during the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) to the become the basis of the Thai middle class (Tejapira 1997). The Sino-Thai relationship with Thai royalty, bureaucracy, and commerce has shifted over time. However, they have taken an increasingly important role in the development of a Thai middle class (Ockey 1999). The newly wealthy consumer middle class is based on income and purchasing power often obtained from entrepreneurial activity and creative professions and an occupational status middle class based on educational credentials and the prestige of employment in places such as the state bureaucracy, both are areas in which Sino-Thais are now prominent.

One area in which Sino-Thai practices come to represent Thainess to foreigners is in the length of names. Thais have a worldwide reputation for long names. The Guinness Book of World Records documents the longest places name as that for Bangkok and the longest personal name that for King Bhumipol.[24] Thai surnames are often five syllables long. However, this is a product of Sino-Thai acculturation and subsequent migration out of Thailand. Thai surnames became required in 1913. Family names were bestowed by the king, following the Western tradition of surname following a given name, and were unique to a family. While royal names are long because of the titles attached to them, Thai names in general tend to be short. However, as there is a legal requirement for surnames to be unique to a family, immigrants construct surnames that cannot replicate an existing Thai name and incorporate auspicious elements such as *phon* (to be blessed, often rendered in English as the sexualized *porn*, prounced like an American would say "pawn"). Nevertheless, Thais still follow the practice of alphabetizing by first name (e.g. academic bibliographies, phone books, lists) and thus de-emphasize family names. This is further complicated because in the vast majority of face to face social situations, first names are not used and an informal nickname is used in its place. Thus one might be introduced to Professor Toon (a common abbreviation of the nickname Cartoon), whose publications will be listed under their legal first name. During my fieldwork, I only once met a Sino-Thai with a monosyllabic Chinese surname. As he had chosen a bi-syllabic nickname based on a Japanese manga character, his name, when written in Thai, looks like a three-syllable Chinese name.

In summary, there are three major phases to the incorporation of Chinese into the Thai national body. First, under Siamese kingdoms and Siam, Chinese readily assimilated

into Thai society. Before Thailand modeled its government on the West, it had previously followed Chinese practices. As immigrant laborers and traders, the Chinese were considered beneficial to the development of the economy and state bureaucracy. Chinese men readily intermarried with Thai women and produced progeny regarded as Thai. In the second phase, between World War I and the American War with Vietnam, Chineseness became marginal and threatening. New Chinese arrivals brought Chinese nationalist ideas with them. They imported wives from China, sent their children to Chinese schools, and lived apart from Thais. This occurred with the end of the absolute monarchy, development of the Thai state, and nation-building efforts. During this period, Chinese were regarded with suspicion. Thais considered Chinese economic activities parasitic, extracting resources to be sent to China. Chinese also were associated with the threat of communist expansion and prohibited from entering politics. Thai nationalist policies forced Chinese assimilation into Thai society. For example, Chinese schools were required to adopt national Thai curricula. In the third and most recent phase, Sino-Thais have experienced a positive evaluation of their ethnic status, being associated with the urban middle class.

The prestige associated with Sino-Thais, however, is based upon popular sentiment. Unlike the "graduated sovereignty" of neoliberal Singaporean policies, which promotes Chinese middle class reproduction over other groups, particularly Malays, as a means to engage market demands for certain kinds of flexible labor (Ong 2006), ethnic preference in Thailand is not being managed by the state. Rather, the producers of mass media, typically Bangkok Sino-Thais, are promulgating Sino-Thainess as a model of Thai beauty and middle class respectability (Jory 1999b). Thus, the biopolitical status of Sino-

Thais is more akin to the parameters of what Peletz (2009) refers to as "graduated

pluralism," or the differential distribution of social structures that privilege the nurturance

and reproduction of some groups over others. Preferential Sino-Thai status is not

legitimized via state policy but through the social organization of commerce, marketing,

and media, which is dominated by Sino-Thais.

Intimate Others: Indigenized Chinese Kinship

Not all foreigners are the same. This is particularly true of the Chinese, both

because of their long history in and with Thailand as well as their indigenization into

Thai cultural norms. Central Thai kinship terminology, for instance, has borrowed

heavily from Chinese terms and systems (Benedict 1943). There are subtle differences

between how Thais and foreigners from different ethnic and national backgrounds are

treated linguistically. These seemed to be based on perceived racial and cultural

differences and similarities. I frequently observed Thais using Chinese kinship terms in

relation to Sino-Thais and each other rather than equivalent Thai terms. Names of

businesses often included a Chinese kinship term, such as my favorite restaurant, Je

Keoy, where *je* refers to a father's younger sister in Cantonese.

Kemp (1983) poses the question of why Thais use kinship terms so pervasively

when Thais place low value on actual geneaology. Kemp questions the utility of "fictive"

to describe kinship relations in a system where the primary use of kinship terms is to

mark respect for those who are older and stake claims on that relationship rather than

actual blood or affinal ties. Specifically, kinship references "establish closer, more

comfortable and trusting relationships …transforming otherwise calculating, competitive

relations by the ideals of love and trust" (90). Kin terms emplace one in a local

community and helps prevent exploitation in transactions while at the same time

acknowledging and reinforcing social hierarchies that can entail exploitation. They thus

function to make moral claims to specific kinds of reciprocity and smooth social

interactions.

In July of 2010, after residing in Bangkok for eighteen months, I noted in my

fieldnotes that Asians were brought into "fictive" kinship networks much more rapidly

than Caucasians. Asians were referred to by kin terms such as "older brother or sister"

(*phi*, the term is neuter but gendered when used as a pronoun) rather than a more polite

and formal "mister" (*khun* or *nai*; or the Thai pronunciation of the English word as

mittoe) or "Mrs." (*khun* or *nang*; or the Thai pronunciation of the English word as *mit*).

So if I introduced a Caucasian and Asian friend to a Thai, it was more likely that the

Caucasian was referred to as *khun* John while the Asian would more likely be *phi* Ming. I

also noticed that in mixed groups, Thais would often refer to me as *phi* when we first met

or within a few contacts, yet still referred to Caucasians they had known for years as

khun. While both *phi* and *khun* refer to a higher status, the former is more intimate while

the latter is more formal.

Many gay Thais, after learning that I was Korean, referred to me as *oppa* (Korean

for older brother as spoken by a younger sister or effeminate gay male). The term is

ubiquitous because of the popularity of Korean dramas and pop music (e.g. Psy refers to

himself as *oppa* in "Gangnam Style"). Less often, I was referred to as *hyeong* (Korean for

older brother as spoken by a younger brother), which both required a more detailed

knowledge of Korean kinship terms and an identification with male rather than female

characters in soap operas. The use of more intimate kinship terms also crossed over into commercial settings and interactions with service workers, such as servers at restaurants. My partner (who does not speak Thai) and I were often referred to as *phi* at the same time Caucasians friends in our party would be referred to as *khun*.

There was only one exception to this. I was consistently referred to as *khun* by a transgender woman who had initially worked as my research assistant and that I was professionally mentoring in international HIV work. She always used *khun* to refer to me. Additionally, students and staff (both from the sex worker NGO SWING, where I taught English, and at Mahidol, where I taught global health and medical anthropology) referred to me as *ajan* (professor or teacher) regardless of where we ran into each other. I suspect that in professional settings, I would have been referred to as *khun* more often. Besides being an honorific, *khun* is also the generic second person singular pronoun "you" used with strangers, like "*vous*" in French. It can also be used emphatically to express outrage as in "you!" Khanittanan (1988) suggests that *khun* elevates the listener as equal to that of the speaker, on status parity with the self, while *than* refers to someone of higher status than ego. In my everyday interactions, *than*, being quite formal, was rarely used. *Khun* was generally used to elevate the listener to a respectful status, typically higher than the speaker. My primary points of comparison are social and commerical interactions in shopping centers, restaurants, and entertainment venues. In these situations *phi*, *nong* (younger sibling, also used generically for any server like *garcon* for a waiter in French), *mae* (mother), *pho* (father), and *ya* (grandmother) would be the most common terms of reference based on relative age and gender. Wealthy Thais often insisted upon being referred to a *khun*, *nai*, and *nang* to formally show respect, especially from people of

lower status. *Kathoey* and gay men often refer to their older intergenerational friends, role models, and those who have provided material or emotional support as *mae* (mother). I was initially taken aback when I was referred to in this way. Yet it represented a respectful stance from younger people and claims to familial intimacy when seeking advice about careers or dating. Wan, one of my best *kathoey* friends regularly referred to me as *phi* or *mae* because I was older than her, but simultaneously would joke about herself as *mae* taking advantage of a younger man, as was common among *kathoey* who paid men for companionship.

I also observed Caucasians who did speak Thai being incorporated into fictive kinship. When Caucasians spoke Thai, they were sometimes referred to with intimate kinship terms rather than a generic, formal *khun*. For example, an older Australian acquaintance who was fluent in Thai was referred to as *mae*. As Wan noted, "when s/he speaks Thai, s/he talks like a *kathoey*, so s/he is like a mother." I also noted the use of *lung* (uncle, older than parents) to refer to Caucasians and one Asian man. This, however, was never a direct address but rather a reference to a third person, and thus more likely refers to someone appearing significantly older than a Thai partner. Both race and language ability made a difference in familiarizing others through fictive kin references. But the persistent use of *khun* with Caucasians who were not Thai speakers also signified a distance and estrangement from intimate networks, an inassimilability in the Thai national body. Even Caucasians who were married into Thai families were continually referred to by their relatives as *khun* rather than by the appropriate kinship term. Perhaps the use of Thai kinship terms would presume that the relative is either of Thai or Chinese descent.

Lives of Work: Migrant Workers, Professionals, and the Holiday Class

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to differences in long-term foreigner work and leisure and how they are perceived racially in Thailand. One way that class perceptions play out among foreigners in Thailand is work. Among Thais working in tourist service work, one of the misconceptions about *farang* is that they do not work to earn a living. Somehow, they have a limitless amount of money to access. Thus, when *farang* do not spend extravagantly, they are labeled "cheap." The *farang* perspective in these encounters is that the feel like "walking ATMs," expected to constantly withdraw funds to give to Thais. This friction is often represented in *farang* accounts of their experiences in Thailand. But the situation is much more complex, especially when we consider other Asians, who represent polar opposites in terms of work and class.

Thailand is a middle income country, which facilitates multiple flows of migrants into, out of, and within the nation. Professional and skilled workers as well as a large number of low wage laborers flow into the country. Thai semi-skilled workers flow out. The issue of internal migration is quite complex in Thailand and made more difficult to track because of the household registration system used in lieu of a census. Thailand is also a hub for refugees, asylum seekers, and victims of trafficking. The most recent figures for migration to, from, and within Thailand are from the International Organization for Migration's Thailand Migration Report 2011, which reports data from the years 2009 and 2010 (Huguet, Chamratrithirong and Richter 2011). Thais migrate for long term and seasonal work within the country, primarily to Bangkok, its metropolitan area provinces, tourist destinations, and agricultural areas. Thailand also sends

approximately 150,000 workers overseas annually. At the same time, it imports both professional and low wage labor. Being the most economically developed country in mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand draws a large migrant labor workforce from its three poor Mekong neighbors: Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar.[25] All three nations are classified as "least developed countries" by the United Nations and collectively referred to by Thai immigration as CLM.

In this migration report period (2009-2010), approximately five percent of the population in Thailand was foreign. There were over three million workers and family members from the Camboia, Loas, and Myanmar residing in Thailand, though this number is likely an underestimate as perhaps half of low-skilled workers are not officially registered. Additionally, there were 141,076 refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from the same neighboring countries, especially Myanmar. This large population of low wage migrant labor and refugees/asylees contrasts to a much smaller group of 100,338 foreign professional and skilled workers (94,190 after removing diplomatic officials). Among these non-diplomatic professional and skilled workers, the most prominent nationality is Japanese (23,060), followed by the UK (8,481), China (8,414), India (8,047), the Philippines (7,052), and the US (6,838). The vast majority of Japanese worked in senior managerial positions (77 percent), while the majority of Filipinos and Americans worked in education (e.g. teach English). There are two important facts that are not apparent to those who conflate foreigners with Westerners in Thailand: 1) the vast majority of long-term foreigners in Thailand are migrant workers and refugees from its poor neighbors and 2) the majority of skilled foreigner labor in Thailand is Asian.

Foreigners in Thailand

- Migrant Workers - Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar
- Professional Foreigners
- Retirement
- Stay with Thai Wife or Family
- Torurist and Transit Visa Extensions
- Persons Overstaying Visas

210,182
69,799
45,746
95,330
19,052
65,175
65,558
92,014
233,811
27,425
28,509
100,338
2,455,744
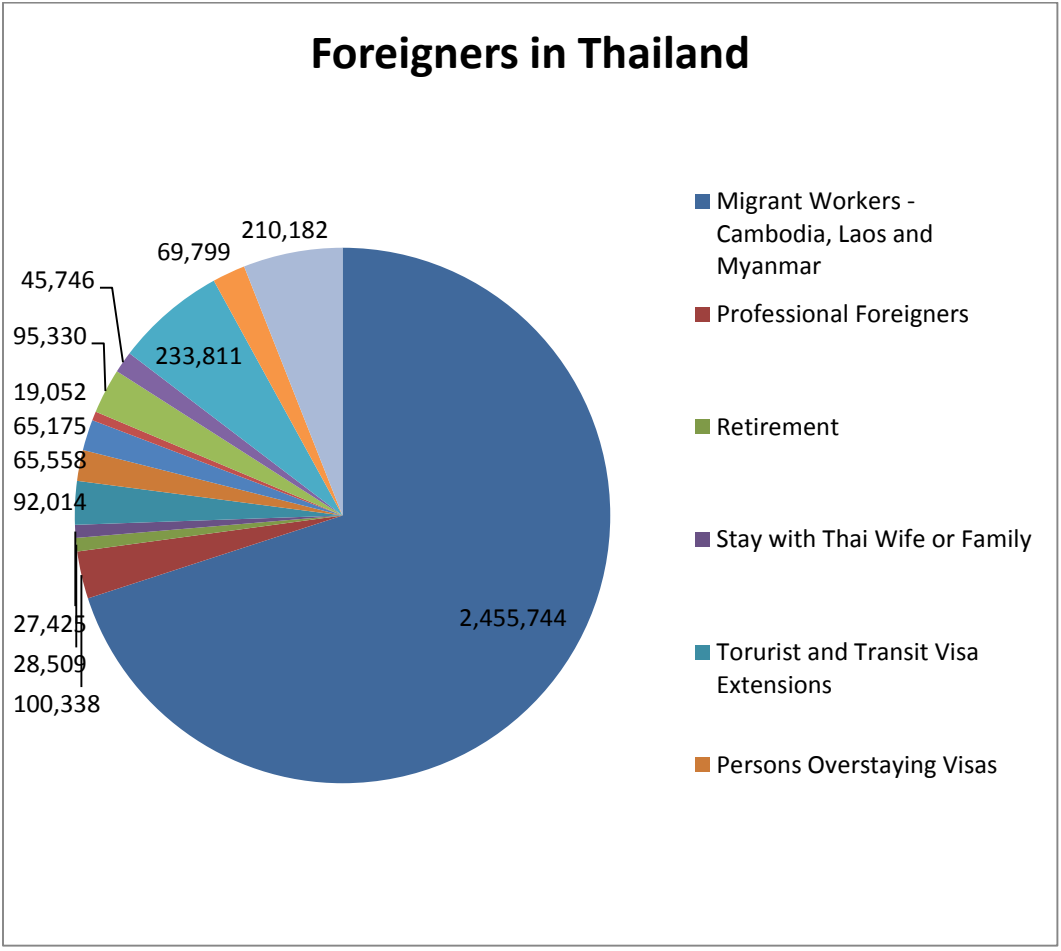
Figure 9: Foreigners in Thailand by Migration Category [Source: Thailand Migration Report 2011]

Asians, by far, constitute the largest group of immigrants and foreign workers in Thailand. Thai naturalizaton of Westerner citizens is relatively rare, requiring extended residency in the country, a Thai language examination, and the navigation of the legal hurdles, including years in which applications are simply not processed. Marriage to a Thai allows residency in the country by marriage visa (which requires exiting the country or paying a fine for not doing so every ninety days), but provides no legal advantage in

the pathway to citizenship. Yet, what is strikingly large is the category of people I refer to as the "holiday class," which includes tourist visa overstays, foreigners temporarily visiting wives or families, and the retired. That is, a group that can not legally engage in employment and is thus in theory on an extended vacation. This group is more than twice as large as those who hold work permits for professional or skilled labor. There are 213,506 foreigners who are more or less officially on a long term holiday as they are technically excluded from work, not involved in study, and not engaged in other activities such as medical treatment. This includes 92,014 individuals on tourist and transit visa extensions, 65,558 undocumented expatriates (visa overstayers), another 27,425 visiting Thai wives or families for extended but temporary periods of time (primarily foreign men visiting Thai wives and families, though this could include Thais who have relinquished their Thai passports and are visiting families beyond the timeframe exempted for tourists, fifteen to ninety days), and 28,509 retired persons. Though many are likely working illegally (e.g. English teachers), or legitimately visiting spouses, family, and friends for extended periods of time, they constitute a group of foreigners from more developed countries whose legal situation is officially suspect and whose lifestyle is often based on leisure consumption. This is the stereotype of the Western expat in Thailand.

While national data for individuals such as undocumented expatriates is not available, I would suggest that the majority are Caucasians. If one assumed all the Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and Filipino professional and skilled work permit holders were Asian, the number of all other race professionals could only be 53,765. The number in the holiday class is 213,506. If one assumed that this group came to Thailand at the same rate as tourists in general, and that 85% of those coming from Western countries were

Caucasian, the number of Caucasians in the holiday class still would outnumber the number who could possibly be professionals. This perpetuates the stereotype among Thais that *farang* do not work.

Official tourism, of course, well exceeds these migrant figures. In 2012, over twenty-two million people visited Thailand and Bangkok was the most visited city in the world. Nonetheless, these kinds of figures perpetuate Thai stereotypes that migrant workers from neighboring countries are poor and backward, Japanese are hard-working, and *farang* have money but tend to be old and do not need to work or engage in the "simple" task of teaching their native language. Additionally, frequent news reports of inappropriate behavior with students nurture the stereotype that Western English teachers are perverts and child molesters, who teach in Thailand for easy access to girls (as is the case in Japan and Korea).[26] In this sense *farang* are not only hypersexualized but have the magical ability to live without working hard, like in Papua New Guinea, where "whitemen" are independent from manual labor and yet flaunt their wealth, provoking envy and perhaps retaliation (Bashkow 2006).

In general 50,000 THB ($1,700) monthly income is enough for a foreign (non-migrant labor) work permit, though this varies with national development (e.g. those from Cambodia, Myanmar, Loas, and Vietnam need to make only 25,000 as professionals). As migrant laborers they only need to make minimum wage, which was, for most of my fieldwork, 100 TBH or about $3 per day. Though one of my Thai neighbors, who worked for a refugee NGO, reported that Burmese migrants more often made 50 THB (with housing but not food), and sometimes as little as 20 THB per day. There is also an exception to the minimum professional salary for teachers, who can

make less. Furthermore, salary is what a business reports to the government, which means that a foreigner can be hired for less than this amount if she is, on paper, making more, and sometimes the difference between what is reported and what is paid is kept by the employer. Foreigners are required to make more than Thai nationals, even for the same positions, to discourage foreign workers from taking jobs away from native Thais. Thus two people doing the same job, holding different passports, can make drastically different amounts, foreigners often making three times as much. This also plays out, for example, in compensation for "native" English speaking teachers. Those holding passports from developed countries (e.g. USA, UK, and Australia) occupy the highest salary level, regardless of race/ethnicity (i.e. Thai-Americans holding US passports would make the US salary). Those with Indian and Philippine passports constitute a middle tier salary. Thai nationals are paid on a third, lowest tier, even if they were native speakers by virtue of growing up in an English speaking country. Similarly, an Indian or Filipina with a UK, US, or Australian passport will make 50-100% more than those with an Indian or Filipino passport, regardless of actual English proficiency.

There is also a minimum ratio of Thai to foreign workers that must be retained in a company. In white collar business settings, this means that for every foreign professional one must hire four Thais (e.g. a receptionist, janitor, security guard, and driver or other low paid employee). This does not apply to factories, where supervisors are often East Asian and line staff are typically CLM migrant workers. A retirement visa requires being 50 years of age and either having a Thai bank account holding 800,000 THB ($26,700) or monthly income of at least 65,000 THB ($2,200 which must come from sources external to Thailand and be verified by an embassy), or a combination of a

bank account plus annual income that would be equivalent to THB 800,000. That is, many pensions from Western countries are large enough to meet the requirements. I have met many retired foreigners, wary of keeping large sums of money in Thai bank accounts, who opt for non-retirement visas in order to prevent financial loss in case of another financial meltdown or political unrest.

Thai migration and labor practices are keyed to foreign nationality in terms of salary and work that justifies local hierarchies. This is experienced by Thais in their everyday encounters with migrant workers and professionals. However, there is a large segment of foreigners that does not appear to work or is retired. This "holiday class" possesses the uncanny ability to live on money sent from abroad without working or being supported by family. This group is associated with Caucasians, who are stereotyped, in contrast to groups like the Japanese, as lazy (ไม่ขยัน *mai khayan*, lacking effort, diligence, or industriousness).

In summary, Thai racializations follow two primary axes of difference, based on spatial distance, but also include other variable such as skin color, economic development, and cultural similarity. As Thai racialization relies on physical features, a geographic and cultural proximity, and economic achievement, some ethnic groups, such as Chinese, are easily assimilable in this framework, while others, such as Indians, continue to be excluded. The process is motiviated by political economic and cultural factors. Change in the status of Chinese over time from welcome traders to extra-national and communist threats to emblems of the middle class over the course of the twentieth century demonstrate this fact.

Sino-Thais and the mixed-race children of Thais and Caucasians (*luk-khreung*), have elevated their status in the last decades of the twentieth century. *Luk-khreung* in particular have transformed from being the outcast children of US soldiers and Thai sex workers to epitomizing contemporary beauty ideals. However, *farang* continue to constitute a group of perpetual outsiders. The less marked incorporation of mixed Thai-Asian children as Thai, demonstrates how Asians are more easily brought into the national fold compared to Caucasians. This is also evident in the use of Chinese kinship terms and the incorporation of other Asians as kin. These practices point to a sense of common Asianness and the racialization of Asians as a group. In the last two decades, Asianness has taken a new on new meanings and significations based on political economic and cultural changes in the region.

Asian regionalism refers to the contemporary cultural exchanges and political economic integration occurring in East and Southeast Asia.since the 1990s. While China has become the pivotal economy in the region, significant hurdles to cooperation in areas such as peace and security continue. Where regionalism has perhaps been most successful is in the arena of popular culture. East and Southeast Asian sentiments are converging in a shared popular culture that helps construct a cosmopolitan Asian imaginary (Chua 2004, Chua & Iwabuchi 2008, Berry et al. 2009). Media flows, however, are not even. Korea and Japan have come to dominate the screens and soundscapes of the region. At the 2013 Inter-Asia Cultural Studies conference in Singapore, Chua Beng Huat.made the pronouncement that "Asian popular culture is Korean popular culture." He contended that no other national media currently provides such a pervasive shared imagination. Even when pop cultural forms are a repackaging of

Western forms, their hybridization and re-branding through countries such as Japan make them more acceptable to Asian appetites based on their cultural proximity (Iwabuchi 2002). Iwabuchi contends that similarities in middle class lifestyles, physiognomy, and media conventions in the region facilitate transnational intra-Asian flows and identifications. The popularity of Japanese cultural productions has coincided with Japanese re-integration into Asia.

Common mass media consumption has led to the development of an Asian "taste continent," in which sentiments are converging to produce a cosmopolitan Asian middle class identity (Lim 2008). Common viewership of easily understood narrative forms like television dramas portraying similar people and contexts creates a sense of wider identification with "Asianness" modeled on the most advanced economies in the region. This orientation to "Asia" is increasingly instilling as sense of belonging and, I would argue, is helping to fuel the contemporary racialization of Asians as "Asian" rather than simply belonging to a disparate group of ethno-national groups.

In the next chapter, I introduce the term "white Asian" to describe light-skinned Asians from more economically developed areas of the world. I specifically draw on how the term is associated with ethnic/national development. I use the Chinese as a bridge to describe Asian racialization in Thailand. I move from the history of the Chinese in Thailand to focus on recent changes in the representation of Mainaland Chinese, Vietnamese, and East Asians in Thailand. In particular, I explore the Korean Wave and Asian, especially Japanese, views and associations with whiteness, to point to new ways of thinking about Asian whiteness.

CHAPTER 5

"White Asians": Beauty and Transformation in a Trans-Asian Context

I met Kei because he is the best friend of one of my neighbors, Korn who runs a shake shop around the corner from my apartment. Korn's sister operates a nearby boat noodle shop where Kei sometimes hangs out as well. Kei is a twenty-two year old gay college student. He lives with his mother, grandmother, and sister in a four story town house. The first floor operates as a shop selling cosmetics and beauty pharmaceuticals, staffed primarily by his grandmother, though he sometimes helps out.

Kei's sister is a cosmetic surgeon and operates her own clinic near the largest university in Bangkok. This gives him free access to products and procedures beyond the means of a typical middle class individual. Kei has had a nose job, a relatively common procedure among middle class gay men his age. The procedure decreased the size of his nostrils and raised the tip of his nose. Kei has also had the much less common chin shave, or jaw contouring, which removes bone from the jaws to produce a more "V" shape to the face. This is a highly desired procedure among femininely-identified people who follow Korean star aesthetics. The procedure is both relatively rare, expensive (55,000 THB or $1,800; a more common procedure in Korea for approximately $10,000), and dangerous.

Every several months, Kei has Botox injections that lift and shape his eyebrows into a more defined arch. Kei also wears Korean (though most brands in Thailand come from China) "big eye" contact lenses, colored contacts with large irises that make the pupils appear larger. The combined effect is supposed to "brighten" his appearance,

making his eyes look more alert and youthful, not to make him look Caucasian. Indeed, Kei has considered making his eyes smaller (*ta lek*), like East Asian eyes, as he believes that Thais already have large eyes (*ta to*) like Caucasians. But he does not know if this surgery is possible (it is, but not common).

Kei's skin is also very pale. Kei has whitened his appearance through glutathione and vitamin C injections. His sister injects one glutathione ampule for him every week. Glutathione is an amino acid that acts as a melanin inhibitor, which lightens the skin by preventing the formation of melanin, or dark pigmentation in the skin. It is also the active ingredient in Thai skin lightening beverages and pill supplements that are readily available, but more or less ineffective due to the low dosage. Vitamin C is simultaneously injected to improve the results. Thais who use glutathione typically inject one ampule, costing 1,000 Baht (about $33 every month). However, Kei has increased the dosage to enhance the results. Besides cosmetic surgery and dermatology clinics, glutathione injections are also available at beauty salons and by home visits from para-professionals for approximately a third of the cost at a clinic. Kei has shown me earlier photos of himself on his cell phone and childhood photos from a photo album to point out his transformations: dark to light skin, fat to thin body, masculine to feminine features.

The most important changes for Kei are going from "tan" to "white" and the loss of weight from "fat" to "normal." Kei appears to be of average weight, though the skin around his abdomen has a lose quality to it, as if there is too much of it in comparison to his body. Kei has lost 30 kilograms (approximately 65 pounds) of weight. He has tried various supplement pills that are designed for weight loss but attributes his achievement to simple discipline. He only eats one meal a day, lunch. For that meal, Kei eats whatever

he wants, so he does not feel deprived. He also buys snacks, though he does not necessarily consume them. Once, when we were walking around the neighborhood, he bought three pieces of sushi. The nigiri was placed in a clear plastic box about the size of two decks of cards, and then placed in a proportionally small clear plastic bag. The bright orange of the salmon and fish roe and the pink of the shrimp were eye-catching. I asked Kei what his favorites were. He replied that he did not like sushi, he bought it to carry around more like an accessory (at outdoor street stalls, a piece goes for approximately 5-10 Baht, or $0.15-30). For many middle class Thais, Japanese food, and especially sushi (Japan is colloquially referred to as "sushi-land"), represents contemporary cosmopolitan tastes. Indeed, at large shopping malls, Japanese restaurants, owned and operated by Thai companies, outnumber all others combined. While we walked around, he never ate the sushi, just carrying the bag in his right hand, and eventually, throwing it away.

Another time, when I met Kei at Paragon mall in central Bangkok, he bought a cup of Starbucks and carried it in his right hand while we walked around. I noticed that he was not drinking the coffee and asked how it was. Kei stated: "I don't like the taste of coffee, too bitter. But when you are strolling at the mall, you should have coffee in your hand." Kei tilted his hand to show me how he was holding it. "And you should carry it so that the Starbucks logo shows in front." Starbucks, of course, is both relatively expensive compared to Thai brands and has high brand recognition. This reminded me of Thai gay bar etiquette. I often ran into Kei and Korn together at gay bars in the Ortorkor and Silom Soi 2 areas. In these spaces, one should always have a glass in hand (those who do not can be freelance sex workers), and, in Thai style bars such as those at Ortokor, what one is drinking is displayed via table bottle service, typically of whisky. The label of the

bottle is thus an important object of display. Green bottles of Heineken beer, clear Smirnoff mixers, and other individual drinks are déclassé and associated with *farang* tourists.

Within a several year period in college, Kei has transformed his appearance. He has gone from medium to light complexion, from over to average weight, and refined his facial features. Overall, the changes produce both a more feminine and a higher class appearance. For Kei, what is important is that he looks better to himself and thinks that others find him more attractive as well. He has improved and continues working to maintain the changes. He also does not feel that the changes are unusual. Indeed, Kei contrasts his bodily modifications with what he considers his best friend's more radical gender change. Kei's best friend Korn, used to dress and live as a girl in high school. But after s/he transferred to another high school, that did not allow cross-dressing, s/he reverted to being a boy and has since lived as a gay man. Kei is quite proud of his changes, and openly discusses them.

There is no shame in improving oneself. There is little dishonor in having a cosmetic procedure. Indeed, such interventions point to one's wealth, the ability to afford beauty, demonstrates a morally upright commitment to giving "face" appropriate to one's status, and continuous self-improvement. It is quite common for Thais to show others "before and after" photos of themselves. The most dramatic pictures are of transgender transformations, from male to female, and less commonly, from female to male. Unlike the historical American model where transsexuals disavow their previous lives, there is generally no humiliation in revealing photos of oneself as another gender earlier in life. Images are sometimes juxtaposed in Photoshop to highlight the "amazing" conversions.

Thais show off their rhinoplasty, breast enhancements, laser skin procedures, and routine spa treatments. It is currently trendy for young Thais to wear fake braces on their teeth, often highlighted by neon colored tracks or ostentatious rubber bands.

Most ubiquitous is the practice of skin lightening and lightening of photos. While this was previously an activity that required some effort on the computer, smartphone photo apps can automatically "enhance" pics instantaneously. Selfies and other pics are often posted on social media sites such as Facebook immediately, with friends praising the alterations. Other forms of body modification, such as muscle development from a gym regimen, are also diligently posted. These also reference class standing, as they locate the poster in well-appointed private gyms and locker rooms, sometimes with attractive personal trainers, rather than in places such as public or "local" exercise spaces. Changes in the body are thus keyed to positive transformations of the self and index class standing.

Most scholarship on beautification practices have focused on their ideologically oppressive force on women, non-Caucasian peoples, and the disabled (see, for example, Blum 2003, Kaw 1993, Talley 2014). However, a growing number of scholars are redirecting attention to the agentive and pleasurable aspects of fashion, cosmetic surgery, weight loss, and other changes to the body. Rather than pointing to body modifications as "duped," inauthentic, or deceptive, these "body work" (Gimlin 2002) practices point to the cultivation of idealized and disciplined bodies as a moral endeavor (Bordo 2003). Within the East and Southeast Asian context, numerous scholars have noted that there is neither a need to maintain a "permanent" self that remains constant in varying situations or over time, nor an absolute differentiation of the self from the context of kin and other

social relations (see, for example, Ho 1995, Tu 1985). Outside of Islamic and Christian contexts (though even then practices are often syncretic and more flexible than in other parts of the world), the body is not an unalterable godly creation. This partially explains the recent development of cosmetic surgery industries in East Asia.

Beauty is a social practice supported by an extensive set of consumer industries. In *Beauty Up*, Miller (2006) refers to "beauty work" in Japan as socially sanctioned self-improvement that displays admirable effort and discipline. The attainment of beauty signifies "individual success, moral improvement, and self-transformation" (Miller 2006:175). Similarly, in *Buying Beauty*, Wen uses a quote from an informant: "Being good-looking is capital" (2013:80) to describe cosmetic surgery in China as a form of "beauty capital." Chinese girls and women thus see surgery to resemble Korean actresses as an investment in their future marriage and job opportunities within the framework of filial piety and social conformity. This form of beauty capitalization and embodiment of middle class consumer identity also occurs in Korea, which has the highest per capita rate of cosmetic surgery in the world. Elfving-Hwang (2013) has noted that bodily transformations to achieve aesthetic ideals, endurance of pain, and financial expense are not keyed to individual vanity but can be understood as a moral duty to family members who also benefit from a woman's social and economic success. In this context, beauty work is closely linked to middle class standing and obligations to appear appropriately in public. Importantly, the cosmopolitan characteristics Kei idealizes are East Asian, far from the foil of the Thai farmer and rural Thai aesthetics, especially in terms of dark skin and rugged masculinity.

The recent Thai aspirational orientation toward East Asia contrasts with the situation in Sulu, the Southern Philippines. A crucial difference however, is that of Bangkok being a Thai urban center and Sulu being both geographically and religiously peripheral to the Philippines. In *Beauty and Power*, Mark Johnson (1997) argues that *gay*/*bantut* (femininely and transgenderally identified gay men, who, like women, desire to be penetrated) in Sulu are ethnically differentiated from their peers as neither authentic Muslim men nor Muslim women. At the same time, *gays*' ability to imitate and perform American style is linked to features like glamor and education. For *gays*, their upward status mobility is a product of high status femininity associated with modernity and the USA, the Philippines' last colonial power. Thus, *gays* are "both celebrated as masters of beauty and style and circumscribed as deviant and vulgar" (Johnson 1997:146). *Gays*' capacity to transform themselves, and make over others, in the creolization of local Muslim Sulu, national Christian Filipino, and transnational American style, is simultaneously awe-inspiring and "over-exposed." Appropriating Western and American *istyle* in particular makes *gays* less recognizable as either local men or women. By contrast, urban middle class gay men in Thailand are actively differentiating themselves from what would be considered "local" or rural in Thailand. Yet the styles they are chosing to emulate are those from developed East Asia.

In this chapter, I further explore racialization in the contemporary Thai context. After the prior discussion on stereotypes of national and racial work ethic, I discuss Thai notions of beauty primarily as it relates to skin color. I argue that skin lightening and other cosmetic surgery procedures in contemporary Thailand are being misread as a desire to look Caucasian when the model of beauty is what I refer to as "white Asian."

The desirability for certain ethnic others is keyed to economic development and popular culture trends. This makes groups such as Koreans and Japanese highly desirable and is also positively changing the perception of groups such as Mainland Chinese and Vietnamese. To reiterate, I use the term "white Asian" as an external label. Thais themselves do not use the term. Instead, they typically say "Asian." However, which Asians counts as "Asian" is different than what people in the West would consider Asian. Thai "Asian" excludes South Asia and its neighbors such as Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. It also excludes majority Muslim nations in Southeast Asia. That is, the Thai use of "Asian" approximates my use of "white Asian."

For the purpose of my argument here, I will use two additional artificial groupings that conceptualize how Thais think of racial and national differences. As noted in the last chapter, I use "tropical Chinese" to refer to Chinese East and Southeast Asia, including Sino-Thais. Though stereotypes are changing, Mainland Chinese are often thought of as less economically developed and uncouth, lacking manners, refinement, and transnational cultural capital. I use this framing as it is the locally relevant distinction from a gay Thai perspective. The "tropical Chinese" are the desirable Chinese. The positive valuation of Chinese physical characteristics among Thais can be seen in the use of the terms *ti* (younger brother) and *muai* (younger sister) referring not to kinship relations but attractiveness in men and women for having light skin and Sinitic features.

I also use the neologism "Korpanese" to refer to contemporary Thai imaginaries of Korea and Japan as a unit. This is a common combination in cultural references that increasingly are labeled as "Korean," even if they are Japanese, because of the Korean Wave. For example, Thais commonly misattribute Korean origin to Japanese products

and popular culture. One of my Japanese friends, Daisuke, cringed when a mutual Thai friend referred to the Line instant messaging app he was using as Korean. "It's Japanese," Daisuke replied gruffly. (Line was developed by the Japanese subsidiary of the Korean internet company Naver.) Line is the most popular messaging app in Thailand. Kakaotalk is the Korean equivalent, which is much less popular, used primarily by those with Korean friends and partners, or looking for them. In a similar vein, when I told someone I was Korean, he responded by saying: "My Korean name is Yoshi." That is, Korean and Japanese are often conflated and transposed.

Korean and Japanese cultural elements are also commonly combined. In many public displays of Japaneseness, the materials are actually often Korean. For example, at "Japanese" cultural fairs held at Thai malls, many of the products for sale are Korean clothing and cosmetics, Korean food items like *kim* (seaweed laver), Korean celebrity paraphernalia, and all the music will typically be K-pop.[1] These fairs may also combine popular culture activities such as Japanese cosplay with K-pop cover dance. This conflation is not so far from reality as many "Korean" commodities, like *manhwa* (Korean *manga*) or K-pop, are also often reinterpretations of Japanese products or have already incorporated or hybridized Japanese elements.

Japanese restaurants run by Thai companies (e.g. Oishi, Fuji, Yayoi), are the most numerous and popular restaurants in Thai malls. Unlike Japanese restaurant chains in Thailand such as Ootoya or MOS Burger, Thai Japanese restaurants typically incorporate elements of Thai and Korean food and décor.[2] Besides the ubiquity of sweet Thai kimchi served with sushi, there will often be Korean and Thai sections in the Japanese menu. Female hostesses are sometimes dressed in both kimono and hanbok (traditional Korean

dress) uniforms. The majority of music is typically K-pop. Indeed Oishi Japanese Buffet restaurants, the largest chain, use K-pop bands as brand ambassadors.[3] Thus, in Thai spaces and in Thai imaginaries, Korea and Japan are often merged as a single unit, which is eminently desirable in contemporary Thailand.

This can be disturbing to Japanese expatriates and visitors, who sometimes harbor negative associations with Korea, and older Koreans, who sometimes maintain anti-colonial resentments toward the Japanese. These phenomenon, however, are often of questionable authenticity. K-pop or Japanese burgers are, of course, already thoroughly hybridized products, both between countries and with the West.[4] They also often follow paths from Japanese origins, through Korea, to Thailand, marking them in Thailand as Korean. For example, the popular Thai film *The Letter* (2004), followed the Korean TV drama *Love Letter* (2003), which is based on the Japanese film *Love Letter* (1995). Thus, Thais referenced this film as a Korean remake, when in fact, the original is Japanese.

The opposite also occurs, when Korean images are read as Japanese or a mix of the two. For example, in this video clip screenshot of a young Korean man masturbating, he is identified as Japanese-Korean. This is likely because the majority of pornography consumed by Thai gay men is Japanese, while Korean pornography is extremely rare as the industry in Korea is much more highly regulated and has not developed like in Japan. The image is from a "cam" session that was recorded by a viewer and subsequently circulated online. Attributing it as Japanese references the importance of Japanese pornography in Thai gay imaginaries of Asia. Because Korean pornographic images are highly sought but quite rare, clips like this circulate widely and for long periods of time. I

have encountered this clip numerous times on various Thai websites with different

names, all referencing Korean ethnicity.

Figure 10: Korpanese Clip. Screenshot of a young Korean man in a "cam" video. The

clip is titled: "Gay Clip Japanese-Korean." This clip is likely posted by a *kathoey* or

femininely-identified gay, as the name tag "angle" is how many Thai *kathoey* spell

"angel," referring to their transformed and elevated gender status.

What this clip's name points to is the way in which Korea and Japan are often imagined

as iterations of a single category, like two sides of a coin. In this manner, Korea and

Japan are often conflated in the Thai imagination. The two countries together come to

represent the pinnacle of a developed East Asia and a model to emulate for national

economic development.

A Positive Exception: Popular Biopolitics and Whiteness

Thai and foreign critics have diagnosed Thai desires for white skin and modified facial features as racist and as a demonstration of the postcolonial mimicry of Caucasianness. Napat Chaipraditkul (2013), for example, refers to cosmetic surgery as "therapy" designed to mimic Caucasian features. Here, I am not arguing that Thais are not racist or colorist, nor are they not postcolonial even if they have never been formally colonized. However, I aim to articulate how whiteness and cosmetic surgery can be understood apart from Caucasianness as processes of self-transformation or care of the self, and to describe contemporary racializations of what I describe as "white Asians," or those Asians who have white skin and are from developed nations or ethnically successful Chinese minority populations. That is, the features Thais are currently seeking to emulate are those of East Asians and are primarily a reference to class and economically developed national status. I aim to show that racialized desire is both structured and agentive. That is, within the context I will describe, professing such yearnings make sense locally in material terms and point to aspirations of upward mobility. They are practices constructed through and manifestations of desires for high class standing.

In Agamben's (1998) work on "bare life," he describes the concept of the "exception," or how exceptionalism conditions the possibility of the norm, defines normative law, and thus underwrites sovereign rule. Agamben's exceptionalism, however, focuses on the negative case of those who are rendered biologically human but without the social status of being human, and thus strippable of human rights. Aihwa Ong

(2006), using Agamben's concept of the "exception," describes how the Singaporean state promotes a "positive exception" for Chinese Singaporean citizens who are both the racial majority and constitute the largest segment of the middle class, but also not reproducing their numbers in relation to Malay and Indian citizens. That is, the Singaporean state is using biopolitical governmentality to try to reproduce the subjects it considers desirable. Here, I focus on a popular cultural biopolitics, or a positive exception from below, regarding "white Asians."

Care of the Self and Taking Care

Agamben, in part, reworks the theoretical contributions of Michel Foucault. One of the latter themes in Foucault's *History of Sexuality Vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (1986) is "the care of the self." Foucault begins with the classical Greek ethical injunctions to take care of the self and to know oneself. The arts of self-care and self-knowledge allows one to be in constant control of the self, moderating behavior, especially sexual conduct, to promote good health and maximize spiritual relationships with wives and boys. But for Foucault, Greek philosophers construed knowledge as a consequence of care, the practice of taking care of the self produced self-knowledge. Foucault (1988) further traces the care of the self through early Christian asceticism and modernity in the West. For Foucault, self-care beomes immoral and vain as Christian salvation is based on self-renunciation and austerity. Post-Renaissance philosophy continues to prioritize thinking and knowledge over the body and pleasure. Hence, in modern philosophy, there is a reversal of ancient Greek principles, where the arts of living follow knowledge. Prohibitions on sexuality are linked to obligations to tell the truth. From the eighteenth century,

disclosure of the self is divorced from Christian renunciation as confession. Under the new human sciences, verbalization becomes the primary means to positively constitute a new self. These "technologies of the self" "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1988:18). That is, disciplinary regimes of domination simultaneously enable ethical and moral action. Like in theories of practice, technologies of production, symbolism, and power mold the individual, but the individual is not determined by social structures and can take pleasure in agency, even when such actions maintain or reinforce domination.

The application and relevance of Foucault's theorization based on the West to Thailand has been questioned and debated (see, for example, Jackson 1999, 2000, 2003, 2004; Loos 2006, 2008, 2009; Morris 1994, 1997, 2000, 2004; Sinnott 1999, 2000, 2004, 2010, 2012). In short, Foucauldian analysis is commonly employed, with the caveat that the operations of power in Thailand have focused more on gender than sexuality (Jackson 2000, 2003). Furthermore, as Wongyannava (2010) has noted, Thai scholars have indigenized Foucault's theory of discourse in pragmatically understanding and exposing Thai power structures. Foucauldian analysis provided a framework for the Thai left when the collapse of the Communist Party of Thailand in the 1980s made Marxist theory less tenable. I would also argue that there are two related Thai concepts (*du-lae* and *riap-roi*) that bridge Foucault's "care of the self" with Thai notions of "face."

The Thai idiom of *du-lae*, meaning "to care for," combines two words that both mean "to watch" or "examine closely." "Caring for" is always relational. The practice of

du-lae is epitomized by the mother-child relationship, in which a mother nurtures her children. It also extends to other older family members, teachers, spouses or partners, and friends. In a more indirect way, it can be used to refer to protecting society or the physical environment. Caring for requires ongoing work and, in some cases, reciprocal obligations, for example, taking care of elderly parents and friends. Additionally, one is often reminded to take care of oneself and especially one's health as in the oft repeated entreaties *du-lae tua-eng duai na khrap* (take care of yourself) or *du-lae sukkhaphap kha* (take care of your health). This can also be rendered into a farewell greeting borrowed from English: "take care" (*thek khae*).

In Thai there is an implicit relationship between looking at or watching something (*du*, *lae*) and nurturing it (*du-lae*). Within the context of interpersonal relationships, caring for cultivates loving warmth (*khwam-opun*), closeness, and intimacy. It is also essential to the development of proper affects and manners (*marayat*). *Du-lae* is also related to the idea of looking good (*du-di*), both as in being attractive and in looking appropriate for the situation. These relationships between examination, care, and propriety all converge on notions of face and propriety. They are manifested in being *riap-roi* (complete, in order; proper, polite, neat), which has a dual sense of being "finished" (e.g. having completed a transaction or signed a contract) and being well-mannered.[5] In the context of body practices, being *riap-roi* can index both having completed a procedure, like surgery, or everyday routines of grooming. A respectable person would not leave the home without being *riap-roi* already.

Thais freely comment on others' bodies. Changes in skin color, skin complexion, weight, grooming, and style are public topics, particularly among women, *kathoey*, and

gay men. Every time I became slightly darker, my neighbor Korn's mother would ask: "Where did you come back from? You are so black [*dam*]." Women, transgender women, and gay men would also comment on the texture of my skin, especially to praise its increased clarity (*sai kheun*). I was constantly reminded about my weight, especially when there was concern: "You lost weight." This could be followed up by a question like: "Have you been ill?" or "Have you been taking ice [illegal methamphetamine popular with gay men and transgender women]?" If the reply was negative, then praise often followed as it indicated a purposeful effort.

Beyond commenting, among intimates, there is an understanding that the body itself can be manipulated by others. The most obvious example of this is a mother primping her child before leaving the house. However, even among friends, this was a common practice, though the person caring for, in my experience, was always female-bodied or feminine in demeanor. One of my best friends, Wan, a transgender woman, would routinely chastise me for not being *riap-roi*. I thought it better to be on time than perfectly groomed. She thought otherwise. For example, one day she had come over to my home before we were to go to a party together. When I stated that I was ready to go, she stated that we had to wait until I was "ready." "Why, I asked?" "Your hair is still wet," she replied. I did not own a hair dryer, but she insisted that my hair had to be dry before leaving. I wondered if this was a health concern, as Thais often fear getting their heads wet. "No," she replied, "you are not ready yet, you are not *riap-roi*," meaning that I was not yet complete, I was not yet presentable.

Once out in public, it was common for others to manipulate my body. Among more femininely identified gay men, this often was a simple statement and fix: "your hair

is not *riap-roi*" and then he moves my hair into place. When the person intervening was a woman or a transgender woman, there was typically an "excuse me" before my body was touched, for example, to straighten a collar. But the intervention was often highly intimate. As someone not used to the heat and humidity of Bangkok, I often used prickly heat powder (like a cooling talcum powder) on my body from my neck to my waist. I simply applied it after showering and before putting on my shirt. As I typically do not button my shirts to the top, there was often a triangular area of skin covered in white powder that was exposed. I was surprised at how often one of my friends would say "excuse me" and then use their hands or a handkerchief to blend the powder out of sight. When I asked what the matter was, the reply was typically: "*yang mai riap-roi"* (you are not *riap-roi* yet). I was told that powder should not show. The use of such powders was quite common, though most of my friends preferred baby powder in plastic containers to the old-fashioned tin Snake brand I was fond of. But, their powder was blended into the skin to become invisible where it was exposed. When I did see visible powder on others, they were generally either rural Thais or Burmese migrants, who sometimes also used powder or *thanakha* (a yellowish paste made from ground tree bark) on their faces. Although none of my friends made the explicit connection, I came to believe that being *riap-roi* entailed not looking like these foils of urban middle class Thai modernity: rural Thais and Burmese. Their actions pointed to my duty to be *riap-roi*, to be well-groomed and polished in public, to express my appropriate status.

Moral Standards, Social Standing, and Bodily Transformations

The duty to be *riap-roi* is a moral obligation based on one's status and position. This is also a conditional state tied to context. No respectable mother would allow her children to go to school in dirty or wrinkled uniforms. Anyone who has the financial means to transform is expected to engage in the labor of self-care, to improve oneself. Transformation is simply not a choice but an expectation, like proper grooming. This could be as simple as ironing clothes or as complicated as changing one's sex. The latter was perhaps more common than expected. One day that I went to a local clinic famous for transgender surgery to support Wan getting new breast implants, I encountered another friend at the clinic the same day getting breast enhancements. For both of them, bigger breasts were not an option, but an obligation to exemplify their femininity.

Being a foreigner, I was given more leeway than Thais. But I was not immune to the peer pressure to enhance and modify my body. The greatest imperative was to improve my skin, by lightening and clarifying it. I was routinely chastised for using soap on my face (as opposed to a facial cleanser) and not using enough sunscreen and Korean BB creams (blemish balm, similar to foundation). Friends routinely diagnosed me as having splotchy skin. I countered that I have freckles. That did not matter. Numerous friends reiterated the same routine: "You know you can take care of that? Why don't you take care of that? You have the money?"

I was confronted with this expectation so often that I became self-conscious. I went to a number of clinics to investigate the process and cost of removing the dark spots from my face. In summary, the procedure would take approximately three months and $1,000 to $1,200 at an established, reputable clinic which would involve three laser treatments to remove any facial discoloration spaced a month apart with intermittent

conditioning treatments to assure proper healing and enhance the quality of skin. A low

cost procedure could remove each spot for approximately $1.50 each with no follow up,

using a machine my parents bought in Korea that cauterizes the spot, and makes it a scab

that drops off. I decided against laser treatment but did modify my behavior in other

ways. I became a habitual shadow walker. Basically, I followed the behavior of Thais

who avoided the sun. When walking in the sois, I walked on the same shaded side as the

majority of women and followed the shadows provided by buildings, trucks, and large

trees. I learned to wait for street lights by standing behind utility poles that provided

cover. Sometimes, a long line would form there. I sat on the darker side of the bus. I

sometimes held up papers and books to block my face from the sun. These were

considered appropriate measures to prevent sun exposure, typical among women and

other femininely identified people. I also used sunscreen from the US, with a high SPH. I

vividly remembered a television commercial for sunscreen, where a light-skinned Thai

woman runs alongside a bus to stay in the shade. The tagline stated that if you used their

product, you wouldn't have to resort to such behavior. Shielding the sun had numerous

options. But, I only saw old Thai women and female Japanese expats using sun

umbrellas. Large rimmed hats and non-Muslim head coverings were worn by rural Thais

and mainland Chinese tourists.

Many Thais also used a heavy foundation or powder several tones lighter than

their skin, which looked like a mask, especially when the color was visible at the neckline

and the product cast a glow in artificial light, such as in bar settings. This was a common

but much more contested practice. Thais often commented on others' ostentatious use of

such make-up, which came off as unrefined compared to blending BB cream down the

neck for a more naturalistic style. Wan taught me her technique. She used a Korean BB

cream, blended in with a sponge. Then she tapped the sponge into white talcum powder

and blended that on top. This made her face whiter but provided a matte finish that did

not stand out.

Thais are quite obsessive about skin. Most feminine gay men and nearly all the

transgender women I knew who could afford it went to a dermatologist, who was often a

gay man. Besides dealing with problem skin such as acne or pock marks, practices to

lighten and even skin tone and reduce pore size were popular. One day, while having

lunch with a dermatologist friend, Olay, I asked what moisturizer he recommended I use.

He replied: "This is Thailand. It's a tropical country. You don't need to use a moisturizer.

The air is humid enough. But you should always use sunscreen. You need to use

sunscreen to stay white even when you are indoors, because the UV still gets inside and

reflects off surfaces." I was surprised by Olay's focus on skin color. A light-skinned

Sino-Thai, Olay worked at a public hospital where he made a relatively meager salary

treating burn victims and other medical cases compared to those in private practice.

Discipline through Commentary

Thais generally consider it inappropriate to express negative inner states such as

disappointment or unhappiness, and this increases with feminine gender and class

standing, so that those who are well mannered women are least likely to openly express

negative emotions. The many meanings of Thai smiles are perhaps an exemplar of this

affect management. At the same time, well-off women are also the most likely to describe

and comment upon the physical manifestations of others, especially those with whom

they are intimate. Statements about skin color darkening (being negative, but showing signs of possible leisure such as going to the beach) and losing weight (which references both attempts at body modification-positive and illness-negative) are particularly common. Yet anything visible in public, such as carrying a cheap imitation Louis Vuitton bag, is open to critique. This commentary disciplines those who are subjects of the observation when it is heard, but more directly models ideals to the other spectators and interlocuters. Here, I will describe a case that points to the importance of appropriate transformations and questions the legitimacy of the provider and one's class position in a gay context.

My partner Hoang was visiting me in Bangkok and wanted to get away to the beach. I did not have much time, so we went with two Thai friends, Mark and Dew, to a relatively close island popular with gay men, Koh Samet. On the island, which is mostly a national park and thus relatively pristine, the Tub Tim beach caters to gay men with nightlife centered around the bar at the Silver Sands hotel. Our first night there, we walked with our friends down the beach, which is strewn with seafood restaurants on the sand that shrink in size as the tide rises. Within minutes of walking, we ran into another Thai friend of mine from Bangkok, Oat, who had come for the weekend with his new Thai boyfriend. We all went to a restaurant together, sitting around a low table on big cushions in the sand.

During the dinner, Oat, a hair stylist, mentioned that there were many changes in his life. He had a new boyfriend and he had moved up from the salon he was working at in MBK mall catering to *farang* to a Japanese salon at Central World mall. Oat then asked me if I noticed anything different about him. I replied that he looked thinner and

that his nose looked smaller. Oat giggled with glee. "Yes!," he shrieked. "I've lost seven kilos [approximately 15 pounds] and I did my nose." He whipped out his phone and showed me a series of photos of how he looked when I had seen him last. "Fat, fat, fat," he shrieked. Then holding the pictures of his face up to his new nose so that we could make a comparison, "big, big, big." He was obviously proud of himself, his changes. "Do I look better?," he asked. We all agreed and nodded.

Hoang immediately asked: "How did you lose the weight? Have you been going to the gym?" Oat replied that he was simply eating less. Then Dew asked: "Where did you get your nose done?" Oat replied that he got a really good deal at a small clinic. "I only paid 5,000 Baht [approximately $160]!" Dew sarcastically asked: "Was that a real doctor? You might have problems later." Oat did not reply and excused himself to go to the restroom. A minute later, his boyfriend got a call from Oat. He said Oat was not feeling well, gave us some money for their part of the bill and excused himself as well. Then Oat called me a few minutes later. "Big brother Dredge, I'm so sorry, but I had to leave. Your friend Dew, he is so rude. I felt so ashamed. I had to leave." I told Oat not to worry, it did not matter. Dew had a reputation for being catty and acting *hai-so* (high society). The tension in this interaction contrasted Oat's pride in improving himself and the status devaluation he suffered from Dew's snide remark, which dismissed the quality of that transformation. By questioning the credentials of the person who performed the surgery, Dew was also questioning the outcome of the operation and the possibility of later problems, that which was not immediately visible. It also questioned Oat's class standing.

On the other hand, Oat had lost weight on his own. He felt this was significant in his new attractiveness. Within the year, Oat broke up with his Thai boyfriend and began to simultaneously long-distance date a Japanese man and a Taiwanese man. The Japanese man paid for another rhinoplasty, from a more reputable clinic. Oat's nose became even thinner. When I met Oat at a club in Bangkok later in the summer, he introduced me and Hoang to his Taiwanese boyfriend. Oat asked: "He's cute like a Korean, isn't he?" I replied: "he looks more Korean than me." My partner Hoang agreed. Oat's Taiwanese boyfriend looked like a K-pop star. His mid-length hair perfectly swooshed around his head and his tight black jeans and jacket looked svelte. Oat was trying to achieve that look through weight loss, cosmetic surgery, and hair and clothing choices. When his Taiwanese boyfriend had gone to the restroom, Oat pulled out a credit card given to him by his Japanese boyfriend to show me. Oat then said he stopped working in the Japanese salon, as he was receiving enough financial support from his new companions to stop working. When I initially met Oat, four years prior, he showed me the ATM card he was given by his then white Australian boyfriend, who provided Oat with a monthly allowance that covered his rent in a small condominium unit. From Oat's perspective, he had moved up in the world. Oat proudly showed his before and after photos on his phone. He no longer had to work and was able to afford regularly purchasing luxury goods like Louis Vuitton bags and SK-II cosmetics. His foreign ATM card was replaced by a credit card. Oat expressed pride in the transformations, both physical in terms of his body and face as well as metaphorical in his new relationships with his Asian patrons. Oat was both embodying white Asian asesthetics and partnering with white Asians as well.

Beauty is Everything and Nothing

      Materializing Thailand (van Esterik 2000) is the most important treatise on the importance of beauty in Thailand. As van Esterik argues: "Appearance matters. Beautiful appearances matter even more. In Thailand, beauty can override family connections, money or class, as well as other ascribed and achieved attributes of women, and to a lesser degree, men." (2000, 129). For women, beauty is a concern of morality that can substitute for the real and spiritual. Given the impermanence and emptiness of the body, "the surface is taken for the real" (4). Surface is all there is and is thus everything in social interaction. Hence, "beauty is interpreted less as a natural attribute existing within the body and radiating outward, and more as something that can be purchased, placed on the surface, and enhanced, it becomes the responsibility of women to develop their own beauty potential rather than assume responsibility for meritorious acts that will result in inner beauty" (154). The most important attribute for women is thus good skin: light and bright. Beauty is most important for royal women, and varies by region, ethnicity, and class. For males, beauty can legitimate the power to rule. As a form of sociality, beauty must also be appropriate to one's station and sensitive to context, it emplaces one within social relations.

      In this vein, Nathan Porath (2015) notes that tattooing and body modification are common procedures among diverse groups of men, women, and *kathoey* in Thailand. Buddhist beliefs about the impermanence and ephemerality of the body possibly account for the ease at which Thais adopt gender confirmation surgery and the continuation of pre-Buddhist practices such as male genital modification in Thailand that have all but disappeared in Muslim and Christian Southeast Asia. Cosmetic surgery can also be

viewed in light of the importance of "face," a beautiful appearance that portrays friendliness and happiness is highly valued as symbolic capital and can mask negative emotions and thoughts.

The Thai emphasis on and obsession with outward beauty, however, is based on a vernacular practice of Buddhism. In an interview with the Venerable Luang Phi Chai Waradhammo, he explained to me that this is contrary to Buddhist doctrine, which states the opposite. Buddhism, acknowledging that physical beauty is impermanent, focuses on the cultivation of inner, spiritual beauty. Luang Phi refers to these as "gracing virtues" such as forbearance, tolerance, patience, modesty, and meekness. Indeed, the disavowal of physical beauty is most readily materialized in the presentation of monks, who are not allowed to use cosmetics or perfumes, wear lay clothing or jewelry, and shave all the hair on their heads, including the eyebrows. Nevertheless, the importance of attractiveness is well established in Thai society.

Beautifully White, Powerfully White

A principal indicator of social status in Thailand is beauty, and particularly the whiteness and clarity of skin (van Esterik 2000). The term "white Asian" highlights the racialization processes related to economic development and cultural orientations currently taking shape in Thailand. White Asians are not just East Asians, or developed Asians, but those Asians who are thought to be high status and beautiful. Light skin is an important component of how I conceptualize "white Asian." But light skin itself is not sufficient. For example, the Lao and the Burmese are both considered to have lighter skin by Thais. Burmese use of *thanakha*, for example, is said to make women's skin light and

soft. But, at the same time, these groups are seen as poor and lacking development. For the ethnic minorities in Thailand, the term used is more likely to be "uncivilized." That is, like in the production of racial categories more broadly, there is a constellation of factors that are variously related to ethnic groups, such as skin color or "ability." But these assemblages are neither hermetic nor permanent. The Vietnamese and Mainland Chinese provide examples of how recent economic changes affect racialized perceptions.

Notions of race are always historically and culturally specific. In Thailand, race and ethnicity are primarily associated with national or regional origin, though clearly, physical factors like skin color, eye shape, and body size are used to categorize groups. Additionally, cultural values also shape how race/ethnicity are viewed. Thais differentiate between the race of a person and their skin color, though the two are also linked. That is, there are *farang* (Caucasians) and there are those who are *phio khao* (white-skinned). The reference to white skin is frequently used with Thais of Chinese descent and East or white Asians, namely Japanese, Korean, Chinese, tropical Chinese, and to a lesser extent Vietnamese. Thus, "white Asian" here encapsulates a cluster of associations including skin color, advanced economic development (as a nation or as a minority), and Thai imaginings of what "Asia" and middle class "Asians" look like.

There is no denying that white skin is considered beautiful in Thailand and linked to social standing. "To have 'white' skin in Thailand connotes a higher social status and indicates wealth and success" (Esara 2009:411). It is difficult to find cosmetics and everyday cleansers like liquid body soap that do not include at least one whitening agent. It has become virtually impossible to buy liquid facial cleansers and moisturizers that do not claim to have whitening properties. Even underarm deodorant / antiperspirant and

feminine douche products claim to whiten.[6] Whiteness is powerful as an indicator of class status and reproduces the naturalization of this social fact through its material effects. Job applications, for example, require photos. Of course, these are typically lightened when the photos are taken at portrait studios. It is also common for people to manage their appearance by only posting lightened photos on their social media profiles. I now turn to a case which both demonstrates the desirability of whiteness and provoked controversy in Thailand.

In December 2010, Oishi (a major Thai brand of restaurants, food, and beverage named after the Japanese word for "delicious") released a large campaign for their Amino Plus Brightenn skin "brightening" (whitening) beverage.[7] A coordinated marketing campaign targeted television, billboards, and other media. Their use of BTS Skytrain spaces, which is associated with middle class passengers, was particularly significant. The Oishi campaign completely wrapped numerous stations and trains with their Amino Plus Brightenn ad campaign. This meant, for example, that at the Phaya Thai train station next to where I lived at the time, every advertisement in the station was for the Brightenn campaign. Signage on billboards, columns, walls, and barriers were all coordinated. Additionally, some train exteriors were completely wrapped with corresponding advertising on video monitors and signage on the inside. The campaign featured an incredibly white Sino-Thai couple and pet fish. Most of the ads featured the woman, as women are the target for such campaigns. Another recurrent set of images featured a large white goldfish partially swallowing a small pink goldfish. This related to one of the taglines: *phio khao-om-chomphu* (skin that is white with a touch of pink, literally, "white

sucking pink").[8] This was the ideal skin color being promoted, the claim being that

drinking Amino would produce this white with a touch of pink result.[9]

Figure 11: "Seats Reserved for White People." Advertisement of Oishi Amino Plus

Brightenn skin whitening beverage on a BTS train."[10]

The Oishi Amino Plus Brightenn campaign lasted for several months. However,

part of the campaign attracted controversy and was rescinded. In February 2011, signage

was placed above rows of seats inside the train carriages. The sign read "seats reserved

for…white people" (*samrong thi-nang samrap…khon-khao*). The slogan was a parody of

signs on all forms of public transportation that request passengers to give up their seats

for monks, disabled people, pregnant women, the elderly, young children, and others in

need. The use of "white people" did not refer to Caucasians, as some *farang* thought. Not

unsurprisingly, Thai Netizens posted criticism of this "racist and classist" (*yiat-phio*

baeng-chonchan) campaign online starting February 21, 2011 on the popular site

pantip.com.[11] Posters felt offended by the sign, comparing it to apartheid and caste

segregation. Some posts suggested suing the company for insulting passengers. Though

the campaign continued, these specific "seats reserved for…white people" signs were removed within two days of making headline news. Netizen complaints vociferously stated that the ads promoted inappropriate ideas around skin color. But the fact that the campaign existed, and that the drink continues to be sold, points to the popularity of whitening products and the fact that many people seek them.[12] The imagined foil for these ads is the rural farmer, the antithesis of an urban professional class whose white skin both points to longstanding elite disdain for outdoor physical labor and recently idealized Chinese heritage.[13]

I follow Aren Aizura (2009), L. Ayu Saraswati (2010), and others in arguing that desire for whiteness is not the same as desire for European or Caucasian whiteness. Aizura (2009:304) notes that surgical procedures related to whiteness (e.g. nose and eye surgeries) index "class, Sino-Thai understandings of the relationship of facial features to future prosperity, and Thai aspirations for modernity" but does not address the contemporary East Asian references for these ideals. Similarly, Suraswati (2010) states that while Caucasian models do not need to be named, the fame of Asian models from China, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, or Thailand in Indonesian skin whitening advertisements points to their transnational credibility, which supersedes their nationality. I suggest that ethnic coding is still important. One need not know the actual stars in the ads, but rather, that the models appear to be like currently popular figures from countries such as Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan, which are associated with class and modernity. Naming the models also points to their star status and creates yearning to be beyond ordinary. In the contemporary Thai context, the whiteness being accessed is not a deracinated cosmopolitan whiteness, but whiteness associated with certain ethnicities,

most notably Korpanese and Chinese. White Asian groups specific to certain developed nations represent the aspirations for the developmental future of Thailand's economic trajectory. That is, white Asians represent modernity and middle class consumerism specifically tied to the Asian region and Asian bodies, neither an ambiguous, deracinated whiteness nor Caucasianness.

The cultural analysis of skin whitening generally makes the assumption that Asians are not white to begin with. That is, they are some other color (namely yellow or brown) that needs to lighten in order to become white. However, this is an ethnocentric and racialist reading of skin color that does not account for East Asian (though not necessarily Asian American) ideas about their own skin. The idea that lightening is a desire to become white like Caucasians simplistically misinterprets colorism for racism, though the two are clearly mutually entwined. For example, Walter Persaud (2005) rightly identifies skin lightening in Thailand as a process of beautification and development but interprets it as a form of gendered colonial subjugation. While this may have occurred in the past, especially in colonial contexts, in the contemporary scenario, a more precise reading would be of a capitalist neoliberal refashioning of the self in line with dominant East Asian beauty standards, which themselves hybridize the West and Caucasianness in referencing class, modernity, and development as modern and Asian.

Asian Whiteness

Whiteness, white skin, and "white people" (*khon-khao*) does not necessarily reference European descent. In contemporary media, advertising, and everyday discourse, white skin is often associated with East Asians, most notably Chinese, Japanese, and

Korean women. For example, whitening creams claim to produce "white skin in the style of a young Korean woman" (*phio khao baep sao kaoli*) or encourage Thai women to "become a beautifully white skinned woman like a Korean" (*ma plian pen sao phio suai khao meuan kaoli*). Importantly, Thais (or other Asians) do not consider their skin to be yellow, as Asians are often described in Euro-American contexts (Keevak 2011). The use of "yellow" to describe skin color originates in eighteenth century German physical anthropology and then is disseminated through European colonialism and racial ideologies.[14] The reference to yellow skin was sometimes adopted within Asia. For example, post-WW II Japanese authors see themselves as "yellow" after traveling to the West. In "Dream of the Seventh Night" Soseki sees what appears to be "a hideous yellow dwarf" approaching him on a London street (Napier 1996:28).[15] The figure is actually his own reflection in a shop window. A near identical scene occurs with Watashi in "Dark Pleasures" (Orbaugh 2007:127). Japanese who had travelled to the West came to see themselves as yellow. By contrast, in the popular Thai historical film *Yamada the Samurai of Ayothaya* (2010), the Japanese character is referred to as "white face" (*na khao*).

Thais do not refer to their skin as yellow, though East Asians are sometimes described as yellow or white yellow (*khao leuang*). Skin is typically thought of as either "white" (*khao*) or "black" (*dam*), where the former category is rather limited and the latter category is much broader. In Thailand, it can be more polite to refer to someone as "dark" (*khem* or *khem-khem*, concentrated). Some Thais will also use terms such as "sugar" (*nam-tan*, referring the brown color of palm sugar) or the English loan word "tan" (*thaen*). Indeed, I argue that there is a common misperception among contemporary

foreign observers and Thai social critics that whitening products reveal Thai desires to look Caucasian. In fact they generally desire to look Sino-Thai or East Asian. I make this claim based on contemporary ethnographic data and representational trends in visual media including advertisements, magazines, television, and film. Thais repeatedly told me that they wanted white skin "like Koreans," Japanese, or Chinese. Heterosexual men often told me that they preferred Korean or Japanese women because they have white skin. Indeed, the typical contrast for gay men within Thailand is between *ti* or *ti-ti* (Sino-Thai; a Chinese loan word meaning younger brother or young man more generally, in Thai it refers to Thai men with Chinese heritage and references light skin and Sinitic facial features) and *thai*, *thai-thai*, or *thai-thae* ("real" Thai). *Ti* is a common descriptor used in gay personal ads. For example, the poster of this profile headline from Jack'd, a gay cruising and social network app, accessed July 2014 in Bangkok, describes himself as a "white Chinese."

ผมคนขาวตี๋ ผอมสูง ใครชอบไทยๆเถื่อนเซอๆผมไม่ใช่คนของคุนคับ

Phom [I] khon khao ti, phom [thin] sung. Khrai chop thai-thai, thuean, soe-soe [surreal]; phom mai chai khon khong khun khap.

I am a white Chinese (Sino-Thai) man, thin and tall. Whoever likes typical Thais, rough, unkempt ["surreal," slang referring to the fashion aesthetics of artists]; I am not for you.

That is, the poster specifically contrasts his "white Chinese" status in contrast to *thai-thai*, which also incorporates other characteristics related to social status such as being

"tall" versus being "rough." In his analysis of male imagery using the existent archives of gay Thai commercial magazines from 1980 to 2000, Narupon Duangwises (2003) argues that there is a shift in representations of models from those with dark "Thai" features (*thai-thai*) to those with a "Chinese" look (*ti*) approximately halfway in the late 1980s/early 1990s.This also is linked to the promotion of middle class aesthetics and culture in the magazines. The shift is in line with wider trends in the Asianification of imagery in Thailand and other parts of Asia. Jory (1999) notes that following the 1997 IMF Financial Crisis, Thai advertising has increasingly devalued Western images and promoted Thainess, Thai traditions, and Thai values. In Thailand, advertising relies nearly exclusively on the use of Thai, often Sino-Thai, models. Yet during my fieldwork, it was common to see television and print advertisements using Korean stars, particularly K-pop idols.

In her study of beauty, television imagery, and ethnic identity among Isan Lao youth, Hesse-Swain (2006) examines the status of the ethnic Lao in Thailand. Isan, or the Northeast, is the largest and most populous region of Thailand, bordered on the north and east by Laos and Cambodia. While there is a contemporary revival of Isan Lao traditions and language, the youth in her study had ambivalent identifications with a region that is portrayed as poor and primitive. The Isan Lao consider themselves "ugly" compared to Central Thais, especially those from Bangkok. In comparison to *na Thai* (Thai faces), *na Lao* (Isan Lao faces) are darker and square, with high cheekbones and flat nostrils. On television, Isan characters are almost always portrayed as farmers, prostitutes, taxi drivers, servants, or manual laborers. Because they were generally not seen as beautiful or handsome, Hesse-Swain's informants thought it would be extremely difficult for Isan

Lao to become television stars. As Isan Lao have dark skin, use of cosmetics for skin whitening is common. However, Hesse-Swain notes that "several student participants went to great lengths to explain that the Thai obsession with paler skin was not based on European or Western physical beauty but rather on Asian races with fairer complexions, such as the Japanese and Chinese, thereby keeping the zone of cultural influence at least within the Asian region" (2006:267). Hesse-Swain attributes this to the importance Thai identity places on never having been colonized by a European power as well as skin comparisons with Asian neighbors prior to relationships with the West.

Thai Beauties

Thai heartthrobs (that is, singers, actors, models, and other stars) clearly show the desire for whiteness. The four stars most often mentioned in early interviews during my primary fieldwork (2009-2011) were Nichkun Horvejkul (US born, Sino-Thai, K-pop star and model), Mario Maurer (*luk-khreung* Sino-Thai and German actor and model), "Barry" Nadech Kukimiya (*luk-khreung* Sino-Thai and Austrian, actor and model), and "Dome" Pakorn Lum (*luk-khreung* German and Thai-Singaporean, pop star and actor).[16] It is important to note that none of them look "really Thai" (*thai-thae*, e.g. having tan skin and robust features such as a wide face with a broad nose). Most importantly, all of them are light skinned, having Chinese and/or Caucasian lineage.[17]

The case of Nadech Kukimiya is particularly interesting. A contemporary of Mario, he had always publicly stated that his father is Japanese, which explained why he had a Japanese surname. However, a gossip magazine uncovered that his biological father is actually Austrian; his step-father, who raised him, is Japanese. Nadech's ethnic

heritage was major news and generated a great deal of debate. The controversy can be summarized in the following quote from the Bangkok Post: "He was forced to come forward when a magazine, digging into his past, revealed last week that he was not Thai-Japanese as he claimed, but a relatively less hip Thai-Austrian. Declaring he was unworried by the resulting fuss, Nadech said that far from deceiving fans for his own sake, he really did it for his parents. 'My foster father is Japanese. I told everyone I am half Thai, half Japanese to honour him,' he said."[18] This revelation was considered a devaluation of his ethnic heritage. That is, Thais considered it better, or at least more interesting, to have a white Asian father rather than a Caucasian one. Nadech, nevertheless continued to be a spokesperson for the Oishi brand playing Japanese roles for their line of green tea beverages. He was forgiven by his fans, who often stated: "It doesn't matter, because he's cute." That is, being attractive was the most important factor in maintaining his status as a star. Furthermore, his invocation of honor created a sense of behaving as a Japanese person would. That is, he not only played Japanese in advertising but acted Japanese in real life as well.

Within Thai gay media, the image of ideal male bodies is contracting. Previously, there was a wider range of body types. Models could be light or dark skin, be slim or muscular, and have rugged or fine facial features (Duangwises 2003). Gay bars in Bangkok host "Chinese Boy" (*ti*) beauty contests in which participants look Sino-Thai. This aesthetic is preferred in male beauty pageants overall (gay and straight), except those in areas like Silom Soi 4, which are geared toward gay *farang* patrons and "coyote boy" contests, featuring exotic dancers that cultivate a Thai working class masculinity. This more generally references the changes in tastes associated with the development of a

middle class gay community in which dark skin becomes associated with farmers and laborers, who are generally not desirable partners but can also be fetishized for their low class masculine status and associated virility. Thai male sex workers also state that the *thai-thai* look is popular with *farang*. Indeed, dark skinned sex workers market themselves to Caucasians, believing that other Asians will not be interested in them. This was a recurrent assumption in my volunteer work with sex workers.[19] A Bangkok pornographer I interviewed targeted different markets based on the skin color and ethnicity of his models.[20] According to Dave, Western audiences preferred Asian men who were young, skinny, and looked like they were "farm boys from Isan." However, he used light skinned or muscular Japanese and Korean models to attract Thai, Japanese, and other Asian viewers.

There are two major aesthetic strains among middle class Thai gay men. Both are considered *intoe* (international, cosmopolitan), in contrast to *lokhan* ("local," low class) style. All three are also hybridized to varying extents. For the sake of a more distinctive typology, I describe the two middle class "inter" styles in more oppositional terms. The first is a Sinicized-American style. The focus is on masculine athleticism: muscular bodies and "jock" fashion brands like Abercrombie & Fitch or Hollister. A singlet (tank top) with baggy cargo shorts and sneakers epitomize this look. Since Thailand is a tropical country, this can be worn more or less year round. This style is similar to mainstream American gay styles and is most clearly associated in Bangkok with Singaporean gay men and the internationalized gay zone of Silom. The second is a Korpanese-continental European style, focused on slim tone bodies, trendy and tight-fitting clothing, coiffed hair, and sometimes, cosmetics use including BB cream (blemish

balm, a cosmetic similar to foundation), lip gloss, eyeliner, mascara, or eyepencil to
darken the eyebrows. This look, which incorporates European high fashion labels, is
more distinctly "Asian" in that it is associated with K-pop idols and Japanese male beauty
aesthetics.[21] This Korpanese identified look is more common in everyday Thai life and
popular among gay men outside of the Silom area, where the majority of gay venues are
actually located. Nevertheless, the masculine style has representational domination in
Thai gay media. I would suggest this is the case because the Asian style is often
associated with sissies (feminine gay men), who themselves often idealize masculine
partners, though this is also changing.

Sinicized American aesthetics converge with masculine gay imagery from East
Asia in publications such as the Taiwanese physique magazine *M1*, which are sought
after by Thai gay men. Like the popular women's features Junko Ishiguro (2009)
describes of Japanese faces on Western bodies, these models have East Asian faces with
bodies that approximate muscular North Atlantic gay ideals. Since 2011, the British gay
magazine *Attitude* has been publishing a Thai edition, their only international edition.
This is currently the only regularly published mainstream (i.e. modeling upper middle
class sensibilities) gay magazine in Thailand and thus has a great deal of influence in
regards to fashion and lifestyle tastes.[22] Approximately seventy percent of *Attitude*
Thailand (แอตติจูด) content is a direct translation of Attitude articles from the UK edition,
which often does not make sense in the local context (e.g. on issues such as coming out in
the workplace). The rest of the magazine is specifically written for a Thai readership. The
cover and photographic editorials are also produced in Thailand. The cover model is
always a Thai star, Sino-Thai, *luk-khreung*, or white Asian.[23] The only cover model

identified by ethnicity in the first year of publication was the Korean, Jiho Lee (January 2012), referred to as "Korean Guy" and "Korean Fit." Lee was also voted by readers as the "Straight Guy We Love" for the year. Subsequently, he became a spokesmodel for Adam's Love, the Thai Red Cross' project promoting HIV testing and treatment among gay men. He posed again for the September 2012 cover with Singaporean fitness model Jason Chee. Chee won the "Straight Guy We Love" title in the second year. They represent ideal male beauty in the contemporary Thai context among internationalized middle class gay men.[24] In an interview for BK Magazine, Attitude editor, Thawatchai Deepatana, noted that Chinese, Korean, and Japanese are the favorite looks among Thai gays.[25]

Figure 12: Attitude Magazine September 2012. Jiho Lee (Korean, upper right) and Jason Chee (Chinese Singaporean, lower left), the two most popular models in the first two years of *Attitude* (Thailand) magazine publications, represent male beauty ideals.

There is not a single type or "*sapek*" (short for specifications, as in qualifications on a resume) among middle class gay Thai men. However, two features are nearly universal: light skin and tall stature (in Thai, it is an insult to be called short, not fat). Beyond this, there were four primary styles I observed. First, there was a "cute" or "popular" type. This was the most commonly desired. This type is epitomized by many Thai stars such as Nadech Kugimaya and associated with K-pop boy band members like Nichkun. Plastic surgery to look like them was the most popular among the middle class gay men I interacted with. That is, Thais brought photos of these stars with them to cosmetic surgery clinics. Second, and also common, the "manly" (*maen-maen*) or "circuit" type, is generally muscular in the chest and has six-pack abs (as does the first type). This type is epitomized by Thai stars such as Chaiwat Thongsaeng, who was popularized through his role in *Bangkok Love Story* (2007, the Thai equivalent of *Brokeback Mountain*). However, the most popular images of this type were of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese models such as Jason Chee, Jiho Lee, and Koh Masaki. This type of body is expected at circuit parties in Bangkok, and is common in the Silom area, especially in Silom Soi 2. It is most commonly associated with Chinese Singaporean tourists. Those interested in the cute type would refer negatively to muscular men as "crab claw" (*kam-pu*), suggesting that their bodies were out of proportion and overly developed in the arms and chest. Those interested in the second type often derided the first as "sissy." The third and fourth types were more particular *sapek*. This included an Asian bear or "panda," generally a large-bodied, muscular or chubby Asian. The fourth was the "bad boy" (*baet boi*), wild (*thuean*), manual laborer (*kon*), or *thai-thae* type of

darker skin, working class Thai men or migrant laborer who represented an authentic and sometimes dangerous masculinity. This last type, unlike all the others, was generally not considered boyfriend material, but more like what would be called "trade" in the USA, or a working class man desirable for a brief sexual affair. White Asians were associated with the first three types. The last type could include foreigners such as Burmese and Cambodian construction workers. Caucasians, who tended to be older and less fit, were marginalized by middle class Thai gay men. Though, young Caucasian men could also be quite popular.

Being an "Asian" or a "White Person" in Thailand

In this section, I ask if being "Asian" or a "white person" is new in Thai discourse. Jilliana Enteen (2010) has noted that "Asian" was being used by Thai gay men and a consciousness about being "gay Asian" developing in the period from 1998 to 2008. I first noticed the verbal use of the term "Asian" in statements like "I like Asian people" (*chop khon echia*) when I started fieldwork in January 2009 and the latter term "white person" (*khon khao*) during the interview with Krit in January 2011. "Asian" does not appear in any of my pre-field notes (2004-2006), which describe *farang* and Asian people of different nationalities: Japanese, Singaporean, Korean, etc. To investigate the historical use of "Asian" as a racial category to refer to a group of people that more or less refers to a race, I conducted database searches using the Global Factiva database of news limited to Thai language sources and the library databases of three major Thai universities: Chulalongkorn, Mahidol, and Chiang Mai. I also ran searches for "Asian" (คนเอเชีย *khon-echia*, ชาวเอเชีย *chao-echia*, ผู้เอเชีย *phu-echia*) in Google and Google Trends

functions to identify when the term becomes popularized in lay internet use. The earliest

academic use of "Asian" I encountered via the Thai university databases appears in a

1984 thesis offering an opinion on the problems of using fortune telling (*kanwat*

thatsanakhati: panha nai kan-chai pheua thamnai phreutikam) which specifically

primitivizes Blacks, Asians, and other foreigners (เช่น คนผิวดำ คนเอเชีย และคนต่างชาติอื่น *chen*

khon-phio-dam khon-echia lae khon-tang-chat eun). Another early use of "Asian"

appears in an article "Hepatitis B Virus that Causes Acute Hepatitis" in Report in Khon

Kaen Medical Journal (Vol 9 No 4 October-December 1985) which states that Asians

(*khon-echia*) might have a genetic predisposition to the agent. Few examples exist

through 2013 in the academic literature, and when "Asian" is referenced, it is focused

primarily on either Asian physiological differences or Asian colonial history.

The popular literature (from online sources) places the rare use of "Asian" on a

military document starting from the 1970s. However, the dates might not be correctly

attributed as Thai years are not aligned with Western ones nor are Thai websites

particularly reliable. Perhaps more important is when it becomes popularized; something

that Google Trend is able to capture for recent phenomenon. The internet became

available in Thailand in 1996, with broadband in 2004. While Thais are internet saavy

and among the most dedicated users of sites such as Facebook, there are still issues of

access, especially outside of metropolitan areas. One of the small Bangkok sois I lived in

had eleven internet cafes, open 24 hours a day, in a half-kilometer stretch. I do not rely on

Google Zeitgeist, which compares different countries; because it assumes that everyone

in the world uses Google as their primary search engine, which is not true in places like

Korea, for instance, where national search engines Daum and Naver dominate. However,

Google is the primary search engine used in Thailand, so within country use is relatively indicative of popular use among those with internet access. [26]

In the first Google Trend graph below, I compare the trending and relative use of variations for "Asian person" (*khon-echia*, *chao-echia*, *phu-echia;* the alternate spelling of *esia* is less common) with "ASEAN" (อาเชี่ยน *asian*, the geopolitical body which will allow internal labor migration within its regional borders starting in 2015 similar to the European Union).
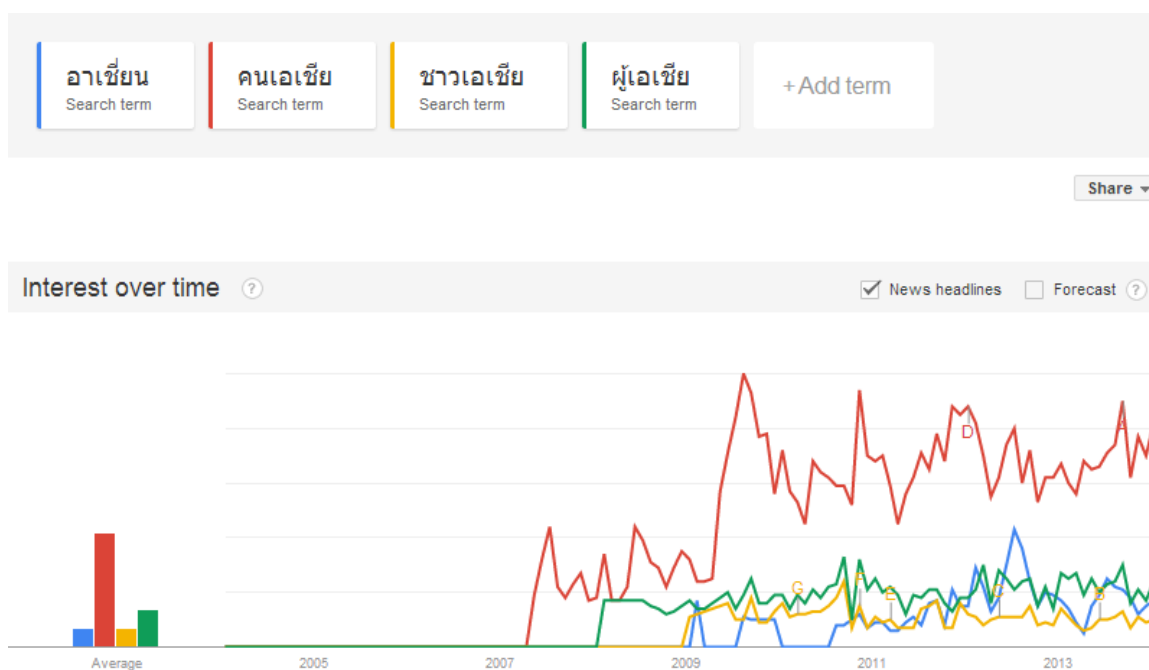
Figure 13: "Asian" Terms. Thai Google Trend searches using four common terms that mean "ASEAN" (blue, starting at 2009) or Asian person" (red, yellow, and green), accessed on January 22, 2014. The term most common term for "Asian person" (*khon-echia*) registers as a trend in online discourse only since 2007.

What the Google Trend graphs show is that the idea of an "Asian person" or "Asian people" (the terms are equivalent in Thai) is relatively new to Thai online discourse,

starting around 2007 with *khon-echia* being the most common term. This does not

identify a time for the initial construction of this idea, but rather suggests that this concept

becomes widely mobilized at this time. What is important here is that Asian people are

not new to Thai conceptions of race and difference, but rather that the identification of

"Asian people" as a group or being an "Asian person" takes on new significance starting

around this period of time. One area in which the term "Asian" is used is in cosmetics

that claim to be made specifically for Asian skin or hair, such as the Asience line from

Japan. That is, as Enteen (2010) notes, the processes of racialization are operating to

produce the category "Asian" starting from the mid-2000s when the concept did not

previously exist in everyday use.

The next graph compares the term "Asian" (*khon-echia*), with "white skinned

person" (*khon pio-khao*) and "white person" (*khon-khao*)
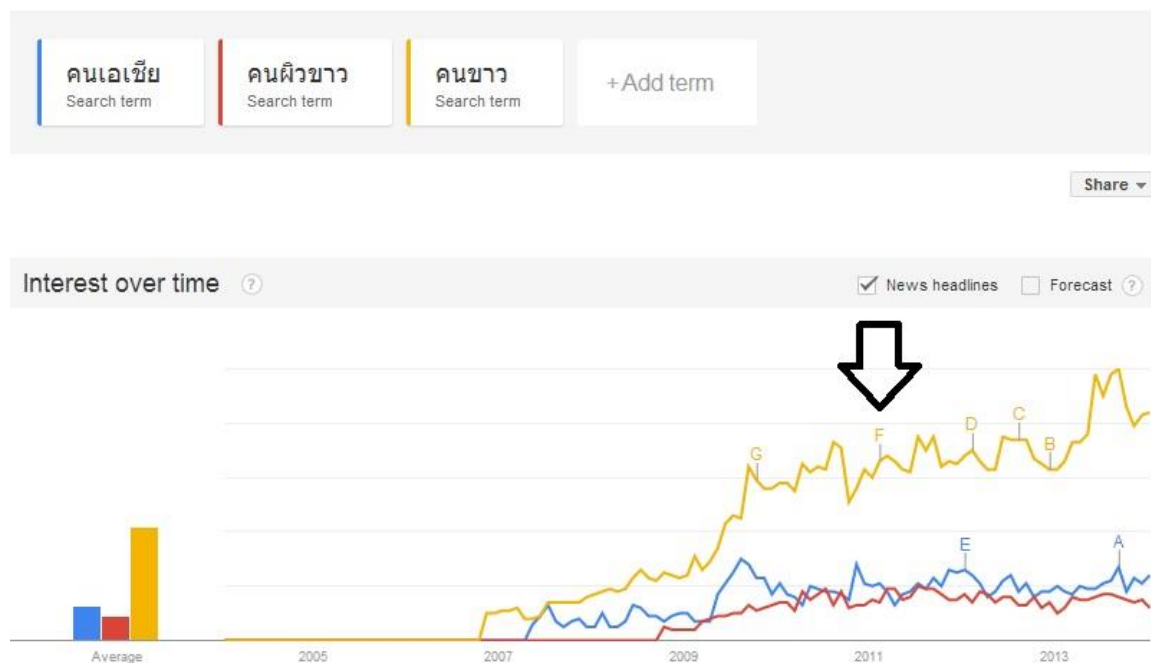
Figure 14: "White Person" Terms. Thai Google Trend comparing "Asian person" (blue,

middle line), "white skinned person" (red, lower line), and "white person" (yellow, top

line), accessed January 22, 2014. The blue line in this graph is the same as the red line in

Figure 3. Note that the terms "white skinned person" trends with "Asian person," but that

"white person" is more prominent. The letter F marked by the large arrow corresponds to

the article criticizing the Oishi Brightenn ad campaign described above. This shows that

the concept of a "white person" who is not Caucasian was developing before the

Brightenn campaign and its subsequent controversy.

The term for a "white person" actually precedes and is more popular than "Asian

person," while "white skinned person" and "Asian person" trend together, suggesting that

the desirability of light skin color precedes the racialization of "Asians."

 The next graph compares "Asia" (removing "person" so that it is more

comparable to "Asian" rather than "Asian person") to *farang* (which not only refers to

Caucasian people but can also modify things like moves or music, more akin to

"Western"), and the most popular Asian national terms, Japan/ese and Korea/n.
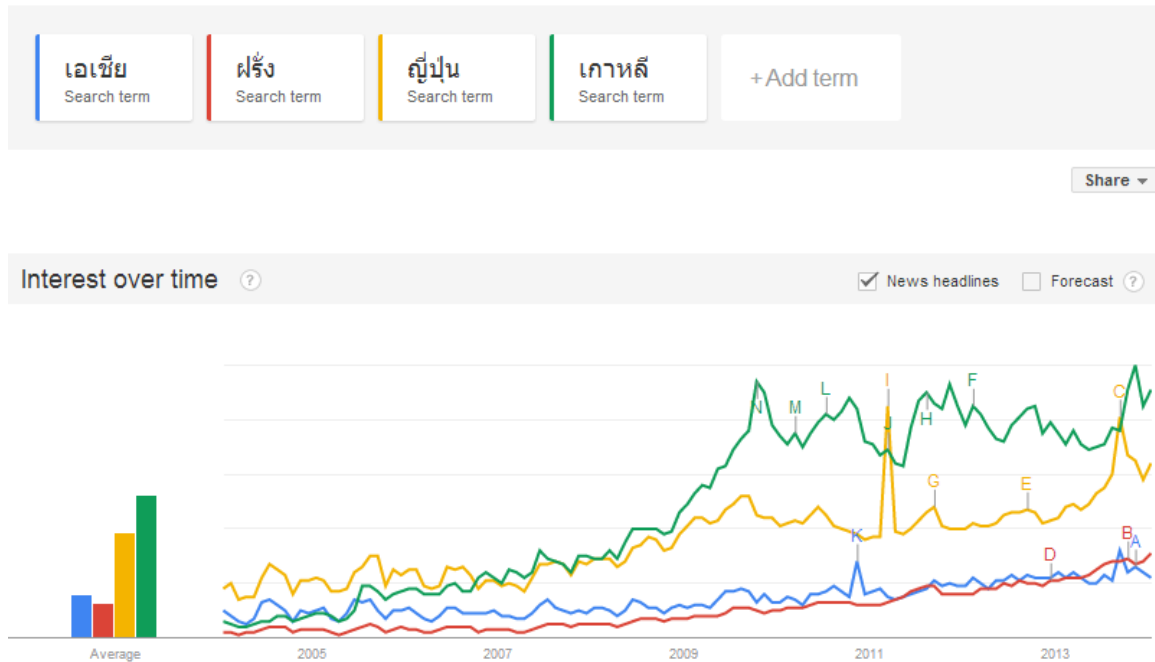
Figure 15: Ethno-Racial Terms. Google Trend search comparing the category of "Asia" (blue, initially second line, lowest line at end) in terms of relative online use compared to other groupings: *farang* (red, initially lowest line, third line at end), Japan/ese (yellow, initially top line, second line at end), and Korea/n (green, intitally third line, top line at end). Accessed January 22, 2014. As can be seen here, Asia is slightly more popular than *farang*, though the two are similar but not equivalent terms. The spike in the Japan/ese line at "I" represents the 3-11 Fukushima nuclear disaster. The spike in the Japan/ese line at "C" follows news that Thais beat Japanese at a women's volleyball tournament.

Figure 16 clearly shows the popularity of Korean and Japanese categories. They also point to, and are in line with, popular culture trends in the Asian region, where Korean popular culture becomes dominant over Japanese popular culture.

The following graph depicts the more equivalent terms of "Western" (*tawan dok*, the direction of the sun set) and "Eastern" (*tawan ok*, the direction of the sun rise). "Eastern" is the more popular term on the web.
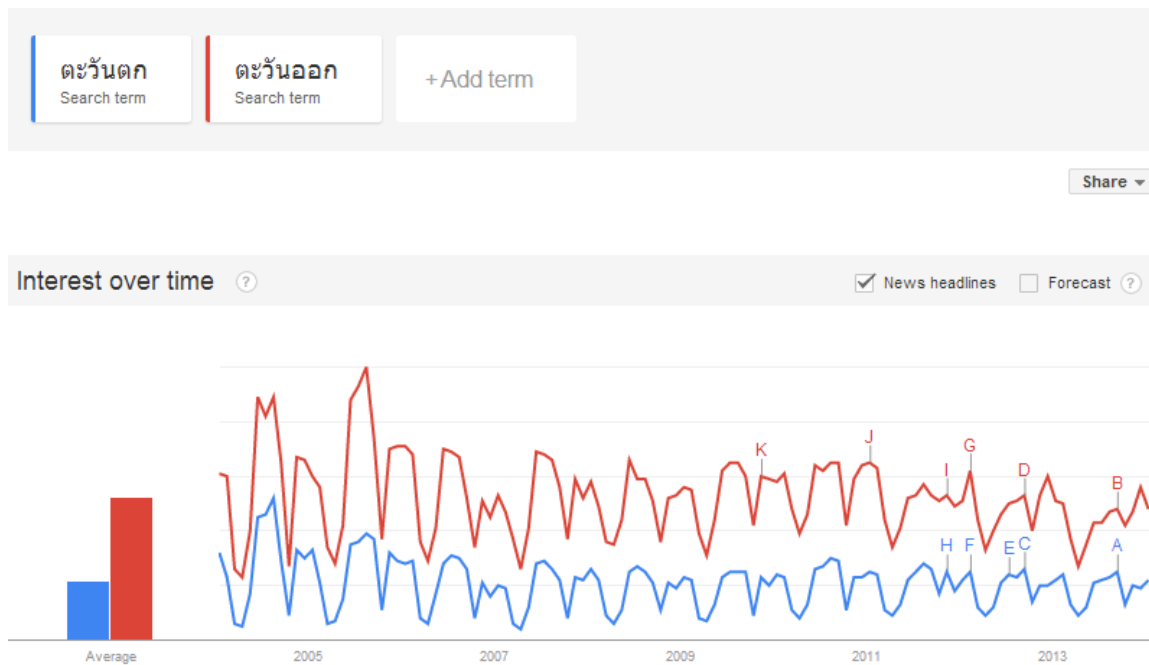
Figure 16: Hemispheric Terms. Western (blue, bottom line) is less popular than Eastern (red, top line).

Furthermore, within Asia, different countries have very different significance in the imagination of Thais. This next slide, using Korea/n as a reference point, compares other areas in Asia.
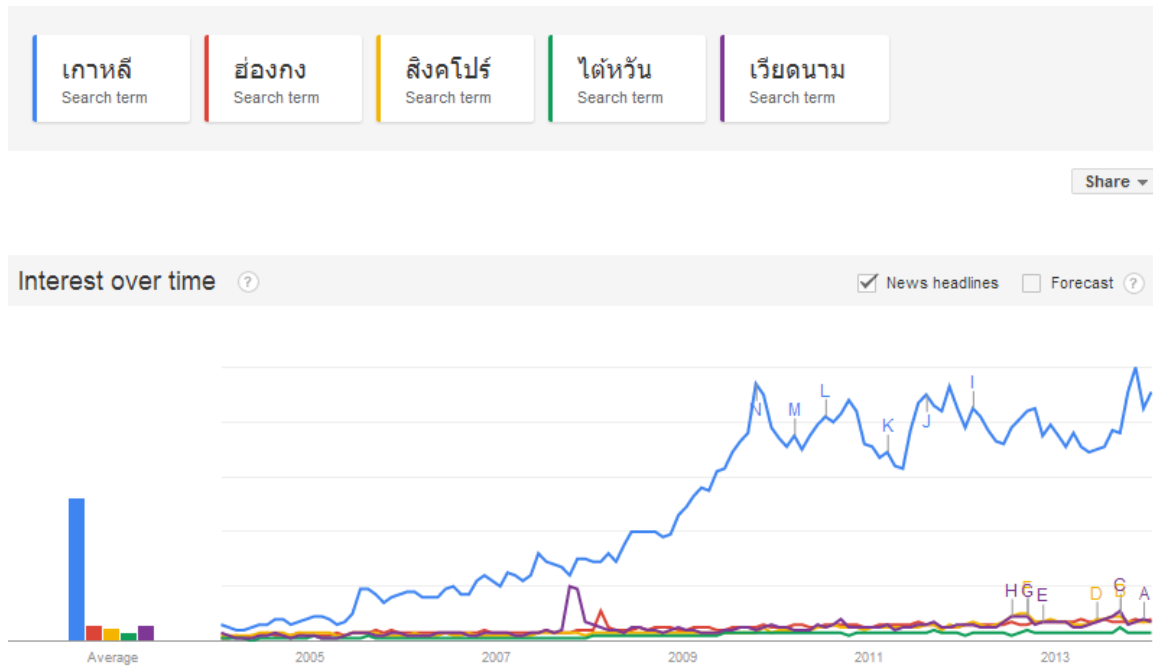
Figure 17: National Terms. Google Trend search comparing several countries in relation to Korea. Korea/n (blue, top line), Hong Kong/er (red), Singapore/an (yellow), Taiwan/ese (green), Vietnam/ese (purple); accessed January 22, 2012. As can be seen here, the other nations are much less significant than Korea/n in online discourse, visibly representing the Korean Wave. A term for China is not used as the term would be difficult to disaggregate for Mainland China, as "Chinese" does not only apply to China but would include Sino-Thais, Taiwanese, and other groups identified as ethnically Chinese. Note that Vietnam is relatively equal with developed areas of East and Southeast Asia.

Figure 17 dramatically demonstrates the popularity of Korean things in comparison to those from other white Asian areas. Only Japanese comes close to Korean in Thai online searches. Overall, these figures point to two main issues: 1) the recent emergence of

"Asian" and "white person" categories and 2) the relative popularity of searches for Korean and Japanese in relation to Caucasian (*farang*) and other Asian groups.

The terms "white person," not referring to Caucasians, and "Asian" develop around the same time. In this context, whiteness does not refer to *farang*, but to a general category of "white people" who are Asians with light skin. Indeed the Facebook group *samakhom niyom khon-khao* (Society for Those who are into White People) instructs its users to only post pictures of "white people," which, in this situation, means Thais with light skin.[27] These categories are newly emergent and relatively uncommon. Both "Asian" and "white person" pale in comparison to categories such as *farang* and the dominant Korpanese. However, these terms are not isolated but interact and, in my etic formulation, come together in the concept of the "white Asian," which is epitomized by the Korpanese. These ideas of "Asian" and "white person" (who approximate what I am calling "white Asian") are still new and evolving. In the next section, I describe how mapping practices and continental divides make a difference in terms of the construction of Asianness.

The Construction of "Asia" and "Asians" from Outside In

Asia as a thing and place, as a continent, is a construct from ancient Greece that has been adapted over the years to suit Euro-American needs. The earliest description of Asia is found in Herodotus' *Histories* written in 440 BCE (Painter 2010). For the Greeks, Asia referred to lands to the east of Greece, namely Anatolia/Turkey, the Persian Empire, India, and beyond. The Caucasus mountains also created a natural geographic but arbitrarily defined barrier that came to divide Europe from Asia. The third part of the

world constituted Africa. The center of the world was the Mediterranean. Widespread

trade, movement of people, and common ecological conditions integrated much of the

area. However, the expansion of Islam in North Africa associated it with "the Orient."

European expansion, and especially the "discovery" of the New World, increased its

power and hegemony. Colonialism and the ideologies justifying it were essential to the

construction of racial differences.

In contemporary times, the "Pacific Century" has expanded "Asia" and the "Asia

Pacific" region. I first encountered an Australian referring to Australia being Asian in

1999, and have heard this repeatedly at Asian Pacific conferences since. This kind of

thinking perhaps comes to a climax when Craig Emerson, the former Australian Minister

for Trade, in 2011 posts a webpage outlining his contribution to former Prime Minister

Gillard's "White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century."[28] Emerson focuses on the

"mutually beneficial enmeshment with an Asia that will be the dynamic center of the

global economy." The second paragraph reads:

> Australia is in the right place at the right time: in the Asian region in the
>
> Asian Century. We did not arrive by accident: visionary leadership
>
> resulting in early engagement set the platform for our integration into the
>
> booming Asian region. Australia's engagement with Asia is an ongoing
>
> project. The White Paper will equip us to ensure our trade and economic
>
> policy settings are right in a time of astonishing economic transformation
>
> within the region and at home.

That is, Australia was taking its earned place in the Asian region and would continue to integrate regionally. Indeed, this position perhaps insulated the nation from the 2008 Financial Crisis when Chinese investments continued to flow and prevented Australia from entering a recession as did the US and Europe. This policy, however, has not outlived a change in administration. And while I've often heard Australians say that Australia is a part of Asia, I've never heard a white Australian refer to themselves as Asian. Asianness, however, is not given, including for those within its geographic boundaries. Rafael (2000) for example, notes that the Philippines had to learn to identify as "Asian" vis-a-vis Spanish and American colonialism and Japanese domination.

This is all to say, Asia, of course, is not a given entity, but something that shifts over time, is contested, and deeply political. Beyond Eurocentric perspectives on Asia, to imagine Asia as a place from within Asia has different connotations, but is just as problematic. Domination and imperialism also occurs between countries in the region (Chen 2010). Asia's continental status and racial equivalent does not exist in regional consensus. In places such as Japan, where a common Eurasia continent exists on the map, there are notions of a postcolonial Asian sphere of which it itself is not a part. Indeed, for many Asians, Emerson's statements above are haunted by prior visions of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere based on Japanese racial superiority that justified its military and economic domination of the region.[29] Indeed, Japanese develop the concept of "Asian" in the 1930s when constructing a pan-Asianist ideology in which the Japanese would liberate Asians from European colonial rule (Dower 2012). Thailand was the only other country not formally colonized but nonetheless fell within this rhetoric as Japanese ambitions included Southeast and parts of South Asia. Japanese thus promoted Asian

cultural allegiance and economic unity as a means to gain regional dominance. Dower (2012:60-61) notes that "the Japanese were interested in other Asians only as subordinate members of the family who could be manipulated to play roles assigned by Japan." That is, Asia is emplaced in the Japanese imaginary through the desire to colonize its neighbors.[30] Thus, the construction of Asia comes about through its utility. In the Thai situation, "Asia" is increasingly important as an economic, political, and cultural unit. The "Asia" referred to takes shape in specific contexts, yet the general configuration is based on the economic alliance of ASEAN +3 (Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and Korea).

Precedents for Asian Whiteness

I also argue that the idea of Asians being white is not unprecedented, and in fact, is the way many Asians in Asia think of themselves. Asians were not always portrayed as yellow by Europeans. It was not until the eighteenth century that Asians became yellow. Painter (2010:44) cites a typology by Bernier, a seventeenth century French traveler and physician who considers Asians, including those from Thailand, as "truly white, but they have broad shoulders, a flat face, a small squab nose, little pig's-eyes long and deep set, and three hairs of a beard." In his book *Becoming Yellow*, Keevak (2011) notes that early European travelers and missionaries, starting with Marco Polo in the thirteenth century, refer to Asians as white. Asians only become yellow with eighteenth century science first described by Linnaeus, and then made unequivocal by Blumenbach in his description of a yellow "Mongolian" race, which applied to East Asians, as Southeast Asians were a separate "Malay" race regarded as brown (tawny).

According to Keevak (2011), yellow thinking allowed Europeans to portray themselves as more evolutionarily evolved than their distant "Mongolian" counterparts, with their infantile eyes, Mongolian spots possibly tracing where monkey tails previously had been, and features resembling those with Down syndrome. Europeans could be afflicted with such conditions, but their characterization for Asians demonstrated yellow people's childishness, lack of evolutionary development, and subhumanity. This justified European superiority and colonialism. However, European hegemony was threatened by the expansion of a Japanese empire and Asian migration to the West, which was cast as the "yellow peril." The concept of yellowness is imported into China and Japan in the late nineteenth century. "Yellow," which has positive associations in China, was adopted while the descriptor "Mongolian" was not. Japanese continued to describe themselves as white, and rather labeled other inferior Asians as yellow.

In the context of Asian American studies the category of white Asians can be particularly offensive as it invokes "honorary white" status, something that does not fit either Asian American historical memories of exclusion or lived experience (Kim 2007). Aihwa Ong (2003), on the other hand, focuses on the blackening of Cambodians and other Asian groups. Ong argues that there is a bipolarized racialization of contemporary Asian Americans from those who are whitened (for example, Chinese) and those who are blackened. Cambodians fall into the latter group because they are seen to have characteristics associated with African Americans, such as relatively high rates of welfare use, teen pregnancy, and incarceration.[31] Viet Tanh Nguyen (2002) also makes the controversial argument that Asian American studies must give up the essentialist view that Asians cannot become white in the USA.

There are global precedents for thinking about Asians as white, particularly the Japanese. Japanese American experience has been marked by the historical denial of citizenship and later internment during World War II. The denial of citizenship was based on the fact that US citizenship was previously only available to whites. In Takao Ozawa v. United States (1922), the Supreme Court ruled that only Caucasians were white and that Ozawa was of an unassimilable race (Takaki 1990, Ngai 2004). (Three months later the same court ruled in United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind (1923) that not all Caucasians were white, as South Asians were classified as Caucasians at that time in the USA.) However, in Brazil, Japanese were being treated very differently. Their presence in the nation was considered beneficial to its development as they were considered hard working, intelligent, and associated with the success of the Japanese nation (Tsuda 2000). Indeed, Jeffrey Lesser notes that Japanese immigration was considered desirable in Brazil where they were called the "'whites' of Asia" (2003:18). According to Lesser, in Brazil, upward economic mobility can change one's ethnic or racial categorization. By the 1930s Japanese were often moved from the "yellow" to the "white" census category and considered even more white than the Portuguese (Lesser 2007:24). This is a sharp contrast to the treatment of Japanese in the USA at the time. However, it follows the treatment of Japanese by European colonial powers in Asia.

The Dutch in Indonesia considered the Japanese to be "European." For example, according to Peter Burns' (1988:246) study of colonial law in the Netherlands East Indies, after the nineteenth century "the legal category of 'Europeans' included 'all Japanese and other peoples (for example, Americans, Argentineans, Australians) who came from states in which substantially the same family law was observed as that which

held good in Holland'. There, the category 'Foreign Orientals' encompassed all non-Europeans and non-natives on the basis of their observance of 'polygamous family law.'" Stoler (2002 and 1989:153 citing van Marle) also notes that during the early twentieth century, "the legal category of 'European' paralleled only loosely the idea of ethnic European origin. Included within it were Japanese, Jews, Arabs, Armenians, Filipinos, naturalized Javanese, the Sundanese wives of Dutch-born bureaucrats, the recognized children of mixed marriages, and Christian Africans, among others." Benedict Anderson refers to the Japanese in this context as "honorary Europeans" (2006:123). The French also considered the Japanese white in colonial Vietnam by treaty convention (Vann 2003). This was predicated on the relative power of the Japanese state in relation to colonized natives in other Asian nations and Japanese adoption of European Christian monogamous marriage as a legal standard (Loos 2006). Japan, like Thailand, self-colonized through modernizing efforts.

Other neighboring groups can also consider Asians as white. Ira Bashkow (2006) in his ethnographic study of the perceptions of white people in Papua New Guinea notes that "whitemen" were sometimes Asian (e.g. Japanese, Chinese, Filipino). Indeed whiteness was most associated with objects and concepts rather than people (e.g. foods, time, the church) which meant that whiteness had a life of its own independent of actual people and could perpetuate stereotypes in their absence. As I previously noted, Asians do not think of themselves as "yellow" but were described as such in early European anthropological classifications of race based primarily on skin color (Keevak 2011).

In *Living Color*, Nina Jablonski (2012) states that Japanese consider themselves to possess white skin. As in other societies, whiteness is also symbolically associated with

spiritual purity. White skin expresses class privilege and is an important component of female beauty. Prior to contact with Europeans, Japanese only used white (*shiroi*) and black (*kuroi*) to describe skin color. Japanese were white while groups such as Okinawans, their southern neighbors, were black. After contact with Europeans, in Japanese paintings they are depicted as gray or flesh tone, but Japanese continue to have white skin. In World War II depictions, war scenes show Chinese, Southeast Asians, and Polynesians as dark while Japanese are illustrated with white or near-white skin.

Laura Miller (2006), in her treatise on Japanese beauty, states that pale translucent skin, or the ideal of *bihaku būmu* (beautiful white boom), has been a Japanese ideal for centuries.[32] Since the Heian period (794–1185), following Chinese beauty ideals, wealthy women and men have whitened their faces with various substances, including toxic ones that could later be identified in the bones of the rich. Miller notes that contemporary Shiseido (a prominent Japanese cosmetics company) brochures claim that Japanese white skin is different from Caucasian whiteness both in its unique color and notable quality. Describing the popularity of skin whitening products, Ashikari (2005) also notes that Japanese consider their skin superior to Caucasian skin in whiteness and texture. Caucasian skin is darker, rougher, hairier, more spotted, and wrinkles faster.

Japanese are not the only Asians to make this claim. Other East Asians consider their skin whiter than Caucasian skin as well. In Leong's (2006) study, Hong Kongers rated their whiteness with Northern Chinese and Japanese as superior to Caucasians and much more refined than that of Filipinos, Indonesians, Thais, and Indians. In the context of Hong Kong, these latter ethnic groups engage primarily in low wage domestic, construction, or security work. The association of lightness with beauty and class are

found in other parts of Asia as well.[33] Young Filipinas desire the skin color of Japanese, Korean, Spanish- and Chinese-Filipinas (Glenn 2008). More recently, the Korean wave has influenced other nationalities to want to look Korean. This is also the case among Chinese women who are interested in Korean beauty aesthetics and cosmetic surgery to look more like Korean stars (Wen 2013).

There is also a whiteness culture in India. Picton (2013) refers to Indian's desire for light skin as the "fairness complex." Like other scholars, he traces the desire for whiteness in India via the ancient Aryan invasion of Dravidians (1500-200 BCE), subsequent development of the caste system partially based on skin color, and the firm entrenchment of racial difference through British colonialism. While acknowledging that there is tactical agency, following de Certeau, and a potentially subversive aspect to whitening, in that mimicry, following Bhabha, can mock colonial authority, Picton sees the fairness complex as a form of "Caucasianisation." Yet, in doing so, he fails to account for the pre-colonial history of skin color differences and the contemporary meanings he notes are associated with white skin: beauty, wealth, and success. Indeed, while his argument is based on advertising, his primary example being a "Fair and Lovely" commercial, the photographic examples he provides are of a fair skinned Indian woman on an Indian billboard, a Sino-Thai in a Thai product box, and what appears to be a Chinese woman in a Filipino advertisement. I thus suggest that a desire for white skin is not necessarily a desire to become racially like Caucasians.

Indeed, Parameswaran and Cordoza, in their analysis of advertisements, argue that "practices of skin lightening and their commercial discourses do not *necessarily* imply Indian women's desire to erase their ethnic identities and become the 'superior'

white racial other" (2009:217 emphasis in original). Rather, they point to growing middle class consumption since the 1980s that has exacerbated the negative associations of dark skin. The target of advertising is the growing pool of women working outside the home. Further, Parameswaran and Cordoza (2009:221) challenge "dominant Euro-American myths of a homogenous 'brown' South Asian population" by examining how light skin operates as a form of social capital related to racial, regional, and caste/class status. The accompanying bodily and psychic transformations not only make individuals more confident, desirable, and beautiful but are also linked to national economic development.

Jha and Adelman (2009) analyzed profiles and photographs on Indian matrimonial and mate-seeking websites. These sites are a common feature of Indian match making, with approximately 15 percent of Indians using them by 2007. They note that none of the profiles they analyzed self-identified as "dark" or "very dark," defaulting instead the category "wheatish" (like the color of wheat). Potential grooms stated a preference for lighter skin brides and generally married women lighter than themselves. Jha and Adelman note the near absence of dark skinned women in photos of successful marriages (only seven of one hundred photos assessed).

The important point, however, is that colorism is not necessarily racism and that color and race need not be conflated.[34] In summary, Asians can think of themselves as possessing white skin and there are both European colonial and new world immigration contexts in which groups like the Japanese can be considered racially white.[35] The desire for lighter skin, with exceptions such as Japanese tanning and subcultures such as *ganguro* (blackface), is associated with beauty and class standing. Thus the desire for

whiteness continues to act as a disciplinary force, molding bodies and behaviors to produce white skin as a marker of status.[36]

Miller (2006) also cautions against reading desire for features that appear Caucasian as wanting to be Caucasian. She instead interprets them as different experiences of modernity rather than a mimicry of Western bodies and styles. That is "Japanese beauty experimentation does not always have to be read as a form of deracialization" (2006:101). More recently, Miller (2015) has contended that Caucasians misinterpret Japanese beauty practices as a sign of wanting to be Caucasian, as a means to erase their Japanese features. Wanting larger eyes does not mean wanting Caucasian eyes, but rather those eyes that the majority of Japanese women already have. Early surveys of Japanese women's eyes from the late nineteenth century note that the majority of Japanese women already have large eyes. Current trends reverse previous hierarchies in which the smaller eyes favored by Yayoi elites were prized over Jomon features. "Foreign observers suspect that young Japanese are playing at being white [Caucasian], but it is truer to say that they are playing at being manga and anime characters and Japanese pop stars" (2015:12). Porath (2015) also cautions against interpreting Thai beauty practices as a desire to mimic the West. The desire for white skin is long standing and high-bridge noses are a common feature of Buddha images. While there were different beauty ideals twenty years ago, Porath asserts that when contemporary Thais dye their hair blond, it is not to look Western, but rather to look like Korean pop idols.

Locating Desires: Bangkok at the Heart of Gay Asia

The figuring of "gay Asia," in the Thai imagination places Bangkok at its heart. "Asia" is a geography in progress. Clearly, places like Cambodia do not constitute contemporary Asia in the minds of many Thais. Bangkok has the largest and most international gay scene in Asia.[37] The vast majority of gay venues in Bangkok, however, are rarely accessed by foreigners. With few exceptions, only the bars, clubs, and saunas in the Silom area cater to international visitors, and *farang* are generally limited to this area. Clubs throughout the rest of the city operate on a very different table system than that of the West or East Asia. Most importantly, these venues provide bottle service, which lends itself to group sharing. Though a number of Asian expats and visitors participate in these venues, *farang* rarely do. Many online sites warn Westerners not to go to local venues, especially on their own. *Farang* are often avoided in these spaces, though there may be some curious Thais who are willing to interact with Caucasians. Most Asians who do attend such venues, go with Thai friends. However, it is not uncommon to encounter groups of Koreans, Chinese, Taiwanese, or ethnically mixed groups of Asians who have found information about the venues in guide books, online, or via word of mouth.

Some specialized gay venues cater to white Asian travelers and the Thais who seek their partnership. This advertisement for Chakran Sauna (Figure 18) from a free monthly gay magazine exemplifies how "Asians" are racialized in contemporary Thai discourses.[38]

Figure 18. An advertisement for Chakran Sauna, 2009

The model for the ad appears to be Sino-Thai or *luk-khreung*. Importantly, his skin is light and his body is muscular. The combination signifies new middle class gay subcultural styles that emphasize masculinity and fitness. Working out at the gym indicates economic status that becomes materially embodied in the flesh. Text exists in both Thai and English. The tagline, in Thai, translates to "The Meeting Place for Asians."

Being in Thai, it is clearly addressing Thai men who are interested in meeting Asians. (Other Chakran ads also state that this is a venue for Asians in English, Chinese, and Japanese.) The Thai text also describes discounts for those under 25 years old on weekdays.[39] Most importantly, the advertisement defines who these "Asians" (*chao-echia*) one will meet at Chakran are. The countries listed on the map (in clockwise order) are China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore. That is, the groups I have been arguing constitute white Asians (China and Vietnam being more recent entries). It is also important to note, that in the context of gay communities, Malaysia and Singapore are reduced to Chinese from Malaysia and Singapore. Those of Malay and Indian descent would not be thought of as "Malaysian" or "Singaporean" without some ethnic modifier. They are relatively rare in Thai gay venues. Thus, those from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore constitute the tropical Chinese group. On the map, Bangkok is situated at the heart of gay Asia, where people from these other countries converge.[40] The map schematically outlines both the central role of Bangkok in the inter-Asia gay scene and invites only men from white Asian groups as belonging to this space. Caucasians and the West are completely omitted in this representation of the sauna's clientele. This construction of Bangkok and gay Asia is radically different from what would be expected from a Western perspective. The US, UK, Germany, Australia, and other major countries that send tourists and expats to Thailand are not represented at all.

The Rising Status of Mainland Chinese

In this section, I focus on the rising status of Mainland Chinese through the narratives of Krit. Krit demonstrates his ambivalent feelings toward Mainland Chinese men in simultaneously idealizing their Sinitic phenotype while invoking their lack of refinement in comparison to Sino-Thais and other developed Asians. Krit was the first Thai person who called me a "white person" (*khon khao*). I met Krit at a bar in Ortorkor, in a situation similar to how he met Jason below. He was average height but very pale, considerably lighter than me, with longish black hair that swooped to one side, partially covering his right eye. When he smiled, a crooked tooth stuck out. The first time I met Krit, I was with a group of friends at Fake Cafe, which is a sit down, open air bar next to its more popular sister Fake Club, so it is easy for someone to spot someone else there and go to their table to say hello, unlike the club next door, which on the weekends was always packed. It could take ten minutes to walk from the front door to the restrooms in the back, a distance of about 50 feet, making it easier to exit the club and use the restroom at the bar next door.

Krit was in a cruisy mode, looking for a date. He had left his table of friends to go chat with other tables, something that is more common at Thai gay bars after the midnight show, when patrons have had enough alcohol to feel "confident" in interacting with strangers. He knew my friend Max, so Krit boldy sat down next to us and started chatting. When he left, Max warned me. "Don't talk to him so much, he is very possessive. He will tell everyone that you are his boyfriend to prevent them from talking to you." At one point later in the evening, Krit saw me again and asked for my number, which I gave to him. He entered my name in his iPhone as "Jet Korea" (Jet was one of my Thai nicknames, a simplification of Dredge, which had no Thai sound equivalent; เจ็ท

is the Thai loanword for "jet" as in airplane, which is a homonym for เจ็ด, or the number

seven). He said he would call me later in the week to have dinner or something, so I said

OK. At this time, he was with another friend of his. So I introduced myself to him. (Thais

typically do not introduce strangers to each other in situations such as this). In the end, I

also gave his friend Ped my number as well.

When Krit called me the next day, I asked if I could interview him, that I was

doing research on gay men in Thailand and their relationships. We agreed to meet at a

restaurant near my apartment as he lived on the outskirts of Bangkok and had a car. I

started by asking my basic questions about his background. Then I asked him if he ever

had any Thai boyfriends. I went one by one and asked him to describe the relationships

and some of the dynamics of them. Then I asked if he had ever had boyfriends who were

foreigners. He had. The previous year he had had two brief relationships with men from

Mainland China, one from Beijing, the other from Shanghai.

Krit met Jason, from Beijing, in the same bar he met me: Fake Cafe. As Krit

states, with a glowing affect: "When I first saw him, I thought he was gorgeous. He

looked like a Korean star. I couldn't tell how tall he was because he was sitting. But he

had the lightest skin I had ever seen, and his eyes were so shiny and black, so they stood

out. He was also wearing a white jacket with small, bright-colored stripes on it. I

remember it looked very refreshing." Krit was immediately enamored. "I wanted to go

home with him that night, but I had to give my friends a ride home." So they agreed to

meet the following day for lunch. After lunch, they were "attached." That day, Krit went

back home and packed a small bag so that he could stay with Jason in his hotel in the

Ratchada area. They developed a normal routine of going sight-seeing, going to eat, going to bars together, and having sex every night.

Over the course of their two week relationship, Krit became increasingly disgusted by and resentful of Jason. While Krit was particularly aroused by Jason's body and large penis, he felt that the sex was one-dimensional. Jason did not care whether Krit had an orgasm or not. Krit also thought Jason was dirty because he did not shower after sex. He merely rinsed his penis in the sink. This made Krit uncomfortable sleeping next to him afterwards. Krit also felt that Jason was cheap. As a banker, he could afford to pay for their meals. But Jason asked Krit to share expenses such as the cost of food that Krit would cook. Krit was especially hurt that after basically living together for more than a week, Jason still did not call him by his name. He would shout things like: "Hello! Hello! Bring me a cup of water," where the salutation stood in for Krit's name and made him feel like a servant.

For Krit, this scenario reconfirmed his beliefs about Mainland Chinese. Krit, who identifies as Sino-Thai, said that he did not like Mainland Chinese because of their "uncouth" and "rowdy" behavior. Also, he thought that Chinese young men were too selfish, because they were spoiled by their parents, being the only child. Just a few months later, however, Krit would have a brief relationship with another Mainland Chinese. "His name was also Jason, I thought, do they only have one name in China?" This time, they met at DJ Station, and Krit thought that Jason (who I will refer to as Jackson to differentiate them more easily) was Singaporean. Krit noted that he would not have approached Jackson, but felt the courage to do so because Jackson was alone. Furthermore, being alone made it likely that he was a foreigner.

Jackson worked as a salesperson for a high-end watch store in Shanghai, selling designer and gold watches that often exceeded $10,000. This was his third trip to Bangkok (he made an annual trip), having come the first time for the gCircuit party in 2008. As he was on vacation, Jackson went out every night, even if he had to go out alone as his Thai friends were middle class professionals who had to work during the week. Krit, being an MBA student, had a more flexible schedule. One of Jackson's Thai friends had arranged a one month rental in a condominium for him at a local price, which was the equivalent of about three nights stay in an international grade hotel.

While Krit felt the first Jason treated him like a servant, he felt Jackson treated him like a tag-a-long. Jackson already had friends in Bangkok and knew what he wanted to do. So Krit felt like he was getting in the way of Jackson, rather than being a part of Jackson's life. Furthermore, even though Jackson was renting a condominium, meaning that it would be easy for Krit to stay there and live together as a couple while Jackson was in town, this was not Jackson's interest. Jackson was very curt and expected distance in the relationship. Additionally, Krit was surprised at Jackson's lack of interest in sex. This came to a halt when Krit realized that Jackson was also a bottom (receptive in anal sex). Krit had assumed that Jackson, who was muscular and always going to the gym, was a top. Furthermore, even though Jackson seemed to be a person of means, he was living in a way that was "low-class." For example, his condominium came with furnishings but not linens, so Jackson slept on a vinyl covered bed with no sheets. Krit considered this very *sokkaprok* (literally "dirty," but also "uncivilized") and could not spend the night with him.

In the end, Krit's two experiences with Mainland Chinese men confirmed his beliefs that they were inferior or inappropriate partners. In particular, for Krit, the main issues were cleanliness/classiness and selfishness. Krit notes that Mainland Chinese men have a reputation for being self-centered because of the one child policy. Krit also portrays Mainland Chinese as unclean or uncivilized in comparison to Thais, and especially Sino-Thais like himself. Yet, he found Chinese men to be aesthetically very attractive and said he would consider dating another one if they were more compatible. Krit, like many other Thai men I interviewed, noted that he was "bored" with Thai men. When I asked Krit if he would date a *farang,* he said that he would consider it, but that he was not interested (*mai son-jai*) in Caucasian men. This registered in a much softer tone than the responses in some of my other interviews, where Thai men would use terms like "can not" (*mai dai*), "don't want" (*mai ao*), "don't like" (*mai chop*), and "not polite" (*mai suphap*). Krit, like many other Thais, turned the question around on me and asked if I could introduce him to one of my Korean friends.

In these two scenarios, Krit, a Sino-Thai meets Mainland Chinese men who look like other nationalities to him: Korean and Singaporean. That is, they appeared like people from more developed countries. His desire was not for a Mainland Chinese, but rather an Asian from a developed Asian nation. However, these Chinese men appeared to be from developed nations. Over the period of my fieldwork in Thailand, the number of Mainland Chinese has dramatically increased. Indeed China is now the largest sender of tourists to Thailand. Among gay men, their image has improved significantly. It has become quite common for images of Chinese men posted on Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter, to circulate among Thai gay men on their Facebook pages and web

postings. Images, when reposted, frequently retain their Weibo watermark, or have a Thai watermark partially obscuring it. There are, however, intense debates about Mainland Chinese tourism to Thailand. Tourist policies in places like Phuket have aimed to limit them as part of Thailand's overall strategy of having fewer, more "quality" tourists. Many retailers and agencies, however, are capitalizing on Mainland Chinese shopping. King Power, the largest duty-free retail chain, now requires their staff to learn basic phrases in English, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Russian.[41] I have several friends who work for the chain. One of them, Em, told me that his commissions were very high now because of the Mainland Chinese tourists. "They come in looking shabby and with bad breath. But then they buy a 30,000 Baht [$1,000] watch and pay for it in cash." After I repeated this story to another friend, he replied: "That's what they are, peasants with cash." That is, they have developed economically but are "new money" that lack the cultural capital associated with wealth. In the terms of Andrew Johnson (2013), they have economically developed (*phattana*) but not culturally progressed (*charoen*). Yet, their increasing wealth and presence in Bangkok is making Mainland Chinese increasingly desirable partners for middle class Thai gay men.

Vietnam: Southeast Asia's Rising Star

The shift in what is considered "Asian," referring to developed Asia, is also apparent in the treatment of the Vietnamese in Thailand. Vietnam is a latecomer to ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which includes ten of the eleven states in Southeast Asia. The original ASEAN 5 (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand), a sub-grouping of the most economically powerful nations in

ASEAN at the time, came together in 1967. This subgrouping is increasingly being usurped by references to the ASEAN 6, which includes Vietnam, as the Vietnamese economy has been growing rapidly. My partner throughout my research, Nguyen Tan Hoang, is Vietnamese American, born in Saigon and raised in San Jose via refugee camp in Pulau Tengah, Malaysia and resettlement in New Orleans. His presence, as well as that of one of my adopted Vietnamese gay daughers, and other Vietnamese friends and family, inform my fieldwork.

Throughout the period of my research, I have had numerous family and friends from various ethnic and national backgrounds visit me in Thailand. They included Koreans & Korean Americans; Vietnamese & Vietnamese Americans; white, black, and Latino Americans; other Asians from the US, Australia, and Europe; Japanese, Taiwanese, Singaporeans, Burmese, Indians, Germans, Belgians, and French. My experiences introducing friends and family in different Thai settings inform much of the work presented here. For example, the popularity of all things Korean in Thailand is not news. However, the rapid change in desirability of Korean and Vietnamese partners shows how closely desire is keyed to economic development. Indeed, during my first trips to Thailand in 1998 and 1999, Koreans were not high on the social radar. By the time I started preparatory field research (2004-2006), Koreans had already become desirable partners. Indeed, many people I met, once learning that I was Korean, would immediately start discussing their favorite dramas and stars. Sometimes, they would produce VCDs and other materials as evidence. One of my first Thai friends in 2004, Bee, made it a point to take me to his apartment and show me his collection of Korean

films and dramas. At the time, I simply thought it was quirky. But I soon came to realize the significance of this event, and it was regularly repeated.

My partner was also an unexpected complement during my research. In Thailand, asking if one is married or has a boyfriend/girlfriend (*faen*, the term is gender neutral) is very common in everyday Thai discourse. Marriage continues to be a marker of adulthood, though marriage, and especially being a parent, is less important to determining that status in relation to education and employment in urban middle class environments. In gay venues, where sexuality and the potential for romantic relationships is highlighted, the first questions one is asked include name, age, relationship status, sexual preference, and employment. Early on, when people asked me if I had a partner (*faen*), I would gesture to him. The next question was invariably whether or not he was Thai. My response would be "No, he is Vietnamese." This simple statement elicited numerous negative responses that were made in his presence such as: "How can he afford to come here [Thailand]?" or "I've never met a well-dressed Vietnamese before." These comments clearly referenced Vietnam as a lesser developed country that lagged behind Thailand. However, within a few years, Thai discourse about Vietnam changed. Indeed, many political commentators express anxieties that Vietnam's economic development will soon surpass that of Thailand. During the period of my fieldwork, Vietnamese had become legitimate partners. My having a Vietnamese partner became normal. My Vietnamese friends were in demand as lighter-skinned Asians. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the map of Asia provided by Chakran Sauna, a gay bathhouse that caters to Asians and the Thais interested in them. In Chakran advertisements in February 2009

(see Figure 18), Vietnam was literally placed on the map of "Asia," as was China. This map was used in different variations for Chakran ads throughout 2009 and 2010.

Being emplaced on Chakran's gay map of Asia represented that large numbers of Vietnamese tourists were coming to Bangkok. In 1997, there were 28,122 arrivals from Vietnam to Thailand (Tourism Authority of Thailand).[42] This number rose to 254,252 by 2007, an 804% increase in ten years. By 2011, arrivals were 496,768 or a 1,666% increase over a fourteen year period. This development follows the economic development of Vietnam and its growing middle class. It is also facilitated by the introduction of low cost carrier routes between Vietnam and Thailand. Air Asia began offering routes between Bangkok and Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) in 2007. As of 2012, Air Asia flights travel between Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and Da Nang to other cities in the region. While a Thai route between Ho Chi Minh City and Phuket was tried, the airline now only flies from HCMC and Hanoi to Bangkok. The regular full fare for round trip tickets between Ho Chi Minh City and Bangkok were $188, including all taxes and fees.[43] Online discounted tickets were $120. Passengers who plan well in advance can purchase promotional tickets for $46 round trip and, occasionally, a free ticket, only paying airport fees. By contrast, flying Vietnam Airlines, the national carrier of Vietnam, would cost $396 for a flexible ticket and $204 for a restricted one. Fares on Thai Airways, Thailand's national carrier, are similar to those of Vietnam Airlines. Since 2008, the number of arrivals from Vietnamese has surpassed that of Hong Kong, one of Thailand's historical tourism markets. In 2009, Vietnamese arrivals outnumbered those from Taiwan. Although there is technically no direct currency conversion from Vietnamese Dong to Thai Baht, numerous money changers in the Pratunam, Siam, and

Phatumwan areas provide the service. Air Asia's routes have also inadvertently produced a flood of Vietnamese gay tourists in Bangkok. Because there is only one national carrier in Vietnam, it is now cheaper for Vietnamese from both Hanoi and HCMC to fly to Bangkok than between these Vietnamese cities. Once in Bangkok, staples such as hotels and food are also cheaper. Thus, Bangkok has become a relatively inexpensive and desirable destination for Vietnamese gay men, who have become a common feature of the gay scene.

Vietnamese university students are also increasing rapidly in the Thai higher education sector. As the Vietnamese university system is relatively undeveloped, education tourism to Thailand, which the Thai government is promoting, provides an alternative to much more expensive Western nations. These increasing numbers have also contributed to changing how Vietnamese are perceived by Thais. Indeed, echoing media reports, my Thai friends and informants often state that Vietnam is developing faster than Thailand, and will likely surpass Thailand as Malaysia has done.[44] There is extensive elite discourse in academia and the media about the rise of Vietnam within the ASEAN Economic Community. For example, a report from Chulalongkorn University "The Strength of the Vietnamese in Achieving National Development" (*jut-khaeng khong wiatnam su khwam-samret nai kan-phatthana prathet*) highlights the fast rise of economic development from strategically deployed capitalist policies.[45] The increasing competitiveness of Vietnam brings forth questions like whether Thailand will align with China and Vietnam or continue its ongoing relationship with Japan. China is already Thailand's largest trade partner and on track to build a high speed rail network from Shanghai to Singapore that would create a number of routes in Thailand, further

integrating China with Southeast Asia through travel and trade. In 2012, Thai news reported a national loss of face when Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam made the "Best Countries for Business" top 50 list (9, 32, and 46 respectively).[46] The shame came in Vietnam outperforming Thailand in the ranking. As Manager's Weekly 360° put it, "Rather, it's because [Thais] feel loss of face or disgraced since Vietnam has only been developing a free market system for less than 20 years" (*hak-tae pen phro ruseuk sia-na reu ap-ai mak kwa neuang-jak wiatnam nan phoeng-ja phatthana rabop setthakit kan-talat reu rabop setthakit seri ma phiang mai thueng* 20 *pi*).[47] Vietnam also surpassed Thailand in the 2012 Legatum Institute Prosperity Index (53 vs. 56).[48] The opening of Myanmar in 2012 is also creating fears about Thailand losing its key business position in mainland Southeast Asia, though Thailand is best poised to exploit the resources and business opportunities in Myanmar.

Vietnamese, like Mainland Chinese, were moving up in the world in Thai eyes during the same period in the late 2000s when most developed economies were in recession. Further, besides being mapped onto an Asia of economic means that allows travel to a cosmopolitan center such as Bangkok, Vietnamese are popular for their light skin. Indeed, one of my local daughters, was routinely mistaken for Korean because of his light skin and aesthetic style. Thais routinely comment on the quality of Vietnamese and Burmese skin as being lighter and clearer than Thai skin, even if they are from poorer countries. This skin fairness also makes Vietnamese increasingly desirable partners.

Figure 19: Vietnamese model Chan Tan San in a fashion layout and working out.

Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans such as Johnny Tri Nguyen have been appearing as models and actors in Thai media. However, Trần Thanh Sơn aka Chan Tan San (ชาน ทาน ซาน) made headline news in September 2010 when a series of articles appeared about the Vietnamese model following his appearance on the popular Woody *Koet Ma Khui* ("chat about emerging topics") talk show (the Thai equivalent to the Ellen DeGeneres Show), prompting women and gay men to start circulating his images through web posts. Posts about Chan Tan San received so many hits that he received the 2011 "Most Talked About Guy" award from men.mthai.com. As someone who openly discusses having extensive cosmetic surgery as part of his life narrative (which is common in Thailand), he represented transformation in the context of Vietnamese

national development, expressed in terms of Vietnamese increasingly getting cosmetic surgery and thereby participating in the world of modern Asian beauty aesthetics. Chan Tan San had also built up his skinny body into a muscular one, revealing his diligence. In particular, his new look and hard work was associated with Koreanness. Chan Tan San had transformed himself from an "ugly ducking" into someone who looked like a K-pop star.

The Korean Wave: Recasting Popular Culture Aesthetics

The "Korean Wave" or Hallyu refers to the popularity and expansion of Korean popular culture since the late 1990s, particularly in East and Southeast Asia, in such countries/regions as Thailand, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, and North Eastern India. Korean cultural exports such as films, television dramas, animation, music (K-pop), video games, and software have increased in both mass consumption and critical acclaim. The wave was given an additional boost after Korea co-hosted the 2002 World Cup with Japan, highlighting the prominence of these countries as leaders in Asia. Korean media (especially film, television drama series, and music) has become ubiquitous in the East Asian region and is helping to create an East Asian identity (Chua 2004). Forty-one songs of the Asian Top Fifty on Channel V (the regional equivalent to MTV) were Korean in 2009. Not only is Korean audio-visual media popular in terms of the number of consumers, but it is also tied into and promoted through newspapers, magazines, advertisements, websites, and other commercial ventures. Following the popularity of Korean media, Korean lifestyle products such as clothing, cosmetics, electronics,

appliances, cars, and other goods, services, and aesthetic techniques (plastic surgery, eyelash extensions, big eye contacts, etc.) have become desirable commodities. South Korea has become a travel destination for those who want to visit the location of television drama scenes, shop for Korean cosmetics and fashions, and try the food seen in Korean film and television dramas. Learning the Korean language has become popular in East and Southeast Asia to increase understanding of Korean media and culture as well as to ask for autographs from Korean stars who are performing local concerts or on promotional tours. Given the popularity of Korean media and consumer products, Koreans have come to represent a new beauty standard in the region.

Thailand is one of the countries in the region that has gone *ba kaoli* (crazy for all things Korean). In 2008-2009, eighty-three Korean dramas aired on Thai television, typically on expensive prime-time and weekend slots. Korean stars are popular models in advertisements that sell lifestyle products targeted to women and youth. So much so that the Thai cosmetics brand Cute Press advertised that their "Korean Trend" products can "make you as beautiful as a Korean woman." By 2010, 78.25% of Thai women had tried Korean cosmetics, which are significantly more expensive than local products (and the same products in Korea) because of customs duties and a luxury goods excise tax that increase their price by 300%. The largest mall in Bangkok, Central World, has a zone dedicated to Korean cosmetic stores. Many stores separate Korean and Japanese cosmetics from Thai and Western brands, often with signage stating that they are "real" products from these countries, as Chinese counterfeit products are readily available on the street and in stalls at lower-end malls. Thus, the popular Japanese store Loft has

sections for Japanese and Korean cosmetics labeled: "Cosmetics guaranteed from Japan" and "Cosmetics guaranteed from Korea."

Korean drama "addiction" has been described as a social problem in the Thai media. In their 2010 advertising campaign, the Pizza Company suggested ordering delivery so that one can watch Korean series uninterrupted. My friend Mark's mother was hospitalized after becoming "addicted" and watching a series on DVD non-stop for three days. Dramas and K-pop in particular have made Korea a desirable travel destination. In 2009, 190,972 Thais visited Korea. Thais often cite visiting the sites of their favorite television dramas, eating the food they see on the dramas, and shopping for cosmetics as primary reasons to travel to Korea. Thai Travel guides for Korea focus on these topics and tour groups specifically advertise these itineraries. Since 2000, seven Thai universities have introduced Korean language as a major. Korean has become one of the most popular minors in Thailand and private schools teaching Korean have sprung up throughout the country. This assemblage of media, commodities, and symbolic capital is referred to collectively as *krasae kaoli* (Korean trend) or *kaoli fiwoe* (Korean fever). Yet, the very trendiness of Korean products shows that they have not yet become incorporated into a ubiquitous mainstream, they are specifically marked as "Korean" rather than just being movies, dramas, or music.

The popularity of Korean popular culture follows on the heels of music, television, film, comic books, fashion, and other media forms from Japan, Hong Kong, as well as Taiwan. Korean media, including K-pop, circulates via mediascapes (Appadurai 1996) whose contours are shaped by political economic and cultural forces.[49] This includes an increasing anti-Westernism since the 1997 Asian economic crisis, which hit

Thailand and South Korea the hardest. Both Thai Baht and Korean Won plummeted, losing approximately half their value. This meant that Korean commodities remained affordable to Thais, comparable in price, while American, Japanese, and European goods doubled. At the same time, there has been increasing solidarity among Asian nations. The regional collective of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) plus its permutations, which is most commonly conceived of as ASEAN +3 (Japan, Korea, China), effectively ties Southeast and East Asia together in a common region with shared economic trade, political coordination, and cultural influence. But these flows are conditioned by pre-existing relations of national development and global hegemony in which Southeast Asia more often finds itself the recipient rather that the donor. Furthermore, soft Korean technologies have not flourished on their own merits alone. Korean government policy actively invests in cultural industries and promotes their export (Dator and Seo 2004, Shim 2008). The Japanese government is now following this model in an effort to disseminate Japanese cultural products under the branding of "Cool Japan."

While American popular culture still dominates many media forms, the media ties between East and Southeast Asian nations is arguably creating a "pan-East Asian identity," particularly in regards to middle class urban representation (Chua 2004), what Lim (2008:45) refers to as a "taste continent" of imagined East Asian identity. In 2009, Korean music comprised 17.5% of the Thai market while Western pop music has a relatively small share of Thai music sales (Siriyuvasak and Shin 2007). Nevertheless, Western music is ubiquitous both in commercial centers such as shopping malls and bars, like Korean pop, it is associated with the urban middle class. Even when the English

language can be bypassed through sound, it is usually used for transliteration. However, the presence of K-pop in particular is challenging the ubiquity of American pop music and has refashioned the soundscape of contemporary Thai modernity. For example, in January 2009, approximately one third of music videos played on the three large LCD screens between Siam Center and Siam Paragon were Korean. Overall, the enhanced experience of East Asian media in Southeast Asia has displaced concerns about Western cultural imperialism onto East Asian cultural imperialism (Chua and Iwabuchi 2008). Furthermore, new media in Asia has been transformative in the expression of sexualities (Berry, Martin, and Yue 2003). This is particularly true among queer communities because the internet provides a venue to develop subcultures, especially when they are marginalized in civil society, such as among sissies (Lin 2006).

Mediascapes are not continuous but flow via lines of class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Korean media is most popular in Thailand among the young urban middle class, women, and gay men. When K-pop was introduced to Thailand, the genre consisted primarily of male artists targeted to female fans (Siriyuvasak and Shin 2007). As such, K-pop has become a medium popular for middle-class Thai girls to express their individuality and trendiness. But the K-pop formula is also popular with gay audiences, especially after the introduction of girl groups. In fact, K-pop (*khe-pop*) is joked about as "Gay-pop" (*ke-pop*) in slang, the only difference in sound being the aspiration of the "K." K-pop cover dance, or the copying of movements in K-pop songs, has become a defining feature of gay bars, where the majority of music played is neither Western nor Thai, but Korean (Käng 2014b). The imitation of Korean girl group dance and lip synch performances proliferated in all class levels of gay bars and most social settings. Korean

pop songs, however, usually do not penetrate Silom Soi 2, an alley of five bars and one disco, which are foreigner friendly. This area is known for its more Westernized gay bar scene, catering to foreigners, which attracts both a higher class Thai gay clientele and Thai sex workers. The large disco DJ Station has a no K-pop policy, so as not to offend the large number of Western patrons. There are, however, two exceptions. JJ Park, which is similar to a piano bar with live music, and Expresso, a bar that caters to young Thais that avoid white partners (it is often referred to as a "sticky" bar, or one in which Asians seek Asians). K-pop music and dancing is found at both. Thus K-pop becomes an indicator of non-Western identification for the clientele of spaces where it is played, including the majority of gay bars in Bangkok. In this way, it shapes, as Chua (2004) argues, a newly emergent pan-Asian identity. Finally, Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, is often linked to the economic rise of Korea. What should be emphasized, however, is that the popularity of Korean products is not just about the rise of Korea, but mutual rise. It should also be understood as the rise of China and other countries like Thailand that have developed a large middle class consumer base for the popular culture and related lifestyle goods. That is, the expansion of Korean popular culture into other areas can be accounted for by the expansion of the middle class and their consumerist aspirations.

Imaginings of Korea and difference can also be used to contest local forms of marginalization. In her paper, "'They Have Matching Bodies:' Ladakhi Student Migrants' Engagement with Korean Popular Culture," Elizabeth Williams-Oerberg (2014) describes how Ladakhi college students in Delhi negotiate modernity and morality in the context of being designated a "tribal" ethnic minority from the Northeast of India. In their position as urban migrants, students distinguish themselves both from those

Ladakhi back home and from mainstream Indians, who consider Ladakhis to be un-Indian: backward and foreign. In order to shore up their position vis-à-vis their mainstream Indian counterparts, Ladakhi students rely on "Korean" (which actually refers to anything from East and Southeast Asia) popular culture, especially fashion, hair, and make-up styles. For Ladakhis, their more Sinitic phenotype allows them to identify with "Koreans" as having "matching bodies," that is, sharing racial features that differentiate them from both mainstream Indians and Westerners. As American culture can be considered debased, Korean popular culture provides an alternative that is modern and foreign, but morally accepted. Ladakhi students can thus claim to be more cosmopolitan than Indians following Indian styles. Indeed, Indian students will consult with Ladakhi students on developing a more fashionable style. Adoption of "Korean" style thus is used as a strategy for Ladakhi belonging within the context of their marginalization as Indians. I suspect that this pattern can be broadened to understand the appeal of the Korean Wave in other contexts, such as Thailand. Korean media provides access to an alternative modernity that both contrasts with the values of the West but allows one to be contemporaneous with the West.

In this chapter I have focused on issues of racialization in the contemporary Thai context. I describe two groupings of people "Korpanese" and "tropical Chinese" in referring to sub groupings of Asians popular among middle class Thais. I also describe features such as the Korean Wave and the rising esteem of Mainland China and Vietnam. I do this to set up the foundations for a hierarchy of desire for different Asian bodies. From the perspective of Thais, all Asians are not equally desirable partners and some are

altogether undesirable. I argue that desirability for certain ethnic others is keyed to factors such as skin color, class markers, economic development, and popular culture trends. This makes Korpanese the most desirable, the tropical Chinese desirable, and is positively changing the perception of groups such as Mainland Chinese and Vietnamese. This hierarchy is further elaborated in the next chapter.

I also use the term "white Asian" as an external label to describe the recent racialization of Asianness. Thais themselves do not use the term "white Asian." As noted earlier, they simply refer to an "Asian" or, less frequently, a "white person." Which Asians counts as "Asian" is tied to indigenous notions of race (for example excluding South Asians) and relative financial clout. Thus, as in the Asian American context, where Cambodians are blackened, so too are they in Thailand. This is not simply a reference to skin color, but functions to justify economic disparities. For example, Burmese are considered lighter skinned than Thais but are not considered white Asians because of their relative national impoverishment and their role in Thailand as low wage migrant workers. In this sense, the Thai use of "Asian" approximates my use of "white Asian." That is, "Asia" is a place of modern prosperity, and one in which Thais want to belong. In the following chapters, I describe some the frictions produced in various representations of queer Thailand. In particular, I juxtapose foreign and variously positioned Thai concerns that highlight the overrepresentation of sex tourism and male effeminacy. I frame this within a wider rubric of Thailand being a "gay paradise" and how this can be experienced differentially by Thais, other Asians, and Caucasians. Finally, I demonstrate both the application of a positive exception for white Asians and the negative sentiments attached to relationships with *farang*. The sexualization of Thais as sex workers in

Western media and Thai contact zones ironically has the outcome of interpellating

Caucasian men as sex tourists. This promotes new social practices in which middle class

Thais hide or avoid *farang* partnerships to maintain class distinctions.

CHAPTER 6

Eastern Orientations: Middle Class Gay Desire for "White Asians"

Tao is a doctor who works at Chulalongkorn Hospital, affiliated with the most prestigious university in Thailand. Originally from the south of Thailand, Tao has dark mahogany skin, common to people from that region. He also sports a mustache, which is distinctive as few Thai men grow facial hair. When I first met Tao, he was in medical school, living part time with his father and part time with an older Japanese man. Tao is a self-professed Japanophile. "I like Japan. I like Japanese people. I like Japanese food. I like Japanese language. I like Japanese culture. I like everything Japanese." He was taking Japanese language classes in the evenings at a private school adjacent to the Erawan Shrine in the Ratchaprasong area. His rationale to his father for living with a Japanese man was to practice his Japanese. Tao had been to Japan numerous times and did his medical residency in pathology there. When I first met Tao, he professed that he was only interested in Japanese men, or at those who looked Japanese. He asked me a joke: "What is the anthem of Babylon [a gay sauna known for its heavily Caucasian clientele]?" "I don't know," I replied. He responded: "We wish you a merry Christmas. We wish you a merry Christmas [chuckling]." I noted that I did not understand. Tao replied, "the men who go to Babylon are old and fat *farang*. They all look like Santa Claus!" Tao then emphasized: "I already look more like a money boy more than a doctor because I have black skin." So for Tao, dating someone who liked like Santa Claus would only exacerbate the situation. Though, over time, it became apparent that Tao's singular desire for Japanese men was more flexible than he stated.

One day when I had to go to the AIS store, one of the main mobile telephone companies in Thailand, and Tao accompanied me, he commented on an ad in the store featuring the popular model and actor Boy Pakorn Chatborirak. Boy has pale Sinitic features and sports a signature mustache, in the same style that Tao had. Tao pointed to the ad and said: "he is my *spek* [type]." I replied, "I know, he looks Japanese. He has that same mustache you do that is popular with Japanese gay men." "Exactly," Tao replied. Yet, Tao also showed romantic interest in two of my non-Japanese friends, one a light-skinned Thai (Mark), the other a Hmong from the US. Upon meeting my Thai friend, Tao immediately told me about his interest. I reminded him that he was Thai. "Yes," he replied, "but he has features I like that Japanese people have. He has white skin and a really high forehead." They did go on some dates, but nothing serious evolved. Another day, when I was at Central World Mall, being interviewed with Oa by a Belgian journalist interested in my research on Thai desires for East Asian men, I ran into Tao. He was with a young French man. We greeted each other and then, speaking in Thai so that his companion would not understand, Tao asked: "He's really cute isn't he?" "Yes," I replied, "are you dating?" Tao nodded. They dated off and on for two years. Twice the French boyfriend asked Tao to marry him and twice Tao declined. Though the jealousy Tao expressed when the boyfriend interacted with other Asian men possibly demonstrates his investment in the relationship.

Tao also expressed interest in another one of my friends Teev, who is Hmong American. Tao initially described him as "very cute, sexy, and nice." Tao had heard us speaking Korean together with some of my other Korean friends and thus assumed that Teev is Korean. He was confused when I told him Teev was *Mong* (Hmong), as Thais

tend to use the more derogatory term *Maew*. When he asked who Hmong were, I noted that Teev was "*chao khao*" (hill tribe, *khao* here refers to "mountain" and not "white"). Tao was shocked. "Really? But he looks so adorable? Is he Thai? How do you know him and why does he speak Korean?" I explained that Teev was Hmong from the US and had studied abroad for two years in Korea. Tao still looked confused. "How do *chao khao* get to emigrate to America?" I explained that his family was from Laos and that the US resettled Hmong refugees who had been persecuted for aiding the Americans in anti-communist war efforts in Vietnam and Laos. I showed Tao a couple YouTube videos on my phone of another Hmong American, Txawj Vam, whose renditions of K-pop cover dances had gone viral. "Wow, he's so cute too. He looks Korean too." Tao, like many Thais, thought of hill tribe peoples as backward and uncivilized. Meeting Teev changed that impression. Tao though, began to harbor resentment of Teev, as he suspected his French ex-boyfriend had become sexually involved with him.

Tao is attracted to a certain ethnicized aesthetic, primarily Japanese. The antithesis for him is a "Santa Claus" type *farang*. Not only are they not attractive to him, Tao recognized that his dark skin would make him look like a money boy in such a coupling. Furthermore, Tao emphasized that he wanted a partner who is "like me" in education, occupation, and background. Tao wanted a relationship with someone who was more or less an equal. This was one reason that he idealized Mark, who had graduated from Chulalongkorn and had a professional career with an overseas firm. For Tao, Mark could be *khon khu thao-kan*, an equal partner in a relationship. In this chapter, I describe the paradox in framing Thai desires for white Asian men. Middle class Thais are simultaneously asserting a desire for egalitarian relationships while also

differentiating themselves from those of lower status. These twin issues situate midde

class Thai gay men within local moral worlds at their intersection with global political

economic hierarchies. The friction of cross-cultural encounters provides the means

through which class distinction is made possible.

In this chapter, I hope to show that the race of foreigners and the class standing of

Thais in particular, do make significant differences that drastically alter one's perspective

and experience of public gay life in Thailand. I argue that race and class are frameworks

that orient variously situated actors in the world to some partners and not others, to some

sapek or *spek* (specifications or qualifications). These orientations are not absolute and

fully determined. They are constrained and enabled by our personal experience of the

world as variously positioned individuals within preexisting, but evolving social

structures. I provide evidence for my argument that white Asians are becoming more

desirable partners than Caucasians through the mediation of Thai class distinctions.

However, this is not a straightforward argument about the rise of Asia and how desire is

formed through political economy. I complicate this narrative through multiple

perspectives and varying situations that show the overall trajectory and also reveal limits

of my argument.

I start by describing how Caucasian foreigner experiences of Thais are class

structured. The caricature of the Western male sex tourist on first arrival is of a man who

grabs every Thai woman in sight, unable to tell which women are "respectable,"

assuming all of them are prostitutes available for a cheap price. If a tourist focused his

trip on the beachside of Pattaya or Patong in Phuket, he could very well leave with this

impression intact. Foreigners, and especially tourists, have the most interaction with low

wage service workers, some of whom are desperate for a way out of their life trajectories or Thailand itself. I describe forms of desire that eroticize difference and class based sexual strategies. I also show how Thais and *farang* manage their lives so as not to appear as sex workers or patrons of prostitutes. I address middle class Thai gay men's strategies of managing relationships or avoiding them, which functions to avoid social stigma attached to sex work. I describe an example of how interracial partnerships do "out" sex workers. In the next section, I describe the hierarchy of Asian desirability as it maps onto my previous discussion of white Asians and explore Thai gay men's stereotypes of various white Asian groups. The positive and idealized imaginings of other Asians often lead to personal disappointment in relationships. Finally, the chapter ends by summarizing some of the cultural, technological, and economic forces that enable the desire for white Asian partners. These desires are not only molded by the friction of interactions with Caucasian men, but also facilitated through new channels that have only recently become available.

Bifurcated Experiences

One of the longest interviews I conducted was with the legal scholar and human rights activist Esmond Colonel, Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia Faculty of Law. Esmond and I have shared a professional and personal relationship via our connections with Thai gender diversity rights and our mutual interest in transgender spirit mediumship common in the region (see, for example, Spiro 1967, Morris 2000, Fjelstad and Nesmondẽn 2006, Peletz 2009). In 2010, we jointly sponsored a *nat pwe* ritual at the Taung Pyone Nat Festival in Myanmar as the Brother Lords (see Brac de la

Perriere 2005). Esmond probably owns the largest private collection of Thai phallic charms (*palatkhik*). When I interviewed him, it was in a hotel lobby, but I imagined his collection surrounding him. He was such an avid collector of antiques that he had to rent the unit next to his to store them all.

At the time of the interview, Esmond had resided in Bangkok for sixteen years. But he has been visiting Thailand regularly since the 1970s. Thus, he provided a rich oral history of his relationships and the evolution of the gay bar and sauna scene in the Silom area, from its beginnings when one had to knock on a door and be screened before gaining admittance to a bar to its expansion into open air bars and large club venues outside of downtown Bangkok. Esmond has also been chronicling many of the changes in police relations, sex work, human rights, definitions of gender, same sex marriage, and other issues related to his expertise in law. He shared with me papers he had written and his copies of old gay guidebooks to Thailand, such as *Trees in the Same Forest: Thailand's Culture and Gay Subculture* (Allyn 1991) that are not publicly available in the USA and are rare in Thailand. His personal experience of Thailand, however, has been highly structured by class differences. His social and professional relationships are typically with elite Thais, including those with connections to royalty. On the other hand, in his daily life and sexual/romantic relationships, his interactions are generally with working class Thais such as security guards, food vendors, and sex workers.[1] Indeed, when I asked him to reflect on a Thai middle class perspective, his response was: "I don't know. I don't really have any interaction with middle class Thais."

This differentiation of experience with higher and lower class Thais is not uncommon among many foreigners. As noted earlier in the section on foreigners in

Thailand, Asians who are not migrant workers from neighboring countries in Thailand are likely engaged in professional work and are thus more likely to interact with colleagues who are white collar Thais or those in managerial positions. By contrast, most Caucasians are expatriates of the holiday class, who are most likely to interact with Thai service workers of relatively lower social standing. This difference in employment situation is likely to significantly shape foreigner perceptions about Thais as well as Thai perceptions of various national groups.

The Same Repels

I was talking to an acquaintance, Bryan, about his vacation trip and in the course of a few minutes he had repeated the phrase: "I was the only *farang* in the village" several times. As he narrated it, during Songkran (Thai New Year), one of the most popular times for tourists to visit Thailand, the number of *farang* swells in Bangkok. He is thus repulsed and must go to the countryside where he can avoid being with other *farang*. That year, he went to Koh Chang, a relatively isolated island in the East of Thailand with his Thai boyfriend. As previously noted, in rural Thailand, Caucasian men are seen as wealthy. Bryan noted that one man was offering his niece to him, but that he was not interested. Describing the trip as he did, he showed how being the only *farang* made him special. Indeed, being a foreigner (a difference of nationality) and standing out because of his race, also meant attracting the positive attention of others.

For Bryan, avoiding other *farang* also meant that he was having an authentic experience of Thailand. Furthermore, it also worked to minimize the perception that he was "dating prostitutes." He noted that being in *farang* enclaves, other Thais and tourists

alike will think of you as a "dirty, old *farang*." He thus avoided large stretches of Sukhumvit Road, which are popular with *farang* as well as Arab, Japanese, and Korean foreign residents. There are, along this stip, two concentrated areas for *farang* men seeking Thai female and transgender companionship (Soi Cowboy and Soi Nana). The numerous sois catering to Japanese men are less conspicuous, being integrated with restaurants and other businesses as opposed to being in entertainment zones. Thus entering a Japanese soi does not have the same resonance as, for example, going to Nana Entertainment Complex. Bryan thus tried to avoid looking like a *farang* sex tourist or sexpatriate by avoiding other *farang* in public settings. Although he lived on Sathorn, an easy walk to the Silom bars, he rarely went because there are "too many moneyboys" who will approach him. Bryan insisted that it was impossible to find a true relationship, based on authentic love, in that kind of environment.

Indeed, mirroring the Thai fear of being seen as sex workers, *farang* also have the fear of being seen as sex patrons. Numerous *farang* university professors and English teachers (all men) have told me about the discomfort they feel in public, when a student sees them at the mall or on the train and talks with them. Because of the age difference, they feel that the interaction looks unseemly. As one professor put it, "I don't want to look like a nasty *farang*." This, of course, is based on the context of having interactions in certain spaces rather than others. One would expect these kinds of differences in educational settings, but not in others. Another *farang* teacher, Seymour, recalled an incident to me, where he went to meet a Thai professor at Chula. They often went out together. However, when his professor friend went to buy coffee, he asked Seymour to

wait outside, in case any of his students were in the café. Seymour took this as an indicator that his friend feared that his students would think they were in a relationship.

Similarity can be both a point of social identification and connection as well as discomfort or anxiety. For example, I would often meet Koreans at bars. If I heard them speaking Korean, I would just introduce myself. Usually, this was met with a friendly response. However, at times, it provoked distress and a horrific reaction. Korean tourists were often very happy to meet me and thought that my knowledge of the city and ability to speak Thai was an asset for them. On the other hand, several Korean residents I knew actively avoided me or would politely greet me and then disappear. Similar to the "only *farang* in the village" scenario above, I suspect that they saw me as competition for the attention of Thais. That is, they wanted to maintain their status as the only Korean, though not necessarily the only non-Thai Asian, in the bar, as one of the Koreans I saw most regularly went to the bars with a Filipino friend.

Korean friends of mine also noted that there were social and legal reasons for such avoidances. Many Korean gay men are closeted and sometimes heterosexually married (see Cho 2009), a phenomenon which is relatively rare in Thailand.[2] Thus, being identified in a gay venue is a potential threat. This is especially true given the ubiquity of smartphones and Facebook posts. I often saw Korean men shielding their faces when pictures were being taken around them. During one of my trips to Korea, my friend Jae-min noted that Koreans can be legally prosecuted for embarrassing the nation while overseas. So some are very conscious of potentially damaging photos being spread online. Indeed, a photo of a 2AM K-pop boy band member going into DJ Station, the most popular gay club for foreigners in Bangkok, created a scandal in Korea in 2013.

Additionally, some flights returning from major gay Asian circuit parties are targeted. Korean nationals who look gay (e.g. have a mustache), are stopped for random drug testing using urine and hair samples. Positive testing incurs a prison sentence. The Korean state still uses strong authoritarian practices to regulate social life.[3] This makes some Korean gay men in Bangkok wary of other Koreans.

Given the number of Japanese in Bangkok, surprisingly few participate in the gay bar scene. I had a number of Japanese friends from Japan who liked to go out when visiting Bangkok, but the Japanese residents I knew rarely did so. One of my "daughters" was Japanese, so he would typically talk to anyone he suspected was Japanese. Most of these people, however, were straight women who were going to gay bars. The only time I have ever seen two Japanese gay residents in the same bar was because it was my birthday and I had invited them. Indeed, my two closest Japanese gay friends clearly stated that they were in Bangkok because they did not like other Japanese men. I actually tried to set the two up on a date, which they refused, both professing their desire to date a Thai or other Asian instead. Ryouta, who lived a few minutes walk from me, stressed that Japanese men had a bad attitude or personality (*nisai mai di*) in comparison to Thai men. Ryouta continued to have regular contact with Japanese men, as he worked as a Japanese tour guide for Bangkok and neighboring Ayutthaya and Pattaya. I spoke with both of these Japanese friends entirely in Thai. Neither felt comfortable speaking English. Both had had relationships with Thai men and Hiro was fluent in Thai to the point that he was writing a master's thesis in Thai. Both men did not socialize with other Japanese or other Asians who did not speak Thai. Their motives, however, seemed more of a

disidentification with Japanese compatriots rather than a desire to be the only one of their kind to attract the attention of others.

Only Foreigner in the Bar

Another American friend of mine, Dewon, preferred to be the "only foreigner in the bar," by which he meant the only non-Asian in the bar, or the only person who does not look like they could be Thai. As a large black American, he felt disadvantaged in the Silom area, where "pretty muscle boys" get all the attention, except of course, from money boys, and he had a rule that he did not pay for sex, though he regularly gave "cab money." Our regular spot was ICK, a large lower middle class bar in the Ramkhamhaeng area of Bangkok. He would cringe on the rare occasion that a *farang* walked in the door, but was happy to share a table with me, my partner, my daughters, my Asian friends and family, our Thai friends, and another black American friend who would sometimes join us.

Dewon was well aware of his undesirability in middle class Thai settings. He had dark skin and a disability which made him walk with a limp, was overweight, wore thick glasses, and made a modest living. He employed two different strategies to meet Thai men. One was to live outside of Bangkok, in areas with fewer foreigners, which made him stand out, using his foreigness and meager income to an advantage. The other was to concentrate his efforts and become a VIP at ICK, by going regularly and tipping generously. The benefits included having a regular table in the most travelled location of the bar at the corner of the stage near the restroom entrance, having extra attentive staff, getting inside information from the staff on people he was interested in, and going on

company holidays with the staff. This endowed Dewon with special status within the bar and enhanced his desirability.

In summary, the Thai avoidance of *farang* was not the only kind of social avoidance operating. The context of different spaces also factored into what behavior was considered appropriate, or when it was suitable to be with certain others rather than other others. This did not happen only along lines of race/ethnicity, but also along the lines of class, gender identity, and other factors. Foreigners who understood Thai preferences could use their difference and the mobilize the assets that they did have to meet potential partners. For Dewon, socializing lower on the social scale was his strategy for meeting men that would be open to his advances. Dewon knew how to play the game and felt that he was winning by targeting a venue where he could maximize his dating potential.

Bars & Bottle Politics

Very few of my middle class Thai friends would ever go to a bar like ICK, even if I pleaded with them. When I asked Oa, a friend I had met a couple years earlier at Ortorkor, fond of drinking Johnnie Walker Black,[4] about going to ICK we had the following exchange:[5]

Dredge: I'm going to ICK this weekend. Do you want to go?

Oa: Who introduced you to ICK? I think it is not a good place, na [particle to be polite and soften the statement].

Dredge: Why isn't it a good place?

Oa: Hahaha. I don't like that place na. It's very local [โลคัล *lokhan*].

Dredge: Why don't you like local?

Oa: I am not high class [ไฮโซ *hai-so*]. But I don't like the people there. I have been there, na. Do you know Sake [a working class gay club near Khaosan and Sanam Luang]?

Dredge: Yes

Oa: It looks even lower [class] than Sake.

That is, middle class Thai gay men thought a place like ICK was beneath them. Here the bar is too "local" or impoverished. However, Oa was also not interested in "inter" (*intoe*) places, like Silom, as he avoided *farang*. He preferred the solidly middle class and nearly exclusively Thai bars at Ortorkor. Once, I went to meet Oa at Ortorkor and said I was bringing a friend, which he said was fine. I arrived with a *farang* friend. Oa gave me a look, and though very polite and smiley to my friend, was quiet and distant the rest of the evening. Language was not an issue as Oa works in a tourist oriented business where he interacts with foreigners regularly in English. But he had only seen me previously with my partner and other Asian friends, so I interpret this as Oa having anticipated that I would bring someone Asian, and bringing a *farang* was inappropriate.

Shortly after this experience, I had a similar recurrence, which made me think that a pattern was emerging in regard to bringing *farang* into spaces that were not considered "inter." I was invited by Mark to an upscale karaoke, Sensations, in one of Bangkok's many Sofitel Hotels. I had gone a number of times before with my partner and another mutual Thai friend. The crowd in the front of the bar, which was open, as opposed to the private rooms in back, consisted mostly of wealthy middle-aged Thai women and upper-middle class 30-something professional Thai gay men. Occasionally, the women and men

would be accompanied by husbands, boyfriends, friends, or drivers. But for the most part, the space was quite intimate and dominated by a few key characters. More than anything else, the space was a place of leisure for the middle-aged women, whose husbands were generally too busy making money to spend time with them. The gay men seemed like oddly appropriate entertainment. When the women's husbands did show up, they did not seem to mind seeing their wives act as flirtatious fans to a gay man crooning to Diana Ross songs. These regulars dominated the bar space, while other, mostly younger guests, would enter and rent the private rooms in back. Guests of the hotel rarely entered this space and, when they did, tended not to stay for more than a single cocktail. The music was mostly older Thai pop music, some *luk thung* (Thai country music), with the occasional Diana Ross hit, Mandarin ballad, or K-pop dance track—these foreign songs all being sung by gay men.

My friend Mark always had at least one bottle of Johnnie Walker Gold[6] behind the bar counter. He bought them in sets of three bottles, as part of a promotional offer. I found it ironic, that unlike Thai dance clubs, where the bottle is almost always on the table in the midst of other tables, so that one can literally see what other tables are drinking, and people do pay attention to what is on other people's tables, at high end venues like this, the bottle is hidden out of sight. Indeed, many of my Thai friends regularly chastised me for ordering "cheap" bottles like Blend, Benmore, or 100 Pipers when Red Label was often considered the minimum of middle class respectability. At Thai dance clubs, on busy nights, one would expect to mix one's own drinks. Though at a higher end venue, or one in which one was a VIP, one could expect a server to stand by the table and constantly mix drinks. Here, at Sensations, the waitresses, spotting a glass

that has had two or three sips taken from it, would whisk it behind the bar, where the bartender would add another dash of whisky and the mixers of the patron's choice, before it was returned to the table. At this higher end venue, the ostentatious focus on brands was muted.

On this particular night, I had interviewed a *farang* friend of a friend, Ryan, who worked in the production of Asian (Thai and Japanese) pornographic media. I invited him to go out with me afterwards. I told Mark that I would be coming with both my partner, who he was very familiar with, and another friend. When the three of us arrived, Mark was very friendly, but seemed a little nervous. As my partner and I had been to this venue numerous times, we did not have to order. Drinks arrived immediately as the bartender already knew our desired mix. These were poured from Mark's bottle without question. However, Mark handed Ryan a bar menu and suggested he order a cocktail. Ryan, seeing that both my partner and I already had a whisky-soda in front of us, said he would have the same. So the bartender poured one for him from Mark's bottle, which made Mark cringe.

Mark clearly did not want to share his bottle with Ryan. I knew Ryan could not stay long. Otherwise, I would have suggested that we open a new bottle ourselves, separate from Mark's, because I knew that Mark, as a proper host, would not take money from us. Ryan stayed for two drinks, and I suggested that he offer Nick the amount listed in the menu for two whisky-soda drinks. As I expected, Mark did not accept the money. However, what was significant was Mark's attempt at separating Ryan from his bottle-group.

The politics of the bottle differentiate in-group and out-group membership. Sharing the bottle creates a kin-like circle around the drinkers. Generally, these will be close friends, people who you can trust not to ditch you with the bill at the end of the night, but can include guests (e.g. friends of friends, new dating partners, paid companions), people with whom table members are flirting, and neighboring tables once everyone is drunk. Not uncommonly, a patron will host a table. For example, a shop owner or manager at the office could invite his employees or subordinates, and sometimes paid companions as well. Sometimes, a single table will have more than one bottle because the individuals are not familiar enough to share a bottle or split the check "American" style, dividing the bill evenly. For example, if one person brings a few friends who are unfamiliar with the others, they may subdivide into a separate bottle group. Occassionally, complete stragers have to share a table because the bar is out of space. In this situation, two small parties of two or three will be located at a single table.

What was significant in this situation with Mark, is that I had previously brought a Vietnamese friend from Germany, and Mark had no concern sharing his bottle. That is, race made a difference in how he responded to the friend that I brought. When I later asked about this situation, Mark said that he was protecting the respectability of the Thai women. This suggested that for Mark, the mere presence of a *farang* man was tainting to the integrity of the Thai women present. However, given the circumstances of this karaoke bar, where the Thai women are generally flirting with Thai gay men, the difference is racially ascribed. That is, Caucasian presence was polluting, even when it would theoretically be non-threatening, given that the man is gay. Furthermore, the wealthy Thai women did not seem distressed. As I interpret it, Mark was disturbed

because the friend I brought was *farang*, and close association with Caucasians can be unseemly to Thais in his precarious middle class position, particularly from the perspective of gay men, whose social space is also heavily sexualized.

Strategic Relations: Managing Status and Avoiding Stigma

My argument has been that middle class Thais often avoid relationships with *farang* in order prevent a devaluation of status based on the stigma associated with being interpellated as a sex worker. This can entail a rejection of *farang* as potential lovers. (Sex behind closed doors is another matter.) It also can include the avoidance of being seen in public with *farang*, in situations that could be interpreted as paid companionship. For instance, being in a mixed group of Thais, Asians, and *farang* would not look suspicious. In the internationalized Thai gay scene, this is a common feature. Furthermore, groups are interpreted as friends. However, being alone with a *farang*, which can make the pair look like a sex worker and client couple, can be damning. Breaking cultural rules about public displays of affection can also point to paid companionship. This includes kissing in public, intimately embracing one another, and even holding hands: all behaviors generally considered inappropriate in Thai public space. Other factors, in particular the age difference between an older *farang* and a younger Thai, exacerbate the presumption of sex work. It was relatively rare to encounter Thai-*farang* couples of the same age in gay spaces. An older Asian and a younger Thai can look like they are related in mainstream spaces. Many Thais with older East Asian boyfriends told me "He looks like my uncle." Yet, in gay venues, this is still interpreted as unseemly. Other Thais would joke: "Is he your uncle?" pointing to the age difference

and the assumption that the younger Thai is being taken care of by the older East Asian, though within the framing of a kin relations. This age difference was frowned upon by others, as it suggested elder-younger patronage and being a kept boy. Thus, Thai middle class gay norms relegated relationships with *farang*, and older partners in general, to a lower status. Here, I provide a few examples of experiences with, attitudes towards, and strategies in dealing with Caucasian partners.

Managing *Farang* Partners

Even when middle class Thais have *farang* partners, they often hide this fact from family or friends. Dome, a very fair, upper middle class friend who was educated in Europe states: "I couldn't ever take Matthias [his German husband] home with me. What would my parents think? They would think we are lovers. They would know. But someone like you or Tony [a Chinese Singaporean], we could be friends."[7] Though Dome is highly effeminate, part of this concern rests in his being "outed" as gay to his parents, a concern among many gay men. That is, other Asians can be interpreted as friends while *farang* are more likely coded as sexual partners. *Farang* are sexualized via the very Western gazes that sexualize Thais. That is, the stereotype of the Thai as a sex worker also interpellates the Caucasian partner as a sex tourist. Thai media not only portray Western culture as "sex mad" (Cook and Jackson 1999), Western portrayals of Thais as sex workers serves to reiterate the role of *farang* as sex consumers. Thus, racial difference disrupts homosocial norms in which Thai men or women being intimate with others of the same sex does not seem out of place, even when they are heterogender, as in *tom-dee* relationships (see Sinnott 2004). Relationships between Thais with other Asians

do not carry the same significations. Thus, for Thai gay men, interracial relationships can point to their homosexuality and make this a visibly explicit social fact. The high degree of homosociality in Thailand often masks homosexuality, but this interpretive framing is disrupted by the racial difference of partners.

Jack is a graduate student who has studied in two European countries. He has a Spanish boyfriend, whom he met during his studies. They send text messages to each other constantly and talk on the phone once a day. But having a Spanish boyfriend limits what Jack can do in Bangkok when he visits. One day, I was drinking with Jack in Silom Soi 4, a *soi* that caters to foreigners and has many money boys. I was asking Jack about where he takes his boyfriend when he visits Bangkok. Jack noted: "I could not come here with my boyfriend. What would others think?"[8] According to Jack, having a *farang* boyfriend makes social life more complicated because certain spaces, especially gay zones, are not appropriate for them to appear as a couple. Even though Jack does not receive any financial support from his boyfriend, he fears that other Thais will make that assumption about him. Jack's prior boyfriend was Korean, and he expresses no concern about the public significance of that coupling. For Jack, others would interpret a young Thai man with a *farang* boyfriend as a paid companion when the same association does not apply to Asian boyfriends.

Denying *Farang* Partners

Thais will often put a large spatial distance between them and a *farang* to indicate they are not together. Furthermore, Thais will often speak English loudly to other Thai service workers to show that they are of a cosmopolitan status, rather than "local" Thais

who could be mistaken as paid companions. Dew, a real estate agent in his mid-30s who comes from a relatively wealthy family that owns an apartment building in an exclusive neighborhood and has two master's degrees from the US, complains often about how he is treated when he is seen with Caucasian men. Dew went to the Oriental Hotel (which was for nearly two decades considered the best hotel in the world by travel magazines) for a drink with a *farang* he was dating. He was served "cheap nuts" (fried broad beans) with his cocktail. So Dew asked the waiter for cashews. The waiter replied in Thai: *Tong khit tang* ("You should consider the price"). Dew took this as an indication that he could not afford cashews himself, that he is a money boy or kept boy accompanying the *farang*. So Dew handed the waiter his credit card and replied loudly in English: "Don't worry, just charge it. I don't care how much it costs. I can pay."

Soon after this incident, Dew went shopping at the Night Bazaar with a *farang* who bought his condo in Hua Hin, Thailand's Hamptons. He was looking at something he wanted to buy. The shop keeper said: "You don't have to think about money, just buy it. Your boyfriend will pay for it." Dew, offended by this assumption, stated loudly: "I have a good job. I have an education. I have my own money…. He is not my boyfriend. I do not date people who are as old as my uncle… I don't want this anymore, you can keep it." Then he walked away.[9] Dew, while someone who is wealthy, must constantly perform his social standing for others. As a mutual friend noted: "Because Dew is dark, he looks like he is from Isan [the poor Northeastern region of Thailand], he looks like he could be a money boy."

The "Perfect Match": Money Boys and Farang

As noted previously, the exchange of *farang* financial support with youthful beauty for a Thai from a poor rural background creates an idealized match, even when this is not the case. Wit, a dark skinned Thai who completed a Taiwanese PhD in biology, recounts a situation when he met his Belgian boyfriend at the Malaysia Hotel, a hotel popular with budget gay tourists in the international district. Wit was waiting in the lobby for his boyfriend to come down from his room. When his boyfriend arrived, another *farang* gave Wit a piece of paper with his phone number written on it. Then, speaking to Wit's boyfriend in English (as if Wit did not speak English or could not make decisions for himself), he asked: "When you get bored with him, can you pass him on to me next?" When I asked Wit to reflect on this situation, he replied: "Money boys target *farang*, so if you are seen with a *farang*, you are like a money boy. An Asian can pass as a friend, even if he is not, because it is assumed that money boys will be with *farang*." For Wit, *farang* and money boys are symbolically linked such that association with *farang* makes one appear to be a money boy.

Concern over the signification and public interpretation of these relationships is not limited to Thais. Many of my *farang* friends who teach in schools and colleges in Thailand note their uneasiness being seen in public with their students, as they can be seen as predatory ("old pervert") *farang*. This is operationalized through the Thai politics of appearance. Thai students, through their undergraduate college careers, are required to wear uniforms. Thus, they are easily distinguishable in public space. Several of my friends have taught at Chulalongkorn University and at language schools such as American University Alumni and Wall Street. With locations near Siam, the central shopping district and the transfer point for the skytrain lines, it is quite likely that they

run into students at nearby malls or on the train itself. With regular news reports about *farang* pedophiles and English teachers engaging in inappropriate sexual relations with their students, my *farang* friends note their dis-ease at Thai interpretations of their behavior when talking with students in public spaces. Again, truth is less important than the surface image produced. Additionally, the politics of national assimilability, where reputed racial and cultural similarity makes some groups incorporable into the national body and others not, plays a role. *Farang* are thought of as outsiders.

Racial Matters in Sex Work

While I have been discussing the avoidance of looking like a sex worker, Thai sex workers also feel the stigma of being with Caucasian clients. Pom worked for over a decade as a go-go boy and coyote in Soi Twilight, and as a freelance masseur.[10] Relatively rare among sex workers, he described himself as someone who sells his body (*dek khai tua*). I first met Pom in 2006, when he joined my English class at SWING (a non-governmental organization that works with sex workers in Thailand). I have been in regular contact with him since then, visiting him at work and occasionally meeting him on his days off.

Pom gives several reasons for preferring Asian clients. Pom says Asian customers, even though they often pay less than Caucasian ones, are usually younger, more attractive, and have better bodies.[11] That is, he is more physically attracted to them and this makes the labor of sex work easier. *Farang* customers, he contends, tend to be old and fat. Yet, they also take better "care" (provide money, gifts, and otherwise show appreciation) of Pom because they are really happy to be with a young Thai man. *Farang*

(as well as some older Thai) customers also are more likely to want a relationship or to spend more time together in daytime activities.[12] But, Pom says he feels ashamed, because when he is with a *farang*, his status as a sex worker is exposed. For example, when a *farang* customer takes him shopping at MBK, the most popular mall in Bangkok, other Thais will see him as a *dek liang farang* (younger person supported financially by a *farang*). Pom says he can see it in the expression on their faces. Additionally, only *farang* customers will ask Pom to kiss him in public places like shopping malls, which he will allow. But he says this is not appropriate behavior outside of DJ Station, the most popular gay club for foreigners in Bangkok. Pom says that such displays of public affection are extremely embarrassing. It points to both being gay and a sex worker. He does it reluctantly because it is his job and he wants make his customers happy, so that they like him and so that they appreciate and come back to Thailand. According to Pom, as long as other Thais do not hear his Asian customers speak, they will think they are just other Thais because they have "the same hair and skin." Yet, being with a *farang* customer always stands out and attracts "dirty looks." As a relatively successful paid companion, Pom prefers the less lucrative but more fun and anonymous situation of serving Asian clients. Being seen in public together with Caucasian clients "outs" his profession.

In the Thai context, sex work needs to be hidden to be considered appropriate. It points to the lack of both national and individual development. Bee is a school teacher at one of the most elite private schools in Thailand (measured by the number of students who are accepted to study medicine in college). Like many middle class Thais, Bee refuses to date a *farang* and is very straightforward about his situation. When I asked, "Why don't you like to date *farang*?" He replied frankly: "Why would I want a *farang*? I

have a job." Bee associates being partnered with a *farang* with money boys and kept

boys, Thais who are generally from poor rural backgrounds.

The Chain of Being Asian

Overall, the partner preferences stated by middle class Thai gay men produced a

hierarchical list of nationalities that closely mirrors the economic and cultural status of its

citizens such that 1) Japanese and Koreans are prioritized over 2) Hong Kongers,

(Chinese) Singaporeans, and Taiwanese, who are preferred to 3) (Chinese) Malaysians,

Mainland Chinese, and Vietnamese. These are the groups identified as "Asian" on

Chakran's map. When I ask middle class Thais what kind of partner they are interested

in, the answer is often "Asian." If I follow up with a probe, "like Cambodians or

Burmese?" the answer is almost always a strong rebuttal. "Oh no! Not those!" Other

Asians, especially Burmese and Cambodians, are considered highly undesirable. Lao are

very similar to Thais, especially those from Isan, and are typically fluent in Thai. Thus

they constitute a less desirable but familiar group. Though Thai language, culture, and

religion borrow heavily from Indian precedents, South Asians are generally not

conceptualized by Thais as Asian. For many Thais, they are detested compared to *farang*.

Thus, in the imagination of middle class gay Thais, preferred partners are white Asian,

including Sino-Thai. They are followed by central or northern Thais, other Thais, and

farang. Other racial partners are generally abhorrent or unimaginable.

As I speak Thai, I often passed for Thai, and many Thais paid no particular

attention to me. The assumption was often that I was a recent Sino-Thai or *dek-nok* (Thai

educated overseas). However, their affect often changed dramatically when a friend or I

would state that I was Korean.[13] This fact was often met with disbelief. Some Thais assumed that I or my friend was lying. It was common during my field work for Thais to take on playful Korean nicknames, use Korean names on their Facebook profiles, and to otherwise pretend that they were Korean.[14] When the fact of my Koreanness was confirmed by others, this often led to a reevaluation of my status and desirability. Thais who previously had no interest in me would re-orient their gaze and pay close attention, looking me up and down. This often led to Thais practicing their Korean on me (*sarangheyo*, I love you, being the most common phrase they would use, sometimes accompanied by a body tilt with an arms over the head heart gesture), talking about their favorite Korean dramas and stars, and generally holding me in greater esteem. They would also name all the other gay Koreans they knew in Bangkok, assuming that we would know each other (I did know the ones who attended gay venues and a few others I met online or via smartphone apps). I also met a number of individuals who had Korean language aids that they carried with them. That is, they carried small notebooks, cards, papers, and installed phone apps that they could use to communicate with the Koreans they hoped to meet. Rarely, they also carried Japanese language materials.

Unhappy Endings

Even while middle class gay Thai men profess a desire for white Asians, they often do not have the opportunity to enact these relationships. Not surprisingly, most often these gay men end up with other Thais. When Thais do have relationships with East Asians, they are often not as satisfied as they imagined the relationship to be. While I know many happy Thai-Thai, Thai-Asian, and Thai-*farang* couples (both in Bangkok and

long distance), people tend to focus on and report negative emotional incidents. Thai-Asian relationships are not exempt from cultural misunderstandings because of regional proximity.[15] Stereotypes about national character and imaginings created by the profusion of regional media abound. Groups like Koreans and Japanese are not exempt.

Oa is in his late-20s, chubby, and runs a shop selling high end tourist souvenirs with gold engraving that are made by his parents' workshop. He has a habit of producing an upside down smile when he is displeased. He makes this face as he tells me that "in Korean soap operas, the men are all soft, sweet, and romantic."[16] But having dated two Korean men, he sees them as brash and stubborn. He uses a time and temperature analogy to describe Korean character. "Koreans cannot wait. When they order food they expect it to come out fast and eat it immediately. The soup comes out still boiling in the stone bowl. You can still see the bubbles. Koreans will start eating the soup that way. Thais cannot do that, it is too hot. We will wait until the soup cools down and then eat it." Korean temperament is commonly referred to by Thais as "hot-hearted" (*jai-ron*).

Oa was also among many of my friends who noted that when they visited Korea, they were disappointed. Koreans were not dressed liked K-drama and K-pop stars. Sadly, they looked like normal people. Oa was particularly incensed because he experienced discrimination at Korean immigration. When the officer asked how much cash Oa was carrying, he responded $200. As Oa was planning to stay for three days the officer told him that he did not have enough money. Oa noted that he had credit and ATM cards with him. The officer insisted he needed to have enough cash for food and hotel for the time he would be in Korea and sent him to an office to be interrogated. The time was spent waiting in an empty room. After five hours, they let him enter. Oa recounted this incident

with anger. However, the next year he returned to Korea, taking more cash. Oa still felt that Korea was an attractive destination and continued to hope to find a Korean partner.

While Koreans have a reputation for being "hot," Japanese, on the other hand, have a reputation for being cold and distant. For Thai gay men, this was also an undesirable stereotypical personality trait. Jiu had been studying Japanese for many years and routinely dated Japanese men. As Jiu noted, "they are always busy and more interested in work than social life. They work all the time and then go out with their co-workers." He was very disappointed in his most recent relationship of a year and a half with a Japanese man. "If you call a Japanese to go out to dinner tonight, they will say they have plans to do the laundry or something like that, how about next month [sounding very annoyed]."[17] Indeed, even though they were living in the same city, Jiu said that he rarely saw his boyfriend and never felt he got to know him. Jiu felt like the relationship was labeled as boyfriend, but that he was not treated like one. The expectations he had for a Thai boyfriend were significantly different.

Singaporeans, who were very popular in my preliminary fieldwork (2004-2006), generally became devalued over time in favor of Taiwanese partners. Singaporeans are reputedly selfish and conceited. As Mark noted, "twenty years ago they were NIC [newly industrialized country] too, now they are feeling better than us."[18] As the most common of the white Asians in the Bangkok internationalized gay scene, Mark felt that there were already too many of them. Once, just before the drag show at DJ Station, when a large group of Singaporeans entered, he quipped "the Chinese army has arrived." For Mark, gay Singaporeans treated Bangkok as an extension of Singapore's Chinatown, where their gay scene is concentrated. Yet they disrespected local Thais and "act like the soi

[referring to Silom Soi 2] belongs to them." With the changing profile of the Asian gay scene, Taiwanese became popular partners. They are also considered the easiest-going of the tropical Chinese, with an easy-going, "cool-hearted" (*jai-yen*) character most similar to Thais. Nevertheless, regardless of negative personal experiences and stereotypes, white Asians remained desirable partners for most middle class Thai gay men. Even those Thais with repeated negative experiences with East Asians continued to seek them as partners.

A *Farang* Expat's Voice

The majority of white expatriates in Bangkok have not noticed the shifting status of various national and racial groups. But the decreasing desirability of *farang* is experienced and noticed by some Caucasian men. Alex Hugh-Jones is the best-selling author of books on popular culture in Thailand. A British expatriate, he has lived in Bangkok for two decades working as a journalist and guide book writer. In his roles, as social observer, mapper of various Bangkok scenes, and recommender of venues, he is one of the few Caucasian men I know who have had significant experience in the local Thai gay bar scene and also someone who participated in it not with other Caucasians but with Asians and Thais. In conversations we have been having over the years, Alex has verified some of my interpretations about the increasing desirability of white Asians. For example, when I told him about *farang* avoidance strategies to minimize the perception of being a sex worker, he offered a story of his own:

> I had hired this guy from Chula to be a translator. We had decided to go to get
>
> coffee at MBK [a mall on the property of Chulalongkorn University, a short walk

from the main campus]. When we were heading to MBK he says: "Please don't be offended, but as we walk up to MBK, do you mind if I walk behind you or in front of you, because a lot of people would know me." This guy is straight. That means that this idea, that being seen with a Westerner might be a way for him to earn some extra money [in sex work], is extremely widely perceived.

So, as a keen observer who has been in Bangkok through recent political, economic, and cultural changes, I interviewed him on July 14, 2013, during one of my return trips to Bangkok after my formal fieldwork had ended. As someone with a much longer history than me in Thailand, I asked Alex to assess when Thai desires for Asian partners increased. The following is Philip's recollection and interpretation of this trajectory. I provide a near verbatim response, as it summarizes much of what I have been claiming.

> I've been in Thailand two decades, and about midway, in the early 2000s, there was a shift. And I noticed it because my circle of friends were generally Thais with their own jobs and careers. I didn't particularly circulate with farm-raised Thais or the upper crust. The shift was particularly noticeable in the bar scene. Two things were noticeable. The scene spread out dramatically from a small number of venues in the Silom and Sarasin areas and some saunas. It spread to the suburbs where the clientele were local [Thai] or other Asians, since some of the venues for other Asians were not in the central area.
>
> As the editor of the City Listings Magazine of Bangkok and the writer of Bangkok guide books, I had the incentive to explore the places that were

springing up. And the atmosphere was very different at these places outside the international zone. Thai people were into each other. Not that they were hostile to Westerners, but they did not fancy them. This was different than in the international area, where there were a lot of relationships with expatriates, both casual and long-term. So my interactions with these venues become more people watching rather than direct engagement, because [the Thais] they weren't directly engaging with me. I know there were Singaporeans, Hong Kongese, and some Malaysian Chinese, because I went with Southeast Asian friends and they could pick out where they were from based on accent.

During the time of the [Thaksin's] social order clamp down [to decrease alcohol consumption, eliminate drug use, and regulate entertainment venues], around 2001 to 2003, bar opening hours were affected. This revealed the reality of people going to other countries for nightlife. This is quite common in Europe, but was new to this region. Singaporeans were coming up to get away from a repressive environment. At the same time, Singapore was opening up. So Thais would go there. This [traveling] was a common topic of conversation when people met.

Initially, there was a pattern that the "inter" tourists were following [in Bangkok]: Friday night at Silom, Saturday early was downtown shopping, then maybe a late afternoon or early evening trip to Bablyon, then at night to [Silom] Soi 4, and then to [Silom] Soi 2. Over time, as the scene grew up, particularly at Ortorkor, people [Thais] would go to the bars and then to suburban saunas after in the Lad Prao, Ari, and Saphan Kwai areas, like Chakran, 39 Underground, and

Farose. This is where the Thai scene was and, the Asians, they linked up with that.

For Thais, the social order campaign diverted them [away from bars] to the local saunas. People didn't have to go downtown. And it was cheaper. There were free drinks [including alcohol], free food, and a free shag [sex]. And they encountered other Asians in these places. It reflects later on, as the momentum grew, there was more disposable income among Thais. Thailand was increasingly an affluent nation. There was a role modeling of people who could see themselves as having kudos [prestige] attached to having a friend from Singapore who had attributes previously only associated with Westerners, like having money, being well dressed, being confidently homosexual, even if they were closeted at home, having a cosmopolitan lifestyle.

And for the Thais, they were closeted at home but they had money. They were not poor. It was a different Asia. More young people lived away from their parents in other places and in Bangkok. Families were moving out to the suburbs and gays were moving into town, with independent, albeit quite small living spaces. So there was a great flowering of independent sex lives. And not just for gays. There were lots of issues with girls having independent apartments or living with their boyfriend at his apartment.

So the Bangkok scene became more cosmopolitan and Thais began to see themselves able to interact with people from different countries. Speaking as a gay man interested in Asians but not into the money boy scene, I was interested in middle class Thais. Guys who could share the relationship, have confidence in

being gay, with a career to be proud in. That kind of Thai was my sights [target] for relationships or prospective friends.

In the 1990s, there was a lot of interest to be with a Westerner, to be in the downtown bar scene. Proof of that was the appeal for a few years of the "Gay Pride" identity. If a Thai was going to be international and gay, this was the structure. But it struggled to get mass appeal. It failed for many reasons. Partly because the businesses that sponsored it [mostly bars catering to Westerners] didn't manage it so well. And it was dominated by money boys. So middle class Thais didn't want to be seen in it. The idea of an independent gay lifestyle among Asians became a more appealing way to be cosmopolitan and sophisticated without [undecipherable], without having to be "out" or have the spotlight on them. They would be meeting Chinese diasporans who are closeted at home and out in Bangkok. For them [Chinese], it was quite exciting to come to Bangkok, to have relations with other [Chinese] diasporans or other Asians, which they couldn't do at home. My Southeast Asian friends in Bangkok, Singaporeans and Malaysian Chinese, were more interested in Thais than Westerners. In the context of the boom in these visitors and a sense of Chinese diasporan fellowship, there was some looking down, contempt of Westerners. I'd also note that on online dating sites, they shudder at the idea of being with a Westerner. It might be because they think only lower class Thais go with Westerners. But there was a sense that the Chinese diasporans look down on Westerners. It's like last year's fashion. There is nothing as unfashionable as the previous fashion.

I also think there is a bit of a shift because of the development of the ASEAN [Association of South East Asian Nations] community. Thais are always sneering about their immediate neighbors, especially the darker skinned neighbors over the border referred to as *sokkaprok* [literally "dirty" or "unclean," but figurative "uncivilized" or "obscene"]. Maybe they are parroting the government or taste makers, but there is much more talk about "ASEAN brothers." Thais are also holidaying more in Laos, Cambodia, Burma, and finding that they share a lot in common, like food, and heritage tourism, like temples. I do detect a sense that there is this emerging narrative and vocabulary of ASEAN friends and neighbors. I don't know, but I doubt that it is very deep though. There is this new way of relating though. Upper middle class Thais speak as if no Burmese migrant worker was every mistreated in Thailand [sarcastically].

Regarding my personal experience, I could tell there was this shift. Like at saunas. They would be interested in my body shape and reach out to touch. When they felt my chest hair they would know I was *farang* and recoil in horror. That never happened before the 2000s. You know, there is this way that Thais move through tight spaces, like in markets. They slink away so they don't bang into each other. In this new sense of aversion to Westerners, I noticed they were not simply shrinking away, but steering clear, like there was a force field to not come close. It's not pleasant to experience being avoided [sighs]. This reaches its apogee in Sauna Mania in Silom [a muscular Thai-Asian oriented sauna in the international district]. There would be zero interest. They want Southeast Asian [Chinese] diasporans and Sino-Thais. It's not the same story in the suburban

areas, where Thais might be shy towards, but not averse to, Westerners. I also think that it's interesting that online there is a self-description of "Thai Chinese." They are labeling themselves as Thai Chinese as opposed to being Thai. This is opposed to when they are speaking to you in public, where they say "Oh no, I am Thai" because they have to emphasize being Thai, as part of a social contract for their belonging in Thailand. But within the context of dating, there is Sino-Thai pride or ways of leading to meet other hyphen Chinese [such as Malaysian Chinese or Chinese Singaporean].

In this account of the evolving gay scene in Bangkok, Alex points to changes in Thai attitudes towards differently raced partners. In line with my overall argument, Alex plots a shift over the last two decades in which Thai desires shift from Westerners to other Asians. Alex also points to Thai economic development and middle class desires to avoid being seen as sex workers as the rationale for these changes.

In summary, there are numerous strategies being used both by Thais and foreigners in regards to relationships and how they are perceived. For example, while the racial difference of non-Thais can be polluting in some contexts, in others it can be mobilized to attract partners in others. Thais that do engage in interracial relationships can strategically manage the potential stigma by hiding them from the surveillance of family, friends, and public spaces where condemnation is likely to occur. As previously noted, the association with *farang* in public is often associated with sex work and thus can represent a diminishment in status. Yet the alternative of having an Asian boyfriend is often no more fulfilling.

In concluding, I consider the issue of change. As this is a contemporary study without comparable data from the past, I can not definitively claim that the desire toward white Asian partners are historical changes. That is, as I am not comparing the same data from two points in time, there are other possibilities that account for current attitudes. For example, the preference for light skinned Asian (beyond Thai) partners may be long standing or have previously existed but never been commented upon in Thai or English literature. The trend may actually be a shift in perspective, analytical interest, or documentation bias (see Loos 2008). These desires may also have vacillated over time. Furthermore, I am focusing on a group, middle class gay men, that is itself a recent development, arguably only existing since the 1960s or 1970s and in significant numbers in the 1980s and 1990s. A number of sources, however, suggest or point to a shift in desire from Caucasian and Thai to Asian partners. Narupon Duangwises' (2003) analysis of gay magazines identifies a shift in preference from "real" Thai to Sino-Thai aesthetics in the late 1980s to early 1990s. This could also be based upon a transformation in communal identity, editorializing, or readership from primarily femininely identified gay men looking for "real" male partners (represented by working class laborers, rural farmers, and other macho types) to a more egalitarian pattern of middle class partnerships among similar, masculine identified gay men. In the *Rice Queen Diaries*, Daniel Gawthrop (2005) makes numerous references to differences among poorer and middle class Thai gay men. He, for example, notes that the latter stigmatizes relationships with Westerners (110), an increasing anti-Westernism after the IMF crisis of 1997, and anxieties about his losing relative status to Japanese or Singaporean men (216). Jillana Enteen (2010) has noted a reduction in the reliance on English and Western references

both online and offline among Thai gay men from 1998 to 2008. She also documents an increase in identification with the term "Asian" and an increase in desire for Chinese, Japanese, and Thai partners as compared to Caucasian (Western) ones. This may be related to the disdain for Caucasians and orientations of desire towards other Asians among gay men in the more economically developed areas of Hong Kong (Chou 2000), Singapore (Au 2011), and Japan (Suganuma 2012). Such adaptation would fit within a broader context of Asian regionalism and the Asianization of gay Bangkok (Jackson 2011), though in the Chinese and Japanese contexts notions of racial superiority and purity are invoked in ways unfamiliar to Thais. Finally, the change in partnership patterns toward white Asians has been described within the last twenty years by my informants, both Thai and Caucasian.

CHAPTER 7

"True Love": Romance between "Ordinary" People

"Film is Prince's beloved (*thi-rak*)," Film gestured to a Sino-Thai who looked similar to him. Film was using a grammatical form in which pairs refer to each other using one another's names or use the partner's name to refer to oneself. In this case, he was stating: "Prince is Film's beloved." Film continued, "We are often mistaken as relatives (*khreua-yat*) because we look similar (*khlai-kan*), but we are a couple. It's seven years already." Prince squeezed Film's arm to demonstrate affection. "Prince's (Film's) mother really likes Film (Prince). She cooks his favorite foods more than mine." Film's substitution of their names showed their intimacy.

Film works in advertising for the Bangkok office of a US ad agency. I initially met Film in Silom Soi 2 through a mutual friend whose company had a contract with him. His partner, Prince, worked as salesperson at the King Power Duty Free mall near Victory Monument. While being a salesperson was not as prestigious a job, Prince made significantly more money than Film, as he made commission from selling luxury handbags. Because of his work with tourists, Prince also had many more foreigner friends. He also likes to go to bars much more often than Film, so I regularly saw Prince with a group of Thai and Asian friends at Disco Disco in Silom Soi 2.

When I asked Prince what attracted him to Film, he responded: "He is an ordinary person (*khon thammada*)." This particular statement stood out to me because earlier in the day I had had a conversation with a colleague who had started dating someone new. When I asked him to describe his new boyfriend, his initial response was "He is a

thammada person, like me." When I asked him what being *thammada* meant, Prince

replied: "There is nothing special, comes from a good family (*ban di*), has a good job

(*achip di*), has a *thammada* life." I asked Prince why being *thammada* was a desirable

trait for a partner. Prince replied that with a *thammada* partner, one "doesn't have to

worry, doesn't have to think too much about it, can have *khwam-rak jing-jing* (true love)

easily." Prince went on to explain that if there is too much difference between partners,

there will be envy (*itcha*). This will cause jealousy (*huang*) and other problems in the

relationship. Prince was espousing an egalitarian ethos. He was linking similarity in

social status to compatability within a relationship, which would allow the relationship to

last. This framing of relationships is similar to the western notion that true love is

incompatible with pragmatic concerns like financial security (Cohen 1993, Constable

2003). That is, being ordinary meant being middle class and having a relationship with

another middle class person rather than one based on patronage and more directed flows

of resources and emotional labor.

Ordinary Buddhism and Queer Sexuality

In addition to a normalized middle class standing, the other way that being

"ordinary" is conditioned is through religion. In this context, being normal or average

means being a layperson. Many queer individuals are deeply religious in vernacular Thai

Theravada Buddhism, the practice of approximately 90 percent of Thais.[1] Vernacular

Buddhist practices in Thailand incorporate animism (e.g. the ubiquitous spirit house,

phallic charms, magical tattoos) and Hindu Brahmanism, which is currently rising in

popularity. Making merit is a routine activity including sustenance for the spirits, alms to

monks, rituals at temples, donations to beggars, the releasing of captive animals, prayer, and other such activities. Such activites are not limited to the socially and politically conservative nor those who might be considered marginal to religious merit making. For example, some temples near red light districts remain open 24 hours per day to provide access to sex workers. Sex workers pray for clients and leave donations to improve their chances and when they have succeeded in making money. I attended a number of large-scale merit making activities organized by queer people and sex workers. For example, one Bangkok bar owner I knew annually organized his staff, family, and friends for a two day merit-making trip. I attended a trip in which he rented three tour buses that drove out to Buriram province in Isan, an area with a large ethnic Khmer population. The transgender women and gay men organized an impromptu parade of queens in the downtown area of a small city near the temple the trip was supporting. During the parade, staff requested donations from all the vendors they passed. Megaphones promoted a beauty contest to be held the same night as a temple fair, encouraging all to attend. Over fifty *kathoey* and drag queens pariticpated in the pageant with several hundred audience members from the local community. The contest lasted for several hours after which we slept on mats in buildings throughout the temple grounds. In the morning the monks held a large ritual was blessing the group. All proceeds from the contest, approximately 29,000 THB, and another 16,000 THB in private donations (from the merit-making participants, local businesses, and networks in Bangkok), or a total of $1,500, was donated to the temple to support the construction of a new building. Making merit is taken very seriously and generally considered necessary to build ones spiritual potency for a better rebirth.

All Buddhist males still ordain for at least a brief period in their lives as young adults to make merit for their mothers. It is an essential rite of passage, often associated with achieving manhood. In Bangkok, young men typically ordain for a month, though sometimes as short as a week. In rural areas, ordinations tend to be for several months. Among the impoverished, ordination often lasts for years, as it also provides access to food, housing, and education. Temporary ordinations are also repeated for significant life events, such as the death of a parent.

Kathoey often ordain before they physically transition, as monks and novices are not allowed to have breasts. Wan, a transgender woman, for instance, had surgery to remove her breasts after the death of her father so that she could ordain temporarily as a monk to make merit for his soul and improve his next rebirth. This was done at a major emotional and material cost. Without large breasts, Wan lost earning value as a transgender sex worker. She subsequently had to work harder and save money for several years to afford another breast augmentation at a local clinic (not international standard hospital) in Bangkok where the prodecure was 33,000 Baht (approximately $1,100) in 2010. While there is a small sangha of female monks who manage a temple in the outskirts of Bangkok, the Thai sangha only recognizes male monks. Indeed, one of the key tests of maleness during ordination is an examination of the chest, as it is for military service.

Vernacular Buddhist beliefs on homosexuality and transgenderism (or being misgendered, *phit-phet*) are typically negative, as are teachings about sexuality in general. Some *tom*, *kathoey*, and gay men relate their identity to prior karmic infractions related to sexual or family misconduct (Jackson 1995, Sinnott 2004). However, no gay

man I interacted with ever made this connection regarding their own sexuality even though some considered their gender or sexuality to be abnormal (*phit-prokkati* ผิดปรกติ).

Tom and *kathoey* feel a greater burden of suffering in that they sometimes believe they are destined to be lonely in life. There are *tom* and *kathoey* who socially marry and adopt children. However, as people who generally can not or chose not to procreate, they sometimes feel their partners will replace them with normatively gendered partners who can provide children. That is, both *tom* and *kathoey* expect their more-or-less heterosexually identified partners to find other heterosexual partners and leave them. Similar to *tom* (Sinnott 2004), many *kathoey* expect to suffer in love, as their partners are inevitably thought to want to marry a "real woman" who can bear children. Transgender women thus saw themselves as expoited by men, being only benefactors and mistresses rather than wives. This, however, is also lessening as more *tom* are developing long term relationships with other *tom* rather than *dee*, and *kathoey* are increasingly partnering with gay men or socially marrying their heterosexual partners.

The general Thai belief is that being misgendered (not a heterosexual male or female) in this life is a consequence of prior heterosexual sexual misconduct in activities such as sex work, adultery, incest, or neglecting parental duties to children in a prior life (Jackson 1998). Informants noted all these possible infractions to me but usually, only mentioned adultery. However, this would be followed up with a statement such as "but it doesn't apply to me," "I think I'm this way because of genetics," or "people like us have different hormones." None of my gay informants stated that karma was the cause of their homosexuality, though some *kathoey* noted that it was the cause of their transgenderism. Nor did any heterosexual person I interacted with ever consider avoiding sexual

misconduct to prevent a misgendered rebirth. Karma was invoked in regard to other issues such as overall life misery, unfulfilling relationships, and financial troubles. According to many of my informants, suffering is not so much located in being gay or transgender as karmic retribution but rather in the inability to establish and maintain sexually and emotionally fulfilling relationships with preferred partners, which is more difficult for queer people but not a consequence of karma. This fits into a wider pattern of what Fuhrmann (forthcoming 2016) refers to as "Buddhist melancholia," or the notion that desire is always already destined to fail because existence is marked by impermanence, and yet there is a continued persistence of desire when it is not attainable.

Non-karmic causal attributions for misgendering follow a shift in Thai discourse that situates homosexuality and transgenderism within the realm of popular science, which links these conditions to environmental and social issues such as overuse of plastics, uncaring families, and watching too much television (see Käng 2012). All of these conditions are on the rise and therefore also neatly explain the rise in visibility of queer people. Preventing queerness and related health problems from environmental causes was a topic of concern among queer people themselves, especially regarding the use of plastic. I was often warned not to use plastic bags when buying hot premade food. Typically, food to go is placed in a small clear plastic bag that is twisted at the top, tied with a rubber band, and then placed in a translucent plastic bag with handles. One can alternatively bring a more permanent container of one's own, like a small bowl or thermos, but this is an uncommon practice. Unexpectedly, the warning was also applied to those who were already queer. For example, when I was eating to go food from a Styrofoam container at Wan's apartment, she warned me that what I was doing was

dangerous. I responded that there was not much to cause concern. She took the container away from me and placed the contents in a melamine bowl. She stated that eating from Styrofoam will make me gay. A bit puzzled, I told her that I was already gay. Her response was that she knew I was born gay, "I can tell that when you were in the hospital, you did not cry 'wae wae' but rather 'ke ke.'" Nevertheless, she insisted I not eat from a container that was bad for my health and would make me even more gay. These new beliefs informed by popular science (exaggerations of scientific findings related to chemicals that are hormone disruptors or potentially carcinogenic) are perhaps also linked to changing attitudes toward male homosexuality and male to female transgenderism due to AIDS. Jackson (1998) notes significant increases in the stigmatization of gay men and *kathoey* following the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s that helped consolidate community identity, which led to the development more positive social attitudes. AIDS also shifted the discourse on karmic retribution away from homosexuality as the epidemic in Thailand became primarily heterosexual.

Karma nevertheless does continue to play a role in beliefs about the causation of homosexuality and transgenderism. I have documented a religiously informed view of environmental karmic decline linked to queerness. During an interview I conducted with a gay vernacular Hindu ritual specialist who assisted a gay master that channeled Vishnu, I was told that the recent increase in homosexuality was caused by broader karmic cycles of the universe. He stated that the universe will only exist for 5,000 years after the death of the Buddha. As it was the year 2553 BE in 2010 CE (the Thai Buddhist Era calendar is 543 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar, as it starts with the death of the Buddha), he noted that the universe was already in a state of decline, which began in 2550. Social

problems like homosexuality, illegitimate children, and incest will only increase as the earth sprials into a state of absolute barbarism and chaos, leading to the end of humanity, after which time the cycle of the universe will restart. In describing this scenario, however, he did not link individual karmic infractions to being gay. Rather, the world had reached a cosmic tipping point where accumulated karmic demerits produced negative social conditions such as homosexuality that would decrease the population. The accumulated karmic misconduct of the population as a whole was responsible for the increase in homosexuality. At the same time, he believed that gay people themselves are specially endowed with talent in areas including the arts, performance, and ritual. While providing an indirect causal chain for homosexulity, and highlighting the talents of gay men, the framing of homosexuality as a social problem inherent to the demise of the humanity maintains a highly negative valence.

The notion karmic retribution is still a widespread belief that queer people contend with, even among people who are supportive of queer issues. Ple, was a teacher in her late 20s who wanted an Asian boyfriend, preferably Japanese or Korean. I routinely ran into her having coffee and cake with gay and *kathoey* friends of mine at Siam Paragon mall. Because I had seen her out frequently with queer people, I asked her more about her beliefs on queerness. As a heterosexual woman, she bemoaned that there were too few heterosexual male partners to be found in Thailand (see Käng 2012). Yet, when she did have relationships, she relied heavily on the advice of her queer friends. As Ple suggested, "they understand both sides." When I asked her about Thai beliefs about the cause of homosexuality and transgenderism, she gave me the answer I anticipated. Ple explained that being queer was a consequence of inappropriate behavior with a wife or

children (*phit-mia phit-luk*) in a prior life. This, of course, assumes the offender was a man. But, Ple continued, "and the rebirth is not for just one life, it is for 500 reincarnations." I had not expected this reply and was a bit shocked. I responded: "If that were the case, everyone on earth would be queer. Then how is heterosexuality possible?" She replied that she can not explain the complicated mathematics, but it is possible, and that is the world that we live in. Ple also did not feel that being queer in this life was a stain on someone's character. She had many gay, *tom*, and *kathoey* colleagues and friends and enjoyed their company. Another explaination for misgendering among heterosexual men and women was that being gay was simply a popular lifestyle choice because being queer was fashionable and trendy or that it was contagious because of the star power of queer entertainers (Käng 2012). Thus, karmic infraction was not the only cause of misgendering.

Arnika Fuhrmann (2016 forthcoming) notes that the karmic cause of homosexuality and transgenderism is now being reframed by queer Thai activists as a form of social suffering produced by social stigma rather than Buddhist doctrine. She refers to Thai sexuality as "Buddhist-informed," as Buddhism does not necessarily structure sexuality in a pervasive transhistorical way but is rather invoked and deployed in particular ways at particular historical moments. When I interviewed Luang Phi Chai Waradhammo, a monk and author of texts on Buddhism, gender, and sexuality (see, for example, Waradhammo 2013), about his opinions about the karmic cause of homosexuality and transgenderism in sexual misconduct from a prior life, he denied the connection. Luang Phi stated: "This belief comes from latter Buddhist generations. The Tipitaka itself never says that clearly. It is a latter interpretation. For me, I don't believe

that. Because I have a question, what is the cause of heterosexuality? Why do gay, kathoey, and tom get this teaching when they go to the temple when heterosexual men and women don't get the teaching in the same way? This teaching makes them [queer people] feel bad about themselves. It's a kind of discriminatory teaching. I think religion should be about beliefs that make you feel good about yourself, to take your spirituality to a higher stage, not make you feel you are going down to hell." Luang Phi considers this teaching counterdoctrinal, based on biased interpretations rather than sacred texts. Luang Phi argues that the belief in a karmic cause is discriminatory because karma can not be applied uniformly to identitarian criteria (e.g. women, *kathoey*, gay, lesbian) but rather is the result of individual intention and action (Fuhrmann 2016 forthcoming).

This kind of argument is now being used by queer Thai activists to depathologize homosexuality and transgenderism in social and legal arenas. Furthermore, it is essential to note that queer stigma not only originates in vernacular Thai Theravada Buddhism but also from discourses in medicine, psychology, law, and media. Fuhrmann (2016 forthcoming) refers to the inseparability of these domains as "the Buddhist-liberal synthesis." In summary, the belief that being misgendered is caused by sexual misconduct in a prior incarnation is still widespread but receding. Furthermore, this idea can have a wide variety of permutations and ambivalent identifications. Queer activists are actively trying to delegitimize the belief in favor of promoting equality and respect for gender and sexual difference.

The Quest for Respect

One theme that emerged in my work among middle class Thai gay men was the desire for an egalitarian relationship, or at least the resemblance of one. That is, a relationship in which they felt they could be perceived as the status equal of their partner. One rationale for not wanting a *farang* partner was that the Thai partner would always be perceived as inferior by others, irrespective of actual engagement in sex work. This was also often the case in relationships with white Asians, who, as foreigners, had higher status.

Asians and Caucasians were also enmeshed differently in networks of reciprocity. In theory, any foreigner is a guest. Thus, they, as visitors should be treated. For example, if one visits a Thai home, the guest will be offered food and beverages. If possible, this will be a meal. Otherwise, snacks or fruits might be offered. Minimally, a beverage would be provided. The guest, of course, should partake in at least some of the offerings. For the most part, in domestic settings these rules still apply, regardless of who the guest is. However, the expectations are racially coded in restaurants and other businesses in areas with many foreigners. For example, if there is a *farang* male at the table, the check will almost always be placed in front of him. The higher the bill, the more likely this becomes. This is a reversal of the normative expectations of guest-host relationships predicated on the idea that the Caucasian, though a guest, is of higher financial means than the Thais, and thus becomes a host in the vein of being a patron. When couples or groups include an Asian, check placement is more random. This is true even when the Asian is clearly a foreigner and does not speak Thai. There is not the same expectation that the Asian will pay, and, in my experiences with middle class Thai men, they will almost always offer to pay, sometimes accompanied by a statement that one is a guest

and that he would expect reciprocation if and when the Thai visits the Asian's country. Middle class Thai gay men have frequently told me they are offended when servers place the bill in front of a *farang*. To them, this is an assumption that they can not afford the meal. Whether they verbalize it or not, the feeling they want to express is "I can pay."

Mark has visited me and my partner twice in the USA since the beginning of my fieldwork. In Thailand, he uses the line that as the host he has to pay, and suggests that I can reciprocate in the USA. However, on arriving in the USA, he insists on paying or does so surreptitiously. For example, going to the restroom and paying the bill on the way back. When in the USA, Mark feels great anxiety that Americans will believe that he, as a Thai, would not be able to afford the expenses. Thus, he pays and often leaves excessive tips, to demonstrate this ability. My Thai *hai-so* friends do not share this attitude. They are happy to reciprocate or split the bill. They are not under the performance anxiety of middle class people like Mark, who is from Isan and the first of his family to move to Bangkok.

Golden Cages

The alternate extreme is the kept boy, which is a label used by people external to the relationship. Kept boys do not use the term to refer to themselves and would be outraged if they were called money boys, which they sometimes are. Kept boys are distinct from money boys in that they consider themselves outside the realm of sexual commerce. They make a clear distinction between being paid for sex and being loved, which includes being supported by their boyfriend. Boyfriends with the means have a moral obligation to support their boyfriends from poorer backgrounds, and to an extent

their families as well. This typically means that kept boys do not work outside the home, but it does not necessitate full financial support. Kept boys may work, for example, as servers at bars. However, most of them are removed from situations such as bar or restaurant work, as it allows them to be in contact with many other men. Indeed, I have seen kept boys move from boyfriend/patron to boyfriend/patron, generally moving up the social ladder. There are also semi-kept boys, such as bartenders, who are patronized in short periods while a foreigner is in Thailand, and then moves on to another when the temporary boyfriend leaves. These relationships, however, can endure. If the foreigner returns, the semi-kept boy may have to juggle a number of men or decide between his options. This pattern has increased with the ease of online communication through which Thais can keep in contact with foreigners and vice versa.

Most kept boys seem to enjoy their situation. The trade offs between their livelihood and the demands of their partners is relatively easy to negotiate for them. Though in the minority, a number of kept boys with Caucasian partners referred to their dissatisfaction with being in the relationship using the metaphor of being "in a golden cage" (*krong thong*). That is, they felt that the power imbalance attributed to the financial support being provided in their relationships prevented them from being free. This seemed particularly common when there was a large age difference between partners. The most common complaint was that the patron partner was a "butterfly" (*phi-seua*), referring to a man who constantly hops from flower to flower to drink their nectar. The thought of infidelity did not bother all of them, but sexual contact with others was a threat to the security of the relationship, since the partner might find a tastier bud to hold on to. On the other hand, the young boy's sexual behavior was tightly controlled. This included

reading his emails, reviewing his phone call logs and text messages, constantly calling to check up on where and who he is with, using smartphone apps that track the phone's location, and limiting his movements by requiring him to stay at home during certain parts of the day, such as when the partner is at work.

Gunther, a retired German banker who told me that he did not "fool around" but that he had a weekly nude massage, demonstrated the use of an iPhone tracking app for me. He called his lover and asked where he was. The reply was at college. After hanging up, Gunter opened the app on his phone. A green dot dropped on the screen and he made an expansive motion with his index, middle, and thumb fingers to enlarge the map. The dot was on a university building. "Confirmed!" He grinned. Then he said, "you have to call first, because it tracks the phone and he could give the phone to a friend and go somewhere else. Sometimes he does not pick up, and will say he is in class or something, but he knows to call me as soon as he can." This jealous control over a boyfriend's sexuality is not uncommon in Thai gay couples. I witnessed it frequently. However, in Thai couples, the age difference was generally not as large and the roles were usually reversed, with the younger or less wealthy partner keeping track of the older, more stable partner. These younger men were preventing their older boyfriends from being butterflies. I thus interpreted this as a means to secure continued financial support within the limits of the agency respective partners had. But those in a golden cage could not make the same demands on their patron partners.

I rarely met intergenerational Asian-Thai couples and interviewed only one Thai, Woody, a 20 year old kept boy in this situation, though I knew of a couple others. His partner, Feng, was a 42 year old Singaporean living in Bangkok who often traveled to the

United Arab Emirates for work. I saw Woody regularly in Espresso, with a group of young Thai friends, but never with Feng, even though they lived together in a nearby condominium. During his interview, Woody said matter of factly: "My boyfriend is old. He doesn't like to go out. He likes to watch TV and go to sleep." Woody also noted that because of Feng's age, "He also does not like to do 'it' often, so I want it more than he does. Sometimes, I like someone at Silom, and I feel I want it, but I can't do anything because I am with Feng. Last weekend, I met a very handsome Japanese man. He was my type, tall and muscular, but I could not do anything." Woody did not use the metaphor of a golden cage, but expressed feeling unsatisfied. On the other hand, he was very appreciative of the material life Feng provided for him.

Feng met Woody when he was sixteen at the Weekend Market. Once Woody finished high school, he moved in with Feng. Woody's parents accepted the relationship. Feng gave about 10,000 THB ($350) whenever, they visited Woody's parents, which was every few months. According to Woody, his parents did not need the money Feng gave them, but did not refuse it. Since Feng was often working overseas, Woody visited his family two to three times every week in their shophouse near the Weekend Market. He was particularly close to his mother and they cooked together. Woody especially loved to make sweet green curry. I would also see Woody eating on the streets in the Silom area. One of those times, he was sitting eating a bowl of noodles. In the past, I had asked to join him and he always agreed. This time he awkwardly stated that he was with his boyfriend, who he pointed to across the street at a vendor stall. Feng did not move, so Woody grabbed my arm and led me across the street. He introduced me and said I was a friend from Soi 2. I said "Hello" and put out my hand. Feng shook it but remained silent.

Then Woody said "Bye" and led Feng back across the street to their table. I walked away, feeling a bit disturbed by what had just occurred. The interaction with Feng and Woody's management of the tense scene revealed the kinds of constraints he had on his freedom. Woody was clearly afraid Feng would misconstrue our relationship and become jealous.

Not Just for Foreigners

While in the field, I regularly did searches on coconut-grove.com, the most popular website for gay men and *kathoey* in Thailand.[2] Here, I examine one forum post that summarizes many issues in the discourse on this website in regard to foreign partners. The post generated forty-three responses over a period of three days. The forum begins with the question: when will Thai *kathoey* [here used generally to include gay men] stop thinking that having a foreign boyfriend or sex with a foreigner is something to be proud of? (*meuarai kathoey thai theung-ja loek khit wa kan-thi-dai-pen faen reu mi arai kap khon-tang-chat pen sing thi na-phumjai sakthi na*).[3] The vast majority of responses, contra the original question, assert the desire for Thai partners. However, many of these are also satirical and mock rural Thais in particular (e.g. *na ban-ban*, a homely face). Others specifically fetishize this same type for their masculinity (e.g. *chop baep maen-maen khem-khem*, I like them manly and dark).

From the beginning, the posts suggest that lack of Thai development produces this desire for foreign partners. That is, Thais who seek foreign partners are seeking an escape to a wealthier country or from relative poverty within Thailand. Response 8 lays out the general thrust of the responses. Clear Sky (*fa sai*) makes a direct connection between desire for foreign partners to the desire for a better life. The tone of her post is highly

derogatory, both toward Thais interested in foreigners and foreigners. Here I quote the entirety of her post:

Ninety percent of Thai *kathoey* want a foreign partner because they think it is a bridge to a better life in the future.

Another 5% who are fanatic [*baep fanatic*] about foreigners are addicted to [*ba*, literally crazy] chinks [เจ๊ก *jek*] or whites [*farang*]. Those who are crazy about whites will only eat guava, mango, rose apple, or durian [likely a metaphor for desiring wealth]. They won't eat chestnuts, watermelon seeds, envious people [ขี้ใส่ *yi sai*, likely a metaphor for poverty].

Those who are crazy about chinks are less serious about it. They can have Korean [เกาหี *kao hi*, literally a vulgar phrase meaning "to scratch pussy" which sounds very similar to *kaoli*, Korean], Japanese, boys who sell [*dek khai*, literally child who sells, a euphemism for sex worker] old-fashioned Thai coffee [oliang, here likely a metaphor for anus], boys who sell soy milk [likely a metaphor for semen], and all other kinds of disgusting shit.

The last 5% coincidently ran into their fated lover [*bupphe-alawat*, a karmic reunion of argumentative couples in a former life that will be happy in this life]. In the distant future they can have true love with someone really wealthy, fly

away to live together, or buy a condo of not less than 85,000,000 [about $2,850,000].

So the first 95% is envious of the latter 5%.

Clear Sky is clearly linking the desire for foreign partners to fetishistic desires and a better station in life. Initially, Clear Sky differentiates the 90% who want a better life from the 5% who racially fetishize white and Asian partners. Those who seek Caucasians are dedicated to seeking a more comfortable life as described metaphorically in the contrast between juicy and relatively expensive fruit compared to dark and less meaty nuts and seeds. The Thais seeking other Asian partners and other Thais are not as "serious" about the endeavor. These Thais perhaps are just "fanatic" about a certain *sapek* (romantic type) rather than seeking financial gain. Other Asians and Thais here are lumped together as "chinks," but Thais are reduced to sex workers. All Thais seeking foreign partners are envious of the final 5%, who unintentionally, through karma, find love and wealth with a foreigner. Like the majority of commentators on the post, Clear Sky is using satire to re-instantiate pride in being Thai. There is a status rationale for desiring foreigners, but this, or having a fetish for them, is "crazy." In addition, her disgust with Thai sex workers also points to a desire for non-monetized relations with other Thais. Her underlying message is that Thais should love and accept themselves in ways that are respectable to middle class sensibilities. In short, Clear Sky is promoting egalitarian relationships, in which partners are more or less equal.

Indeed, one theme in the posts is about disgust with sex workers or those

perceived to be sex workers. For example, one poster describes a scenario where he goes

to G.O.D (short for Guys on Display), a dance club in Silom Soi 2/1. He is approached by

another Thai person who says "*mai fren lai yu*" (มาย เฟรนด์ ไลค์ ยู้ my friend likes you) and

asks "*wae yu kham fom*" (แวร์ ยู คัม ฟ็อม where you come from) in stereotypical money boy

Tinglish (Thai English). The poster replies that he is from a province in Thailand, he is

Thai. While the poster finds the experience of being approached in this manner

demoralizing, a number of responses point to what it signifies: other Thais mistook him

for a white Asian foreigner. One response states: "In this case, older brother, it means that

you are hot and must be light skinned like a young man from Hong Kong or Korea, for

sure, *krit-krit* [the sound of someone screaming]." Thus, without obviously stating a

desire for East Asian partners, the respondent makes clear where his desires lie, with the

"hot" "light skinned" guys from Hong Kong or Korea.[4] A number of other posts

comment on the desirability of white Asians, particularly Koreans and Japanese. One

respondent provides the following list of desirable partners: "Chinese from China (ตี๋จีน *ti*

jin), Sino-Thai (ตี๋ไทย *ti thai*), Chinese mixed with Thai (จีนปนไทย *jin pon thai*); followed by

Japanese, Korean, and some Vietnamese." However, the largest number of posts focus on

farang.

There are competing discourses of not "being taken care of" by a *farang* and

becoming a *farang*'s housewife. Many posters state that they want to be the latter (*mia*

farang or *mae-ban farang*). That is, they want to be supported by the Caucasian partner

in a role that is both femininely gendered and financially dependent. One notes that when

she first met her *farang* partner, she thought that he was *farang khi-nok* ("bird shit"

farang, either implying poor or cheap). Surprisingly to her, he ended up being rich, so she is happy to be with him. However, this is often countered in other responses. For example, in response 14 by PP. PP begins by stating that there is not anything to differentiate Thais from *farang* now. He goes on to describe how Thais need to take care of themselves. PP ends by stating that "Whoever has a real *farang* boyfriend won't find anyone else seeing pride in this. Pride comes from having a career and being able to take care of yourself, not putting out a hand to beg from a *farang*. Having the money to visit Thailand when you want [suggesting he is Thai living abroad] and sending money home to your parents is what you should take pride in." Later, in response 33 by Sandy, she states that "It's good not to have a *farang* as your type, but if he is handsome, I will ask for a one night stand. But if I'm looking for love, I would rather ask a Filipino [ปินอย *pinoi*], Burmese, Japanese, Chinese, or Thai." That is, for Sandy, handsome *farang* are good for sexual partners, but not for being boyfriends, in which case she would rather have an Asian partner.

Sandy also bucks the trend among *kathoey*. In particular, the discussion is often gendered, in that *kathoey*, transgender women or other feminine identifying gay men, seek *farang* partners while those who do not focus on Thais or other Asians. I suggest that this is because of the situation of *kathoey* in Thailand, and their economic relations with heterosexually-identified men. Like in the Philippines, Burma, Indonesia, and other parts of Southeast Asia (see, for example, Garcia 1996, Johnson 1997, Boellstorff 2005), transgender women are typically the breadwinners in a household, taking care of their male partners, who are often deemed lower class and lazy. Thai *kathoey* thus typically find themselves in a system where they must financially support their heterosexual male

partners who typically do not work but instead are like kept boys. Avoiding this situation means finding a foreign boyfriend who will support them or identifying other means of romantic relationality, which now, increasingly includes more gender egalitarian relationships with gay men and, rarely, other *kathoey*.

Early in my fieldwork in 2009, Wan, a kathoey sex worker, revealed her ideal relationship situation. She would partner with an old *farang*, the older the better, she surmised. The older the male partner, the less likely he would want actual sex with her and the more likely he would die and leave her money. Wan felt that she could support three households: she could use the *farang*'s money to maintain a companionate household with him in which she played the role of housewife, she could help support her sister and mother in Isan, and she could maintain a second household with a young Thai man who would provide her with sex and companionship. The *farang* would be her patron *daling* (darling) and she would in turn be a patron for a Thai boy (*dek*). Wan later abandonded this plan as she fell in love with a Korean gay man, whom she referred to as her beloved (*thi-rak*). She subsequently emigrated to Hong Kong, where, while not legally married, she took on the family name of a Chinese gay man she referred to as her husband (*pua*). When I visited her in Hong Kong in 2014, Wan proudly showed me her Hong Kong Resident ID card, which indeed, used her partner's surname. While Wan complained about her husband's philandering, jealousy, and controlling attitude, she also took pride in having a husband based on love rather than a patron based on money.

The theme that ties these various strands together is the notion of egalitarianism and companionate love in relationships. While these ideas run throughout the thread, it is

rarefied and racialized in the final response, where "Friendly Auntie from Ortorkor"[5]

states:

> Regarding the status of one's life as it is lived and the cost of living in a Thailand
>
> that is not yet developed, having a *farang* boyfriend is a good way out for this
>
> group who speaks so vociferously about it.
>
> But personally, if you want Auntie's advice, I would say that if you have a
>
> Western [*khon tawan-tok*] boyfriend, other people will look at the couple more
>
> accusatorily [*top jot*] than if it were a Thai-Thai couple. I say this even though
>
> Auntie has never had true love. I've only ever had Thai and Asian partners, where
>
> we are both Asian and equal [เอเชียด้วยกันเท่ากัน *echia duai-kan thao-kan*].

In this last post, Friendly Auntie, who owned the most popular bar in Ortorkor
during this time period, is making a distinction that is building throughout the thread.
Again, desire for *farang* partners is associated with social climbing and escaping the
situation of being "not yet developed." Yet, there is social stigma attached to these kinds
of relationships. That is, there is a perceived inequality in relationships between Thais
and *farang* that does not hold the same weight in relationships with other Asians, who are
often described as "equal" (*thao-kan*) partners. For middle class Thais, the perceived
inequality in relationships with Westerners is distasteful as it points to Thailand's
relatively low status in relation to the West.

I also conducted searches for racial/ethnic terms on gay cruising websites such as gayromeo.com, the most popular site during my fieldwork. The term *farang* is often related to sex work in Thai profiles, both among Thai sex workers who specifically are looking for foreign partners and among Thais who are disavowing being sex workers. Indeed, statements such as "I am not a money boy" are common on Thai profiles and often collocated with the term *farang*. Dear, a Sino-Thai (his father is from Hong Kong but now lives in Thailand) with a PhD in education, regularly complained to me that *farang* constantly sent him messages assuming that he was a sex worker. The messages would start with the basic question "how much?" He thus posted the statement "I am not a money boy" on his profile, yet he continued to get the same requests for price. I suggested to him that he simply ignore the messages and not respond.[6] The statement "I am not a money boy," after all, is often not genuine, as many sex workers use this as a ploy to increase their price in online negotiations. Telling the "truth" in online profiles is clearly fungible.

When I did searches to look for information about Koreans, Japanese, *farang*, and other foreigners, I routinely found many Thais who claimed to be multilingual in English, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and other languages. For example, this profile shows Big, a young Thai man looking for other masculine men to have sex with while on drugs.

Figure 20: Gayromeo Profile (identifying information redacted). I have included a translation of the Thai text on the screenshot.

I want to point out a few key characteristics from this profile. Besides the fact that Big is looking for sex on drugs with a handsome, masculine partner, he lists numerous characteristics about himself that can be read in different ways. First, Big incorporates Thai text in his profile, which means that he is looking for Thai partners among others. Many Thai profiles only use English to decrease the likelihood they would be contacted by another Thai, especially one who lacks the education to be able to understand English. Second, Big's profile states that he knows the following languages: English, Thai, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese. This is quite common in Thai profiles. It does not mean that the person actually has any knowledge of these languages. As you can see in this screenshot, the only languages he employs are English and Thai. What it refers to is his desire for partners who know those languages, as users of the site can specifically search for others based on language ability. Thus, tourists and expats from places like Japan, who are looking for others like themselves, can specifically search for speakers of Japanese language in Bangkok. However, what they will encounter is primarily Thai

people who do not have any Japanese language ability but want to be found in searches by Japanese men. That is, a profile with this language description more or less states that the user is looking for white Asian partners: Sino-Thai, Korpanese, or tropical Chinese. Third, his ethnicity is "mixed." In this context, it means that he identifies as Sino-Thai, the mix being Thai and Chinese, as demonstrated by the light skin in his profile picture. This contrasts with the use of mixed orally to refer to being *luk-khreung*. Fourth, he identifies his sexuality as "bisexual." Here, it means "masculine gay," as evident in the picture of him at the gym. He need not have any desire for women, only a "straight acting" demeanor. Fifth, he is predominantly "more top" (insertive in anal sex). This follows from his masculine "bisexuality." And finally, he is not interested in "feminine(sissy), sugar daddy, old, slim guy!" This statement is a repudiation of several categories that include Thai sissies, older *farang*, and those who do not go to the gym, which invokes middle class status and gay lifestyle through body type. Big was one of my neighbors in a new condominium complex across the soi from one of my residences in Bangkok. When I contacted him online, he invited me over. So I was able to confirm my interpretations about his profile, for example, in his inability to speak East Asian languages, being gay rather than bisexual, and being Sino-Thai. Big also invokes the notion of being the "same" or similar. While the statement primarily references his body and mannerisms, it is also referencing other aspects of his profile, such as a presumed middle class lifestyle.

Egalitarian Relationships

In The *Transformation of Intimacy*, Anthony Giddens (1993) describes the development of contemporary sexual identity linked to love in intimate relationships and large scale social changes. With economic development and modernization, ideas of romantic love emerge. Romantic love is a durable emotional attachment that is based on the close tie between individuals rather than based on kin relations, marriage, and other prescribed relationships. This leads to new forms of relationships, such as companionate love marriages, where couples chose their partners based on emotional connections and act as partners in making decisions about the relationship. Combined with "plastic sexuality," or sexual activity that is freed from reproduction given the technologies available, intimate relationships have been moving towards what Giddens calls a "pure relationship." Pure relationships are "a social relation entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another, and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfaction for each individual to stay within it" (Giddens 1992:58). Giddens, furthermore, lays out the relationship between intimacy, self-making, and liberal democracy. Pure relationships are possible as a consequence of and reinforce greater gender equality and acceptance of sexual pluralism (e.g. non-monogamy, homosexuality, transgenderism). That is, they imply both social and interpersonal egalitarianism. Contrary to pre-modern relationships based on inherent differential power relations, pure relationships both require respect for the other as an equal and promote sexual and emotional equality. The transactional negotiations of pure relationships occur between people who are more or less equals.

The cultural movement in modern societies toward pure relationships parallels shifts in forms of homosexuality. Murray (2000) argues that modern societies practice a

form of egalitarian homosexuality in contrast to age structured (i.e. intergenerational) or gender stratified (e.g. where one partner changes gender or there are strict gender roles) types. That is, there is equivalence among partners in modern homosexual relations based on similarity in age and gender. To these kinds of equivalences, I would add race in environments that are racially charged or hierarchical. These kinds of similarities are both a function of socially structured dispositions and reinforce one's place in modern middle class lifestyles. Yet, such typologies also have the tendency to reiterate a teleological evolution in which egalitarianism or companionate relationships are the pinnacle of modernity, a sexuality naturalized by liberal democratic ideology (see Povinelli 2006).

Monetization has been a classic cross-cultural conflict identified in interracial relationships between Caucasian men and Asian women (see, for example, Constable 2003, 2009). Cohen (1993) specifically contrasts what he refers to as Thai "additive" versus Western "substitutive" love. In the former scenario, Thai women expect that the more a partner loves her, the more he will demonstrate it through financial support. Caucasian men, in contrast, assume that emotional attachment substitues for economic remuneration, so that the more love exists between a couple, the less he should have to prove it through gifts and other pecuniary means. Cohen suggests that Western notions of substitutive love are increasingly common among Thai female sex workers in relationships with *farang*. Similar shifts in ideals of romance and companionate marriage are also evident in other parts of the world. For example, in *A Courtship after Marriage: Sexuality and Love in Mexican Transnational Families*, Jennifer Hirsch (2003) describes how notions of companionate marriage have transformed among Mexican American men and their wives in rural Mexico. Ideals of respect and responsibility are increasingly

superceded by trust and intimacy. Hirsch and Wardlow (2006) and Padilla et al. (2008) attribte the shifts toward "modern" and "global" love to wider political economic and demographic shifts that idealize companionate coupledom based on mutual choice and emotional intimacy.

Egalitarian relationships, and particularly those in which financial security or transaction was not a factor, are also idealized by middle class gay men in Thailand. In the period from 1980 to 2010, patronage of sex workers has decreased, especially among younger men. The shift among gay men from sex mostly bought or sold to sex without economic exchange, is in line with wider shifts in the decrease of male reliance on marriage or commercial sex for sexual debut (Ojanen 2014). Thai gay men tended to frame this in terms of *khwam-rak jing-jing* (real love) or *rak-romaentik* (romantic love) that disavowed any economic component to the relationship, similar to how the love between a mother and child was based on care that minimized material support. According to Mark, "the most important things in your life are not money, but respect (*khaorop*) and love (*khwam-rak*)." This refers both to family and to romantic partners. Part of his display of these qualities with his family is that he invited his parents to live with him in Bangkok after he established himself professionally and bought a house. The parents maintain their land in the provinces but have lived with Mark for over a decade now. Mark's younger brother, who is unmarried, also lives with them. Mark's sexuality is not an open matter, but there is also no hostility towards his lifestyle. Mark regularly hosts events at home, like dinner parties and barbeques, with primarily gay Thai friends and Asian visitors. As homosociality is common, this does not appear out of place. Yet there will be no open discussion of gay matters. For example, in conversation, one would

ask other participants about their boyfriends. But as the word is gender neutral in Thai, it has no homosexual reference. Once my partner asked someone a question using the word "gay" in English and Mark immediately shushed him and pointed to his parents, who had not been paying attention.

When I visit Mark's home, I will bring his parents "Korean" gifts such as ginseng (which as a *yang* herb is often considered inappropriate for women in Korea but is popular among Thai women), soju (a Korean liquor like light vodka), or seaweed laver, which makes them very excited. Korean imports are both desirable and relatively highly priced, especially liquor. Mark's parents are quite accustomed to foreigners. Their daughter married a Brit and moved overseas. However, the travel is usually to visit them abroad. On the other hand, there is a relatively constant flow of Asian male visitors. Mark maintained a primary relationship with a Chinese Malaysian for several years, so just about every other trip Mark took was to Kuala Lumpur. His boyfriend would also visit him in Bangkok regularly, staying with him in his bedroom. At the same time, he made other friends throughout the region, who he would invite to stay with him at his home. Generally tropical Chinese and more recently Mainland Chinese, they also slept in his bedroom. They would go sight seeing when Mark went to work and would go out to bars and discos on the weekends. Sometimes, Mark would also invite me and my partner to join him and his guests on weekend trips to Pattaya, Koh Samet, and other nearby destinations.

These visits by Mark's friends were reciprocated in kind. Mark travelled throughout Asia, visiting boyfriends, potential new boyfriends, and friends he met online. At the height of his travels, he was going abroad every three weeks along the routes of

discount airlines such as Air Asia. On an advanced fare, one can travel from Bangkok to

Beijing, Shanghai, Seoul or Tokyo for under $300, while promotional tickets are often

less than half that cost. Closer destinations and popular routes to endpoints such as Bali,

Indonesia are often less than $100. However, most nearby destinations were undesirable

places, as they did not have the kind of men Mark wanted to meet. Mark also made

frequent trips to Vietnam, where a Korean American friend in his firm was relocated.

Mark quickly monopolized on the recent economic development of Mainland China and

Vietnam. He felt that these places had the kind of partner he desired (young, attractive,

professional Asian men) and yet, lacking a gay scene as developed as places such as

Tokyo or Taipei, he was also able to meet men that would be "out of reach" in more

developed gay scenes. Traveling in this way, without using hotels, created regional

networks and allowed Mark to travel at much lower cost than if he had to pay for

housing. I occasionally had the chance to make my travel plans coincide with his and that

of other friends who were engaging in similar independent travel circuits. Thus, I was

able to observe the relationship dynamics among Thais with men of numerous other

nationalities, both in Thailand and abroad.

The newly developed gay Asian circuit of parties and large events, means that I

will always run into Thais I know from Bangkok and other gay Asians from major cities

if I go to Taipei for Halloween (the time for both Taiwan Pride, the largest in Asia, and

the G5 Circuit Parties planned around it) or that I can expect to run into many of my

Korean, Chinese, or Vietnamese friends if I stay in Bangkok over Thai New Year. Gay

apps like Grindr, which are designed for cruising, are also useful in this regard.[7] It is

common for gay men to favorite their friends, so that if one is at the mall for example and

turns on the app, one can easily chat and meet up. The same is also true during travel. For example, in 2011, I attended the International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific in Busan, Korea, not the most popular destination in the gay Asian imaginary. When I opened my Grindr app, Poon (an abbreviation of the Thai word for Japan, here meaning someone with a small body), one of my Thai gay neighbors popped up. He was staying at a hotel close to mine for a Korean seafood tour and a shopping trip to Shinsegae, the largest department store in the world. He can afford such trips because he lives with his family, thus his living expenses are the part of his salary that he gives to them. This leaves him with the disposable income to take several trips abroad each year. In an interesting twist, a Chinese friend posted his image on his Facebook profile. Poon is very light skinned and quite handsome. A Chinese woman had secretly taken a picture of him with her phone and posted it on Weibo, the Mainland Chinese equivalent of Twitter. One of Poon's Chinese friends, recognizing him, reposted it to his Facebook profile. Poon would never have known about the existence of this picture if he did not have extensive social networks throughout the region. These types of images, are, however, circulating widely. As certain websites and apps leave a watermark on photos, one can literally see the history of an image in the layering of water marks.

The respect and love that Mark desires have clearly coded racialized and class-based signs. Even though his sister married a white British man, he finds the idea of being with a Caucasian repulsive for himself. As he notes, he could never have a relationship with a *farang* that appeared "equal" in the eyes of others. Mark, a migrant to Bangkok from the Thai border with Laos, went to great lengths to show his status outwardly to others. Going out with Mark often involved his insistence on driving, so that

one shows up in a car rather than a taxi. For me, the inconvenience of driving and the fact that the only people who see you parking are the parking attendants, made it a moot point. But Mark took great pride in arriving in a car, a clear sign of upper middle class status, and one of the most symbolic as far as Bangkokians are concerned. Some nights, he would also hire a driver, if he did not want to place limits on his drinking. Once in a bar, the type of drink was incredibly important. We regularly had clashes about what to order, though, as I often arrived first, my speed meant that I was able to place the first order. This could be something like a bottle of Benmore or 100 Pipers whisky. Mark would always be shocked and ask: "Who ordered this?" In the unspoken rules of middle class respectability, the minimum one should request is Johnny Walker Red Label. For upper middle class people, the minimum would be Black Label. When the bottle of whisky I ordered was potentially going to be finished, Mark would order a Red Label or something higher.[8] As bottles of liquor are the most prominent objects on one's table, they signal class standing to others.

For Mark, the stakes of class appearances are very high. One's face and social self is made and evaluated on consumer choices, even when they are not visible to others or only visible to people like the cashier at 7-11. As noted in the previous chapter, Mark, at his regular karaoke bar, ordered Gold Label, even though it was kept behind the counter so the only person who really knew what he was drinking was the bartender. When drinking at home, I would always buy Crystal soda water (8 THB, about $0.25), while Mark would buy Singha (9 THB, about $0.30). I once challenged him to a blind taste test, and we agreed that the Crystal was more "sparkly" (*sa*), the carbonation was stronger, it was more refreshing. Nevertheless, he insisted we buy Singha at the store, for the sake of

appearances, even though we would be taking it to be used in a group of intimate friends. The brand choice still made a difference for him. While I, as a foreigner, could think and act differently, he as a Thai felt trapped in this system of local moral evaluation when it was visible to others. It was expected that he buy the more expensive brand. On the other hand, consumption that did not involve his purchasing and was outside the view of other Thais was a different matter. My partner and I more or less exclusively drank Blend at home, a Thai brand of whisky, cheaper, but better tasting than many Scottish imports. When Mark visited our apartment, he was more than happy to be served and drink Blend. Mark agreed that Blend was better tasting than many imported brands, even though it is a brand so inexpensive few Thai gay bars in Bangkok serve it.

Public appearances and face are of the utmost importance. The display of status was exceedingly important among many in my immediate circle of fictive kin and friends. Indeed, part of the rationale that middle class Thai gay men expressed to me for wanting white Asian partners was to escape the "frame" (*krop*) of Thai society. Although in the end, most of Thais ended up with each other (though typically Sino-Thai and thus falling within the broader category of white Asian I am using), there was an experiential disciplinary force in being with another Thai. A relationship with another Thai kept one within the Thai system of social evaluation, while, being with a white Asian meant a partial escape. There was a sense of equivalence in status with white Asians, but also the ability to break with some Thai norms. Furthermore, Thai partners meant that gossip could expand rapidly throughout Thai networks. Having a foreign Asian boyfriend generally limited the flow of information, as a language barrier was introduced. Within gay circles, gossip about who one was seen with was one of the primary means through

which reputations were built and faces were cracked. Accusations about cheating, secret relationships, and sexual improprieties were one of the main reasons for a bar table or peer drinking group to disband. This was only exacerbated with new technologies that made the flow of gossip and pictures that conveyed "truth" that much more readily available. Online web postings and instantaneous social media intensified the broadcast of chatter. Thai gay couples often go out to bars separately, with their own group of friends, to minimize conflicts, and are known to avoid certain environments such as saunas or beaches where jealousies might flare up.

Respect and Moral Development

In this environment, being with a foreign Asian partner was generally status elevating and elicited gossip about how envious one was about the Thai with a foreign partner. That is, it propped up one's face. At the same time that it prevented more widespread gossip. Thai partners were often integrated into the networks of foreign Asians, further isolating them from prying Thai eyes. In contrast, having a *farang* partner generally elicited a more complex set of responses. Sex workers, for example, would often congratulate each other. The assumption was that they could now retire and become kept boys or receive support that they could capitalize into a business venture, farm land, or other financial resource that would secure them and their families for the future. It also was linked to the idea that because of same sex marriage in the West, one would not only be taken care of, but could live abroad in a more developed country and expect compensation at the end of a relationship. Indeed, this was the situation of half the Thai gay men and *kathoey* I met in Berlin. Many of them expressed disappointment in their

German partners being of relatively low social status in Germany. However, they were able to gain German residency and travel and work freely in the Schengen Area.

There is not a simple division between love and material support. Germans, and other Westerners, often thought of Thais in these situations as gold-digging mercenaries, manipulating their emotions for financial gain. This was generally not what I observed. Thais, including sex workers, typically were emotionally invested in their long-term relationships. Nevertheless, there can also be an agenda in that one need only be married for a few years before gaining foreign residency or citizenship.[9] This can lead to extending the length of a relationship that otherwise might have been dissolved sooner. Gay and *kathoey* Thais who have married Germans, and sometimes subsequently divorced them, congregate in Thai Park in Berlin and share their experiences and provide advice and support to one another. The same is also true of Thai women I have interacted with, who make pronouncements such as "one more year," in Thai, then smile at their German husband and ask in English: "another beer darling?"

Among middle class professional Thais, the implications are different. A professional gay Thai in a relationship with a foreigner is still expected to work, maintain a career, and control their own finances. There are also different expectations in regards to differences in age, educational background, and attractiveness. Generational differences are common when the younger man is of a lower socio-economic status, but this is not true of middle class men, who prefer partners of approximately the same age. The expectation is that they be similar. That is, whether the partner is *farang* or Asian, middle class Thais will expect an egalitarian relationship. When this does not occur, for example, because of differences in age or income, accusations of being a money boy or

kept boy follow. Golf, a lawyer who had always professed his desires for a white Asian partner to me, started dating a Thai of limited financial means. Golf started to support the younger and physically much smaller man, Guz, and his mother. While Golf sympathized with their impoverished situation, he also recognized that Guz had "beauty," fair skin and fine facial features. Indeed, Guz was soon on billboards advertising cosmetic surgery. Yet, Golf's friends continue to gossip about Guz being *dek liang*, a kept boy. The initial class difference overshadowed Guz's improving financial situation.

Egalitarian Relationships and Equal Rights

I liken the development of middle class egalitarian sexuality in Thailand to Gidden's pure relationships. Sexuality itself is constructed through this middle class-based framework, which can also marginalize racialized, queer, and other groups (Povinelli 2006). At the same time, it comes into contact with the friction of sex tourism. Indeed, for many *farang* gay sex tourists, part of the allure of Thailand is the notion of a pre-modern homosexuality in which men sell their bodies because they have no Western complexes around guilt, pleasure, and the appropriate use of the body in sexual contact with variously gendered others (Atkins 2011). Yet middle class Thai gay men do see themselves as part of a "global gay" imaginary, and increasingly, this is a "gay Asian" imaginary (Enteen 2010), which Thais participate in, not only in a subservient position, but increasingly as equals in homogender, homo-aged, and homo-racial relationships.

The Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand (RSAT) is the largest gender and sexual diversity organization in Thailand. Based in Bangkok, they have satellite offices throughout the country and serve all gender and sexual identities, though their primary

source of funding is from HIV programming and thus their primary constituents are gay men and *kathoey*, also known as in public health parlance as MSM and TG (men who have sex with men and transgender women). RSAT repeats four values in their programs: *rak khaojai saksi thaothiam* (love, understanding, honor/pride, and equality). Though the terms have difference resonances whether at a human rights march, a beauty pageant, or a workshop, part of these words' relevance lies in their ability to traverse levels from a couple, a family or group, up to society at large.

Only certain equivalences are important, and among them is a newly developing racialization of Asianness based on economic and status equivalence. Within middle class Thai circles, this means that they can feel more-or-less equal to Asian partners from developed nations as well as other middle class minorities from developing nations (e.g. Korpanese and tropical Chinese). The most important component of these relationships is that modern love must be materialized in specific ways. This means that love can be highly monetized but not commercialized. That is, one shows love by making reciprocal extravagant expenditures, like going on vacation trips and buying gifts for the other. But an imbalance in the flows between partners suggests something closer to sex work. To express modernity, love must be pure love, devoid of blatant monetary transaction, though, one still must remain generous and take care of kin and those who are less able. For middle class Thai gay men, dating an Asian foreigner provided a means to simultaneously be revered by one's peers, escape routine surveillance and gossip networks, and remain relatively invisible as a transnational couple in Thai public space. In the recent literature on queer Asians, perhaps this is best exemplified by the idea of queer subjects trying to be "as normal as possible" (Yau 2010).

Perhaps one way to approach Thai relationships with the foreign is in three similar but contrasting terms that refer to development: *watthana*, *phatthana*, and *jaroen* (or *charoen*). The first, *watthana*, refers to a historical process such as in the change of architectural styles over time or biological evolution. The second, *phatthana*, refers to progress and development in building a structure or the economy. Thus, Thai classifies economic development into the three categories of developed (*phatthana-laeo*, e.g. Japan), developing (*kamlang-phatthana*, e.g. Thailand), and underdeveloped (*doi-phatthana*, e.g. Laos) countries. The third term, *jaroen*, means to achieve a state of development, to be *siwilai* or civilized (Winichakul 2000). It is derived from a fourteenth century Khmer term meaning "cultivating, increasing, growing, building up or expanding until complete in a positive sense…applied mostly to nonmaterial matters, such as cultivating merit and Buddhist awakening, making (someone) happier, growing up, increasing maturity, and so on" (Winichakul 2000:531). In this sense, *jaroen* incorporates a sense of progress, prosperity, and thriving. *Jaroen* is the most morally coded of these terms and refers to spiritual development or transformation, for example, when a child becomes an adult. This would be most frequently encountered in Thai daily life through the ubiquitous blessing: "Long Live the King" (*song phra jaroen*). In the modern Thai context, *jaroen* differentiates the civilized from the barbaric.

Andrew Johnson (2013:315), however, notes that migrant workers in Chiang Mai refer to the newly built but empty high rises as physically completed but lacking moral progress (*phattana tae yang mai charoen*). For Johnson, *charoen* refers to spiritual, moral, and rational progress, which points to an internal essence of a potential being fulfilled, made wise, advanced, or progressive. However, for migrant workers who build

these buildings, signs such as cracks in the walls of a new house point to its inherent imperfection. The building is finished but not perfected, it lacks a sense of quality in having been completed in a manner that has not reached its fullest potential. These buildings reference both their own material superficiality and an economy based on speculation. Migrant workers comments about the buildings they construct are thus a critique of empty materialism that lacks substance.

Yet, Johnson's analysis can be modified when examining the structures from a middle class perspective. These buildings still have concrete meanings for their buyers. They are symbols of wealth, and as investments, have the potential to continue to increase in value. While they can be mocked by the workers who build them to protest their frustrations, those who buy them are highly invested in the same structures as symbols of their own *jaroen*, their own development and having "made it" into the developed, or civilized, world. The participation in civilization, however, is no longer reliant on the sole judgment of the West. In an increasingly multipolar world, there are new gazes, new stakes, and new ways of making distinctions.

I argue that in Thailand, there is a strong desire among middle class individuals to display egalitarianism in intimate relationships. Within the context of widespread sex tourism, national development, growing inter-Asian regional flows, and the politics of visibility and face, this creates a situation in which Caucasian partners are devalued at the same time that white Asian partners are positively excepted. I am arguing that there is a professed preference among middle class gay Thais for white Asian partners. This is often hidden to Caucasians, as there is a divergence of experience in which white men tend to interact with lower class Thais, so they continue to feel desired, but it is generally

by individuals from a lower stratum of Thai society. *Farang* can thus not notice that middle class Thai gay men will avoid white men in order to maintain class distinctions. This manner of relating to foreigners is also relatively silenced in Thailand as it relates to sex tourism and forms Thai "cultural intimacy," or the shameful aspects of one's culture that shape national identities. Thus, the reorientation of desire among middle class Thai gay men from *farang* to white Asians points to the ways in which macrosocial changes are not unidirectional and homogenizing, not simply a desire to become Western or American. Local frictions and the transnational connections that otherwise might produce racial gaypergamy in Thailand are refracted through class standing and rerouted through local moral worlds that produce new desires and allow for new distinction making possibilities. Thus, the egalitarianism espoused in desire for white Asian partners is a certain kind of equality in the service of distinction making that, at the same time, makes one superior to others, those who remain below and figuratively work on their backs. While this can be read as a resistance to Western hegemony, I argue that it more intimately represents a continuation of long-standing Thai status ideologies intensified by capitalism to produce new status hierarchies. That is, middle class desires in a middle income country are both aspirations for personal and national development and complicit in the reproduction of social norms that marginalize, stigmatize, and exploit those who do not meet the rising expectations associated with development.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

When I describe the phenomenon of transnational inter-racial romance, and specifically the way that some gay Thais stigmatize Thai-Caucasian partnerships, I am often met with disbelief by Caucasian and Asian gay men alike, though not by Thais. I also get a persistent response of "this doesn't fit my experience" by gay Caucasians who have visited or lived in Thailand. To a certain extent, I do not expect it to. In part, this is because white men continue to attract the attention and adoration of Thai men at various class levels, especially those who are lower or higher in the class hierarchy. As foreigners they remain high status targets for many Thais. However, many foreigners fail to see class differences operating in Thai society, or rather, see only the parts of it operating in spaces that are often set up for foreigners to have pleasurable experiences. The vast majority of Caucasian gay men who travel to or reside in Thailand, some of whom are fleeing homophobia, ageism, classism and a general sense of diminishment in their home countries, will have a very different experience indeed. The Caucasian expatriate experience of becoming a "king" in Thailand is predicated on structured international relations of power and privilege that are typically unacknowledged. Whiteness, Caucasian or otherwise, is not only a standard of beauty and cosmopolitan modernity, but also considered a superior model of being in the world. This quality of being can be granted by birth, but it also requires cultivation, and can become an achievement. The relative marginality of groups such as Russians makes it clear that *farang* status is not automatic, both from the perspective of Thais and other Caucasians in Thailand.

Furthermore, the status of the outsider in a country like Thailand, renowned for its

generosity, flexibility, and hospitality, provides a warm welcome. Being a foreigner (who

is not a migrant worker, refugee, etc.) simultaneously places the individual higher on the

social ladder but also excuses the expat or tourist from many local obligations and

expectations. The zones of contact between Caucasian and Thai gay men, however, are

spatially but a small sliver in the gay life of Thais. While Asians are considered the more

recent arrivals in Bangkok's extensive gay scene, non-Thai Asians are more widely

distributed in the international and local scene.

In conclusion, I explore visibility politics that make intra-racial Asian

relationships relatively unremarkable in Thailand. In part, this is a matter of class

differences and what receives attention as "international." As I have shown, the

relationships and linkage between *farang* men and lower-class Thai women and sex

workers is well documented. However, there is also an issue of optics, or what becomes

noticeable, visible, and subsequently controlled. Thai relationships with white Asians are

less visible than those with *farang*, so it is the latter that attracts glares from strangers,

snide comments from service staff, and other insults to face and ego. I then return to the

issue of racialized gendering in US same sex relationships, where Asian partners are

feminized in comparison to men of other races. While this is considered a race-based

injury for Asian American men, I suggest that masculinity need not be recuperated.

Finally, I consider how Thai middle class desires for white Asian partners simultaneously

enact an egalitarian ethos while continuing to perpetuate the marginalization of the poor,

rural, and otherwise stigmatized that constitute the majority of Thai citizens, migrant

workers, and other groups within Thailand's national borders. The globalization of gay sexuality need not reiterate Western norms in an era of increasing Asian regionalism.

Interracial Optics

Tamara Loos' (2005, 2006, 2009) critique of Stoler's (1995, 2002) work that focuses on the perspectives of European elites is critical to the contemporary Thai situation. Loos (2008) argues that the majority of relationships between Asians were not regulated as they were not of concern to colonial administration, while the minority of relationships between European men and Southeast Asian women were, and therefore, highly regulated. This optic on interracial relationships persists today in a different way. Relationships between Thais and Caucasians are still of concern. However, the locus of anxiety has shifted from European elites to Thai ones. Internationalized Thais are seeing themselves through the Western gaze. When they adopt this perspective, what they see is unseemly. In particular, there is a desire for the Thais not to look like colonial or postcolonial subjects pulling themselves up on the shirt tails of farang. The internalization of the view from the outside increases Thai sensitivity to local practices of interracial relationships.

For Loos (2008), relationships between various Asians populations are relatively invisible in the historical archive. They remain so today. But what was regulated by colonial states before is now internalized via a kind of self-surveillance (Foucault 1995) in maintaining middle class standing. Following Loos, I suggest that Asian-Asian relational invisibility and unremarkability continues to exist in the realm of everyday life in Thailand, especially in relation to same sex couples. Given Thai homosocial norms,

where intimate bonds are forged primarily among members of the same sex, homosexual Asian-Asian couples are virtually invisible to the untrained foreign eye. That is, for most Thai people, a Chinese/Japanese/Filipino and Thai same sex couple does not stand out. They exist under the radar of discernibility in contrast to *farang*-Thai couples. As previously noted by several informants, racial difference can also recode homosociality as homosexuality. The stereotype of the Thai-*farang* relationship as a commercial sexual transaction not only implicates the Thai as a sex worker, but also the Caucasian as a sex tourist.

While I contend that the majority of sex tourists in contemporary Thailand are Asian, the stereotype of the Western sex tourist persists in part to the misapprehension of these racialized visibility politics.[1] East and Southeast Asians constitute a majority of tourists to Thailand. Yet, in everyday life, interactions between Thais and other Asians are not coded by Thais as sex work, even if they are. There are red light districts that specifically cater to Japanese tourists in Soi Thaniya and several Sukhumvit sois between Phrom Phong and Ekkamai. Additionally, many hotel-size massage parlors (*ap-op-nuat*) in the Ratchada area cater to Thai, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese men.[2] Other large establishments can be found throughout the city, particularly along New Phetchaburi and Rama IX Roads. These establishments tend to be significantly larger and much more expensive than the go-go bars that cater to *farang*. Yet, as they are considered "local" establishments catering to Thais and other Asians and are generally less sexually explicit (they generally have large ads with bikini clad women on the front of the building but no actual women are visible), they generate less stigma for the establishments, clients, and workers. In particular, at massage establishments, all intimate activity between service

provider and client occurs out of public sight. The system is even more anonymous at gay massage venues as there is no signage that identifies it with sexual activity. Even when Asians "off" at go-go bars (pay the establishment to leave with a sex worker), which requires leaving the premises, there is less stigma for the companions of Asians. In the cultural logics of assimilability and appropriate public appearance, being seen in public with another Asian attracts less attention and is less likely to be associated with sex work or paid companionship.

Interracial optics are activated by friction (Tsing 2005), or the cross-cultural encounters that cataylze cultural change. The friction of intercultural contacts and relationships that visibly cross racial lines provides the opportunity for Thai middle class distinction making. That is, desires for white Asians are partially produced through local dynamics in which multiple racial groups come into contact in Bangkok. As interaction across racial boundaries is class coded, this provides the opportunity for class differentiation and the emergence of preferential racial partnerships. The multi-cultural contact also provides the opportunity for Thais to embrace and identity with, or resist, increasingly powerful cultural flows from East Asia. In sum, it is in the multiple contacts with numerous groups that Thais can create new desires for Asian partners.

Impossible Desires: Same Same, But Different

In *Impossible Desires*, Gayatri Gopinath (2005) explores how female same-sex desire is rendered unthinkable in nationalistic and diasporic patriarchal South Asian discourses. Lesbianism is not legible in the South Asian context as racial difference is rendered invisible or stereotypically hypervisible in the diaspora. In a similar, but

internalized homogendered and homoracialized vein, *gay/bantut* in the Philippines and diasporic gay Filipino men's desires for each other are deemed disgusting, incestuous, or at least improbable: metaphorically lesbian or cannibalistic (Johnson 1997, Manalansan 2003). As Hwang (1993) was told by Asian gay men, in the US, the patterning of relationships among older, masculinized Caucasian men and younger, feminized Asian men "had become so codified, that, until recently, it was considered unnatural for gay Asians to date one another. Such men would be taunted with a phrase which implied they were lesbians" (98).

The idea that Asian-Asian pairings of gay men are akin to lesbianism reveals misogynistic attitudes toward the racialized gendering of gay Asian men as overly effeminate and lesbianism as abject in mainstream gay American culture. Such a formulation renders relationships between gay Asian men as abhorrent. Yet the disgust attached to such homoracial and homogender pairings are not limited to the US. Many Thai gay men and transgender women also express the idea that relationships with other Thais are like incest. I have never heard a straight man or woman or lesbian in Thailand express this sentiment, however, even if they are not interested in Thai partners for other reasons. The phrase "friends don't eat friends" (*pheuan mai kin pheuan*) literally refers to the idea that friends should not have sexual relationships with each other, but the metaphor can be used in a broader sense to refer to other Thais.[3] The idea is that another Thai is too similar to the self, too kin-like, to arouse attraction. Some kind of difference is needed to erotize a potential partner. On the other hand, some gay Thais express the idea of "having already tasted Thai" (*kin khon thai laeo*, or *chim khon thai laeo*, *jim khon thai laeo*) or comment on the idea of sex with a Thai as mundane (*chin laeo*-be accustomed

to) or boring (*beua laeo*, *beua beua*, or *na-beua*), with the implication that such relationships are uninteresting and monotonous.[4] Indeed, variety in food and sex (Jackson 1995) are considered important aspects of Thai masculinity.[5] Thais also highly value experiences that are novel and exciting (*na-tuenten*). However, in the end, most Thai gay men end up with other Thais.

The contemporary situation for Thai gay men is simultaneously feminized and hypermasculine in regards to both Caucasian and East Asian gay men. On the one hand, Thailand's position as a developing nation feminizes it the global economic hierarchy, where it is more often the receiver than provider of technology transfer and foreign aid. On the other hand, Thailand's status as "pre-modern" or "pre-gay" can polarize homosexuality into transgender *kathoey* and heterosexual male forms (Jackson 2001, Peletz 2009, Atkins 2011). Rural, poor, and dark men are cast as "real" men who happen to engage in homosexual encounters, commercial or not, and assumed to take a penetrative role. As noted previously, sex workers often assume that their clients desire to be penetrated.

The feminization of Asian men in the Western imagination is nothing new. The apparent lack of Western-style gender dimorphism was a justification for colonialism in Southeast Asia and elsewhere (van Esterik 2000, Barmé 2002, Jackson 2003b, Loos 2006, Peletz 2009, Käng 2014a). In the 1970s, this gendering of Asian men was contested as Orientalist, for example, in the Asian American anti-racist, but simultaneously masculinist, discourse of Frank Chin and others who attempted to reverse conventional attitudes (see, for example, Chin and Chan 1972, Chin et al. 1974). In the late 1980s and 1990s, debates about rice queens, sticky rice, and other forms of racialized and gendered

same sex desire became a politicized topic in US Asian gay men's community organizations, some of which excluded Caucasian members. These were part of larger queer of color debates on gay men of color interracial dating, lesbian butch femme and BDSM politics, and multiculturalism at large (see, for example, Beam 1986, Hemphill and Beam 1991, Nestle 1992, Munt 1998). Asian men critiqued the singular desire for Caucasian partners as internalized neocolonial racism and Caucasian men countered with assertions of xenophobic reverse racism among Asians.[6] During this period, diasporic gay Asian activists and artists in the US, Canada, UK, and Australia were promoting same-race relationships (Manalansan 2003, Nguyen 2014). Manalansan (2003), for example, provides the example of Gene Chang's 1993 presentation at a meeting of Gay Asian Pacific Islander Men of New York. Chang enumerates differences in age, body size, and other factors between Caucasian and Asian men to assert an inherent inbalance in corresponding power relations and a pedophilic tendency among rice queens.

Nguyen (2014) has critiqued efforts to recuperate Asian American masculinity and the harms of racial castration (Fung 1991, Eng 2001). For Nguyen, the Asian American determination to shore up masculinity, to be considered as masculine as Caucasian men, fails to recognize its privileging of the masculine over the feminine. It is a reaction that reinstantiates a devaluation of the feminine. Rather than healing impotency to achieve dominance, Nguyen proposes "bottomhood" alliances with other disempowered groups to destabilize sexual, gender, and racial norms. He proposes an ethics of shame, openness, and vulnerability in contrast to masculinist heteronormative politics based on mastery, in line with what Halberstam (2011) refers to as the "queer art of failure."

A politics that eschews mastery can seek change, but is guided by the idea that the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 1984). In the *Twilight of Equality*, Lisa Duggan (2003) critiques what she refers to as the culture/economy divide in feminist, queer, and civil rights politics in the era of neoliberalism since the 1990s. The adoption and mainstreaming of diversity in supposedly neutral free market terms has refocused social movements on narrow policies such as access to abortion rather than re-imagining of the social order in broader political economic terms. For Duggan, "*the new homonormativity* [or the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian life to be like heterosexuals]…does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them" (50, emphasis in original). The mainstreaming of lesbian and gay rights movement thus locates gay culture in the realms of domesticity and consumption by naturalizing an identity-based minority group as a constituency with the right to privacy and access to conservative institutions such as legal marriage and military service. Politics such as homonationalism, which posits gays and lesbians as good citizens, provide precarious security for some queer subjects at the same time they rely on the Orientalizing of terrorist others as sexually and racially perverse (Puar 2007).

After True Love: Inequality Again

In 1990 Cuba entered the "Special Period," implementing severe austerity measures. Dissolution of the socialist bloc and the Soviet Union itself in 1991 led to an end of subsidies that had propped up the Cuban economy, leading to shortages of food, fuel, and other commodities. In *After Love*, Stout (2014) describes the impact of this economic crisis on the way lesbian and gay Cubans relate to each other, foreigners, sex

workers, and ideas about love. Increasing hardship in Cuba led to the expansion of tourism, black markets, and monetized relationships. Differently positioned actors were variously able to capitalize on the new opportunities to earn hard cash and escape social sanctions. Like in Thailand, "within Cuban popular culture, relationships between white foreign men and darker-skinned Cuban women were automatically perceived as motivated by money or access to immigration, despite the cultural and educational background of the couple" (78). Similarly, light skin shielded Cubans from the public perception of being sex workers compared to their dark skin compatriots. The social tolerance for gay men in particular, however, relied on unlinking homosexuality from other categories of deviance such as sex work, criminality, and delinquency. Within this context, gay men and lesbians disparaged commoditized sex at the same time that they hired local hustlers to fulfill their own desires. However, the use of tactical relationships with foreigners for personal financial gain, both in sex work and related services, created nostalgia for the "authentic" love that presumably existed before capitalist penetration.

Cuban gay men and lesbians were thus in the situation of both espousing egalitarian relationships and reinforcing existing status differentials regarding skin color, rural background, and involvement with sex work. The simultaneous espousal of egalitarianism and distinction among Cubans resonates with my research among middle class gay men in Thailand. As noted in the previous chapter, middle class Thai gay men claimed to desire relationships among putative equals, often framed as pairings based on true love rather than monetary investments. In a similar context, where sex work also overdetermines the nature of relationships, particularly among those who look poor because of skin color, rural dispositions, and other factors, Thai men actively avoided

relationships with Caucasian men. Paired with new beauty ideals around white Asians, Thai gay men tried to embody the aesthetics of and professed desires for white Asian partners.

I do not interpret these statements and behaviors as "resistance" to Caucasian global hegemony or oppressive Western ideologies. Rather, I consider them to be aspirations and strategies to move up in the world, within the framework of existing capitalist structures and racial idealogies. Though the vast majority of Thais I interacted with had a sense that they as Thais, were somehow inferior to Caucasians and the West, this was not universal. For many Thais, especially wealthy ones, their financial resources, ability to travel relatively freely in developed countries, and the oft-cited pronouncement that Thailand was never colonized, gave them a sense of equality.

Many middle class Thais had a global hierarchy in mind, where the West was at the top, East Asia close behind, followed by Southeast Asia and Latin America, South Asia and the Middle East, and Africa at the bottom. At the same time, some interlocutors, especially Chinese and Japanese, often professed a sense of superiority over Caucasians and the West, at least culturally, morally, and spiritually if not in the economic realm. Within this context, strivings are not only about improving the self but maintaining existing regimes of power. That is, individuals are seeking to improve their life changes without questioning the basic assumptions of success in relative status, wealth, beauty, and other forms of privilege. What I want to emphasize however, is not the critique of false consciousness or the local instantiations of power. Rather, I want to be generous in the assessment and acknowledgment that we are all complicit in complicated and interlocking webs of power. Furthermore, criticism is easy. Warm- or watery-

heartedness, to use a Thai idiom, is perhaps a more generative move. The stakes, after all, are different for those in an emergent middle class, from a developing middle income country trying to prove its worth in the contemporary world.

Gay Asianness in the Age of Asian Regionalism

Ara Wilson (2006) has called for studies that highlight the regional influences that Asian nations exert on each other rather than positioning Asia as a recipient of flows from the West.[7] This project explores contemporary shifts in the experiences of Thai gay men through a critical regionalism that situates Thailand as a zone of interaction between Southeast and East Asia and explores the inter-Asian constructs which posits an alternative capitalist modernity to the West (Johnson, Jackson, and Herdt 2000).[8] Except for Megan Sinnot's (2004) work on *tom* (masculine female same-sex sexuality) and Peter Jackson's (2011) recent edited volume *Queer Bangkok*, existing accounts of gender, sexuality, and sex work in Thailand focus on the interaction among autochthonous, national, and Western influences. Southeast Asian regionalism and the growing impact of East Asian capital, media, and tourists are now paramount to understanding Thai gender and sexuality. Japanese foreign investment in Thailand is more than double that of all European, North American, and Australasian countries combined. Japanese and Korean "soft power" are dramatically shaping Thai desires (Iwabuchi 2002, Chua 2012). Thailand increasingly imports media, cosmetics, and fashions from Korea and Japan, associating these nationalities with wealth, beauty, and modernity. Middle class consumption patterns include eating Japanese food, listening to Korean popular music,

watching Japanese anime and Korean drama series, wearing Korean clothing, and using Korean cosmetics.

The figuring, embodiment, and enactment of desire for white Asian partners has been enabled by the economic clout of East Asia (which both makes East Asians more desirable partners and allows them greater access to travel), the regional circulation of media that promotes East Asian beauty ideals, Internet sites such as fridae.asia which link gay Thais to other Asians, and the proliferation of regional discount airlines that facilitates travel. Bangkok is a top international travel destination, the regional hub for gay tourism, and remains a relatively cheap destination in Asia. Bangkok hosts the largest gay circuit parties in Asia, including gCircuit's annual Songkran (Thai New Year) parties. These factors both shape desire for white Asian partners and facilitate actual engagements between Thais and other Asians.

Rather than being a unifying teleological force, globalization also produces local difference. Elaborating on John D'Emilio's (1993) assertion that capitalism enables gay identity, Dennis Altman (2001) argues that the spread of capitalism has created a global gay identity outside the North Atlantic region. Yet, this approach does not account for the contemporary diversification of sexual identities in Asia or elsewhere. Outside influences are always absorbed through existing cultural schemes, particularly those modes not associated with "modern" and "egalitarian" forms of homosexuality. Wilson, for example, describes the production of new non-Western sexual subjectivities in Thailand, such as *tom* and *dee* (masculine and feminine partners in female same-sex relationships), through the same market mechanisms that create "global gays" (Wilson 2004). Indeed, the anthropological and sociological literature points to the modern development of a

gender-based Asian model of same-sex female sexuality throughout Southeast Asia and

Greater China, which is constructed against their understandings of Western lesbianism

(Blackwood and Wieringa 2007, Kam 2012, Leung 2002, Sinnott 2004, Tang 2011).

Geopolitical inequalities, refracted through local moral logics, shape sexual desires and

their social evaluation. With this research, I hope to contribute to our current

understanding of sexuality and globalization by focusing on the effects of Asian

regionalism that are producing the desire for white Asian partners

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Glossary

Gender / Sexuality

dee: a feminine woman who engages in same-sex relationships with *tom*. *Dee* do not identify as gender variant. They may identify as sexually different, though many only are identified in relation to a *tom*, not as a separate identity. Many women experience being *dee* for some part of their lives, typically when they are young.

gay: a male, masculine or feminine, who engages in or desires same-sex relationships with other males. In Thai usage, the term is used primarily as a noun and refers only to males, and sometimes limited to masculine men. There are many sub-types of gay.

gaypergamy: the tendency among gay men in low and middle income countries to seek partners from wealthier countries and in high income countries to seek partners from higher status ethnic/racial groups.

kathoey: a male to female transgender person, typically engaging in or desiring relationships with heterosexual men, irrespective of operative status. In general Thai usage, *kathoey* refers to anyone with non-normative gender presentation or sexuality, any variation beyond heterosexual male or female. In Bangkok, it is used to refer specifically to male to female transgender persons. I use the term "ladyboy," a common English translation, only when it occurs in original text sources as some *kathoey* consider it

offensive. Ladyboy is the term for kathoey in cross-cultural environments such as ladyboy cabarets and sex tourist bars. The term *kathoey* can also be used as a slur.

phet: broadly form or kind, it is most often used to mean sex, gender, and sexuality and can be used in compound constructions to create more specific meanings such as *phu-ying-kham-phet* (transsexual woman).

tom: a masculine woman who engages in or desires same-sex relationships with a woman. Their counterparts are *dee*, feminine women in relationships with "*tom.*" The terms are derived from the English "tomboy" and "lady." *Tom* who are in realtionships with each other are referred to as *tom gay* or TG.

Race

Asian: a racial category that in contemporary Thailand refers to East and Southeast Asian peoples.

Farang: sometimes used to mean a foreigner (*chao-tang-chat*) more broadly, but typically refers to a Caucasian person. The term is least likely to be used for East and Southeast Asians, who are called "Asian" or by their country of origin. *Farang* is related to the Thai word for French (*farangset*), numerous fruits and vegetables such as guava, asparagus, and potato that were introduced by European traders, and words used in languages such as Farsi, Arabic, and Hindi that are derived from "Frank" to denote European. Though a neutral term, *farang* can also be used as a slur by itself or in

compound words. For example, *farang-khi-nok* (literally "bird shit *farang*"), refers to shabby looking or shoestring budget Caucasian tourists, such as backpackers. The term can also be used as a slur against another Thai in terms like *farang-ja*, a Thai who only likes Western culture or acts as if they are *farang*.

khaek: a Thai racial category that refers to South Asians, Southwest Asians, and North Africans.

Korpanese: an etic term referring to the conflation of Korean and Japanese people and culture in Thai imaginaries. Korpanese represents the pinnacle of modern cosmopolitan Asianness, the most desirable commodities, and the most beautiful bodies.

luk-khreung (ลูกครึ่ง literally "half-child") can be used for any racial/ethnic mix, but is most often associated with mixed parentage that "shows," e.g. with white or black parents. The term is not used for Sino-Thais and rarely with other Asians (e.g. Thai-Japanese, Thai-Korean, Thai-Vietnamese). This points to the idea that other Asians are racially similar and more readily assimilable within the notion of Thainess. Nevertheless, all *luk-khreung* who grow up in Thailand speaking Thai are more or less accepted as Thai without question. Previously, *luk-khreung* were stigmatized as the children of Thai prostitutes and US soldiers during the American war. However, with the development of the Thai economy, light skinned *luk-khreung* have become resignified as beautiful. That is, while in the past, *luk-khreung* were more often imagined as the children of prostitutes and soldiers, now they are often the children of middle class/wealthy women and foreign

businessmen. Both *luk-khreung* and Sino-Thais are greatly overrepresented in Thai visual media.

Sino-Thai: Thais who claim some Chinese ancestry in Thailand or the Thai diaspora. The term can apply to a Thai with a Chinese grandparent or a recent Chinese immigrant who has become nationalized as Thai.

tropical Chinese: an etic term referring to Sino-Thais and other Chinese groups in East and Southeast Asia outside the core of Mainland China. That is, Chinese from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and other parts of Southeast Asia. This group represents Chinese from developed areas and the relatively economically priviledged Chinese minorities of Southeast Asia.

white Asian: an etic term approximating the Thai use of "Asian" to refer to Asians with light skin from economically developed countries and the tropical Chinese. The term incorporates notions of white skin color, economic power, and cosmopolitan status.

Biographical Notes

I provide brief biographical descriptions for individuals who are named at multiple points in the manuscript or are quoted from in depth. Biographies try to provide an accurate portrait of the person though details (e.g. occupation, ethnicity, residence) have been changed to protect their anonymity. In Thai style, I refer to people by nicknames. All names have been changed, though I try to maintain some similarities. For example, if they use an English, Japanese, or other language name, I will use another name from that language. If they use an abbreviated Thai name or a Thai animal or object name, I will use a different one (e.g. substituting Kaew-glass for Muu-pig). When Thais use Roman letters, I will use another letter as almost all of them are possible names. When foreign terms are used as names, I try to remain within the categories such that a wealth name (e.g. Bank, Diamond, Yen, Won) might switch a brand name (e.g. Bentley, Benz) or food name might switch between subcategories of drinks (e.g. Beer, Coke, Pepsi, Sprite, Ice) and food (e.g. Cherry, Carrot, Cake, Pancake, Donut, Pizza, Sushi). During interviews, participants were asked to choose a nickname, however, many could not pick one and others are changed to prevent re-use. Even when people have requested to use their real names, I have changed them, except in the case of public figures such as politicians, activists, celebrities, artists, academics, and authors. I have, however, changed biographical details about them that would not be considered common knowlege. The exception is for those who asked for their real names to be used. In this case, I have preserved accurate biographical information but changed the name. I have also changed

the names of businesses in Thailand that might be subject to prosecution for breaking

local ordinances.

The people that I write extensively about are generally people with whom I have

developed various fictive kin relationships. In general, this would be the role of "older

brother" as I was older than the vast majority of my informants. Additionally, I took on

the role of "mother" for four gay men who asked, three of whom were based in Bangkok.

My Bangkok "daughters" were all undergraduate students at the time of my primary

fieldwork, and have all since graduated. **Top** is a Sino-Thai, born and raised in Bangkok,

with extremely fair skin, bubbly personality, and very feminine demeanor. As a vibrant

sissy, he often wears women's clothes, though he is not transgender. **Haru** was a foreign

student from India, his father is Naga (from Nagaland, India) and his mother is Japanese.

He grew up both in India and Japan but identifies primarily as Japanese. Haru looks like a

J-pop idol, with perfectly coiffed and colored hair, dramatic make-up, and ostentatious

outfits. While he is fluent in English and knows several Indian languages and Japanese,

he does not speak Thai, thus servers at bars we frequented often referred to him as "the

Japanese." Haru was always keen on meeting the Japanese women who were at gay bars,

though not necessarily the Japanese men. He goes back and forth between Nagaland and

Bangkok. **Casper** was a foreign student from Vietnam. Because of his pale skin and

style, many Thais assumed that he was Korean. Casper was particularly fond of wearing

big eye contact lenses that gave him a youthful look. He was able to speak a little Thai

and thus servers referred to him by name. After graduating, he returned to Vietnam and

has since become close friends with some of my Vietnamese relatives. Even though they

are among my closest relations in Thailand, I do not refer to them often to protect their privacy.

Darren is a young Asian American of Chinese-Lao descent. He studied abroad in Thailand for one of his undergraduate college years. His year in Thailand provided him with a coming of age experience, in which he came to re-revaluate his social standing and those of his partners.

Bee is a teacher at one of Thailand's most elite private schools (but not an international one, meaning instruction is in Thai rather than English). The school's own primary measure for eliteness is the number of its students who are admitted to medical school programs, the most difficult college entrance exams. Nevertheless, Bee's income as a teacher is not high. Thus, he supplements it with tutoring at a private after-school program, which some of his students also attend. Bee actually makes more from this second, part-time job as the pay rate per hour is much higher. This also means he has relatively little free time as he works during the day and again in the evening. Bee lives very modestly. His studio apartment does not have a sink. Unless he meets friends, he eats a microwaved frozen dinner that he buys for about 20-30 THB ($.70 to $1.00). He saves all his money for entertainment and travel. He has a collection of Korean dramas that he keeps on the shelf above his bed. Bee goes out drinking every weekend with friends. He idolizes the relationship between one of his Thai friends who has been with his Singaporean partner for over a decade. He regularly chats with other Asians that he meets online and occasionally in bars, though he expresses no interest in other Thais. Bee

is always on the hunt for travel promotions. He likes to travel to gay Asian destinations as he is particularly fond of circuit parties. I have known Bee since 2004. Over the years, his muscles have grown tremendously and his preferences have shifted from Singaporean men to Taiwanese men, in line with his favorite circuit parties.

Mark is a mid-level accounting professional in an American firm with branches throughout the world. While he is based in Bangkok, his office setting is bilingual in Thai and English. Mark supervises individuals in over a dozen countries. Whenever he interacts with staff from other locations, he is expected to communicate in English. Thus he often complains that his English is poor and this impacts his career opportunities. He feels that he has reached the glass ceiling for people of his English language abilities in Thailand. Mark is also from Isan, the poor Northeast region of Thailand. He was the first of his family to move to Bangkok. This affects how he perceives of his family status and his insecurity around being a middle class Bangkokian. After graduating from college, he got a good job, bought a house, and invited his parents to move in with him, which they did. Mark, however, feels self-conscious because his younger brother, who works for an international construction company, makes much more money. His younger sister has married an Englishman she met online and moved there. More than anything else, this represents a business opportunity for Mark, who has a side import-export business with his sister. Mark would not be able to afford his lifestyle without this additional income. Mark travels to another Asian country approximately one weekend every month. He also hosts Asian visitors he meets online at his home with his parents. I have known Mark since 2009.

Dew is a real estate agent. He has two master's degrees from Australian universities. Besides buying and selling properties, he manages a large apartment building where he maintains a penthouse unit. He also lives with his parents, his older brother, and the older brother's family. Although he is Sino-Thai, his skin is quite dark, which makes him insecure about his status. He maintains a network of friends that includes many English speaking Chinese throughout the region. I have known Ken since 2009.

Wan is a male to female transgender sex worker. She now primarily works in developed Asian countries and remits her earnings home to her mother in Isan, where she is from. I first met Wan in 2005, when she was working in a "second class cinema" (porn theater), where gay men went to meet sex partners and transgender sex workers serviced the working class heterosexual patrons for approximately 100 THB ($3). She told me her "story" then, which she later revealed to me during a trip to her mother's house, was a complete fabrication meant to make me feel sorry for her and give her money (which I never did). Since then, she has become one of my closest companions in Thailand. For a period of time, she worked at an HIV NGO, and I regularly went to sex work venues with her as a volunteer outreach worker and language instructor. We also would go to venues where *kathoey* went to meet heterosexual male partners (e.g. karaoke bars that provided hosts, restaurants frequented by heterosexual Thai men looking for transgender partners, military barracks) and beauty pageants together. Her dream is to have an Asian male partner, gay or straight. But because she is transgender, she thinks a more realistic option

is to have an older white companion who financially supports her and who she sexually

satisfies while she financially supports a young, impoverished Thai male sex partner.

Methods

This project addresses how class stratification and Asian regionalism structure Thai gay and *kathoey* life opportunities and romantic partner preferences. Multi-sited anthropological fieldwork consisted of approximately 58 months of participant observation, primarily in Thailand from 2004 to 2014. During my longest period of residence, I was based in Thailand continuously from January 2009 through September 2011. During the period of fieldwork between January 2009 and August 2014, I profiled 343 gay and *kathoey* Thai and foreign individuals as well as their families and friends and conducted interviews with 72 Thai *kathoey*, gay, and bisexual men, their foreign partners, their families and friends, as well as various experts and specialists in gender and sexuality (e.g. researchers, pornographers, film makers, artists, activists, business owners). In addition, I conducted a free list and pile sort exercise with 37 participants and spent two weeks conducing archival research in Los Angeles. I have been collecting media and public discourse throughout this period, including public policy, human rights and public health materials, DVDs/VCDs/CDs, television series, books, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, websites, online forums, and other media. I also use quantitative data from public sources such as tourism figures available through the Tourism Authority of Thailand. Together, these items frame interpersonal action within wider symbolic, structural, and political economic practices. Quantitative data inform the structural forces that individuals interact with and incorporate or resist in their lives. Public discourse provides the resources of cultural scenarios for social action. In Gagnon's script theory (2004), cultural scenarios refer to the symbolic resources that individuals can use to

fashion their performance of an event. For example, Gagnon describes how young adults can act out romance and intercourse without prior experience by creating individualized scripts refashioned from films, books, and peer stories.

I generally do not write about people with whom I've had brief interactions. Rather, I focus on those individuals that I have had extended contact with over the years or a brief but intense encounter (e.g. traveling together). In either case, I'm interested in how one's behavior triangulates with the statements they make and the context of actions. That is, I do not accept statements as given. As interviews are highly performative events of face-making, I generally apply these to situations outside my immediate networks where I want to focus on something specific. For example, interviewing pornographers about local perceptions of beauty and their marketing strategies, interviewing bisexual men to understand how they deal with fatherhood, or interviewing minor celebrities to understand how they construct public and private persona. As an academic, my own networks included other academics, activists, and artists. These, however, were people I generally felt were atypical because of their extensive education overseas, ideological stances, and politicization, so I minimize discussion about them.

Participant observation involves documented face-to-face interactions of quotidian life which allow for the comparison of insider and outsider perspectives. Barth (2002) argues for an anthropology that focuses on variation. He suggests that accounting for the ways in which people experience complex life situations and act with purpose captures the reality of cultural phenomenon and social action. Thus, particular attention was paid to covering a breadth of the community in terms of gender, class, age, and district. I thus made specific efforts to engage people outside of my own networks,

making extra efforts to spend time with *kathoey*, sex workers, and gay men who did not attend commercial gay venues such as bars and saunas.

Throughout my primary fieldwork period from January 2009 to September 2011, when I maintained my primary residence in Bangkok, I volunteered weekly conducting language classes at SWING Foundation (Service Workers in Group), an NGO primarily dedicated to serving male and *kathoey* sex workers. I also conducted HIV outreach with SWING staff to sex work venues in Silom/Surawongse, Saphan Kwai, Nana, and Sanam Luang areas. Thus, I had regular contact with sex workers in go-go bars, massage parlors, second class cinemas, and on the street. However, I also cultivated networks among male and transgender sex workers who did not participate in SWING programs and activities including online freelancers, massage parlor workers, and coyote boys.

Much of my participant observation occurred in public venues such as my local neighborhood, shopping malls, and on public transportation. I also focused attention on gay bars, saunas, beauty salons, parks, and other venues that specifically cater to or employ gay and *kathoey* Thais. I attempted to split my time more or less equally between international venues that attracted Caucasian and Asian foreigners and Thai venues that rarely did so. I very rarely visited venues such as bars or saunas alone, as these are social venues, and in the Thai context, generally attended in groups. I went with my multi-racial/ethnic local friends and often took foreigner visitors of different racial/ethnic groups from the USA, Canada; Australia; Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden; China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam. My three local "daughters," who were my most common bar companions, were Japanese/Naga (the primary ethnic

group of Nagaland in Northeastern India), Vietnamese, and Sino-Thai. My partner, who

is Vietnamese, was in the field with me a third of the time. I also openly approached and

talked to foreigners from around the world, whether they were in groups or alone (often

to the dismay of my Thai friends). Typically, the men who were alone were older

Caucasian men who often felt isolated and exceedingly happy to speak with someone in

English who they felt was not reaching for their wallets. This provided me with a wide

range of cross-ethnic experiences and allowed me to interact with others in numerous

languages. Finally, I regularly attended academic and human rights seminars related to

gender and sexuality, protests and other activist events, religious festivals and events

(especially those that had a queer component), art events, *kathoey* and male beauty

pageants, coyote boy and K-pop cover dance contests, gay circuit parties in Bangkok, and

Pride / Pink Dot and other queer regional events in Mandalay, Singapore, Taipei, and

Tokyo. I also traveled or met up with Thai friends throughout the country, Asia, and as

far afield as Germany.

Jottings were kept in the field on small note pads or smart phone apps and

expanded into fieldnotes at least every other day when there was computer access.

Fieldnotes were entered into a password protected computer program. Early on, as I was

a foreigner, taking jottings looked like practicing the language. I also kept small index

cards in my shirt pocket for this purpose. The jottings, however, were not unnoticed. At

an early dinner gathering of Thai queer activists and academics, one of the participants

noted: "You can't say anything around Dredge, because he will write it down." I thus

stopped using notepads, though I occasionally used the pretext of texting phone messages

to remember important details. I also was in the position of interpreter for many Thai and

foreign couples. This included messages in loud bars which required them to write their questions and responses to each other. I offered my notepads or smartphone for the communication relay. Though I translated these to them at the time (and thus have some recollection of them), I have discarded the actual messages as I feel that their use would be an unanticipated invasion of privacy. The same applies to online chats, where programs like MSN Messenger or Skype automatically save the content of the dialogue. I have decided not to use this data except when I have rendered the conversations in my fieldnotes. After a few months in the field, I disabled recording of online conversations, for reasons of privacy and ethics. Nevertheless, these interactions inform how I think about the situation in Thailand. By contrast, I have routinely used dialogs from web forums, in which case I consider the communication to be public. Thus, these often feature prominently while individual chats are excluded.

In cultural anthropological fieldwork, the ethnographer herself is the key tool for data collection (Schensul 1980). Different subject positions both open up and foreclose opportunities. Indeed, I believe that my findings rely heavily on the fact of my Asianness, which allowed me access and anonymity to spaces that would not have been possible otherwise. At the same time, this likely biases my findings as well, since Thais most interested in interacting with Asians, and especially Koreans, would be drawn towards me when I seemed out of place, when I did not pass as Thai. However, I also made efforts to find and question Thais who stated that they only wanted Caucasian partners. For example, when online profiles stated this, I would contact the poster and engage in conversation about why they do not like Thais or other Asians. It was all too easy for them to respond that they liked everyone, so I also made efforts to meet them face to

face. Davey, for example, made it clear on his profile that he was only interested in Caucasian men. He also explicitly stated that he was not a money boy. When I met him in Siam Square and later in Silom, two things were revealed. First, Davey was a sex worker. He, like many other online freelance sex workers, was using the statement as a negotiating tactic to increase his desirability and raise his prices. Later, I found a number of pornographic videos in which he had modeled, something common among sex workers that would be unseemly for those trying to uphold middle class sensibilities. Second, Davey did not care whether a potential client or boyfriend was Caucasian. According to Davey, he used the statement on his profile that he was only interested in Caucasians because he thought only Caucasians were interested in him. That is, as a person with what he called dark skin (which, I noted to him was about the same hue as my skin), Davey thought that Asians would not be interested in him. For Davey, stating a preference for Caucasian partners was part of his overall strategy in attracting the clients he thought would be most interested in him.

I was openly a researcher and there were many people who were afraid to interact with me because of this. One of my friends, Korn, ran a coffee house around the corner from where I lived and his sister, Ploy, ran a neighboring noodle shop. At night, when her shop closed and I sat on the steps with her, Ploy would harass all the local queer people who walked by in the *soi*. "Hey you. Here. You, come here. He's doing research, talk to him." I asked Ploy not to call people out in this way, but it became an automatic reaction for her. I got to know many of my queer neighbors this way, but people were also a bit afraid of me. I return to this neighborhood every year and my partner is always amazed at how queer people suddenly appear before us and apologize to me for not having followed

through with an interview. I greet them warmly and always assure them that I hold no grudge, something Thais fear.

I personally found it less intrusive to use smartphone apps such as Grindr and Jack'd to meet my queer neighbors, though this excluded *tom* and those who did not have smartphones. In 2009, using these apps on an iPhone oriented me towards East Asian visitors, as there were few Caucasians in my neighborhood and most Thais were using Blackberry phones, which supported apps like Grindr but either required jailbreaking or subscription fees, and frequently crashed. This situation, however, changed rapidly as iPhones became more popular and affordable, dropping from approximately $1,000 to $500 in a year's time. Additionally, it became easier to buy unlocked phones from places like Hong Kong. Indeed, one could observe entire tables of friends who just entered a Thai gay bar staring down at their Grindr for a minute to scan the area for potential partners when entering a new space.

My Thai friends were also often jealously protective of me. Thais generally fear strangers. When I was in groups of Thais, they often prevented me from approaching unknown others. Talking to strangers is considered a dangerous activity, as one does not know their intent. This was perhaps more true than I anticipated. My partner and I did have many electronic items stolen (seven phones and two cameras between us). I was also once drugged, robbed, and left at a faraway hotel. My networks also did not protect me from local hierarchies. A powerful businessman sent a minion over to court me at a bar. A common practice in Thai bars is that if someone is interested in someone else, they will send a messenger, a female if one is available, as she would be considered less threatening. A woman approached me and pointed my suitor out and said he wanted me

to go home with him tonight. I had no idea who he was. This was also much more forward than the usual suggestion that someone wants to meet you, which indexed his confidence and authority. I replied simply "I'm sorry but I'm not interested." She then asked if I was interested in her, as is often the case when someone turns down a same-sex request. "I'm sorry, I'm still not interested." What I did not realize was that this non-acceptance of a sexual offer excluded me from an entire network of individuals. Someone who I met before at both Silom and Ortorkor, who worked for this individual, never spoke to me again. Whenever I was in the presence of this man, he would turn his back on me. Another friend of mine, who saw the two of us standing relatively close by, grabbed my hand and took me to him and said you have to meet him. The man would not look at me while my friend made introductions. When my friend asked me if we knew each other I said yes, and then the man simply turned around and left. All those who worked for him or were otherwise obliged to his patronage acted as if I no longer existed.

As a general rule common in ethnography, I prioritize observations and informal interviews over formal interviews, which tend to have a much more constructed presentation of the self. Thus, I have used the latter primarily when seeking specific kinds of information. I interviewed a wide range of individuals including Thai sex workers about how they relate to clients of different races, long term *farang* expatriates about changes they have experienced in the Thai gay scene, and Asian tourists about their experiences with Thais and Bangkok over time. I purposefully interviewed Thais who were outside of my immediate networks (generally friends or family of friends) and those who interested me because they had special insights (e.g. a gay monk, pornographers and webmasters, censored film makers, the Wonder Gay and other semi-professional K-pop

cover dancers, Filipino migrant workers) as well as those who made me rethink my expectations of participants in *kathoey* and gay spaces (e.g. bisexual men, older *kathoey*, and those who switched between gay and *kathoey* identifications). I also made special attempts to interview Asian American, African American, and other Western minorities who were not my guests, to get their perspective on local racial dynamics. Because of the co-constructed nature of the data: what people want to stage, reveal, and emphasize, I triangulate interview and observational data. Besides people like Wan, who admitted to lying to me early on, I also acknowledge that people live real lives contingent on unexpected circumstances. Tao, for example, who had learned Japanese and studied in Japan, professed a desire for only Japanese men. But, I ran into him at a mall with a French guy. When I asked him about this, his response was simply that he met someone "so cute" and wanted my affirmation, which I gave him.

Interviews typically lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, though they could be shorter or much longer (up to four hours). Depending on the circumstances, interviews were documented with a small Sony digital recorder, recorded on an Acer netbook with a microphone extension, and/or interview notes. They were most often conducted in public spaces such as coffee houses, restaurants, and shopping malls. Sometimes they were also conducted at my apartment, the interviewee's apartment, or another private space such as an office room. When interviews were conducted at participant's homes, I closely examined what was in full view in the premises (e.g. their collection of books and media, the type of bathroom they had, their cosmetics, their medications, their appliances, photos posted on the wall). I often asked for the person to show me and, if I had space on my USB drive or they could burn DVDs, give me samples of the media that were important

in their lives. I specifically asked for samples of their favorite music and pornography, as I was trying to identify trends in the consumption of Chinese and Korean music and Japanese pornography.

I considered conducting a survey in the field using respondent driven sampling or RDS (Heckathorn 1997), but was advised against it by Philippe Girault of Family Health International. Girault, who used RDS to evaluate an HIV media campaign for MSM in Bangkok suggested that the incentives encouraged low income people to lie about their identities in order to participate. I also worked with numerous other local and foreign researchers and film makers in Thailand. For example, I assisted Prempreeda Pramoj Na Ayutthaya on her research with *kathoey* in sex work and media representations in Thailand. I was particularly struck by a research trip to Phuket, where transgender women repeatedly stated that they were arrested simply for being in public with a Caucasian male, on the assumption that they were sex workers.

In addition, I conducted pile sorts on gender/sexual categories with 37 individuals. Pile sorts are a cognitive mapping procedure to understand how community members think about and attach meaning to different items within a conceptual domain. I began the exercise with a free list to identify the *phet* (gender/sexuality) respondents conceived of as most salient. That is, I asked participants to write down all the gender categories they knew (they ranged from two to nine categories). After they produced the list, I then presented a set of cards with twenty-two gender/sexual categories, most of which were not understood by most participants, meaning they were not salient in their everyday lives. Indeed, the exercise demonstrated how perspectival gender categories were. The twenty-two terms were then sorted based on similarity. If there were more than

three initial piles, I asked participants to subsequently sort into three piles and then two piles, as I wanted to see if the "traditional" 3-sex system would be reproduced and how genders in the third category, especially *kathoey*, would be categorized as either males or females when forced to limit to two piles. Respondents were asked to think aloud while making their taxonomic decisions. Individuals used a variety of factors in creating groups: anatomy, gender expression on a male-female continuum, romantic attraction, common/normal/natural status, and personal experience. I was not surprised when an early free list by a heterosexual man in his fifties returned two items: man and woman. I was, however, taken aback when, after elaborating a wide number of gender categories, he created two piles: man and woman in one called "normal" and the rest in another called "abnormal" (*phit-pakati*). I had erroneously assumed that man and woman were counterparts and would remain in separate piles because I failed to account for the moral valence attached to *phet* categories. I did not anticipate that both heterosexual and queer participants would create two final categories of "normal" and "abnormal." I did not expect that moral or normative stance would override other classificatory schemes. Gender/sexual classifications are not an amoral process. *Phet* are defined by factors which are variously invoked by different people, situationally dependent, and experientially based.

In October 2012, I spent one week at the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries in Los Angeles (the largest LGBT archive in the world) reviewing newsletters from Asian American gay and lesbian organizations to investigate interracial relationship debates and imaginings of Thailand in articles written by gay Asian Americans and rice queens in the 1990s. I spent another week at the archives between

November 2014 and May 2015. I wanted to understand how race is talked and specifically to compare the different ways that Asian Americans and Thais described their desire for Asian partners. One of the articles I found had a large section whited out with correction fluid. I showed this to the archivist, and he put a note in the database that that newsletter should be replaced if another edition of it comes in, which I felt would be a loss of data in erasing the erasure. I did not, but I thought I should move the paper around to make the correction crack off and see what was hidden underneath. I assume that it was something the person who donated the newsletter, and who wrote the piece, thought was not appropriate in retrospect, and thus erased. I found it simultaneously sad, in the erasure of "data," and profoundly beautiful, in the agency of the person who, I assumed, was protecting his own posterity. In the future, I hope to utilize the archives of the Queer Resource Centre in Bangkok, to trace how discourses around foreigners change over time in commercial Thai gay magazines.

This research also occurs during times of geopolitical turmoil, an explosive HIV epidemic among MSM in Asia, and the violent suppression of elected governments and active citizen protest in Thailand. The longest period I went only speaking Thai was a week in the middle of May 2010. As I lived within the anti-government (at that time Reds protesting the post-coup installed Yellow government) protest area in central Bangkok, life became increasingly difficult. At first, from April 18, I went daily to the largest protest encampment site, centered around Siam Square, a short walk from my house. After a bomb exploded at Victory Monument, a short distance up Phaya Thai road, violence spread beyond Phan Fah and Ratchaprasong. As tensions escalated and the area around became highly militarized, I left Bangkok. All the roads surrounding my house

were closed, which meant, among other things, that it stank. Trash was thrown out daily, usually in plastic shopping bags. However, with the road closure, there was no longer any trash collection. So the small pile that accumulated in front of the *soi* every day became a massive, festering pile. When friends asked me if I wanted to visit one of their homes in the South, I took the opportunity. The trip itself was horrendous. I had to walk out of the area of street closures, then took a taxi to the Southern Bus Terminal. From the Southern Bus Terminal in Bangkok, the bus ride was supposed to be 13 hours. But of course, the air conditioning on our bus was not working. So after approximately five hours, the bus dropped us off in the middle of nowhere and said another bus would be sent to take us the rest of the way. From Satun town, we took motorcycles the rest of the way. When we finally arrived in Khuan Kalong, Satun province, which borders Malaysia on the far Southwestern border of Thailand, the television was on. Central World mall was burning. As one of my two travel companions worked at the Centara Grand Hotel attached to Central World mall and the Bangkok Convention Center, and the other worked at a nearby hotel, the situation looked dire, not just because Bangkok was burning, but that their livelihoods were in jeopardy. I called my friend Mark, to tell him I was safe in Satun. His reply was: "What? You leave Bangkok and go to the most dangerous part of Thailand?" Satun is a Muslim area, but not one of the three Southern provinces most associated with a separatist insurgency (Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani). Our two-day trip quickly expanded to a week, as both my friends' managers called to say their respective hotels were closed. Staying with a Muslim family for a week in a rural area on the Malaysian border meant that I could observe how gay men and young women in the area managed their intimate lives.

Multi-Sited Approach

I took on a multi-sited approach to address how Bangkok acted as a hub for Southeast Asian and specifically an emerging gay Asian regionalism and Thai gay/*kathoey* migration patterns. In particular, I investigated Bangkok's draw to other queer Asians by examining the life opportunities and constraints individuals faced in regional countries. "Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography" (Marcus 1998:90). This study is multi-sited, primarily in the sense of "following the people" (here Thai gay men, *kathoey*, and their partners), this including traveling with Thais within Thailand and overseas, visiting areas in Thailand where a great deal of inter-cultural interaction takes place (e.g. Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, Koh Phuket), meeting partners of Thais abroad, attending regional events, comparing other areas that either attract Thai tourism or send large numbers of tourists to Thailand, and receiving Thai friends when they visited the USA. I also followed Asian gay men back to their hometowns. Thus, I occupied numerous locations within Thailand, the Asian region, and the wider Thai diaspora.

Though my research is primarily based in Bangkok, Thailand, I have conducted research throughout all regions of Thailand and lived briefly in Chiang Mai. I have followed gay, transgender, and sex worker friends to their home provinces throughout the

country, popular vacation spots such as Koh Samet (the Fire Island of Bangkok), and places for religious merit-making. I also visited, sometimes on numerous occasions: Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, (all the countries of Southeast Asia except Brunei and East Timor); China, Macau, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan (all the nations and major administrative areas of East Asia except North Korea); and India. I travelled to these places to compare how the local gay/transgender scenes were in comparison to Thailand. I also went to these areas for HIV consulting work and to travel with Thai friends. In all of these places, I met gay/transgender Thais, even if I had not planned it in advance. Sometimes, I unexpectedly ran into Thai friends. I made two trips of a month each to Berlin, where I had many contacts with gay men and *kathoey* who had engaged in civil partnerships with Germans and moved to Germany. In Berlin, Preußenpark (Preussen Park) is a local hub of Thai activity every day of the week when weather permits. One can purchase Thai food, receive a Thai massage, and catch up with other Thais. Indeed, the park has signage in Thai. Of course, I also have benefited from friendships with Thai Americans and have hosted and met with Thai friends during their travels to the USA.

On Buddhist religious holidays, when alcohol is forbidden, Thai bars close (though not necessarily those in the international district or in hotels that cater to foreigners) and the staff sometimes go on vacations or merit-making trips together, paid for by the bar owner. I went on two of these trips, one was a *katheoy* beauty pageant fundraiser for a temple in Buriram, a rural province bordering Cambodia where there is a sizeable Khmer minority. Imagine, if you will, three large tour buses of mostly gay men and *kathoey* descending on a rural town, conducting an impromptu march through the

downtown area highlighting transgender beauty pageant contestants to promote a contest to be held that night at the temple, and collecting money for the temple from businesses that were passed. During the evening, the temple buildings were taken over as dressing rooms for pageant contestants. The juxtaposition of semi-nude bodies putting on make-up and getting dressed in front of Buddhist murals and statues was quite striking and a bit surreal. The following day, the monks at the temple held special blessing ceremonies for the participants, to show their gratitude for the fundraising efforts, which raised $950.

Technology

Technology has dramatically changed the ways in which a field site is constructed. Traditionally the purity of "the field" was constructed by distance and temporal difference (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), having gone far away and having been there in the past for a period of time. Current technology now allows for regular travel to sites and the ongoing following of research participants, it allows more or less constant and continuous communication if it is so desired. Since my first visit to Thailand in 1998, technological change has been rapid both in the USA and Thailand. In 1998, when I visited the village my Thai friend's parents lived in, the entire village shared a single phone located in a convenience store. When a call was received, someone would bicycle over to find the person being called. By the time I started preliminary fieldwork in 2004, many people I met had at least two phone numbers. Those with multiple mobile phones could be reached at all times. However, some people owned a single phone and would switch SIM cards at different times of the day, and thus were only reachable on a certain number during the work day and another one at night. My friend Bee changed numbers

almost monthly, and often used multiple numbers at the same time because there was often a new-user promotion. Thus he would get a new SIM card with a new phone number to maximize the promotional offers. Inter-SIM cards had also become popular and, for the most part, replaced pre-paid international calling cards used on land lines. These SIM cards have promotional rates for international calling, but the best rates were for cards that only worked with a single country or a small set of countries. Bee, for example, proudly showed me his Korea SIM card, which provided night and weekend calls at 1 THB/minute, or the typical domestic day rate. He had recently met a Korean online, in the Korea room on gay.com (the preferred online site for Thai gay men at the time) and was calling on the weekends.

I also have done a considerable amount of research on Thai and English language gay online sites, virtually interviewed the writer of the first gay Chinese language travel guide to Bangkok, and maintained ongoing communications with many of my research participants via hi5, Facebook, Line, KakaoTalk, MSN, Skype and other media. As I have experienced fieldwork, there is little cleavage or "distance" from the field. Rather, the field continues to be mediated on a constant basis through technological means. I have nearly a thousand Facebook friends from Thailand, and keep in regular contact with about three dozen individuals. There is little excuse not to keep in touch if one wants to. This also means that I regularly see what my friends eat, see where they travel, see who they are now dating, and this is something I integrate into face-to-face conversations when we meet again. After greeting someone, I might say something like: "You and your Hong Kong boyfriend look really happy together. How are things going?" Technology also makes gossip spread much faster, and thus leads to both new modes of presenting the

self and of hiding aspects about oneself. Such contact keeps me up to date but also takes a

great deal of time and energy to manage the deluge of information. The constant flow

also makes it more difficult to create analytical divisions in space and time.

Widespread communication technology also means that I know not only that

some people in my primary fieldsite are following my work, but people have already

commented on it, including people I have never met. I have presented my work at

numerous conferences, including in Thai. Audience members have tweeted while I was

presenting. There have been web forum threads about my presence and research in

Thailand. After I appeared on a popular television show, online comments said things

like: "I really want him to come do research on me." One of my students wrote my name

in both English and Thai and described how to find me on Facebook and what bar areas I

frequented. He further stated: "Teacher Dej is cute and has a good personality. But if you

didn't know him, you would think he is a bitch. For example, some of his pictures on

Facebook are over-the-top, or he is just wearing underwear, or wearing a hat at a gay

party at night. To conclude, he has a great personality." This student, a sex worker, is

actually defending presentations of me unseemly to middle class gay Thai sensibilities.

He is referencing photos of me from a sex worker empowerment event I attended in

Pattaya in which I was dressed by sex workers in skimpy outfits. His statement

acknowledges that my appearance and behavior would be judged negatively in regards to

middle class Thai standards of respectability, which I was only partially immune from as

an Asian foreigner. I also receive feedback from Thai researchers who read my

publications and make suggestions for improvement. Finally, I also participated in

interviews for Thai researchers and popular media.

Notes

Endnotes Chapter 1

[1] The first use of this term I know of is from 2006, on the Australian website

http://sexualracismsux.com/.

[2] The differential value of Asian masculinity and femininity in the USA also means that

while Asian American men are typically devalued in gay settings, the opposite occurs

for Asian American transgender women. In racially mixed groups of transgenders and

in settings where there are men who seek transgender partners, Asian transgender

women are highly valued. In such settings, small body size and perceived racial

femininity contribute to Asian transgender women "passing" and being considered

more femininely beautiful.

[3] See for example, Nguyen 2014.

[4] This statement is widely quoted in varying forms, see for example: Kuo 2005 and Bales

1999.

[5] This meant that Korean expats I knew did not worry about their visa status as many

Westerners did. Besides being more likely to be legally employed in Thailand, if they

were not (e.g. in a language school), they only needed to cross a border every 90 days

instead of every 30 days. Additionally, while Westerners were generally given 30 days

at airports and 15 days at land borders, Koreans told me that they made visa runs at

land borders to receive the full 90 days.

[6] Pan-Asian/Pacific Islander ethnicity plays out very differently in Asian American and

Pacific Islander studies, activism, and social services. Although there are clearly

hierarchies and power differentials with leaders typically being of Japanese, Chinese,

Filipino, or Korean descent, the emphasis on oppression also embraces marginalized status, such that poor, dark, and indigenous communities are at minimum acknowledge and represented, though often tokenized.

[7] Interview February 1, 2011.

[8] I would suggest that there probably is a history that is hidden because it did not involve foreigners nor get documented in the Thai archives. For example, there was a local gay bar where I lived. This bar did not advertise in gay magazines but only online and through small promotional flyers and thus left few traces of its existence for three years. The bar, first called Temptations, was actually quite large, covering three floors of a street facing building. The first floor was a bar with a DJ and a karaoke lounge with tables that covered the sidewalk as well. The second floor was a dark room and the third was a private karaoke room. The bar, with the same owner, later rebranded itself as Divas, with kathoey staff. I only found this bar because it was in my neighborhood and I noticed a small rainbow flag sticker on the door. I asked my partner if he thought it was a gay bar and he replied that there was no way there could be a gay bar in my neighborhood. When I ventured in, I asked the staff what kind of bar this was. The owner came over and hesitantly responded with the phrase "*chapho klum*" (เฉพาะกลุ่ม for a specific group). I followed up by asking if it was a gay bar, to which he responded positively. I told him I lived in the neighborhood so I would come back.

I have encountered numerous "queer" spaces that are on no foreign or Thai gay maps. These include restaurants where all the staff are *kathoey* or working class *mor lam* (a genre of music associated with Isan and Laos) bars with a large *kathoey* presence. There are also apartment buildings that have, by design or not, primarily gay and

kathoey residents. Indeed, one of the sois I lived in was nicknamed "soi *kathoey*" because of the presence of *kathoey* there. One of the more established restaurants there was named "som tam kathoey" (kathoey papaya salad), but after moving three spaces to the corner of a Muslim soi, the owner removed "kathoey" from the name and stopped serving pork to cater to Muslims.

[9] The "sticky rice" metaphor works differently in Asian gay regional Thai discourse. Among internationalized Asian gay men, the term is used to reference Asian-Asian relationships. So in a place like Silom Soi 2, a Thai or other Asian might ask me "Are you sticky rice?," to evaluate whether I might be interested in them. The term can also be used by middle class Thais to invoke geographically coded ethnic and class differences. Central Thais eat jasmine rice, which is long grain and not sticky. Referring to someone as eating sticky rice therefore, references their Northern or more commonly, Isan (Northeastern) ethnic background. Thus, stating that someone eats sticky rice is akin to saying that the person is from the boondocks. Many central Thais have told me that people from Isan have big square faces, less attractive than a sharply pointed jaw, because sticky rice requires a lot of chewing. Thai sticky rice is quite dense, having a very different texture than Japanese or Korean short grain rice. My preference for spicy Isan food often confounded middle class Sino-Thais, who partly express their identity through the avoidance of spicy, low class foods. The more offensive slur is to say that someone eats grass, which suggests that they are as dumb as a water buffalo. "Eat grass!" was a common chant used by counter-protesters during the red shirt protests of 2010.

Endnotes Chapter 2

[1] Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, June 15, 2009. I witnessed this behavior many times. I also witnessed sex workers whose comportment (e.g. contorting their bodies to lean away from their partners) and affect (e.g. looking down, making sad eyes) demonstrated their displeasure.

[2] The sense of smell is much more important to Thais than in the West. Foul odors are also important indicators for social distress. This can also manifest in supernatural forms. For example, some ghosts emit odors. On the other hand, the smell of rotting garbage can be neutralized through routine contact.

[3] There is a significant population of Indians and other populations from South and Southwest Asia in Thailand. Many have risen to economic prominence, though few have participated in electoral politics. There are, however, many Thais who have extremely negative views of Indian people, even at the same time they are following Hindu, Brahman, or other religious practices associated with India. Sex workers will sometimes refuse to serve South Asian clients. There is a common saying: "If you run into a snake and an Indian in the road, deal with the Indian first."

[4] Caucasians often use the term "racism" to describe the experience of xenophobia, prejudice, and discrimination in Thailand. However, racism implies an institutionalized system that maintains racial hierarchies. That is, racism enforces differences in power based on racial classification. While I do not diminish the painful experience of racial prejudice, as Caucasian foreigners generally experience racial and foreign privilege, I do not consider it racism. That is, negative stereotypes of Caucasians, denial of Caucasian privilege, and other forms of negative sentiment attached to Caucasians in

Thailand do not undermine Caucasian hegemony. Indeed, one can interpret what is experienced as "racism" or "reverse racism" among Caucasians as a form of "resistance" among Thais who contest the global dominance and privilege of Caucasians.

[5] See alphadesigner.com/mapping-stereotypes/. The updated 2012 map combines Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia into an area called "Sex Slaves." The change in moniker suggests a more empathetic stance, but as victims of slavery. This problematically equates sex work with human trafficking and denies the agency of those who chose sex work as a profession, given the options available to them.

[6] Bangkok was defined as "The capital city and main port of Thailand. It is famous for its temples and other beautiful buildings and is also often mentioned as a place where there are a lot of prostitutes." Della Summers, ed., 1993. Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, 1st ed. updated reprint (Harlow, England: Longman). Quoted in "Abhisit Swipes at UK Publisher," Bangkok Post, July 4, 1993. This Longman dictionary is particularly important because it used internationally to teach English as a second language and claims to provide a popular point of view on contemporary American and British English usage. A wave of public protests occurred in Thailand. Initially, Longman declined to change the definition. After all Longman publications were banned in Thailand by the Foreign Ministry, the Longman Publishing Group agreed to withdraw the dictionary from all markets globally and to revise the description of Bangkok in the next edition. This followed shortly after the fictional documentary "The Good Woman of Bangkok" (Dennis O'Rourke, 1991), about a female sex worker catering to tourists in Patpong, was released in 1992. Around the same time, the June 21, 1993 cover of Time

Magazine featured a photo captioned "a customer and a bar girl in Bangkok" with the headline "Sex for Sale: An alarming boom in prostitution debases the women and children of the world." Combined with increasing reports about AIDS and sex tourism, Thailand was branded as a country of prostitutes. Popular representations of Thai sex tourism continue to be common, for example, when Stu has sex with a transgender sex worker in "The Hangover Part II" (Todd Phillips 2011). The Longman dictionary incident and "The Good Woman of Bangkok" are commonly cited and analyzed. See for example: Barmé 2002, Bishop and Robinson 1998, Harrison 2001, and Maderson 1997.

[7] Citizens of most developed countries receive a visa exemption to visit Thailand for thirty days. In 2006, John Mark Karr was extradited to the US for murder.Thai officials used his case as an example of lax immigration policy, which allowed criminals free access to and residence in Thailand. Subsequently, visa restrictions were heightened for foreigners without "legitimate" reasons for being in Thailand. This particularly impacted citizens of Western countries who lived in Thailand on ongoing tourist visa exemptions by doing visa runs (at first paying for Thais to take one's passport to the border for a monthly stamp and later actually having to go to a land border monthly). Thai immigration changes decreased the visa exemption at land borders to fifteen days from thirty, which were still available at airports. A new rule also limited visa exemption entries to three in a six month period. This policy change required foreigners (here coded as *farang*) to have an actual visa based on retirement, employment, education, marriage, or other criteria. Thai embassies and consulates in neighboring countries also stopped providing multiple back-to-back sixty day tourist visas which previously had allowed for extended stays.

Many Westerners were thus reconstituted as illegally living in Thailand unless they

returned home and applied for long term visas. Among the easiest are retirement visas

for those over fifty years. However, retirement visas require maintaining funds in a

Thai bank account. The most common solution for Westerners was to get an education

visa studying Thai at language schools that cared more about profit than pedagogical

rigor. Education visas could be extended indefinitely since a foreigner can claim that

learning Thai requires years of study to make progress. One *farang* I met recounted that

after six years, the immigration officer questioned why he could not speak Thai in

complete sentences. Yet he was still given another one year visa as he had paid the

school tuition in advance. An Asian American friend of mine on a work permit

switched from a popular language school to individual tutoring. He stated that he was

disgusted to be in classes where completion phrases such as "I like the smell of…"

would be filled in with "Thai women." The second most popular option was to teach

English, however, this required, at minimum, a bachelor's degree from a country where

English is the native language and part-time employment at a government recognized

school.

Discussion about visa strategies is common among Western expatriates and numerous

online forums are dedicated to differences in policy implementation at various Thai

embassies and consulates in the region. I did not experience this among Asians or Asian

Americans in Thailand, who were for the most part on work visas. I did, however, have

a Japanese friend who lived in Thailand over ten years on back-to-back sixty day tourist

visas. Even after the policy changed, she continued to receive these visas. The revised

visa rules and policies also apply to Japanese citizens, so I assume that immigration

officers continued to give her these visas because, as a pretty young Japanese woman, she did not match the image of the foreigners Thailand was trying to exclude. She did not even know about the policy change when I asked how it affected her status. Technically, the immigration rule does not limit the number of back-to-back tourist visas, only visa exemption entries. However, regional Thai embassies and consulates in Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Singapore have made it a policy not to offer them to prevent foreigners from residing in Thailand long-term on tourist visas.

[8] There is a long history of the link between foreign men, economic development, and prostitution in Thailand. Other scholars have variously emphasized earlier trade relations with both Europeans and Asians in the early modern period, polygamy and slavery, the migration of Chinese men into Thailand, Thai cultural norms and local use of sex workers, Thai economic development policies, the role of surplus rural female labor in Thailand, or the mobilization of comfort women during the World War II Japanese occupation. For an overview of female sex work, see Boonchalaksi and Guest1994. For a recent description of Thai economic development, see Doner 2009. Doner makes no mention of sex work or sex tourism. He does note the developmental role of US support in combatting communism in Southeast Asia. By the mid-1980s, tourism became Thailand's largest source of foreign revenue, surpassing rice exports. Dixon (1999), writing in the late 1990s, suggested that the association of Thailand with AIDS would actually decrease tourism. However, Thailand's "model" response to HIV prevention among brothel based female sex workers quickly allayed such fears. The frankness of my work in addressing prostitution has meant that it is sometimes censored in Thailand.

[9] See, for example, the Hirsch and Wardlow 2006, Padilla et al. 2007, and Jankowiak 2008.

Some ethnographies that lay out the foundations for this area of study include: Rebhun 2002, Constable 2003, Hirsch 2003, Povinelli 2006, and Wardlow 2006.

[10] See, for example, Kempadoo and Doezema 1998.

Two recent ethnographies on the Dominican Republic provide a point of comparison to global sex tourism in Thailand: Brennan 2004 and Padilla 2007.

[11] The term "*kathoey*" is quite broad. In contemporary urban Thailand, the term is most often used for transgender women but can also refer to effeminate gay men and sissies. For a recent discussion, see Käng 2014.

[12] Kleinman later focuses on the term "moral experience." It is important to note that Kleinman does not use "moral" in an ethical or normative sense meaning "good." Rather, the term refers to living, struggling, or being complicit with the social values of a local group.

[13] The geography of older neighborhoods can be very different compared to that of newly developed ones centered on high rise buildings with little street life. Neighborhoods often have *trok* or other passageways only familiar to locals, which may be so small that one has to squeeze by if another pedestrian is walking in the opposite direction. The mode of transportation in different neighborhoods varies from motorcycle taxis and *tuk tuk* to small and large *songthaew*, requiring local knowledge to navigate the area. When I say that these are "semi-private" spaces, I am referring to how Thais often treat *soi* space like their yards. In the Muslim *soi* next to mine, men often wore sarongs and caps, which they would not

wear on the streets of Bangkok. Similarly, women wearing bathing sarongs could be seen moving between buildings, something that would never be visible on a street.

[14] MSM (men who have sex with men) is a public health term that includes gay-identified men and youth, bisexual males (males who have sex with males and females), male to female transgender persons, male partners of transgender persons, male sex workers, and other males who engage in same-sex sexual activity.

The estimate for *kathoey* in Bangkok is from Winter (2002). There is no estimate for the size of a self-identified gay population. Caceres et al. (2006), estimate a 7-12% prevalence of lifetime MSM behavior in Southeast Asia. Various HIV surveillance studies have estimated 3-17% of young men in Thailand engage in same-sex behavior. Estimates for the population of Bangkok range from 9-20 million. In the Census 2010, Bangkok has an official population of 8,249,117 residents, with the greater Bangkok area registering 14,565,520. Using these population figures with the 3-17% MSM rates noted above, these values create a range of between 123,737-1,238,069 MSM in Bangkok and its vicinity. The number of men who identify as gay would be significantly lower than the number of MSM.

[15] The Association of South East Asian Nations is a political organization of all Southeast Asian countries (except for East Timor), which is increasingly developing economic ties with Japan, Korea, and China.

[16] The Korean Wave or *Hallyu* refers to the immense popularity of Korean mass media (i.e. television drama series, pop music, film) and popular culture in Asia and other parts of the globe.

[17] The two main reasons I have been given for the end to Bangkok Gay Pride are disagreements between Thai activists and Western bar owners and organizational mismanagement. Thai activists instead stage a series of events, including a "Sexual Diversity Human Rights" march that coincides with World AIDS Day.

[18] As Taiwan has a large Thai migrant worker population, it is relatively difficult for Thais to travel there. A visa is required, though there are currently negotiations to provide tourist entry. Thais can travel to Singapore, Hong Kong, Macau, and Korea without a visa. Japan allowed tourism without a visa starting on July 1, 2013 and made Japan an immediate travel destination.

[19] Source: Bank of Thailand, www.bot.or.th, accessed June 16, 2011.

[20] The classic work on the flexibility of Thai sex work relationships with foreigners is by Erik Cohen, who published a series of articles and chapters on relationships between *farang* men and Thai female sex workers. See for example, Cohen 1993. These kinds of relationships that extend over time and incorporate romantic elements are less common among Asian tourists, though they also occur with older, effeminate Thai patrons. For Thai gay men, these relationships are like those with mistresses (*mia noi*), though they simultaneously take on a masculine patron role and a feminized sexual role.

For a postmodern "temporary girlfriend" sex work account in the USA, see: Bernstein, Elizabeth 2007. When I described this text to a class I was teaching in Thailand on gender and sexual health, the students did not understand why it was important. I had to explain that sex work in the USA has a much more transactional character, which typically precludes ongoing relationships or emotional attachments, making the concept of a temporarily paid girlfriend more radical in an American context.

[21] SWING (Service Workers in Group), the Bangkok based sex worker foundation,

estimates that half of male sex workers in Surawongse area go-go bars identify as heterosexual.

[22] It can also be argued that modern sex work in Thailand begins with the Japanese occupation during World War II.

[23] Tourism Authority of Thailand, "International Tourist Arrivals by Nationality and Mode of Transport." http://www2.tat.or.th/stat/web/static_download.php?Rpt=nmt (accessed 21 June 2012).

[24] The most oppressive situations for Thai and other Asian sex workers in Thailand are those that cater to Thais, Chinese, and Malays in places such as border town brothels rather than bars that cater to Westerners or massage parlors that cater to Thais and East Asians. However, bar work is publicly visible while the brothel and massage parlor transactions are completely out of sight, behind closed doors, and therefore not a public relations problem.

[25] Though there is not a global transgender imaginary and the general model of female hypergamy also applies to Thai *kathoey*, they often specifically seek foreign Western partners. I would suggest that this is to remove them from a gender situation in which they often face discrimination and are expected to play certain occupational and relationship roles. *Kathoey* are in the situation where they are typically expected to financially support local Thai male partners. Partnership with a foreigner places them in a role more similar to women who can expect financial support from the foreigner. Sometimes kathoey occupy an intermediate position where they are supported by a foreign partner while at the same time supporting a local partner. Partnership with men from certain countries also allows marital out-migration, regardless of operative status.

[26] Faiola, Anthony, 2006 August 31. Japanese Women Catch the "Korean Wave" in

Washington Post

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-

dyn/content/article/2006/08/30/AR2006083002985.html (accessed March 16, 2009).

[27] For a history of Babylon Sauna and extensive description of its design, see Atkins

2011.

[28] I thank Dave from the Sexwork Cyber Resource Center for bringing this to my

attention.

Endnotes Chapter 3

[1] *Slim Up* #19's cover can be accessed at

http://www.magazinedee.com/main/magpreview.php?id=6535.

[2] Worapoj was temporarily barred from boxing for his Stage #36 modeling. The cover

can be accessed at http://www.magazinedee.com/main/magpreview.php?id=6599.

[3] *Kathoey* images for tourists not only naturalize them as local resources, but additionally

work to construct Thailand as exotic, having a "third" gender.

[4] Approximately 90% of Thais practice Theravada Buddhism.

[5] For a recent discussion of Thailand's semicolonial status, see Harrison and Jackson

2010.

[6] My use of "foreigner" here is more or less synonymous with "Westerner" as the texts I

am comparing are those by Caucasians in English. Regarding Asian languages, in

addition to Thai, I am only lowly literate in Korean. In my fieldwork, Chinese, Japanese,

and Koreans I have interacted with have also used the English term "paradise" to refer to

the situation of gays in Thailand. However, I have no extensive interview or other textual

data for this practice. I have identified numerous online sources in other languages, but

do not am not able to discuss them due to language barriers. There is a Singaporean site

that regularly posts about Thailand (http://www.pluguide.com/en/) and a Taiwanese

guide book to Bangkok, which divides Bangkok into ten areas. I communicated with the

writer of the first edition of this book in Berlin, where he was living in 2010.

[7] For heterosexual examples, see: Manderson 1997, Hamilton 1997, Bishop and Robinson

   1997.

[8] In much of the gay foreigner discourse, Thai males are generally referred to as "boys,"

   regardless of age. Many Thai-foreigner relationships, especially with *farang*, are

   intergenerational, where the foreigner is significantly older than the Thai.

[9] *Spartacus*' 2005 edition downgraded Bangkok to "relatively unsrestricted" (Atkins

   2011:254, emphasis in original).

[10] Screenshot from http://www.maitreesiriboon.com/, accessed November 21, 2013.

[11] Gawthrop suggests that he is a rice queen because he witnessed a Chinese boy being

   sexually hazed while in boarding school and idolized a poster of Bruce Lee. I would

   suggest that rice queens make this exception because rice queens are competing

   amongst each other to be the most desirable partners for Asian men. For the claim that

   rice queens become such because the ethnicized sexual marketplace is in their favor,

   given that Asian men are the most ethnically devalued partners in North American gay

   culture and themselves seek white partners, see McCaskell 1998.

[12] The Rice Queen Diary blog went offline in summer of 2010 as the blogger no longer

   wanted to pay to maintain the site. I archived much of the blog in summer 2009.

[13] Anonymous, Rice Queen Diary, "About My Blog, August 18th, 2007,"

http://www.ricequeendiary.com/about-my-blog/.

[14] Anonymous, Rice Queen Diary, "Thai English, December 30th, 2007,"

http://www.ricequeendiary.com/thai-english/.

[15] One bias when looking at forums on sites such as thaivisa.com is that they are skewed

towards retirees who are receiving their pensions in Thailand. Retirement visas are

among the easiest visas to obtain in Thailand.

[16] See http://www.thaivisa.com/forum/topic/293683-be-aware-of-rude-security-guards-at-

silom-complex/ (accessed September 1, 2009).

[17] This story was brought to the attention of the media by the Task Force for the

Preservation of Civilization, including the prominent and controversial gay activist

Natee Teerarojjanapongs. From Natee's perspective, such behavior both demeans

traditional religious institutions and portrays gays negatively, as immoral and

irresponsible citizens.

[18] The vast majority of viewers, queer and not, find these representations humorous and

fun, nothing serious or requiring examination.

[19] For an extended analysis, see Käng forthcoming.

[20] YouTube comments are left in English, Thai, Thaiglish (identifiable through online

idioms such as "555" (i.e. ha ha ha) or a phonetic rendition of Thai in Roman alphabet),

Tagalog, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese.

[21] For a discussion on the commodification of *kathoey* in selling products, see

Prempreeda Pramoj Na Ayuttaya, "The Kathoey as a Product" (2003)

http://web.hku.hk/~sjwinter/TransgenderASIA/paper_the_kathoey_as_a_product(thai).

htm also available in English at

http://web.hku.hk/~sjwinter/TransgenderASIA/paper_the_kathoey_as_a_product.htm.

[22] Text from YouTube is reproduced exactly as rendered online, all spelling and grammatical mistakes have been retained. I have removed the dates comments were left and the voting links. The number following the handle of the poster represents the positive or negative votes that comment received.

[23] The profile for labchaeong identifies him/her as from Afghanistan, but the fact that the profile is written in Thai suggests that the author is either Thai or Thai living abroad.

[24] Wonder Gay follow other Thai imitators of K-pop, such as the all-*kathoey* group Venus Flytrap, modeled after the transgender Korean group Lady and the girl band 7 Days, modeled after the Korean girl group Girls' Generation. Such mimicry questions Thai originality at the same time that it poses a competition between countries. Most Thais do not realize that the Wonder Girls' song "Nobody" recreates a Motown aesthetic.

[25] The Red Shirts (UDD) are a populist political organization composed mostly of the rural and urban poor that supports former Prime Minister Thaksin. They claim the current administration came into power illegitimately and thus call for the dissolution of the government and new elections.

[26] Ratchaprasong is the name of the intersection of Rama I and Ratchadamri Roads. The Red Shirt camp was centered at this intersection, where the main stage was set up. This intersection is also the center of high-end shopping in Bangkok.

[27] Many commercial establishments, especially hotels and night clubs, do not admit *kathoey*. The rationale is that they are sex workers or thieves who will steal from other guests.

[28] Thais often refer to queerness as something that is more acceptable in Thailand than elsewhere. Typically, they will say that Thais "ยอมรับ" (*yom-rap*: accept) homosexuality and transgenderism while other countries are "ปิด" (*pit*: closed, concealed) or queers there must be "อับอาย (*ap-ai*: ashamed). However, this refers specifically to everyday life and the openness one can show in publicly displaying male-bodied effeminacy. Thais often believe that queers have more rights overseas, for example, the right to marry. This is often exaggerated. For example, some believe that same-sex marriage exists throughout the US rather than in specific states.

[29] As in other parts of Asia, there is not an emphasis on "coming out" in Thailand. However, unlike more Confucianist East Asian societies, there is less emphasis on hiding one's gender/sexual non-conformity. For *kathoey*, transgenderism is generally made visible via sartorial practice, cosmetic use, bodily comportment, and language (Thai uses gendered particles that mark the speaker as male or female). Effeminate gay Thais (who generally would not describe themselves as "men"), will often state that everyone knows about their sexual orientation, even if they have told no one. See, for example, Kam (2012) on "the politics of public correctness" among lalas in Shanghai, Tan (2011) on "going home" in Singapore, and Manalansan (2003) on "unfurling the cape." Also see Decena (2011) on "tacit subjects" among Dominican immigrants in the US as well as the African American literature on the "down low" (McCune 2014).

[30] Besides Altman (1997), see Murray 2000. Murray's taxonomy of homosexualities describes modern Western homosexuality as egalitarian in that both partners are more or less equal in status and similar in gender presentation, compared to other systems in which age difference, gender-transformation, or other factors structure homosexuality.

This assumes a teleological evolution of homosexual forms over time. It also relegates transgenderism, which continues to proliferate in places such as Thailand and the USA, to a less modern construction of homosexuality.

[31] Gay men in China avoid white partners to demonstrate belonging to the nation. See Rofel 2007.

[32] Perhaps in reaction to the representation of Thailand as a "gay paradise," particularly in popular literature, academics have emphasized the faultiness of such a portrayal, pointing to the complex and contradictory nature of homosexuality and transgenderism in Thailand. The academic literature focuses on negative events and aspects of intolerance to sexual diversity. However, queer Thais themselves, especially *kathoey*, typically frame their situation in Thailand as being better than in other countries. This is also repeated in Thai newspaper articles and other media that describe why Thailand is such a popular destination for gay tourists.

Endnotes Chapter 4

[1] For a history of this area, see Korean American Foundation-Greater Washington 2009.

[2] Some *farang* find this term offensive because it can be used as a slur depending on how it is said. The technical derogatory curse is ไอ้ฝรั่ง (*ai-farang*).

[3] American Anthropological Association. 1998. Statement on "Race" (http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm).

[4] On mixed race Thais, see for example: Haritaworn 2007, Chaipraditkul 2013.

Mixed race children were discriminated against specifically because they were assumed to be the result of prostitution with American and other foreign service men. The

Amerasian Homecoming Act (1987) allowed children born to American fathers in Japan, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam prior to 1982 to immigrate to the USA.

[5] Academics tend to use the more technical term *chat-phan* (ชาติพันธุ์), which connotes a subspecies grouping based on biological descent, most typically skin color (*si-phio* สีผิว). *Chat* not only refers to race and nationality, but also refers religiously to a life in the cycle of rebirths. Keyes (2002: 1179) notes that the term, derived from the Pali/Sanskrit *jati* for "that which is given at birth" gained its modern meaning of "people who share a common heritage from the past" in the late nineteenth century. Loos (2008) also notes that the term can refer to an extended family. Alternative terms include *cheua-chat* (เชื้อ ชาติ) or *cheua-sai* (เชื้อสาย), which is akin to lineage or heritage. Informants used the latter terms, for instance, to reference their Sino-Thai identity. That is, being Thai with a Chinese family line. A number of other less widely used terms also exist.

[6] There has been a movement in the USA to create a SWANA (Southwest Asian and North African) race category that more or less approximates Middle Eastern, but by definition it excludes South Asians, who were reclassified from the Caucasian category into the Asian & Pacific Islander (A&PI) category for the 1970 Census. For the 2000 Census, A&PI was split apart into Asian and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI). Previously, Asian Indians in the U.S. have been classified as Caucasian but not white. In the U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind (1923), the Supreme Court ruled Indians (also referred to as "Hindoos") ineligible for citizenship because U.S. law allowed only free whites to become naturalized citizens. The Supreme Court conceded that Indians were "Caucasian" because anthropologists considered them to be of the

same race as white Americans, but argued that "the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences." California has a history of separating Filipinos from Asians and sometimes mainland Southeast Asians such as Vietnamese and Cambodian based on refugee status.

[7] Along with mainland Chinese, they are considered undesirable tourists by many Thais and considered too numerous. There is a large expat and tourist community of Russians in Pattaya.

[8] There is a similar notion in Asian American studies. Nadia Kim (2007) argues against the sociological whitening literature, which suggests a polarizing black/non-black (as opposed to the prior white/non-white) distinction in the US, where all non-black groups, such as Asian Americans and Latinos, are aligning with whites as non-black. She argues that even if Asian Americans approximate a similar socioeconomic status to Caucasians, their racial subjugation means that they have not accomplished whiteness. This includes being perceived of as perpetually foreign and linked to Asia. Thus for Kim, Asian American lived experience of everyday racism and the historical memory of racial exclusions means they continue to be non-white.

[9] The term ความเป็นไอ้แขก (*khwam-pen-ai-khaek*, being a damn visitor) can be used for any for foreigner but more specifically refers to South Asians, Middle Easterners, or Muslims. The term would thus be more similar to American racial slurs such as "dot head" (for women) or "turban head" (for men).

[10] Papayas are important fruit in Thailand and they are used in both gender and racial metaphors. Papaya trees that are unable to produce fruit are referred to as kathoey and papaya with dark orange flesh is referred to as แขกดำ (*khaek dam*).

[11] That is not to say that there is not discrimination against black Americans, who are often associated with criminality. When I ask about this, the source is often said to be a Hollywood movie.

[12] Depending on how one counts ethnic groups the number varies tremendously. For example, one can lump all Chinese together or separate Teochew, Hakka, Hainanese, Cantonese, Hokkien, and other ethno-linguistic groups. The greatest variation is with the hill tribe groups, which can be counted as half a dozen major ones or approximately forty. The difference also occurs in that some categorizations exclude ethnic groups such as the Karen who are considered recent migrants and therefore not a historical ethnic group within Thai borders.

[13] For a brief history of the region and its relationship to development of the Thai state, see Loos 2010. For an overview of security concerns see Chalk 2008. .

[14] In tourist areas, Thais will don ethnic clothing, especially the distinctive women's headdresses, to sell tourist trinkets or pay to be models in photographs.

[15] Reconsitituing ethnic Lao as Thai was one strategy for Siam to enforce its borders against the encroachment of French Indochina, which include Laos.

[16] Thais define the continent of Asia as Americans do. However, the race defined as "Asian" does not map neatly onto the geography of Asia in either case.

[17] See, for example: O'Neil 2008, Baker and Phongpaichit 2005, Skinner 1957.

[18] DJ rankings are available at http://dj-rankings.com (accessed 1/3/2013).

[19] Interview by Regina Walton posted on ExpatJane http://expatjane.blogspot.com/2009/03/dj-nakadia.html (accessed April 16, 2009).

[20] See for example คนญี่ปุ่นในประเทศญี่ปุ่นเค้าเหยียดผิวคนเอเชียมั้ยครับ (Do the Japanese people in Japan discriminate against Asians?) posted in pantip.com (Thailand's most popular web board) at http://pantip.com/topic/30831545 (accessed September 21, 2013).

[21] Michael Shaowanasai. 1999. Bunzai Chaiyo Episode II: The Adventure of Iron Pussy. This scene is from approximately eight minutes into the video, which is part of a longer series of video, film, and performance work that has spanned over a decade and includes collaborations with the celebrated Thai auteurs Apichatpong Weerasethakul in The Adventure of Iron Pussy (2003) and Wisit Sasanatieng in Iron Pussy: A Kimchi Affair (2010), commissioned by the Pusan International Film Festival.

[22] Bao (2005) does not use the term "Sino-Thai" as it refers primarily to Chinese men who married Thai women and their descendants. She uses "*Chinkao*" to refer to China-born first generation Chinese in Thailand and "*Lukchin*," to Thailand-born second generation Chinese. She notes how Chinese men, who are highly upwardly mobile, become womanizers (*chaochu*) to attain Thai masculinity in a context where women take work outside of the home. Similar to discussions on Thai masculinity, where tastes must be varied, she uses the idea that "repeatedly tasting the same hot sauce causes a man to lose his appetite" (*kin namphrik thuaikao khoa ko bua*, 13).

[23] Here, there are clearly parallels to the history of Chinese in the USA.

[24] Bangkok's official name is กรุงเทพมหานคร อมรรัตนโกสินทร์ มหินทรายุธยา มหาดิลกภพ นพรัตนราชธานีบูรีรมย์ อุดมราชนิเวศน์มหาสถาน อมรพิมานอวตารสถิต สักกะทัตติยวิษณุกรรมประสิทธิ์ (*Krungthepmahanakhon Amonrattanakosin Mahintharayutthaya Mahadilokphop Noppharatratchathaniburirom Udomratchaniwetmahasathan Amonphimanawatansathit Sakkathattiyawitsanukamprasit*) or the "capital city of angels, great city of immortals,

magnificent city of the nine gems, seat of the king, city of royal palaces, home of gods

incarnate, erected by Visvakarman at Indra's behest." This is typically abbreviated as

either กรุงเทพ (*Krungthep*) "capital city of angels" or กรุงเทพมหานคร

(*Krungthepmahanakhon*), "Krungthep metropolitan area" or its abbreviation กทม

(*KTM*).

King Bhumipol's official name is พระบาทสมเด็จพระปรมินทรมหาภูมิพลอดุลยเดช มหิตลาธิเบศรรามาธิบดี จักรีนฤบ

ดินทร สยามินทราธิราช บรมนาถบพิตร (*Phra Bat Somdet Phra Paraminthra Maha Bhumibol

Adulyadej Mahitalathibet Ramathibodi Chakkrinaruebodin Sayamminthrathirat

Borommanatthabophit*).

[25] Since 1992, the Asian Development Bank and other agencies such as the US Agency

for International Development have referred to mainland Southeast Asia as the Greater

Mekong Subregion, as the river runs through or borders all five nations: Myanmar,

Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The two Southwestern Chineses provinces of

Yunnan and Guangxi are also included in variations of this designation.

[26] South Korean foreign worker policy specifically required HIV testing for English

language instructor visas. Some Korean language schools continue to require annual

HIV tests among language instructors, even when prompted by government requests. In

Japan, Westerners are generally associated with criminality in the media.

Endnotes Chapter 5

[1] Korean seaweed laver, or *kim*, is thinner, crispier, saltier, and oilier than Japanese *nori*,

as it has been toasted with sesame oil. *Kim* is a popular souvenir gift both in Japan

and Thailand from those who have visited Korea. Since 2004, there are now

several Thai snack brands that simulate the Korean seaweed laver. The texture of
the seaweed, being deep fried, is crispier, and incorporates Thai flavors, such as
tom yam. The Thai seaweed is packaged to be eaten like potato chips, much
smaller than the precut snack size typical of Korean brands. The most popular
Thai brand, Tao Kae Noi, owned by a Sino-Thai, uses a Chinese mascot. I also
saw this Thai brand being sold as "Korean food" at supermarkets in Jakarta,
Indonesia in 2013.

[2] I make this assertion based on mall directories and brochures. Restaurants that operate
as separate businesses are named and sometimes ethnically categorized in mall
directories with features such as a national flag (e.g. Japan, Thailand, Italy). However,
those that operate in food courts are not named or categorized. The vast majority of
mall goers will eat at the lower cost food court stalls rather than at restaurants. These
serve primarily Thai food. Thai restaurants, which are walled off rather than in a
common seating area, serve higher end Thai food or are oriented towards tourists.

[3] The Oishi Group operates seven restaurant brands: Oishi Grand Japanese Buffet
Restaurant, Oishi Japanese Buffet, Nikuya Japanese BBQ Buffet, Shabushi, Oishi
Ramen-The Noodle Bar, Kazokutei (Udon and Soba), and Kakashi. Oishi Japanese
Buffet is their original and largest brand.

[4] These hybridizations also occur through the West. Following the Japanese food trend,
one of McDonald's most popular burgers in Thailand is the Samurai Burger, made with
teriyaki sauce. It can be accompanied by Seaweed Shaker Fries, a Samurai Fizzy or
Jasmine Green Tea, and Matcha McFlurry (green tea soft serve ice cream with Oreo
bits).

[5] A related slang word is *fin*, from the English "finished." The term can be used in many contexts, for example, when transgender women have vaginoplasty and consider themselves "complete" or "perfect" women.

[6] Underarm whitening products are considered useful for people who pluck their underarm hairs, as is common in Thailand. Plucking often darkens the follicle areas. Whitening vaginal douches have also been controversial. I have been told that there are whitening feminine hygiene pads, but have never seen these sold in stores.

[7] As of July 11, 2013, there are seven Amino Plus beverages that claim different functions. Four new flavors incorporate additional ingredients for skin whitening, clarifying, softening, and tautening. These are sold in convenience stores and supermarkets among energy drinks and other beverages that improve health, brain functioning/smartening, fat-burning, etc. See www.oishigroup.com/en_product_beverage_amino.php.

[8] The term "sucking" is used for the action of eating things like hard candy. It is metaphorically used for mixed colors like blue-green, which would be described as "blue sucking green."

[9] The drink has 450 mgs of amino acid. The "plus" active ingredient for whitening is glutathione (75 mg). The drink also has 1,000 mgs of collagen to promote smooth skin. Glutathione is a skin depigmenting agent that works as a melanin inhibitor. By decreasing melanin production, it reduces the dark coloration of skin.

[10] Original photo from http://topicstock.pantip.com/woman/topicstock/2011/02/Q10263211/Q10263211.html (accessed February 24, 2011). Pantip.com is Thailand's most popular web forum.

[11] "เมื่อโฆษณา "ที่นั่งสำรองสำหรับ...คนขาว" บนรถไฟฟ้า ถูกชาวเน็ตรุมถล่มและ ลามถึง "เหยียดผิว-แบ่งชนชั้น"" (When the Advertisement for "Seats Reserved for White People" on the Skytrain Caved In to Claims of "Racism and Classism" on the Net), Matichon, February 24, 2011 (2554), www.matichon.co.th/news_detail.php?newsid=1298534576&grpid=01&catid=01.

[12] Many of my friends expressed anger over this ad, but as one stated: "That's wrong. Wait, I shouldn't care. I could sit there." Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, March 8, 2011.

[13] While Jory (2007) relegates it to an endnote, he notes that aspects of Chinese cultural heritage are also being expressed and popularized, with a large proportion of advertising executives and middle class consumers in Bangkok having some Chinese ancestry.

[14] The descriptor of "yellow" comes from evolutionism in 17-18th century natural history and anthropology, for example, in the work of Johann Frederich Blumenbach (1752 to 1840), who is credited as one of the first to scientifically study racial differences. Though he claimed that other races were not inferior (they are degenerated versions of Caucasians that can re-evolve), his works were later used to justify scientific racism. In his posthumously published *Treatises*, he twice describes skin color: on page 209-210, in a section called "Racial varieties of colour" and again in a longer description on pages 264-266 of the "Five Principal Varieties of Mankind, One Species." Blumenbach describes five races defined primarily by skin color: white European, yellow Mongolian (or olive-tinged), copper American, tawny Malay, and tawny-black (or black) Ethiopians.

[15] I thank Jane Park for describing this reference and Kukhee Cho and Earl Jackson for identifying the sources.

[16] Stars go in and out of favor quite quickly. Dome was popular early in my primary fieldwork (he featured prominently as the vocalist in the music video "*Glua*" (Fear) by Nologo, the theme song for the popular horror movie *Seeprang* (2008)), but was replaced by "Boy" Pakorn Chatborirak (Sino-Thai pharmacist/actor with a Japanese look, which is epitomized in his mustache) towards the end. Nichkun, Mario, and Nadech remained popular throughout the period. Heritage is listed mother first, then father. Singaporean, in the Thai context, refers to Chinese Singaporean.

[17] *Luk-khreung* (ลูกครึ่ง literally "half-child") can be used for any racial/ethnic mix, but is most often associated with mixed parentage that "shows," e.g. with white or black parents. The term is not used for Sino-Thais and rarely with other Asians (e.g. Thai-Japanese, Thai-Korean, Thai-Vietnamese). This points to the idea that other Asians are racially similar and more readily assimilable within the notion of Thainess. Nevertheless, all *luk-khreung* who grow up in Thailand speaking Thai are more or less accepted as Thai without question. Previously, *luk-khreung* were stigmatized as the children of Thai prostitutes and US soldiers during the American war. However, with the development of the Thai economy, light skinned *luk-khreung* have become resignified as beautiful. That is, while in the past, *luk-khreung* were more often imagined as the children of prostitutes and soldiers, now they are often the children of

middle class/wealthy women and foreign businessmen. Both *luk-khreung* and Sino-Thais are greatly overrepresented in Thai visual media.

[18] Mae Moo, "The game's up, Tasteless remarks, Fair-but-not-weak, Who's your daddy now?," Bangkok Post, March 20, 2011.

This fact was already known by his manager and primary employer, Channel 3. But they chose not to disclose it. Nadech's fans remained supportive of him. The consensus was that it didn't matter if he was half-Austrian (or Australian [*sic*]); he was still cute.

[19] Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, March 2010.

[20] Dave, interview by the author, Bangkok, Thailand, August 4, 2009.

[21] Sinnott (2012) also notes that K-pop has become the dominant stylistic reference for Thai *tom* (butch lesbians or masculine identified women loving women), who are in part borrowing aspects from Thai gay culture. Indeed, I would argue that the aesthetics of Thai sissies (effeminate gay men) and butch lesbians are converging in the "soft masculinity" of K-pop aesthetics.

[22] There are a number of free gay magazines, primarily comprised of advertisements, events, and nightlife information. A large number of "model" magazines (soft-core pornography) also exists. Furthermore, there are many fashion, fitness, and lifestyle magazines that target gay men but do not label themselves as gay.

[23] Attitude Thailand covers in chronological order can be viewed at the magazine sales site Magazine Dee. www.magazinedee.com/main/magissuelist.php?id=599 (accessed June 25, 2013). The website for Attitude Thailand is www.attitudethai.com.

[24] Both models are associated with the photographer and tastemaker, Haruehun Airry

Noppawan. Haruehun Airry has a Korean boyfriend and regularly discovers Korean,

Sino-Thai, and other Asian models for Thai advertisements and fashion editorials.

[25] Top Koaysomboon, "Attitude Thailand's editor on Thai queerness," BK Magazine,

April 28, 2011, bk.asia-city.com/events/article/attitude-thailands-editor-talks-about-

thai-queerness-complexity-genders-and-his-own-a, accessed May 01, 2011.

I contacted the the staff of the magazine for an interview. After I sent a list of sample

questions on the topic of how the magazine constructs beauty ideals, the staff declined

an interview with me.

[26] The World Bank estimates access at 10.7% in 2004, 20.1% in 2009, and 26.5% in 2013

(source:

http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2/countries?page=1&display=defa

ult, accessed 1/8/2014).

[27] The group address is https://www.facebook.com/WPA11087 (accessed 10/17/2013).

[28] This paper was posted online at

http://trademinister.gov.au/releases/2011/ce_mr_111001.html (accessed 1/27/2012).

[29] This belief in Japanese "ethnic destiny" to dominate Asia is most clearly laid out by

Eizo Koyama in An Investigation of Global Policy with the Yamato Race as Nucleus.

For the nationalist relationship between scientific racism and public opinion in mid-20th

century Japan, see Suzuki-Morris 2000.

[30] Chen (2010) summarizes Han Chinese attitudes towards non-Chinese in two ways.

First Chinese described others as demonized (e.g. Europeans and Japanese) or

animalized (those like Indians who can become humanized through education, though

not as fully as the Chinese). An additional distinction for the ethnic groups on its periphery is between the "cooked" and the "raw," the cooked being more easily digested into the Chinese cultural sphere, that is, those who are adopt Chinese practices.

[31] The whitening literature includes various new American racial classifications and ethnic alliances based on traits such as skin color but not exclusive to it. Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2009), primarily looking at Latino Americans, describe a "tri-racial" system of "whites" including "new whites" such as Russians and assimilated Latinos and urban Native Americans; "honorary whites" including light-skinned Latinos, multi-racial individuals, Middle Easterners, Indians, Japanese, Koreans, Chinese and Filipinos; "collective blacks" including African Americans, dark-skinned Latinos, Vietnamese, Hmong, Lao, new West Indian and African immigrants, and Native Americans on reservations. See also, Bonilla-Silva 2004.

[32] Miller (2006) also describes a contemporary tanning trend among Japanese women.

[33] For a recent review of the skin lightening literature, see Hunter 2011.

[34] The related issue of Indian English is also pertinent here. English was indigenized as an Indian language to rigidify caste hierarchy, discipline gender and sexuality (Chandra 2012). English allowed the upper castes to shore up their power and delink upper caste status from religious ritual. In making caste secular, it was also normalized and universalized. Thus, Indian society shaped English as English shaped India. Normative "native" woman was used to uphold upper-caste exclusivity.

[35] Following Stoler's work in Indonesia, Mizutani's (2011) *The Meaning of White Race, Class, and the 'Domiciled Community'in British India 1858-1930* addresses the British colonial problem from of the "domiciled community," which included those of mixed

Eurasian descent and Europeans who permanently migrated to India rather than staying temporarily for colonial administration or business. In particular, their poverty set them apart from respectable bourgeois whites. Domiciled Europeans were classified as "Natives of India" unlike other poor whites, who could be repatriated to Britain. Middle classness was essential to privileging whiteness and differentiating the colony from the metropole. Though the poverty of the domiciled was caused by the unwillingness of the colonial administration and European businesses to hire them, their pauperism was attributed to degenerations caused by the environment as well as the psychological disorder of being unable to reconcile their mixed heritage with their desire to identify with non-domiciled Britons. Attempts to reform the situation in the early twentieth century labeled mothers of the domiciled as prostitutes and the children as abandoned. Children were raised in artificial families and sometimes sent abroad to other colonies such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Domiciled claims of being white, Christian, and native speakers of English were not enough to be considered white as they had not been educated in Britain.

[36] These beliefs are carried over into Asian American communities. See, for example, Rondill and Spickard 2007.

[37] Cities such as Tokyo and Seoul clearly have more gay bars than Bangkok. Some estimates place the number of gay bars in Tokyo at five hundred. However, the vast majority of these bars are small and quite private, catering to a regular close-knit group of customers. This contrasts to the much larger and more public venues in Bangkok.

[38] I collected several different versions of Chakran Sauna advertisements with this map from a number of free magazines and maps. Several variations of advertisements using this map of Asia were used in 2009 and 2010.

[39] It is likely that foreigners would not be offered this price, even if they met the age criteria.

[40] It is common in Thai discourse to refer to Thailand as the center of Southeast Asia.

[41] I looked at one of my friend's training manuals, which was produced before they included Russian. I surmised that the person who constructed the manual was a fan of Korean media, as the Korean language section was the longest, and the only section that taught the alphabet and grammar in addition to common phrases. The first duty free item recommended to suggest to Korean customers was Ballantine Whisky.

[42] Statistics from http://www2.tat.or.th/stat/web/static_download.php?Rpt=cre accessed on June 13, 2011 and http://61.19.236.137/tourism/th/home/tourism.php accessed on July 26, 2011 and November 5, 2012.

[43] Fare searched conducted on www.airasia.com, www.vietnamairlines.com, and www.thaiairways.com on November 5, 2012.

[44] See, for example, http://www.thailandindustrialtoday.com/titnews/index.php?option=com_content&view =article&id=214:2012-10-26-06-39-33&catid=37:interview&Itemid=27 accessed November 4, 2012. In an article titled "The Potential for Thailand to Compete with Vietnam in the Future" (อนาคตประเทศไทย ศักยภาพสู่เวียดนาม), the author writes that "Vietnam's economic development might quickly surpass that of Thailand" (ขณะที่เวียดนามมีการพัฒนา ก้าวหน้าอย่างรวดเร็วจะแซงหน้าเศรษฐกิจไทย).

45 See

http://www.mekongchula.com/views/mekong_index.php?mode=details&category=artic
le&id=15 accessed on September 11, 2011.

46 The Bloomberg news post at http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-03-20/hong-kong-
beats-netherlands-and-u-s-as-best-place-for-business.html, accessed July 12, 2012. The
list of 50 countries is available at

http://media.bloomberg.com/bb/avfile/r9w3Yd.9CZtU.

47 http://www.manager.co.th/mgrWeekly/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9550000040015,
post from March 29, 2012 accessed July 12, 2012. The article was subsequently
reposted at http://aecmarket.net/news-detail.php?id=35 and accessed July 12, 2012.

48 See http://www.prosperity.com/ accessed November 3, 2012.

Endnotes Chapter 6

1 Both food vendors and sex workers are often able to make more money than middle
class professionals. However their occupations would be considered low class by other
Thais.

2 This sentiment is more common among Sino-Thais. For a discussion of Thai women's
anxieties about marrying gay men, see Käng 2012.

3 Many such policies were challenged in 2011, when Korea hosted the International
Congress of HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific. Korean laws and immigration policies
preventing the entry of drug users, sex workers, people living with HIV, and other
populations at the center of the epidemic threatened to disenfranchise the communities
most impacted and most essential to a community based response. Though negotiations

were made in order to host the conference, the policies remained unchanged. A violent

police crackdown on a protest at the conference demonstrated state authority.

[4] "Black" refers to Johnnie Walker Black Label whisky, which is more expensive than

the basic Red Label (e.g. 1200 and up vs. 700 and up THB).

[5] This exchange is from an online chat I copied into my field notes on April 19, 2009.

[6] "Gold" refers to Johnnie Walker Gold Label whisky, which is more expensive than the

Black Label (e.g. 1900 and up vs. 1200 and up THB). At this venue, the bottle would

be approximately 3000THB.

[7] Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, December 25, 2009.

[8] Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, July 25, 2009.

[9] Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, May 30, 2010. These two stories, which occurred about

a week apart, were recounted to me several times, demonstrating their importance to

Dew.

[10] A go-go (sometimes referred to as a-go-go) boy is a sex worker in gay bars that work

on the "off" system, where the client pays a fee to the bar to take the go-go boy out of

the bar. Go-go boys wear bikinis with small numbers pinned to them so that customers

can request them without pointing, which would be rude. Go-go boys are required to

present themselves on stage, usually by standing in rotating formations at prescribed

times, to allow customers to examine them.

A coyote is a sex worker who dances to music on stage in a bar. The genre of coyote

dance is quite distinctive. The movements are fast and jerky. This contrasts with

"macho" dance, a genre performed by some go-go boys, which is slow and fluid.

Clients who are interested can "off" coyotes but they also function like a show. Coyotes

can wear bikinis or be fully dressed depending on the situation. Typically, the amount

of clothing decreases over the course of a night.

 "Freelance" refers to work that does not occur in an establishment, such as a massage parlor. Freelance massage is primarily marketed in online gay cruising sites. In the public health literature on sex work, freelance would be referred to as "direct" sex work, where the sex worker and the client do not engage each other through an institutionalized intermediary such as a bar or brothel. In contrast, those who work through establishments are referred to as "indirect" sex workers.

[11] Payment is in the form of "tips," that are mandatory but variable. There is generally a minimum tip, explicit or not. Tips are generally left up to the client as long as they meet the minimum a sex worker expects (in Bangkok, in an establishment with foreign clients, usually 1000-1500 THB for a short term and 1500-2000 THB for the night). Tips can also be negotiated. Although sex workers state that they have an absolute minimum tip, this is often not enforced given the circumstances (e.g. what services were rendered, how far they have to travel, how attracted they are to the client).

[12] East Asian clients are more likely to classify sex workers as individuals unsuitable for socializing in public or long term relationships. For some examples about the negative attitudes towards sex workers among Chinese and Taiwanese, see Rofel, "Traffic in Money Boys" and Hans Tao-Ming Huang, Queer Politics and Sexual Modernity in Taiwan (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).

[13] Initially, during my fieldwork I stated that I was "Korean-American." However, this was usually taken to mean that I was *luk-khreung*. Thais assumed that my mother was Korean and that my father was (white) American. I subsequently described myself as a Korean who was born in Korea but grew up in the US.

[14] The playful Korean nick names were not like Thai nick names that are actually more

important in daily life than their real names. Instead, the Korean nick names often

played on Thai sounds and were used for joking. For example, the Korean 히 (*hi*),

sounds similar to the Thai slang word for vagina. Thus, there were many variations on

vaginal puns. Indeed, the term for Korean (เกาหลี *kaoli*) is itself very close to the slang

for female masturbation (เกาหี *kaohi*). Before Facebook changed their policy which

restricted the use of names to certain languages to verify one's identity, Thais often

wrote their names in Hangul (e.g. 미키 for Micky). Many of my Thai friends

complained that they could not find their other Thai friends on Facebook because they

were using Hangul letters, which they could not search in Thai or Roman alphabets.

[15] I contend that the idea of "cultural proximity" used by many scholars of Asian

regionalism has limited value. This is most problematic when referring to "Confucian

values" or "Asian values."

[16] Oa, interview by the author, Bangkok, Thailand, September 12, 2010.

[17] Fieldnotes, Bangkok, Thailand, January 16, 2010.

[18] Mark, interview by the author, Bangkok, Thailand, January 11, 2009.

Endnotes Chapter 7

[1] Thai Muslims generally do not see a problem with self-identification as gay, though

there is generally less acceptance by their families compared to Buddhist ones.

Transgender women, however, must negotiate various aspects of their practice, for

example, praying with men or women. They also must frame any body modification such

as breast augmentation as necessary, as cosmetic procedures are generally forbidden by Muslim law.

[2] I have changed the name as there is illegal activity on the site.

[3] Reading Topic #3460 http://74.55.90.235/CCforum/DCForumID3/3460.html#0 (accessed March 9, 2011).

[4] This is reminiscent of Filipino desires to associate with and be mistaken for Japanese after Spanish rule and pre-Japanese domination. Filipino desires pointed to a Japanese affinity and an idolization of their freedom. The Japanese were an uncolonized Asian nation, both close geographically and a model for independence. Japanese were not considered a colonial threat before WW II. The Japanese, however, become yet another imperial force in 1941, whose practices made Filipinos nostalgic for US domination instead.

[5] Ortorkor (อ.ต.ก. *or tor kor*) is a high end outdoor agricultural market near Jatujak market, which claims to be the largest outdoor market in the world. Nearby is an entertainment district that, at its height in 2009-2010, supported more than a dozen gay bars, discos, clubs, and karaokes. Those these included both lower middle class and upper middle class venues, the area is primarily known for being more upscale.

[6] The common reciprocal statement on profiles of Thais as well as foreigners is "No money boys." Additionally, foreigners in particular will include the statement "No Filipinos," referring to the practice of Filipinos from the Philippines, as opposed to Bangkok, contacting users to develop potential relationships.

[7] Smartphone applications are important in that they demonstrate class status and limit potential partners by class. This was especially true early in the introduction of the new

technology. Using the applications, one would only encounter those who could afford this phone technology.

[8] Mark and I worked with a different framework of drinking rules that caused friction between us. For me, one drank "down" over the evening. That is, the longer one drank, the cheaper the alcohol should be, as there was less ability to make refined taste distinctions. At the same time, I also varied choice based on how one would drink. A sipping whisky without mixers should be of better quality than one mixed with soda water and Coke, the typical way that Thais drink it. This meant that, when I was at a wedding reception and poured a cup of Johnny Walker Blue Label, I told the waiter I only wanted ice but no mixers. The others at my table looked at me strangely. I stated that I rarely get to drink Blue Label, and wanted to be able to taste it, since after mixing with soda water and Coke, I cannot make out the difference. The distinction in taste was not what was important for the other guests at my table. What was important was that there was a bottle with a blue label on it, and everyone could appreciate that. That is, enjoying the drink for Thais in this situation was not about appreciating the fine qualities of the expensive alcohol, rather, it was about displaying what one was drinking to others regardless of the taste.

[9] I tried to assess the types of hierarchies that existed among *farang* of different nationalities. I initially thought there would be differences based on the legal status of same sex marriage. As same sex marriage and civil unions allow entry into the European Union more broadly. However, there was a general misperception among Thais that because some US states had same sex marriage or civil unions that this allowed immigration to the USA, which was not the case until 2013. Additionally,

many gay and *kathoey* sex workers assumed that same sex marriage was universal in Western nations, especially if they had already transitioned. That is, a foreign government would recognize a MTF as a woman, even if the Thai government did not, providing them with another opportunity to access foreign marriage. Thus, there was no preference for *farang* from particular countries based on legal recognition of same sex relationships. What was important was the economic, religious, and geographic contexts of nationality. For example, Israelis and South Africans constituted ambiguous categories while Russians were often considered undesirable. Russians also constitute the only nationally identifiable group of *farang* who work as sex workers in Thailand.

Endnotes Chapter 8

[1] There are obviously no official statistics about sex tourism. Further, it can be difficult to tease out sex tourism from other forms of travel, such as business travel. I make this claim based on the total tourist arrivals by country and gender ratios of tourists, assuming that the proportion of sex tourists is more or less equal between countries but is more common among men. Additionally, the venues for Asians tend to be much larger than those targeting Caucasians.

[2] There are Buddhist temples open 24 hours in the Rachada area for Thai women who work in the nearby massage parlors. Non-Thai/Chinese/Japanese/Korean men (generally *farang*, Middle Easterners, and South Asians) who visit such establishments are sometimes refused or subject to a 500-1000 THB surcharge for a service that is 2000-6000 THB. However, given the optional charges that Thais are expected pay (snacks, parking, tips for managers, etc.) the price is often closer to 10,000 THB for

regular Thai customers who have an established relationship with the staff and are thus expected to be more generous. These establishments also have Russian masseuses, who are working illegally but not in the open, like in Pattaya. By contrast, *farang*, Middle Eastern, and South Asian men are targeted by African sex workers in the Nana area of Bangkok.

[3] This belief is also common among gay Asian American men, who often state that sex with other Asian men is like incest, "like having sex with your brother." Typically, these men will express a desire for white partners instead. White American gay men will pejoratively refer to Asian-Asian couplings as "lesbian." The idea being that both partners must be effeminate. I have also heard both gay Asian Americans and Thai sissies refer to these relationships as "lesbian." In the latter situation, they would avoid similar others in an effeminate, yet misogynistic "lesbian" repulsion. For example, Thai sissies and *kathoey* will often refer to relationships among each other as "lesbian" and disgusting. However, this is changing as homogender relations are becoming more acceptable. That is, there is a loosening of prohibitions on homogender relationships (see Peletz 2009).

[4] Gay men, kathoey, and some women will often use *kin* (to eat) to mean "to have sex with." For example, *chan kin phuchai khon-nan laeo* (ชั้นกินผู้ชายคนนั้นแล้ว) means: "I have had sex with that man." *Chim* means to taste or sample food and *jim* means to dip, as in a sauce. Both can also be used when referring to try something new or sexual exploration. *Chin laeo* means to be acclimated to, be accustomed to, or be familiarized with. Rather than use *kin*, straight men tend to use *set* (เสร็จ to finish), to refer to having an orgasm. For example, *phuying khon-nan set ku laeo* (ผู้หญิงคนนั้นเสร็จกูแล้ว) means "I have

had sex with that woman," with the implication that she has been done. This is in contrast to *taek* (แตก to burst or shatter), or the experiential feeling of the orgasm itself.

[5] This also applies to *kathoey* whose sexuality is considered active (like men) rather than passive (like women).

[6] Newsletters of Asian and Pacific Islander gay and lesbian organizations from the USA, Canada, Australia, and Japan from 1980 to 2004 accessed at the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries on October 16-19, 2012 and December 18, 2014. The most complete collection was for the Asian/Pacific Lesbians and Gays (Los Angeles) at .4 linear feet of records. Other collections included Far East-Midwest Times (Asians & Friends, Cleveland, OH), Gay Asian Pacific Support Network (Los Angeles), Journey Asian/Pacific Crossroads (Orange County, CA), Lavender Godzilla (Gay Asian Pacific Alliance, San Francisco), Long Yang Club-Pacific Friends (San Francisco) Queer Asian Pacific Alliance (Boston), Ring of Fire (Asians & Friends, Pittsburgh), and Silk Road (Asians & Friends, Washington DC), among others.

[7] Ara Wilson, "Queering Asia," Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context, no. 14 (2006), intersections.anu.edu.au/issue14/wilson.html.

[8] "Asian values" discourse, particularly as they have been espoused from Malaysia and Singapore, posits that there is a pan-Asian/pan-religious culture modeled on a specific formulation of Confucianism values (which are neither pan-Asian nor pan-religious) distinct from Western ones. Thus, the economic, social, and political development of Asia should not ape Western nations. Asian institutions are justified in implementing authoritarian policies and practices that, in a Western context, would infringe upon personal civil liberties or human rights because Asian societies express greater

collectivism. Much of these so-called values are derived from Chinese and Japanese sources. Former Prime Ministers Lee Kuan Yew (Singapore) and Mahathir Mohamad (Malaysia) are most closely associated with this line of thought. Countries such as China continue to employ this ideological framework to deflect Western criticism, which is considered ideological imperialism inappropriate for a new multi-polar world order. See, for example, Ong 1999 and 2006.

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