

Performative Genders, Perverse Desires: A Bio-History of Thailand's Same-Sex and Transgender Cultures

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Introduction

1. In this study I explore an apparent paradox in the history of Thailand's same-sex and transgender cultures. In Thailand, the later decades of the twentieth century were witness to a proliferation of transgender, transsexual and male and female same-sex identity categories and a dramatic increase in the public visibility of new gender/sexual cultures. However, this proliferation of identities and cultures, which superficially mirrors the historical situation in the West, occurred in the absence of the forms of bio-power that Foucault argues incited the origin of the contemporary discourse of sexuality and the associated speciation of 'the homosexual' and 'the heterosexual'. In exploring this apparent paradox, I 'forget' the details of Foucault's history of sexuality in the West while relying upon his conception of bio-history and his genealogical method. While the empirical contents of *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* offer little insight into transformations of Thai gender and eroticism, Foucault's genealogical approach provides a productive tool for understanding how local forms of power incite distinctive and equally local forms of discourse and subjectivity. In this study I draw upon Butler's Foucault-influenced account of the performativity of gender and sex to trace the ways that shifts in the forms of bio-power over gender in Thailand not only altered norms of masculinity and femininity but also radically changed patterns of desire and identity. I account for the emergence of the new Thai identities and gender/sexual cultures by mapping the precise character of changes in the forms of power that the Thai state deployed in its efforts to 'civilise' the public gendering of the populace—a project of power incited into being as a response to the combined challenges of English, French, Japanese and American imperialisms in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This study reveals that even in the absence of Western-style interventions in sexuality, the disruptions of traditional Siamese gender culture caused by the state's response to the West radically altered the performative norms of masculinity and femininity, which in turn contributed to the proliferation of new forms of transgender and same-sex identity. This Thai case study provides a counter-example to the presumption that modernity and globalisation necessarily lead to an international homogenisation of sexual cultures.
2. Since the middle of the 1960s, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of gender/sex identity categories and related cultures in Thailand. I have

documented how new male and female same-sex [*gay king, gay queen, tom, dee*], male bisexual [*seua bai*] and male-to-female transgender/transsexual [*kathoey*] categories emerged in public discourse and formed the basis of new homosexual and transgender identities and cultures in Bangkok and other Thai cities.^[1] Superficially, these new identities and cultures appear very similar to gay, lesbian, transgender, and transsexual identities and cultures in contemporary Western societies, and Thailand provides an example of the widely noted globalisation of new homosexual identities in the later decades of the twentieth century.^[2] Because of the apparent similarities between modern Western and Thai gender/sex cultures, I began exploring the origins of the proliferation of Thai identities by attempting to locate similar changes in the historical forms of bio-power in Thailand to those that Foucault described for nineteenth century France. Foucault argues that an intensification of the state's intervention in everyday life accompanied the transition to modernity,

For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence.... Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself ... that gave power its access even to the body.^[3]

3. Foucault defines this new operation of power over the body and 'life itself' as 'bio-power', with 'bio-history' denoting the transitions that led to the greater intersection of institutional power and the body,

If one can apply the term bio-history to the pressures through which the movements of life and processes of history interfere with one another, one would have to speak of bio-power to designate what brought its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life.^[4]

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

powers which may have incited the new Thai identities into being.

5. However, these studies revealed that no new regime of legal, religious or bio-medical power intersected with either same-sex eroticism or transgender behaviour in the period immediately before the new identity categories began appearing in public discourse in the 1960s. Unlike the situation in the West, where both homosexuality and cross-dressing had long been explicitly prohibited, until the later decades of the twentieth century same-sex and transgender behaviours almost completely escaped the attention of Thai authorities.
6. While the sexuality of ordained Buddhist monks is strictly controlled in Thai Buddhism—celibacy is a requirement of ordination into the monkhood or *sangha*—the only significant control over lay sexuality prescribed by the religion is a prohibition against (heterosexual) adultery. Thai Buddhism does not regard same-sex eroticism between laymen or laywomen as a sin.^[5] In the legal domain, sodomy was made a punishable offence in the first decade of the twentieth century as part of an effort to make the Siamese legal code appear to conform to European norms of civilisation. This legal review took place in response to the extraterritorial provisions of trading treaties signed with European powers, the United States and Japan in the nineteenth century (discussed below). In its Siamese form 'offences against the human order' [*phit thammada manut*] included both male and female same-sex activity as well as bestiality. However, while the presence of an anti-sodomy clause in the legal code gave the appearance of conforming to Victorian era sexual norms, not a single prosecution for homosexuality was made under this law and Thai police ignored the clause, continuing, as previously, to overlook consensual same-sex activities. (Thai legal archives record only one unsuccessful prosecution for bestiality under the anti-sodomy clause.)^[6] The clause was removed from the books in 1956 as part of a review to purge the legal code of anachronistic and obsolete edicts.^[7]
7. In summary, same-sex and transgender behaviours have historically been ignored by Thai religious and legal authorities. Nevertheless, the later decades of the twentieth century did see the rise of a Thai bio-medical project aimed at controlling, if not reversing, the proliferation of same-sex and transgender identities. Beginning in the 1960s, Thai physicians and psychologists drew upon Western biomedical sciences in an attempt to control, suppress, and cure both cross-dressing and homosexuality.^[8] However, the Thai project to renormalise 'perverse' [*wiparit*] genders and 'deviant' [*biang-ben*] sexualities only came into being *after* the existence of the diverse array of new identities and cultures had been exposed to public view by the sensation-seeking Thai press.^[9] The Thai biomedical project was itself incited into being by the presence of the new identities, and drew upon Western knowledges in an attempt to put the genie of proliferating sexual and gender diversity back into the bottle. This is the converse of the situation that Foucault described for Western Europe, where it was the rise of new biomedical knowledges, amongst other factors, that in turn incited new sexualised identities into being. The biomedical project has had a significant

impact on the recent history of Thailand's same-sex and transgender cultures, but it could not have had a role in inciting those new cultures into being because it only came into existence *after the fact* as an ultimately unsuccessful regime of control and containment.

8. The key finding of my earlier studies is that despite the global spread of Western power and the intensity of homophobic discourses in the early modern West, these discourses failed to register in Thailand or to be communicated through local networks of discursive power until the 1960s. The approach I adopted in these studies appeared to lead to an analytical dead end. I was presented with what appeared to be a proliferation of sexual identities in the absence of a domestic regime of power over sexuality that might have incited these new forms of subjectivity into being. The type of cultural outcome that Foucault sought to understand had come into being in Thailand in the absence of the forces that he identified as having brought it into existence in Western Europe. This finding is the opposite of Rosalind Morris' view that, 'the arguments in *The History of Sexuality* ... seem to offer the most fecund possibilities for reading the transformations [of gender/sex culture] that have come to bear on Thailand.'[\[10\]](#)
9. At this point in my explorations I abandoned the attempt to undertake a Foucauldian history of sexuality in Thailand. Instead, I sought to understand the history of modern Thai gender/sex cultures by investigating another phenomenon that Morris comments upon—the accentuation of binary gender difference—but which she does not integrate into her account of Thailand's same-sex cultures. I suggest that the way to relate the intensification of the masculine/feminine gender binary with the proliferation of same-sex identities is by means of an historical investigation of the widely reported anthropological finding that all contemporary Thai identities are constituted more within the field of gender than within the domain of sexuality. Anthropological studies have consistently reported that even in the closing years of the twentieth century gender rather than sexuality was the dominant factor in the constitution of personal identity. This result has been found in studies of heterosexual cultures[\[11\]](#) as well as in analyses of male and female same-sex cultures.[\[12\]](#) Instead of attempting a history of sexuality in Thailand, I decided on what at first sight might appear to be the more circuitous approach of seeking to understand the proliferation of same-sex and transgender identities and cultures through a history of Thai gender. In this alternative approach to the history of Thai homoeroticisms I draw on the work of feminist critics[\[13\]](#) who argue against the analytical separation of sexuality from gender, which was one of the founding moves that established queer studies as a distinct line of inquiry from feminist analysis. I also draw on Judith Butler's account of the performativity of gender identities and the cultural priority of gender in all understandings of sex and sexuality.[\[14\]](#) This alternative line of inquiry reveals that the new Thai identities did not emerge from disruptive interventions in sexuality but rather from radical shifts in the performative norms of masculinity and femininity. As Butler points out, when gender norms change, so do forms of desire and subjectivity, and dramatic changes in understandings

of what it means to be a 'man' or a 'woman' will bring with them equally new understandings of erotic being.

The scope and limits of this study

10. In this study I document Western rather than Thai language accounts of Siamese gender and sexuality because it was the stinging thrust of negative foreign representations that incited local responses which in turn radically transformed the fabric of Thai gender culture. In other research I am exploring historical shifts in the key Thai notion of *phet*, which in different contexts may mean 'sex', 'gender' and/or 'sexuality'. I am also tracing changes in the local meanings of gender labels such as *ying* [female/feminine], *chai* [male/masculine], and *kathoe* [hermaphrodite/transgender], which historically have been imagined as the three main varieties of *phet*. In limiting this analysis to the form and impact of Western discourses I am not denying Thai agency or suggesting that Thais failed to challenge, resist, deflect or alter Western discursive power. On the contrary, as detailed below, it was because of the agency of Thai governing elites that Western discourses of sexuality failed to be reproduced but rather impacted on Thai gender/sex culture in highly distinctive and locally nuanced ways. However, the main concern of this paper is to locate the discursive origins of the disruptions that incited the twentieth century revolution in Thai gender culture. While the history of Thai discourses provides ample evidence of local autonomy, the *origin* of the particular phenomena that concern me here lie outside of Thailand rather than within the country's borders. It is for this reason that I place Western rather than local accounts of Siamese gender at the centre of this analysis.
11. Furthermore, while I focus here on the history of forms of discourse I do not deny that economic and other factors have also played important roles in the proliferation of Thailand's same-sex and transgender cultures. While much work remains to be done, my research to date indicates that three broad processes converged in the immediate post-World War II period to fracture traditional Thai understandings of eroticism and gender. Firstly, state interventions to restructure Thai gender norms along 'civilised' Western lines had significant consequences in the domain of erotic desire. The story of the impact of Western imperialism and Thai state power on local forms of gender and sexuality is the focus of this study. However, a second major set of influences contributing to the explosion of identity categories in the years after 1960 has undoubtedly been the rapid marketisation of the Thai labour force and urbanisation of the population since that decade. After almost half-a-century of economic stagnation, the 1960s marked the beginning of several decades of rapid growth in Thailand, with internal migration transforming Bangkok into a mega-city of more than ten million inhabitants in less than thirty years. John D'Emilio [\[15\]](#) has analysed the role of nineteenth and early twentieth century capitalism in the rise of American homosexual cultures, and his work has provided a starting point for my thinking

about the impact of mid-twentieth century economic changes on Thailand's gender/sex cultures.^[16] While state interventions in gender culture in the period leading up to and including World War II shifted the discursive ground of local understandings, in the second half of the twentieth century capitalism and urbanisation provided material opportunities for Thai homosexual men, women, and transgenders to build new forms of collective existence, that is, new gender/sex cultures.

12. Thirdly, in the years since World War II, representations of Western gender/sex cultures communicated via cinema, radio, television, and the Internet, together with greater international travel, have also contributed to the imagining of new local varieties of eroticised being. During the period considered here, Thailand became increasingly integrated into the Western-dominated world order. It perhaps might then be thought that globalisation studies provide the best lens through which to analyse the history of Thailand's same-sex cultures. Such an approach might argue that the direct impact of international (Western) rather than domestic discourses and forms of power incited the proliferation of identities, which in turn incited the Thai biomedical project as a conservative response. There is no doubt that the globalisation of trade, finance, communications, and travel is central to the history of all aspects of modern Thai culture. However, Thai identities are formed within Thai discursive contexts, which while deeply influenced by global forces remain distinctive domains of domestic power and hence of local meaning. 'Global discourses' do not work directly in Thailand but are mediated through local networks. The task of the analyst is then to detail the linkage between global forces and local discourses, keeping in mind that forms of power radiating from metropolitan sources are not mirrored precisely in Thai cultural forms but are refracted and distorted as they are localised.
13. While they are part of the narrative of the explosion of Thai identities, globalising media and other Western cultural influences cannot explain all features of contemporary Thai gender/sex cultures. In particular, globalisation studies cannot explain processes of cultural selectivity: why are some aspects of Western homosexual cultures imitated enthusiastically in Thailand while other aspects are rejected or ignored? For example, why has the discourse of 'gay' been tremendously influential in Thailand but not the idiom of 'queer'? Why do many Thais love imitating Western drag queens, such as seen on satellite transmissions of Sydney's annual Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade, but there is no Thai gay S/M or fetish scene despite decades of exposure to these other prominent aspects of Western queer cultures? I suggest that the legacy of state gender interventions detailed below together with the particular forms of Thai capitalism and urbanisation (i.e. Thailand's peripheral location in global flows of capital and information) constitute distinctive conditions that preset patterns of receptivity towards and/or rejection of the forms of Western homosexual and transgender cultures.

14. However, the precise articulations of the multiple factors of state power, capitalism, urbanisation, globalising media, and international travel in inciting the rise of Thailand's diverse gender/sex cultures requires detailed future study. In this article I have the limited objective of specifying the role of Siamese state power in the era of high imperialism in transforming local discourses of gender and eroticism. I intend considering the influences of capitalism, urbanisation, and globalising media in future studies.

'Forgetting' Foucault's conclusions while employing his method: the necessary limits of Western theory

15. Understanding the origins of the proliferation of Thai identities requires a somewhat counter-intuitive approach. Unlike studies of the history of gay, lesbian, transgender and transsexual identities in the West, the history of Thai same-sex and transgender identities cannot be a 'history of sexuality'. Rather, we are more likely to understand the origins of contemporary Thai identities by inquiring into the history of the apparent 'anomaly' that gender, not sexuality, is the dominant factor in all modern Thai identities and erotic cultures. Adopting a genealogical approach to understanding this situation reveals that the contemporary cultural predominance of gender in Thailand does not represent a continuation of 'premodern' or 'traditional' forms. The patterns and structures of gender and eroticism that ethnographic studies reveal as existing in Thailand today emerge from their own history and have been incited into being by distinctive local forms of power and knowledge.

16. In this gender-centred study of the history of homoeroticism and transgenderism I do not abandon Foucault's insights. I concur with Morris' earlier, but apparently now abandoned, view on Foucault when she says,

In the end, it might be simpler if one could carry out an investigation of Thai sexualities by simply forgetting Foucault. But Baudrillard's witty polemic aside, no one writing about sexuality can forget Foucault. At best we can wilfully ignore him. And we are left with a burden of profound Eurocentrism.[\[17\]](#)

This genealogy of Thai genders draws upon Foucault's insight that power is productive in inciting new forms of thought and identity. However, rather than attempting to reproduce Foucault's results, I draw on his approach to explore the forms of power that incited the emergence of contemporary understandings of masculinity and femininity in Thailand and related forms of eroticism. An understanding of modern Thai gender and erotic cultures cannot rely upon a what David Halperin has described as the 'slavish invocation' of the results of Foucault's research.[\[18\]](#) To seek to 'apply' the results of Western queer studies approaches in Thailand is to start at the wrong end of the inquiry. It is to take the categories that Foucault and others produced at the *end* of their studies of Western history and relocate them in a foreign terrain. This is an

epistemologically invalid approach. We cannot assume that the forms of power over human bodies in diverse geographical locations are either uniform or constant. To do so may reproduce at the level of theory the hegemonic violence that attends the history of imperialism. In challenging the hegemony of theory, even ostensibly critical poststructuralist queer theory,[\[19\]](#) we need to engage in a more laborious academic enterprise than 'applying' Foucault's findings to Thailand. It is necessary to trace the concrete local flows of power; the ways in which Thailand's governing elites have channelled, directed, and intensified power; and the ways in which these deployments have incited their own local responses.

17. While Thai erotic history cannot be identified with Western history of sexuality, Thailand has not been isolated from the effects of many of the same influences that have radically altered understandings of sexuality and identity in the West. Nevertheless, Thailand has occupied a distinctive position within the networks of global power that have transformed all world societies in recent centuries. This means that while we cannot expect to simply 'apply' Western-derived analytical models in Thai historiography, neither should we completely reject the potential explanatory power of those models. To the extent that Western theory captures elements of genuinely global processes it will be a valuable analytical tool in understanding the histories of non-Western societies. However, we should expect to have to revisit the assumptions of that theory and to have to deploy it in possibly novel ways in non-Western contexts. Yet we cannot know in advance of empirical inquiry in concrete contexts precisely what changes may need to be made in originally Western frameworks of understanding.
18. The global spread of Western power is at the centre of the narrative recounted below, for it is the historical disruptions caused by Western influence that have incited modern forms of power, discourse, and identity in Thailand. However, the global expansion of Western power should not be misunderstood as involving the precise mimetic reproduction of the forms of Western culture across all terrains and spaces. While the history of Western power is a narrative of universal disruption and global change, it is not a story of uniformity. The non-uniformity of the intensity and impact of Western power in its persistent but erratic spread across the diverse geographies of the planet produces intensely local variations within its global expansion.
19. It is not the case that a single hegemonic form of power has operated over all human erotic cultures in the modern period to produce identical 'globalised' sexual identities in all corners of the planet. Rather, distinctively local forms of power have intersected with gender and eroticism. In Thailand, these local forms of power have not been constant or remained persistently 'traditional'. They have altered just as radically as forms of power over bodies have changed in modern Western history. As in the West, the mutations in Thai power emerge from the impact of the scientific and industrial revolutions, from the global spread of

capitalism, and from the geopolitical power plays of nineteenth century European imperialisms and the twentieth and twenty-first century neo-imperialisms of the United States. The distinctive local character of Thai forms of power does not emerge from the fact that they have been isolated from the major trends of world history or that they preserve archaic or premodern features. Thailand has been integrated into global networks of transport, trade, commerce, investment, and communications since the middle of the nineteenth century and this integration has transformed all aspects of social, cultural, economic, and political life just as radically as in Western societies. The distinctiveness of contemporary Thai erotic cultures cannot be found in any futile exploration of the persistence of supposedly pristine premodern or traditional cultural forms. Rather, their distinctiveness emerges from the particular way that Thailand came to be part of the modern world. It emerges from the way that the country's geopolitical location and history as an empire at the crossroads of mainland Southeast Asia influenced the ways that its leaders responded to the multiple challenges of Western military, economic, political, and intellectual power.

Nineteenth century Western imperialism and the remoulding of Siamese power

20. While Siam, the country's name until 1939, was not colonised directly by an invading Western power, it was nevertheless subject to imperial power in numerous ways. From the Siamese perspective, one of the most pernicious and demeaning instances of imperial intervention was the series of extraterritorial legal regimes imposed on the country as part of a succession of unequal trading treaties signed with Western powers in the second half of the nineteenth century. Europeans and Americans regarded traditional Siamese law as barbaric and refused to permit their nationals to be prosecuted under its provisions. As part of the conditions of their trading treaties the Western powers required the Siamese monarchy to permit the operation of Western legal regimes within the country to govern the behaviour and commercial activities of their nationals. This resulted in the anomaly of British, French, and other foreign nationals resident in Siam being subject to the laws of their country of citizenship, but not to Siamese law. The extraterritorial operation of foreign legal regimes in Siam was supported institutionally by separate British, French and other courts working within the grounds of their respective diplomatic legations. The nineteenth century treaties specified that the extraterritorial legal regimes and courts, islands of Western law operating within the body politic of Siam, could only be ended when traditional Siamese law was reformed to conform with 'civilised' standards. In this situation the Siamese became intensely concerned to demonstrate their 'civilised' status to the Western powers as part of a concerted effort to regain full legal jurisdiction over their own society.^[20] It was only in the 1930s that Siamese law conformed to civilised standards to the satisfaction of the Western powers and extraterritoriality was finally abolished in the years immediately preceding World

War II.[21]

21. While the Siamese were anxious about the threat of colonisation, as a small kingdom they did not have the resources to resist European imperialism militarily by building up a large army or navy. However, considerable effort was expended in responding symbolically to the Western challenges. Nineteenth century British and French colonial incursions into Southeast Asia were justified by the ideology of bringing 'civilisation' to the 'barbarous' or 'semi-barbarous' 'Asiatic races'. It is salutary to be reminded of the intemperate language that nineteenth century Westerners typically used to describe Asian societies and peoples. In a back-handed compliment, Anna Leonowens wrote that the intellectual acumen and scientific outlook of Siam's King Mongkut (r. 1851-1868) gave him the potential to be 'a demi-god ... among the lower animals of Asiatic royalty', [22] while describing the common people of Siam in the following terms,

In common with most of the Asiatic races, they are apt to be indolent, improvident, greedy, intemperate, servile, cruel, vain, inquisitive, superstitious, and cowardly; but individual variations from the more repulsive types are happily not rare. In public they are scrupulously polite and decorous according to their own notions of good manners, respectful to the aged, affectionate to their kindred, and bountiful to their priests[23]

22. Leonowens nevertheless expressed the hope that in the not too distant future the Siamese might become a civilised people on European terms,

Though a vain people, they are neither bigoted nor shallow; and I think the day is not far off when the enlightening influences applied to them, and accepted through their willingness, not only to receive instruction from Europeans, but even to adopt in a measure their customs and habits of thought, will raise them to the rank of a superior nation.[24]

23. Given the military, technological, scientific, and economic superiority of the expansionist European empires, the disparaging tone of Western accounts of Siam acquired a stinging force that incited a concerted response from the Siamese elites to repudiate the claims of barbarity and to demonstrate the country's genuinely civilised status. A centre of regional empires for half a millennium, the Siamese chafed at being labelled 'barbarous'. The Siamese elites trenchantly opposed the view, often expressed by Christian missionaries, that Buddhism was a primitive, barbarous religion and repudiated claims for the superiority of Christianity. Men from the nobility also resisted calls to end the custom of polygamy and as Scot Barmé has shown, [25] even such a modernising, English-educated monarch as King Vajiravudh (r. 1910-1926) argued that polygamy was a key feature of Siamese culture that should not be abandoned. Yet while some aspects of Siamese culture were defended against the attacks of Western critics, the monarchy also undertook a program of

refashioning other cultural domains in order to represent Siam as 'civilised' in Western terms. Much more was at stake in this play of images and representations of Siamese 'civilisation' than a mere debate over terminology. Tamara Loos notes that King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910) was well aware that 'if European powers seized Siam, they would do so under the pretext of Siam's alleged backwardness ...'[\[26\]](#) Chulalongkorn was aware that institutions such as 'international law protected only "civilised" nations, and so would not protect Siam if invoked by countries like England or France.'[\[27\]](#) The political tenor of the Siamese cultural response to the West is reflected in Thai social critic Sulak Sivaraksa's labelling of Chulalongkorn's self-civilising anti-colonisation strategy as 'fighting wolves by donning their clothing'.[\[28\]](#)

24. King Chulalongkorn initiated a program of remaking and re-badging Siam as civilised, in terms that Westerners then understood that term. While instigated by a need to ward off Western imperial incursions, many of Chulalongkorn's reforms also had the effect of strengthening the monarchy and the organs of central government by concentrating power in Bangkok. In 1892, Chulalongkorn began reforming the Siamese bureaucracy and system of state administration, which strengthened his regime and entrenched the power of Bangkok-based noble families at the expense of regional princes who previously had ruled their local areas semi-autonomously. The centralisation of power effected by Chulalongkorn's legal, administrative, religious, and educational reforms strengthened Siamese national sovereignty in the international arena at the expense of the political, religious, cultural and linguistic autonomy of the country's diverse regions. In later decades, this centralised and intensified regime of state power would prove effective in ensuring that new government-defined cultural norms were imposed upon the entire population of the country.
25. In constructing their symbolic response to the challenge of Western imperial power, the Siamese directed their most intense efforts at repudiating negative Western representations of the country. Siamese 'civilisation' was not always constructed by mimetic processes of directly copying Western originals, although the engagement of Western advisors, the sending of children from elite families to study in Europe, and regular European visits by the nobility did often incite attempts to imitate Western models. Just as frequently, however, the Siamese self-civilising effort consisted of inverting negative Western representations in order to construct highly focussed and targeted positive counter-images to pre-existing negative Western images. In this latter process the actual qualities of the 'original' form of Western civilisation may have mattered little. What was important was the construction of a Siamese image imbued with sufficient positive charismatic charge of 'civilisation' to counter the disparaging and demeaning effects of negative Western representations. It is this phenomenon which explains the apparently erratic and often incomplete 'copying' of Western models in Siam, and why in modern Thailand one often finds an intense fetishisation of some (often minor) aspects of Western civilisation alongside an indifference to, if not ignorance of, other features that Westerners take to be

more central features of their culture. Thongchai[29] notes that the Sanskrit term *araya* and the English-derived term *siwilai* (from 'civilise') marked the local character of this Siamese 'civilisation', incited into being as a response to Western challenges via multiple processes of mimetic representation and strategic counter-representation. In this study I concentrate on the way that forms of strategic counter-representation influenced the development of notions of 'civilised' Siamese gender.

Western accounts of the 'barbarism' of Siamese gender and sexuality

26. In addition to administrative reforms, the program of self-civilisation also involved state-based interventions in gender behaviour in order to counter Western critiques of Siam's barbarous culture. With respect to gender and eroticism, Western visitors consistently made three main critiques that were taken as indicators of Siamese barbarism and lack of civilisation. These three critiques were: (1) the 'nakedness' of the Siamese body; (2) the sexual 'excesses' of polygamy; and (3) the similarity of the appearance of Siamese men and women, accentuated by a lack of differentiation between male and female fashions and hair styles. The following selection of references from early Western accounts of Siam gives a sense of the critical moral force that typically attached to each of these critiques.

The 'Nakedness' of the Siamese Body

27. Surprise at the 'nakedness', above the waist, of both Siamese men and women is a trope that recurs in European accounts of Siam from the first years of contact. Jacques de Coutre, a merchant from Bruges who spent 30 years in Asia including eight months in Siam in 1596 during the reign of King Naresuan, wrote in his memoirs that the king of Siam, 'goes quite naked, apart from a small piece of cloth covering his secret parts, but with no other robe.'[\[30\]](#) Chevalier Claude de Forbin, later made a Count by Louis XIV, visited Siam a number of times in the 1680s during the reign of King Narai and in his report to the French king observed, 'the Siamese went about almost naked, except for a cotton cloth length they wore from the waist to the calf ...'[\[31\]](#) Two centuries later, an American visitor George Bacon wrote,

If all would at all times wear the native dress there would be no occasion for fault-finding. But as a nation they do not know what shame is, and as the climate is mild and pleasant, and the majority of the people poor and careless, their usual dress consists of a simple waist-cloth adjusted in a very loose and slovenly manner; while many children until they are ten or twelve years old wear no clothing whatever. When foreigners first arrive in Siam they are shocked almost beyond endurance at the nudity of the people.... Not until Siam is clothed need she expect a place among respectable, civilized nations.[\[32\]](#)

28. Citing an unspecified Thai archival source, Thai historian Suwadee Patana notes that in the early years of the twentieth century King Chulalongkorn,

complained to the Minister of Local Administration, whose main duty was to look after the various affairs in Bangkok, that whenever he hosted foreign royal guests he was very ashamed by the sight of working class women walking around the city with their exposed breasts. Later, the Ministry of Local Administration launched a decree ordering the working class to cover their body appropriately when they came to public areas.[\[33\]](#)

The Sexual 'Excesses' of Polygamy

29. Western visitors were often outraged by Siamese sexual customs, especially at what was perceived to be the debased and enslaved status of Siamese women. Edmund Roberts, an American naval visitor to Bangkok in the 1830s, noted that in Siam,

Temporary marriages are so notorious, that to sell a daughter wholly to a stranger, or for a stipulated term of time, is as common among the middling and lower classes of people, as to sell any common commodity, usually to be found in a bazaar. Custom has also fixed a certain price for a certain rank.[\[34\]](#)

30. Charles Gutzlaff, a German who worked for the London Missionary Society in the Far East, spent several years in Bangkok from the late 1820s and wrote that in Siam, 'debauchery appears to exist in its most odious forms....'[\[35\]](#) In the memoirs of her 1888 visit to Bangkok, English tourist Florence Caddy concludes her account of an afternoon tea chat with a young English-educated Siamese man with the remarks, 'It seems a grievous pity that after the young Siamese [men] have been educated in England to plunge them back into the semi-barbarism of the native habits; and let them experience all the evils of polygamy.'[\[36\]](#) J.G.D. Campbell, a British school inspector who was an education advisor to the Siamese Government at the turn of the 20th century, was also horrified by Thai men's sexual exploitation of their womenfolk, seeing its causes as lying in the evil moral influences of the tropical climate, 'In the hot regions of the earth sensual indulgence is far more prevalent, and more directly attributable to natural causes than in the colder countries of the north, and the emancipation of woman is consequently much more of an uphill task.'[\[37\]](#)

31. However, unlike the case for some other Asian countries such as Japan and China, early Western accounts did not represent Siam as a site of the 'unnatural vice of sodomy' or of transvestism. Indeed, the colonial period record for Siam is oddly silent on both same-sex sexuality and cross-dressing. To the French and the British, Siam was perceived to be a site of the excesses of heterosexuality not homosexuality. Furthermore, rather than being inhabited by a visible minority

of cross-dressers, the entire population of Siam was seen as androgynous and lacking in the 'civilised' distinctions that separated men from women.

The Universal Androgyny of the Siamese

32. Penny Edwards notes that in Western Europe, 'the Industrial revolution initiated a major divide between male and female roles.... As part of this process, the body became the site on which 'female cultural ideals' were, quite literally, 'manufactured' through new processes of mass production.'[\[38\]](#) Edwards also notes that these bourgeois gender values influenced nineteenth century European perceptions of Southeast Asia,

For the most part, European writings [on Southeast Asia] evinced horror at the sharing of similar hair and wear by male and female. Where both sexes wore long hair—as in Burmese and Vietnamese tradition—the men were generally stereotyped as feminine in colonial reportage, which stressed their smooth skin, hairless bodies, silken heads, and languid pose. By contrast, the constant subtext and context of reportage in Cambodia was that Khmer women looked masculine, and nowhere more so than in their hair. Such similarities in gender were marked as a lack of advance, or a mark of a 'young' race against which Western culture, with its marked gender differences, was held up as a beacon of civilisation.[\[39\]](#)

33. Suwadee's account of the history of Siamese fashion indicates the intimate association of the notion of civilisation and gender-differentiated clothing in the minds of nineteenth century Western visitors to Siam,

At the same time as this expansion in international trade, there grew in Bangkok a community of Westerners which included diplomats, businessmen and missionaries. Of these, the missionaries were the most active agents of Western civilisation, due to their concern about the linking of Western civilisation with Christianity. In respect to women, Victorian cultural attitudes were presented to Thai society as a symbol of Western civilisation, and moreover, as the symbol of Western superiority.... In respect to dress, Westerners felt uneasy with the traditional clothing of Thai women. Normally women wore *pha sabai* and *pha chongkaben*. Both are rectangular pieces of cloth. The former was worn across the chest and one side over the shoulder. The latter was for the lower part of the body and was wrapped around the waist, passed between the legs and tucked in at the back (looking somewhat like loose trousers). This way in which Thai women dressed was very similar to the dress of the Thai males—a concept abhorrent to Europeans of the time.[\[40\]](#)

In commenting on a theatrical performance presented at a royal dinner given in Bangkok in honour of a visiting American embassy in 1832, Roberts noted,

As I cannot tell a Siamese man from a woman, when numbers are seated together, so it is out of my power to say whether any females were present [amongst the audience].... The hair of the Siamese women is cut like that of the men; their countenances are, in fact, more masculine than those of the males: they [the men] are generally very fat,

having very stout lower limbs and arms; are excessively ugly; and when they open their mouths, truly hideous; resembling the inside of a black painted sepulchre.[\[41\]](#)

34. Describing the inhabitants of the royal palace four decades later, Anna Leonowens wrote, 'Here were women disguised as men, and men in the attire of women, hiding vice of every vileness and crime of every enormity—at once the most disgusting, the most appalling, and the most unnatural that the heart of man has conceived.'[\[42\]](#) It appears that the 'women disguised as men' Leonowens refers to were not female cross-dressers but rather the female guards of the King's harem, whom she elsewhere refers to as the 'Amazonian guard'.[\[43\]](#) Furthermore, the 'men in the attire of women' do not seem to have been male cross-dressers but rather actors performing in one of the all-male troupes in which, as in Elizabethan England, men played both male and female roles on the stage. What Leonowens saw as the 'unnatural', 'vile' 'vice' of transvestism was in fact a misperception of what Siamese of the time regarded as normative gender performances by female guards and male actors, respectively.
35. The lack of visible gender differentiation continued to concern Western visitors in the early twentieth century. In 1902, Campbell wrote,

No one can have been many days in Bangkok without being struck by the robust physique and erect bearing of the ordinary women. It is by no means uncommon at first for a stranger, till quite close to them, to mistake them for men, the similarity of their dress and their short-cropped hair lending themselves to this deception. They do far more than their fair share of physical work.... [T]he average Siamese woman is often the better half of her husband.[\[44\]](#)

36. Remarks on the similarity of the sexes continued until after World War II. The report of the first major Western anthropological study of a Thai village, the 'Cornell Project' study of Bang Chan (now a Bangkok outer suburb) led by Lauriston Sharp and begun in the late 1940s, noted the relative lack of gender differentiation in the Central region of Thailand,

The degree of equality between the sexes which exists in Thailand, the relatively slight differentiation in the adult roles of men and women, has been a matter of comment by Westerners since the seventeenth century. This is a characteristic which strongly distinguishes the norms of Thai society from those of India, China or Japan, or even the Catholic Philippines and Moslem Indonesia. It is a characteristic (as elsewhere in Southeast Asia) which predated the influence of Hindu culture and the acceptance of Buddhism with their androcentrism and emphasis on masculine values, and upon the superiority of males and of male concerns.... In Bang Chan there are very few adult cultural roles, apart from those associated with religion, which can not be played by either men or women.... Thai culture in its secular aspects seems to consider all adults as simply human beings together, without major distinction of sex roles; behaviour which is appropriate to one person is equally appropriate to another.[\[45\]](#)

37. Misperceptions of the gender of representations of premodern Siamese women continue to be reported to the present day. In late 2002, the *Bangkok Post* reported anxiety amongst local people that guides for Korean tourists in the southern province of Phuket had misrepresented the apparently 'masculine' demeanour reflected in statues of the province's renowned late-eighteenth century warrior heroines, *Thao Thepkasattri* and *Thao Srisunthorn*, as indicating that the two women must have been 'tomboys'.^[46] Given that the term 'tom boy', often abbreviated simply to 'tom', now means a masculine lesbian in popular Thai idiom this incited anger amongst local people who took the 'tomboy' reference as a derogatory slur implying that their local heroines were homosexual.

Demonstrating Siamese civilisation to the Western world

38. In the project of remaking the country on the model of civilisation, Siamese political elites invested significant effort in responding to those critiques of Siam's supposed lack of civilisation that recurred with the greatest frequency and which attended the greatest sense of moral outrage in the European literature. There was no attempt to completely reform all aspects of Siamese gender and sexuality in order to reproduce Western norms in their entirety. Rather, the response was strategic and specific, with the Siamese state investing considerable energy over several decades in deploying legal and institutional forms of power to: (1) represent heterosexual relations as civilised; (2) fully 'clothe' the population; and (3) visually differentiate the genders.

39. The challenges posed by Western critiques of the barbarous nature of Siamese society did indeed incite a response which involved the intense application of new forms of power over the bodies of all Siamese men and women. However, the 'civilising' forms of Siamese bio-power that responded to the moralistic critiques of Western observers were not directed at reforming the private sexuality of Siam's citizens but rather at refashioning the public gendering of their bodies. A new bourgeois division of social life into private and public spheres emerged as part of the self-civilising mission. Accompanied by Victorian era attitudes, this new bifurcation of social life led to previously public representations of eroticism being expelled into the domain of the private. However, unlike the case in the West, the Siamese state took almost no interest in the character of its citizens' sex lives, whether heterosexual or homosexual, provided sexual practices were restricted to the social spaces that the civilising regime labelled 'private' [*suan tua*].

Rendering Eroticism Private

40. Until the middle decades of the nineteenth century, highly stylised but nonetheless relatively explicit representations of eroticism were common in both Thai artwork and literature. Murals painted on temple walls in Buddhist monasteries often included erotic scenes. Classical Thai literature also regularly included erotic interludes, euphemistically called 'miraculous scenes' [*bot atsajan*], that described intimate acts of love making in flowery language.^[47] However, in the nineteenth century, the Siamese elite soon became aware that Western visitors found the explicitness of erotic representations in the high culture of the royal court and the state religion to be acutely embarrassing. Royal edicts together with an unofficial policy of bowdlerising Thailand's literary classics succeeded in almost completely expunging representations of eroticism from elite culture.

41. In an historical study of eroticism in Thai temple murals Niwat Korngphian notes that after King Mongkut visited Wat Thorng-nopphakhun in Thonburi in the 1860s for a *kathin* clerical robes granting ceremony, he was upset by some of the murals on the temple wall. These images showed some women with their skirts open to the thigh, others squatting urinating, and yet other women in positions that the king considered lewd. Mongkut subsequently wrote to the monastery's abbot requesting that the offending images be erased, justifying the order by saying,

These days people from many countries come and go from our shores.... When pictures such as these exist in our monasteries, places presumed to be the residences of moral people, then it will appear greatly inappropriate and a source of considerable shame.^[48]

The King also directed the abbot to erase lewd graffiti images drawn on the temple walls in charcoal and lead pencil outlines, as well as crude graffiti comments of people 'cursing each other in writing'.^[49]

42. Mattani Rutnin writes of the bowdlerisation of Thai literature as follows,

[M]any works of classical Thai literature express great beauty and sensuousness in love-making scenes. In modern Western literature, the liberation of sexual love is an act of defiance and revolt against Christian puritanism.... On the contrary, Thai literature of the past professes great permissiveness when dealing with sex, while maintaining this Buddhist concept of suffering in sexual love. Curiously, modern Thai novelists became more puritanical while their Western contemporaries moved in the opposite direction. Only recently have a few Thai novelists begun to follow in the footsteps of popular Western novelists and liberate themselves from bourgeois moral conventions.^[50]

43. However, the state ban on the public imaging of eroticism was not accompanied by any attempt to repress or otherwise hinder actual sexual practices. Just as sodomy had been absent from the Western critiques of premodern Siam, so too

it remained outside the concerns of the self-civilising state. This was not the case in Japan, where Western accounts had long described and expressed repugnance at the same-sex activities of both Buddhist monks and samurai warriors. In 1636, the Dutch East India Company officers Caron and Schouten wrote of Japan, 'Their Priests, as well as many of the Gentry, are much given to Sodomy, that unnatural passion, being esteemed no sin, nor shameful thing amongst them.'^[51] In 1691, Engelbert Kaempfer described effeminate boy prostitutes in the town of Okitsu and observed that the Japanese were 'very much addicted to this vice.'^[52] In his marvellous study of the way Western influences contributed to radical changes in Japanese sexual culture, Gregory Pflugfelder^[53] describes how Western critiques of homosexuality amongst men from Japan's elites led to the adaptation and brief legal enforcement of an anti-sodomy law in the late nineteenth century.

44. The quite different focuses of the critiques that Western visitors made of Siamese and Japanese erotic cultures, respectively—homosexual perversion amongst Japan's religious and military elites; heterosexual polygamous excesses amongst Siam's nobility—appear to have influenced the ways modernising regimes in both countries dealt with homosexuality. While Western sexology and anti-homosexual edicts were introduced into Japan in the late nineteenth century, Western homophobic discourses failed to have an impact in Thailand until after World War II. Siam's self-civilising regime did at times give the appearance of seeking to impose Western-styled heteronormativity in the new legal codes that were drafted at the insistence of Western powers. However, numerous paragraphs regarding sexual behaviour that appeared on the books in Siam's revised criminal and civil legal codes, and which copied European and colonial law, were never systematically enforced. The case of the never-used anti-sodomy clause was noted above. Polygamy was also officially banned in the 1930s, but the custom of multiple-marriages continues unofficially, in a modified form, to this day. Perhaps the main difference between the practice of polygamy in Thailand before and after the legal 'banning' instituted in the 1930s is that in earlier periods a man's various wives typically lived together within the same large household, whereas in the contemporary period men with more than one wife usually maintain separate households for their various families, so that a superficial image of monogamy is created. Contemporary Western visitors to Thailand may be invited to dine at the home of a man's 'major wife' [*mia luang*], and even become regular acquaintances of the family, while remaining ignorant of the fact that their male host maintains a second home where his 'minor wife' [*mia noi*] resides and cares for his second brood of children.

The Thai Regime of Images

45. With regard to sexuality, the impact of the new regime of self-civilising power was to create a new, bowdlerised, de-eroticised domain of public representation. This regime of public images operated separately from and, in the eyes of Western

observers accustomed to 'logical consistency' and 'universal law', in apparent 'contradiction' with a domain of private eroticism that continued much as before. While I disagree with Morris' recent view that the analyses in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* provide the key to understanding the history of Thailand's same-sex cultures, I concur with her observation that with regard to same-sex behaviour, 'Thailand is unusual in that sexual practice has never been subject to jural control.'^[54] It is important to note that in Siam heterosexual adultery and sex with monks were important exceptions, with both entailing sometimes severe punishment under premodern legal codes. Nevertheless, while the arrival of 'civilisation' in Thailand saw the legally enforced institutionalisation of a heteronormative and often prudish, Victorian-inspired regime of public representation this had little impact on the private domain in which practical violation of the norms of that regime was, and is, widely tolerated. I have described how this regime of power over public representations leads to the production of intense critiques of same-sex behaviour in public discourse alongside widespread tolerance of homosexuality in everyday life.^[55] As Morris puts it,

By the traditional Thai logic of visibility and invisibility ... virtually any act is acceptable if it neither injures another person nor offends others through inappropriate self-disclosure. As one of the country's more prominent *kathoeyes* remarks about being gay in Thailand, 'There is no problem ... providing you don't ripple the surface calm.'^[56]

46. This split between disparate regimes of power that operate over public images, representations and performances, on the one hand, and private practices, on the other hand, is rarely perceived in terms of 'contradiction' in Thailand but rather as varying one's behaviour to suit the contextual norms and demands of each 'time and place' [*kala-thesa*].^[57]

47. A succession of Western analysts has observed that Thai power, especially but not exclusively in the fields of gender and eroticism, operates more intensely at the level of public 'presentation',^[58] 'surface',^[59] and 'image'^[60] than of private practice. Thai observers have also commented on this phenomenon. Drawing on a range of Western and Thai analysts (including Jeffrey Weeks, Gayle Rubin, Michel Foucault, Nithi Aeusrivongse and Sujit Wongthes), Sutham Thammarongwit argues that the view that eroticism should be restricted to the private domain,

was introduced in the Fifth Reign [of King Chulalongkorn r. 1868-1910], at the same time that many of the Thai nobility studied abroad, and was most likely a result of the attempt by this group to construct an 'outer surface' [*pleuak*] of 'being a civilised person' (on the model of the Western imperialists) to conceal the 'barbarism' [*khvam-pa-theuan*] of the Siamese nation from the eyes of the colonialists of that period. This attitude of dissimulating with respect to eroticism spread widely amongst the upper and middle classes in Thai society and subsequently spread to the lower classes and other groups via the modern education system. This attitude of dissimulation cut off all those who received such an education from the folk culture of rural Thais, who looked upon sex as

something ordinary, a matter of teasing and playful banter such as is apparent in folk songs, artwork, poetry, and so on.[\[61\]](#)

48. Sutham also points out that while this regime of dissimulating power may not interfere in private sexual practice, it is far from benign. It is a form of power that permits all manner of consensual sexual acts but forcefully silences and invisibilises public representations. This contradiction produces psychic tensions amongst those who live under the Thai regime of power,

When it comes to sex, 'everyone knows', and knows full well, who is doing what and how. Most people understand this situation and consider it normal. However, the force of negative attitudes towards sex in Thai society constructs a 'culture of silence about sex' which shuts mouths and imprisons the thoughts, feelings, and desires of every person. Everyone knows the truth but cannot speak it (loudly) out of fear of being labelled morally degenerate ... and being punished by society in various ways.[\[62\]](#)

Sutham makes the important point that under the Thai regime of images accusations of 'moral degeneracy' may attend more to talking about sex than to having sex.

Civilising Siamese genders

49. While the regime of 'civilisation' failed to penetrate to the private domain of Siamese sexual practice, the same cannot be said of the field of public gendered behaviours. With respect to gendered practices enacted in the public sphere, the state decreed—and police, educational, and other authorities systematically enforced—a series of edicts that not only ensured that all adults covered both their upper and lower bodies when in public, but that the new forms of fashion that Siamese men and women attired themselves in were gender-differentiated. This civilising regime of power over Siamese genders succeeded in effecting a revolutionary transformation of the country's gender culture.

From Culture of Universal Androgyny to Transvestite Subculture

50. As noted above, Westerners found the apparent 'confusion of the sexes' that derived from the relatively 'unisexual' character of premodern Siamese fashions just as disturbing as the casual 'nudity' of Siamese bodies. As also noted, historians and anthropologists alike have long commented on the relative lack of gender differentiation in both island and mainland Southeast Asia. This is not to say that premodern Southeast Asian societies lacked distinctions between norms of masculine and feminine behaviour. Neither is it to say that Southeast Asia was a premodern paradise of gender equality. Structurally, all premodern Southeast

Asian societies, including Siam, were patriarchal and in the eyes of local observers gender differences had always been clearly marked. Nevertheless, some areas of cultural life, such as fashion, were less marked by gender-differentiated forms when compared with the radical and more pervasive gender binary typical of modern Western societies. The cultural field of marked masculine and feminine gender difference intersected with somewhat different areas of social life in premodern Southeast Asia compared with the situation in the modernising West. Amongst Western observers, this often created an impression of gender confusion, of 'androgyny', and of masculine women and feminine men.

51. However, the perceptions of gender confusion did not refer only to a particular group or subgroup of transvestite Siamese men or women. On the contrary, the nineteenth century Western perception was of a universal confusion of the genders in Siam, which led to all Siamese women being perceived as masculine and all Siamese men as feminine. This contrasts dramatically with the observations of modern tourists to Thailand, who are often stunned by the prevalence and beauty of cross-dressing males or *kathoey*. Alongside radiant Buddhist temples, tropical island beaches, delicious food, and manifold pleasures of the flesh, the transgender *kathoey* has become one of the international icons of Thailand and the country has become known as an international centre of gender-bending sex-change operations and all varieties of cosmetic surgery. The lyrics of the early 1980s pop song, *One Night in Bangkok*, from the musical *Chess* by Tim Rice and former Abba duo Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, reflects modern Western stereotypes of Thailand,

One night in Bangkok and the world's your oyster
The bars are temples but the pearls ain't free
You'll find a god in every golden cloister
And if you're lucky then the god's a she
I can feel an angel sliding up to me ...

52. However, despite their visibility *kathoey* make up only a small minority of the Thai population. Furthermore, tourists who travelled to Thailand before World War II did not comment on the prevalence of *kathoey* or cross-dressing men. Not a single pre-World War II Western account of the politically and culturally dominant Central region of Siam centred on the capital Bangkok refers unambiguously to *kathoey*. This is more than a little odd given the prevalence of the *kathoey* in post-World War II accounts of Thailand.
53. While the word *kathoey* is ancient, transgender people have not always been prominently visible in the Central region of Thailand. Pre-twentieth century Siam was not a culturally uniform domain, with distinctive fashions, languages, and varieties of Theravada Buddhist religious culture marking the country's various regions. The earliest indisputable references to cross-dressing come not from the Bangkok region but from Northern Siam. Carl Bock's late nineteenth century

account of Chiang Mai appears to contain the oldest reference in a European source to cross-dressing within the modern borders of Thailand.^[63] W.A.R. Wood's accounts of cross-dressing men and women in Chiang Mai, called *pu-mia* ['male'-'female'] in the local language, were written in the 1930s but refer to his experiences in Northern Siam in the first couple of decades of the twentieth century.^[64] In his anecdotal tales Wood emphasises that while *pu-mia* were then well-known in Northern Siam, cross-dressing men and women were relatively unknown in the capital Bangkok. His stories describe Bangkok officials posted to Chiang Mai being surprised by the presence of *pu-mia* in the north and needing to have the phenomenon explained to them by local informants.

54. One of the first accounts of partial cross-dressing in Bangkok is found in a 1924 newspaper article item titled 'Man or Woman?' [*chai reu ying*] written by one *Nai* [Mr] Lert. In his article, *Nai* Lert describes, 'the image of a young man [*phor num noi*] who has tried to change his body into that of a beauty queen [*nang ngam*]' parading on the streets of Bangkok, 'Oh, dear goddess [*jao mae oey*]! He was wearing light pink silk trousers and a pale green silk shirt.... On his left wrist was a watch, on his right wrist a bracelet, and he wore a necklace around his neck'.^[65] *Nai* Lert describes this as being the way female prostitutes [*kari*] dress in brothels, and adds that some men in the capital go even further, wearing coloured silk skirts and blouses and high heeled shoes that make them walk effeminately [*kratung-krating*]. Nevertheless, while cross-dressing began to be commented upon in Bangkok in the 1920s, it was far from common in the pre-War period. Even as late as 1931 another Thai language newspaper article on changing patterns of male and female relations in the rapidly modernising Bangkok opened with the observation,

'Woman' (*phu-ying*) is the name of one of the world's two *phet*. Some may dispute this and say that in this world there are three *phet* because ... there is also the *phet* that is both female and male (*thang ying thang chai*). But I do not accept this third *phet* (*phet thiam*) as a genuine *phet* because in all my life I have never once met such a person.^[66]

55. Apart from a handful of accounts such as the above, both European and Thai language documentary sources are all but completely silent on the cross-dressing minority of men now generally called *kathoey* until after World War II. In contrast, before this time Western accounts almost without exception recount surprise at the universal androgyny of the population of Siam.

From Ugly Asiatic Virago to Exotic Oriental Beauty

56. There is another, and I suggest closely related, difference between early and contemporary Western accounts of Thai gender culture. Along with the *kathoey*, the exotically beautiful Thai woman is another contemporary stereotype of the

country. The French sociologist Jean Baudrillard reflects the stereotypical perceptions of many Western observers when he writes from an intensely androcentric perspective that,

The women of Thailand are so beautiful that they have become the hostesses of the Western world, sought after and desired everywhere for their grace, which is that of a submissive and affectionate femininity of nubile slaves—now dressed by Dior—an astounding sexual come-on in a gaze which looks you straight in the eye and a potential acquiescence to your every whim. In short, the fulfilment of Western man's dreams. Thai women seem spontaneously to embody the sexuality of the Arabian Nights, like the Nubian slaves in ancient Rome.[\[67\]](#)

57. However, premodern accounts of Siam are unanimous in referring not to the beauty of the women but rather to the universal ugliness of the country's female inhabitants. Roberts described one female dancer who performed at a royal dinner for a visiting American mission in 1832 as being 'made of tougher materials than ever fell to the lot of any other female'. She was dressed 'in a dingy cotton waist and breast cloth'; her hair was 'all shaved off excepting the crown, which was combed perpendicularly', standing 'like quills upon the fretful porcupine'; her teeth were 'as black as ebony'; her lips and gums 'livid red' from the 'disgusting practice' of 'masticating areca, siri, chunam and tobacco'.[\[68\]](#) He concluded his description by suggesting that Western women 'could not feel much flattered by this [Siamese] addition to their sisterhood'.[\[69\]](#) After a royal audience, British traveller Florence Caddy described Queen Saowapha, King Chulalongkorn's major wife, as wearing,

the *panung* ... which, like the men's costume, is arranged to have the appearance of knee-breeches.... Her hair is cut short like a boy's, and she wears nothing on her head. It is a comical, yet piquant costume. The queen is not handsome in face, but dignified, and very pleasing in manner; I was captivated by her.... What must she have thought of our voluminous trained skirts![\[70\]](#)

The Siamese women are finer than the men, they do all the work and develop their muscles. The Siamese men do a little clearing, but the women do the actual cultivation of the ground.[\[71\]](#)

58. Writing at much the same time as Caddy, the American George Bacon observed that Siamese children, 'are the most fascinating little things. I was charmed with them from the very first moment, but it grieves me to think that some day they will become as ugly as their fathers and mothers—and that is saying much!'[\[72\]](#) A decade or so later, the English school master Campbell wrote,

The flat nose, wide nostrils, large mouth, thick lips, and black bristly hair form an ensemble of which it is difficult to give an idea by means of the pen only. The natural plainness is even more marked in the women, among whom a pretty face is very rarely to

be seen, but in this sex also the frank cheerfulness of their countenances atones for a multitude of defects.[\[73\]](#)

59. The historian is here presented with a series of radical oppositions between the stereotypes that respectively dominate nineteenth century and contemporary Western accounts of Siamese/Thai gender culture. Firstly, before the twentieth century transvestism, or rather an androgynous appearance, was perceived to be a universal phenomenon while in the modern period transvestism is restricted to the highly visible minority of the *kathoey*. Secondly, in the early accounts Siamese women are universally regarded as being ugly in terms of the then prevailing Western norms of feminine beauty. However, since World War II, the now fabled exotic beauty of Thailand's women has been used to promote international (heterosexual male) tourism to the country. How can we explain these radical differences? Understanding the apparent contradictions between early and recent Western accounts of Thai gender culture will also provide us with an understanding of the two phenomena described at the beginning of this study, namely, the recent proliferation of same-sex and transgender and erotic identities and the anthropological observation of the dominance of gender over sexuality in modern Thai culture.

The Siamese gender revolution

60. A panoply of forces came into play in the period between the mid-nineteenth and late twentieth centuries to radically refashion the ways that masculine/feminine gender difference was marked and performed in Thailand, bringing Thai gender norms into greater conformity with those in the West. Anthropologists working in Thailand in the 1950s and 1960s observed that while work and other activities in premodern subsistence rice-growing villages had been relatively ungendered—with both men and women engaging in hard manual labour and domestic tasks—the rise of commodified labour in towns and cities brought with it new jobs and occupations that were clearly gendered. In the early 1950s, Lauriston Sharp et al. wrote,

There can be little doubt that while Buddhism has failed to develop a general differentiation of sex roles [in Thailand], modern technology and Westernisation are succeeding in doing so. This phenomenon is well under way in Bangkok, and is already beginning in such commercial agricultural districts as Bang Chan.... The development received a major impetus during and after the last war.... Technological modernisation has brought in a host of new occupations for men, many of which are closed to women through a blind following of the Western model. In the villages around Bangkok it is found that men are now adopting a number of activities from which women are excluded, such as automobile driving, operation of gas pumping engines, setting up radio receiving sets, using simple new machines and tools.... The traditional costume for both sexes in the Central Plain was very similar.... Now, however, most farmers customarily wear variants of Western costume, with strong differentiation in dress for the two sexes.... It can be safely assumed that Western modes and technologies have introduced into Thailand an

irreversible movement in the direction of sexually specialised roles with a strong bias towards the adoption of Western inequalities which are at variance with still vital Thai ideals. This development, which outside of the cities is fairly recent, can only contribute to the general malaise felt by the Thai as a pressure from the West towards which they are ambivalent.[\[74\]](#)

A decade later, Hanks and Hanks made a similar observation,

Western doctrines of sex roles include a sharper distinction between the sexes than has traditionally been the case in Thailand. Little boys were once almost indistinguishable from little girls by dress or coiffure. Today sex distinctions are being cultivated.... The hair [of girls] that once was cut short is allowed to grow long. The Ministry of Education has followed Western practice by encouraging the wearing of 'uniform' middie blouses and skirts for girls and shorts and shirts for boys. Formerly, both wrapped a few yards of cloth about their loins.... The elementary curriculum makes further distinctions: while boys engage in Scouting, girls occupy themselves with needlework; boys play football while girls run races. Lipstick, jewellery and permanent waves help further accentuate femininity, while trousers, fountain pens and cameras have become associated with masculinity. Special hospitals for women, the separation of men's and women's wards in unspecialised hospitals, public toilets distinguished for the two sexes, all help now to emphasise a person's sex. Among the importations have come occupations clearly labelled for one sex or the other. Tailored clothing has brought tailors for men and seamstresses for women. Nursing the sick is a female occupation; dentistry, a male occupation. Garage work, radio or electrical repair are masculine domains; needlework, beauty parlour operation and pre-school education are women's.[\[75\]](#)

61. In the above observations one can see the manifold forms of institutional and informal power over the conduct of everyday life that contributed to the differentiation of masculine and feminine gender norms in twentieth century Thailand. The accounts indicate clearly the ways that capitalism may bring with it an implicit Western gender culture. Since the late nineteenth century, a succession of new mass communications technologies have also been introduced—photography, cinema, television, Internet—which together have ensured that images of Western fashion and gendered behaviours have been increasingly represented across Thailand.
62. However, forces much more explicit and precisely targeted than the relatively diffuse processes of cultural mimesis of Western gender norms were also employed by the state in a self-conscious program of refashioning norms of masculinity and femininity. The Siamese population did not willingly copy Western norms and cover their 'naked' bodies with gendered male-specific and female-specific forms of clothing. Neither did Thai men and women willingly abandon established ways of wearing their hair. The mere presence of the cultural 'example' of Westerners enacting Western gender norms in Siam, and their representation in cinema and other media, was not sufficient to persuade the entire population to abandon customary gender practices. The revolution in gender norms that separates nineteenth century Western accounts of universal

Siamese androgyny and female ugliness from late twentieth century accounts of the Thai *kathoey* minority and general female beauty was only effected by a sustained, intense, and legally enforced re-gendering of the population by a highly interventionist state. This project, which it should be emphasised operated only over the public sphere, began in the reign of King Mongkut (r. 1851-1868), was intensified under his successors Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910) and Vajiravudh (r. 1910-1926), and reached the apogee of its intensity under the fascist-styled regime of Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram (first premiership 1938-1944; second premiership 1948-1957).

The Absolute Monarchy Period

63. Morris notes that from the very first year that he ascended the throne in 1851, King Mongkut was concerned about the dress of individuals who visited the royal palace. Mongkut was,

desperately concerned that failures in etiquette would be read by Westerners as legitimating grounds for what the latter would term a 'civilizing colonization'. Thus he stated, 'People who wear no upper garments seem naked; the upper torso looks unclean, especially if the person has a skin disease, or if he is sweating. Other peoples of civilized countries wear upper garments with the exception of the Lawaa and the Laos people who are forest dwellers and uncivilized and do not use clothing. But since Siam is a civilized country and understands civilized ways, we should not cling to the ancient ways of our forefathers who were forest people. Let everyone, therefore, wear upper garments when coming to royal audience.'[\[76\]](#)

64. As Morris puts it, from Mongkut's time, 'nakedness was to become a sign of peripherality, or premodernity, and of pre-Thainess.'[\[77\]](#) Under the rule of Mongkut's son and successor, Chulalongkorn, the state dictated the clothing of the general populace as well as the attire of those who visited the royal palace. In 1899, Chulalongkorn issued a decree specifying the type of clothing that could be worn in public. Citing a contemporary account by Émile Jottrand, Morris observes that Bangkok police began enforcing the decree five days before it was actually mandated to come into effect,

The decree of 1899 made the sumptuary display of gendered differences a matter of law.... The emergence of a normativised public domain, defined as typically Thai, had everything to do with the ways photography was mobilised in the production and maintenance of racial, ethnic, and class difference.... By the time of the 1899 decree, proprietary attire had become a matter of cultural signification not only for foreigners but for Thais, who were beginning not only to anticipate but to internalise foreigners' perceptions. To a considerable degree, the decree's extension of Rama IV's concern expressed the impact of Christian missionary anxieties about the inherent capacity of the body to signify within a moral code.... Clothing was no longer merely what one wore on particular occasions; it was beginning to signify the moral nature of Thai being.... At a time when King Rama V [Chulalongkorn] was travelling widely in Europe and posing for

cameras in the attire of his hosts, cultural self-representation was assuming extraordinary importance in international affairs.[78]

65. Van Esterik notes that King Vajiravudh, the son and successor of Chulalongkorn, considered Thai women's appearance—their teeth blackened from chewing betel, their short-cut hair, their wearing of the unisex *jong kraben* garment—as contributing to Western perceptions of Siam as barbaric and uncivilised,

Western travellers to Thailand, used to the extremes of gender opposition in European constructions of masculinity and femininity, were clearly confused by the similarity in appearance between Thai men and women.... Vajiravudh was particularly concerned because Westerners did not view elements of Thai dress simply as examples of cultural differences in fashions, but as deliberate strategies to keep women unattractive, and thus in bondage (Vella 1978: 154). This attitude would be particularly anathema to Thai sensibilities because of the importance of aesthetic appearance underlying Thai gender constructions. The King encouraged his women friends and relatives to wear their hair long and wear the more stylish but restrictive skirt-like *phaasin*. [79]

Varalee Sinlarat provides a similar analysis, observing that, 'King Vajiravudh also wanted to distinguish women from men. That meant discouraging women from wearing *chong kraben*, which were perceived as a male garment by Westerners.' [80]

The Phibun Period

66. Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram, Thailand's World War II-period premier who styled himself on the model of fascist dictators, even calling himself *phu-nam*, 'the leader', on the model of *il duce* and *der führer*, codified and institutionalised the regime of gender surveillance that had been initiated under the absolute monarchy. It was Phibun who decreed the change of the country's name to Thailand in 1939. In addition to invoking an ethnicised nationalism, the new name reflected a desire by Phibun's regime to mark the 1932 political transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. The name change was also intended to mark a new phase in the country's cultural history: 'Thailand' labels a Siam that is no longer 'barbarous' but has been substantially remoulded in the image of the civilised West.
67. Chetana Nagavajara describes how the German, Italian, and Japanese fascist states provided models for Thailand's national regime of cultural surveillance during the Phibun period, which led to the ongoing politicisation of the Thai notion of 'culture' [*watthanatham*],

It was through deliberate organisation, including legislation and official directives and guidelines, that the Thai government under Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram between

1938 and 1945 proposed to undertake ... a new cultural revival. So as to bring Thailand on a par with civilised nations of the world, concrete cultural reform measures had to be carried out. The very term 'culture' itself was given a deliberately evaluative and directional interpretation. According to the National Culture Act of 1942, culture means 'characteristics that denote growth (*khwam-jarern-ngork-ngam*), orderliness (*khwam-rabiap-riap-roi*), national unity and progress (*khwam-klom-khao kao-na khong chat*), and good public morality (*silatham an di-ngam khong prachachon*).' This may sound totally harmless, but the concrete measures imposed upon the people were not, since they went to excess, including decrees prescribing women to wear hats and stockings in public and husbands to kiss their wives good-bye before going out to work.[\[81\]](#)

68. In the nineteenth century, European visitors were often as perturbed by the failure of the Siamese to wear hats, shoes or socks as they were by the fact that both men and women often went about in public naked above the waist, and wore similar types of clothing when they did cover their bodies. In this period, the exposed heads and bare feet of the Siamese were remarked upon just as frequently as naked female breasts and exposed male torsos. Anna Leonowens observed, 'Men and women alike wear a sort of kilt.... Neither sex wears any covering on the head.'[\[82\]](#) It is in the light of these highly specific criticisms that we can understand the apparently comical and otherwise puzzling concern of Phibun's regime to enforce the wearing of hats, shoes, and socks as part of the cultural dictates [*ratthaniyom*] that were decreed in order to govern the wearing of gender-differentiated clothing. The above anecdote emphasises the fact that under the Thai regime of civilising power the most intensely focussed interventions were often more concerned to counter negative Western representations than to mimic or reproduce Western norms in their entirety.
69. Unisex fashions came to end in Thailand under Phibun when the wearing of the *jong-kraben* was banned, with men being required to wear shirts and trousers and women to don skirts and blouses.[\[83\]](#) Suwadee reports that it was argued that the *jong kraben* should no longer be worn 'because of its similarity to the dress of the people in Cambodia, at that time a French colony. Thus, it was not suitable to be the dress of the Thais who should be proud of their independence.'[\[84\]](#) Mattani Rutnin points out that Phibun also saw the Westernisation of Thai dress codes as an assertion of local autonomy against the power of occupying Japanese forces during World War II,

In defence of his drastic measures, Phibun tried to explain that his policy would prevent the Japanese from imposing Japanese culture on the Thais and civilise the people through Western culture instead. This explanation, however, was not convincing to most people. Negative reactions were inevitable when the government used police force to control and punish those who failed to follow the orders. Continuous controversies and ambiguities generated by a succession of new orders and rules were major factors which caused rebellious attitudes and negativism among intellectuals and the traditional leaders of society. However, their opinions were suppressed throughout the dictatorial regime. Some members of the royal family refused to change and passively held on to their traditions.[\[85\]](#)

On this point Morris observes,

[I]t was necessary for *Luang* Wichit Wathakan, the culturalist architect of Thai nationalism, to defend trousers as being authentically Thai when the government's mid-century publication of cultural mandates regulating dress and requiring trousers (for men) elicited criticism ... precisely for betraying Thai custom. Even in the 1940s, [men's wearing of] trousers could be construed locally as a symptomatic abandoning of the local.[\[86\]](#)

Thepchu Thapthorng notes that before Phibun banned the wearing of the *ong kraben*, this costume,

could be called the national form of dress [in Siam]. People across the length and breadth of the country condemned the directive to abandon wearing [*jong-kraben*], but since officials forced it upon the people it was necessary to comply. If one did not comply, one was not permitted to contact a government official.[\[87\]](#)

70. Michael Wright notes that even the poorest urban and rural populations were forced to buy and wear Western clothes because of the directive that people wearing traditional dress, such as men wearing the sarong-like *pha-khao-ma*, were to be refused service in government offices. The anti-*pha-khao-ma* attitude continued after World War II, with Phibun's successor, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1957-1963), declaring it 'flagrantly impolite and disorderly' to bathe in public in a river or canal wearing only a *pha-khao-ma*.[\[88\]](#)
71. Phibun's gendering of Thai culture went beyond fashion and behavioural norms to include the assignment of a fixed masculine or feminine gender to given names. Before World War II, Thai names rarely had a determinative gender. In everyday speech the gender of a person spoken to or spoken about was denoted by a gender-specifying title such as *ee* for females and *ai* for males. Under King Vajiravudh, the more formal gendered titles of *nai* [Mr] for men and *nang-sao* [Miss] and *nang* [Mrs] for women were introduced.[\[89\]](#) However, Phibun regarded the lack of gender specificity of Thai names as marking a lack of civilisation. He set up a 'Committee for Establishing the Principles for Giving Personal Names', made up of language and culture experts, including the famous cultural historian *Phraya* Anuman Ratchathon, who were tasked with drawing up a list of names and assigning a masculine or feminine gender to each. Phibun released the Committee's final report and issued an official decree on personal names on National Day, 24 June, 1941. The following month the Committee's head, *Luang* Thamrong Nawasawat, addressed officers of the Ministry of the Interior to clarify the decree so as to prevent any deficiencies in its implementation. *Luang* Thamrong began his address by insisting that there was a need to change the lives and minds of the populace to accord with the new political order in the country and stated that the Prime Minister had ordered the

Committee to be set up because the system for giving names to men and women was 'disorderly' [*lak-lan*],

The same name may be given to either gender (*phet*), so that it is not known whether that name belongs to a man or to a woman.... Sometimes a name that should be a woman's name is given to a man, and a name that should be a man's name is given to a woman.[\[90\]](#)

72. *Luang* Thamrong stated that the government's cultural dictates, called the ten *ratthaniyom* or 'state preferences', would encourage the populace to love [*rak*] and prefer [*niyom*] 'things Thai' and emphasised that 'establishing order' [*tang rabiap*] in the giving of personal names was closely related to the changes that had been ordered in male and female dress codes.[\[91\]](#) He justified state intervention in people's behaviour, dress, and names in terms of perpetuating 'the constitutional system of government' so that Thai culture would be made appropriate to the 'national civilisation' [*arayatham khorng chaf*]. The list of gendered names was sent to district offices to guide parents and officials in assigning appropriately gendered names to new-born infants. (People who now found themselves with a wrongly gendered name were not required to choose a new gender-appropriate name.) The name-gendering policy was largely successful. Since World War II it has become 'natural' for Thais to regard most given names as denoting either masculine or feminine gender, respectively. Nevertheless, it is still the case that Thai possesses somewhat more given names with an uncertain or ambiguous gendering than English. Furthermore, nicknames, which are used more frequently than formally assigned given names, remain largely non-gendered. The brief of Phibun's committee did not extend to assigning a gender to the vast and ever-growing profusion of Thai nicknames.

Power, Resistance, and the 'Naturalisation' of Enforced Cultural Change

73. The resistances to Phibun's gender policies noted by Mattani and Thepchu, and the precision with which his regime's cultural edicts specified the details of gendered attire and self-comportment, demonstrate that the revolution in Thai gender culture did not occur by simple processes of cultural 'osmosis' or copying of the West. Only decades of the sustained operation of state force succeeded in overturning the traditional norms of Siamese gender culture. Under Phibun, the new gender norms were enforced by all state agencies: through the local bureaucracy in all provinces, districts, and villages; through schools and colleges; through state health services and state-controlled broadcasting; as well as via new state rituals such as national Miss Siam, later Miss Thailand, beauty contests in which the beauty of the new 'international' (i.e. Westernised) Thai woman was celebrated. As Morris notes, the consequences of this cultural regime meant that, 'For the first time in Thai history ... dress became a means of signifying a binarised genital identity.... [This] marks an important development in

the history of Thailand's sex/gender system, ... in its histrionic assertion of binarity.'[\[92\]](#) The state project, bolstered by the impact of the commodification of labour and international media representations of Western gender, radically changed Thai understandings of masculinity and femininity. This is shown in a range of shifts in gender culture in addition to those that were enforced directly by the state. In particular, the gender norms of styles of theatrical performance as well as gendered patterns of self-representation in the Thai language have been deeply affected.

74. Traditional Thai theatre had been performed by distinct female and male same-sex troupes. Within the royal palace, all-female performances were the norm with the women of the court playing both male and female roles in the *lakhorn nai* ('theatre of the inner [court]') genre. However, outside the palace amongst commoners precisely the opposite situation pertained, with all-male troupes entertaining the populace in the *lakhorn nork* ['theatre outside [the court]'] genre, in which men played both male and female roles. However, both these genres of same-sex theatre, the all-female performances within the royal palace and the all-male performances outside the palace walls, effectively became obsolete by the middle of the twentieth century. Classical dramas are still very occasionally performed by same-sex, usually all-female, troupes. It is now extremely rare for men to play female roles in classical dramas. In performances of modern dramas and comedies the 'naturalistic' genre called 'the theatre of real men and genuine women' [*lakhorn chai jing ying thae*],[\[93\]](#) in which men play only male roles and women play only female roles, has completely replaced the earlier same-sex styles of performance.

75. Perhaps the clearest indicator that forms of gendered subjectivity have changed as a result of the Thai gender revolution comes from studies of the Thai language. Thai possesses numerous first person pronouns ('I'), with the choice of self-reference term being determined by a need to label one's position in the social hierarchy relative to the person(s) spoken to. However, Voravudhi Chirasombutti and Anthony Diller note that it is only since the late nineteenth century, the period when gender edicts were first decreed, that Thai first person pronouns have marked the gender of the speaker,

Terms that show marked gender distinctions ... are rather recent innovations and are not found in other members of the Thai language family. *Dichan* [now only used by feminine speakers] appears in fact first to have been used by royal and high class speakers.... *Dichan* was used by men at least until 1882. A drama script written in 1882 by Prince Pichitpreechakorn has a dialogue in which a lower ranking officer refers to himself as *dichan* when speaking to a high-ranking military officer.[\[94\]](#)

Before the late nineteenth century, the relative age and status, but not the gender, of the speaker had been marked in pronoun use. In modern Thai a new category of gendered first person pronouns, for example, *phom* for male speakers and *dichan* for female speakers, has come into being. In addition, a set

of gendered politeness markers, for example, *khrap* for men and *kha* for women, has also come into use.

76. Voravudhi and Diller present a picture of the gradual emergence of gendering in self-reference as 'a functionally motivated 'top-down' historical development, especially salient in the first decades of the [twentieth] century.'[\[95\]](#) In this process terms that originally reflected class and status difference, but not gender difference, transmuted into gender-marking terms, with this innovation first being recorded for the language of the nobility and bureaucratic elites, and only later spreading from these circles to become a part of the language of the common person, firstly in the capital Bangkok and somewhat later in the provinces and rural communities. The top-down pattern of the gradual dispersion of gendered first person pronoun use mirrors the way that the new norms of gendered fashion were introduced: beginning as norms of palace etiquette and only subsequently being forced on the general populace. However, the gendering of pronouns emerged as an unintended by-product of the project of gendering fashion. While Phibun ordered the gendering of given names, no state intervention decreed the gendering of pronouns or specified which self-reference terms would henceforth label a male or female subject, respectively. This unguided linguistic phenomenon, which occurred in parallel with the introduction of gendered dress codes, reflects the close interdependence of language use in Thailand and the patterns of the surrounding social and cultural order. The fact that in the twentieth century speakers of Thai found it necessary to mark their gender identity discursively, as either masculine or feminine, and that this had not been the case in the nineteenth century, indicates that the shift in understandings of gender involved a much more profound cultural transition than merely a change in fashion.

From performative genders to perverse subjectivities

77. Patterns of personal identity have been altered as a result of the Thai gender revolution. Judith Butler argues that rather than being mere surface effects or expressions of an underlying, pre-existing gendered self, it is the performative force of ritually repeated gendered acts that moulds gendered forms of subjectivity. According to Butler,

[T]he performance of gender creates the illusion of prior substantiality—a core gendered self—and construes the effects of the performative ritual of gender as necessary emanations or causal consequences of that prior substance.... I am ... concerned to rethink performativity as cultural ritual, as the reiteration of cultural norms, as the habitus of the body in which structural and social dimensions of meaning are not fully separable.[\[96\]](#)

Butler distinguishes between the notion of 'performance' – the expression of a

pre-given subject – and 'performativity' – the fashioning of a subject by ritually repeated actions. She defines performativity as,

a process of iterability, a regularised and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject: this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that 'performance' is ... a ritualised production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance.[\[97\]](#)

Annamarie Jagose emphasises the important distinction between gender performance and the performativity of gender as follows,

[G]ender is performative, not because it is something that the subject deliberately and playfully assumes [i.e. 'performs'], but because, through re-iteration, it consolidates the subject. In this respect, performativity is the precondition of the subject.[\[98\]](#)

78. Performativity theory proposes that the ritualised repetition of behaviours or discursive acts labelled feminine and masculine, respectively, produces the perception both in the actor and observers of a feminine or masculine gendered subjectivity. It is a corollary of this theory that a shift in the general character of the performative rituals of gender will be accompanied by a related shift in the forms of gendered subjectivity. The unplanned emergence of gendering as a key structuring principle in the Thai pronoun system appears to provide empirical confirmation of this prediction. The changes in the discursive system of self-representation appear to mark the fact that a shift in patterns of gendered subjectivity took place as a consequence of the enforced reconstitution of all Thai gender performances.

79. Feminist theories of gender and gay studies/queer studies theorists of sexuality argue that while gender and sexuality may be isolated analytically, these two phenomena are nonetheless intimately related. However, the precise articulation of gender and sexuality in human subjectivity is under-theorised in queer studies. This is reflected in Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick's 'axioms' for the study of sexuality laid out in the introductory sections of *The Epistemology of the Closet*, which alongside *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* is a foundational text in queer studies. Sedgwick proposes that the gender-sexuality split is axiomatic, but proposes no clear relationship between these terms,

Axiom 2: The study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, antihomophobic inquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry. But we can't know in advance how they will be different.[\[99\]](#)

80. Despite lacking a theory of the precise relations of performatively incited gender identity and patterns of sexuality, both feminists and queer theorists would concur that a major shift in cultural understandings of gender is likely to have a significant, if difficult to specify, impact upon understandings of sexuality and the relationship of eroticism to personal identity. Butler maintains,

Sexual practices ... will invariably be experienced differently depending on the relations of gender in which they occur. And there may be forms of 'gender' within homosexuality which call for a theorisation that moves beyond categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine'.[\[100\]](#)

81. It is a corollary of Butler's above observations that new forms of sexual desire may emerge from a major shift in understandings of gender. Indeed, Butler provides the outlines of an alternative mechanism for the incitement of proliferating forms of sexual being to that described by Foucault. It will be recalled Foucault argued that proliferating sexual diversity emerges as an unintended consequence of a new regime of power over sexuality. In contrast, Butler's work suggests that a somewhat similar outcome may emerge from a new mode of power over gender. It is beyond the scope of this study to trace the linkages between Siam's 'civilising' regime of gendered power and the precise forms of Thailand's new *gay*, *tom*, *dee* and *kathoey* identities. However, the central conclusion of this study is that the new mode of gendering power was a key source of the new same-sex and transgender identities.

Power, gender, beauty: Thailand's 'perverse implantation'

82. To summarise, the emergence of new *gay*, *tom*, *dee* and other identities in Thailand occurred in the absence of a regime of bio-power that focussed specifically on homoeroticism. Same-sex desires and behaviours were all but invisible to the self-civilising Thai state and at no time were they isolated out or defined as being antithetical to the achievement of the state-defined goal of 'civilisation'. Once the existence of new same-sex identities and cultures came to the attention of the Thai authorities in the 1960s and 1970s, thanks to the sensationalist press, they did become the focus of a series of weak and ultimately ineffectual official attempts at suppression and control. However, the state's anti-*kathoey*/anti-*gay* program *post-dated* the emergence of the identities and cultures that it sought to control and while playing a role in their further evolution could not have been a factor in their emergence. The origins of the new identities cannot, as Morris[\[101\]](#) proposes, be attributed to the incitement effects of a Thai regime of homophobic bio-power.

83. However, while Thailand historically lacks a regime of homophobic power that seeks to constrain human desires within the bounds heterosexual norms it has been subjected to an intense regime of gendering bio-power. Almost a century of

state interventions succeeded in forcing all Thai men and women to refashion their self-comportment in newly defined and clearly differentiated masculine and feminine styles. These new state-defined and legally enforced understandings of performing/being a Thai man and a Thai woman were reflected in the images presented by new mass communications media and they found gender-specific occupations within the emerging urban-centred market economy of commodified labour that replaced the rice-farming subsistence economy. The mass migration of unemployed and under-employed rural labourers to Bangkok saw an explosive boom in the urban population and the rapid appearance of new social spaces where, outside the restrictive cultural controls traditionally exercised by family and neighbours, men and women could enact new identities and develop new gender-based and erotically focussed forms of community. Under the combined influence of all these factors the Thai language itself underwent a rapid and radical change, with the emergence of the linguistic innovation of first person pronouns that labelled the gender of the speaker indicating that fundamental patterns of subjectivity had been altered as a result of the state's highly successful regendering project.

84. The radical inversion of dominant Western representations of Thailand—from general androgyny and female ugliness in the nineteenth century to the presence of a visible minority of *kathoey* transgenders and general female beauty since World War II—emerges as an effect of and stands as testimony to the dramatic scale and success of the state's project to revolutionise the performative norms of gender to accord with the perceived norms of 'civilisation'. It is largely because of the success of the project to refashion the gendering of all Thai men and women that contemporary Western stereotypes of Thailand have replaced the now forgotten tropes that dominated nineteenth century travellers' tales.
85. The analysis developed above allows us to understand the historical interrelationship of a range of phenomena that anthropologists Penny Van Esterik,[\[102\]](#) Nerida Cook,[\[103\]](#) Chris Lyttleton,[\[104\]](#) Andrea Whittaker,[\[105\]](#) Rosalind Morris[\[106\]](#) and others have described as focal characteristics of contemporary Thai gender and sexual cultures, namely: the priority of gender over sexuality in identity formation; the political importance of surface effects; and the fetishisation of aesthetic norms of (especially feminine) beauty. The above analysis permits us to see all these phenomena as contingent products of the regime of 'civilising' power that Thailand's political elites mobilised in response to the challenges of Western imperialism. This historical perspective on the categories of anthropological analysis reveals the amazing recentness of many phenomena now commonly taken as key features of Thai culture, and by deploying Foucault's analyses in a somewhat novel ways it also enables us to understand how the broad-scale transformation of Thai gender culture in turn contributed to the incitement of the diversity of contemporary same-sex and transgender identities and cultures.

86. In *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* Foucault writes of the 'transformation of sex into discourse' and the 'garrulous attention which has us in a stew over sexuality' as being part of a 'stricter regime' and new 'agencies of control' and 'mechanisms of surveillance' over sexuality and its pleasures. The effect of this new regime of bio-power has been to create in the West a 'dispersion of sexualities, a strengthening of their disparate forms, a multiple implantation of 'perversions', an initiation of 'sexual heterogeneities', and the appearance of 'peripheral sexualities'.^[107] In Thailand, distinctive local varieties of bio-power were brought into being in response to the challenges of Western imperialism. However, their modes of operation and the domains of social life over which they have worked have both been different. To paraphrase Foucault, in Thailand the stricter regime of control and mechanisms of surveillance have led to the 'transformation of gender into discourse' and to a 'garrulous attention which has the Thai people in a stew over gender.' Furthermore, the focus of this regime on controlling the surface imaging of representations of gender means that rather than intervening in the bodily effect of sexual pleasure Thai bio-power is concerned with manipulating the aesthetic effect of gendered beauty. The distinctiveness of the Thai regime of bio-power lies in its focus on controlling the beauty of gender rather than prescribing, or proscribing, the pleasures of sexuality. All subjectivities constituted within this net of powers are marked by a predominant concern for and anxiety about the aesthetics of gender. While having distinctive erotic interests and objects of sexual fascination, each of the modern Thai identities is a gender more than it is a sexuality.

87. Yet like the Western bio-power regime of sexuality, the Thai bio-power regime of gender has incited its own proliferations and multiplications. To paraphrase Foucault again, the effect of the Thai regime of bio-power has been to create a 'dispersion of genders, a strengthening of their disparate forms, a multiple implantation of 'perversions', an initiation of 'gendered heterogeneities' and the appearance of 'peripheral genders.' I conclude this section with a further paraphrase, from the final paragraphs of the chapter 'The Perverse Implantation' from Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. In the following, Foucault's descriptions of 'sex' and 'sexuality' are replaced by 'gender', his accounts of 'pleasure' are replaced by 'beauty', and his references to 'the West' are replaced by 'Thailand', in order to summarise the key arguments of this study's bio-history of Thailand's same-sex cultures:

The implantation of perversions is an instrument-effect: it is through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral genders that the relations of power to gender and beauty branched out and multiplied, measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct. And accompanying this encroachment of powers, scattered genders rigidified, became stuck to an age, a place, a type of practice.... Beauty and power do not cancel or turn back against one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement.

We must therefore abandon the hypothesis that modern Thai society ushered in an age of increased gender repression. We have not only witnessed a visible explosion of unorthodox genders; but—and this is the important point—a deployment quite different

from the law, even if it is locally dependent on procedures of prohibition, has ensured, through a network of interconnecting mechanisms, the proliferation of specific forms of beauty and the multiplication of disparate genders never have there existed more centres of power; never more attention manifested and verbalised; never more circular contacts and linkages; never more sites where the aesthetic intensity of beauty and the persistency of power catch hold, only to spread elsewhere.[\[108\]](#)

The thoroughly modern *kathoey*

88. Gilbert Herdt observes,

Sexual cultures can rise and fall with the social politics of the times, they are not dependent upon procreation in any simple sense, and their meanings can rather quickly be spun into 'traditional' customs and lifeways.[\[109\]](#)

This observation is especially pertinent in Thailand. While the cross-dressing transgender *kathoey* is now commonly represented as a 'traditional' aspect of Thai culture, in contrast with modern masculine gay identities, the contemporary form of *kathoey* identity is in fact remarkably recent. Rather than a 'predecessor' from which modern gay identity has supposedly emerged and which is in the process of being superseded by masculine forms of same-sex identity, the modern *kathoey* has emerged *together with* gay identities as one aspect of the broader gender revolution. It was at the historical moment when the state project of gender refashioning began to reach its peak intensity in the middle decades of the twentieth century that cross-dressing began to be reported regularly in the Thai press. Apart from one or two cases, such as noted above, before World War II press reports of cross-dressing in Bangkok and the Central region of Thailand are all but non-existent. The idea of the hermaphroditic *kathoey*—a person imagined to be equally male and female—was present in the popular imagination, but reports of actual people who behaved or lived their lives in ways that instantiated this intersex image are completely absent from the historical record of Thai folk culture for the premodern period. However, starting from the 1950s, it is possible to trace an exponential increase in the representation and imaging of the male-to-female transgender/transsexual *kathoey* in the Thai press and media. The contemporary prevalence of *kathoey* in Thai cinema, television, and other popular media is a thoroughly modern and utterly recent phenomenon. It should be noted that it is only possible to cross-dress and visibly transgress gender norms if the norms of masculine and feminine fashion are in fact markedly distinct. It is only *after* the apparatus of the state regendering project reached its apogee in the 1940s, expanding for the first time to incorporate the entire population of the country and requiring all Thai women to wear dresses and all Thai men to wear trousers, that cross-dressing began to be reported in the press. Indeed, cross-dressing in the modern sense had not been possible

before that time.

89. This situation is not unique to Thailand. Morris summarises Marjorie Garber's [\[110\]](#) study in which it is argued that the transgressive act of cross-dressing first emerged in Western European cultures as an unintended consequence of legally enforced gender-differentiated fashions.

In her provocative analysis of cross-dressing and Western culture, Marjorie Garber notes that sumptuary laws, whose original purpose was the protection of upper-class privilege and the restriction of upward mobility during the late medieval and early modern periods, effectively entrenched an aesthetic of binary gender difference. The legislation of appropriate dress, which crystallised ideally dualist visions of male and female appearance, also opened up the possibility for transgressive cross-dressing. [\[111\]](#)

The Modern Thai Fetishisation of Feminine Performances

90. In the early 1960s, Hanks and Hanks observed that in Thailand's economic transition from a largely rural subsistence to an urban market economy, '[t]he reorganisation of work has made more radical changes for women than for men' [\[112\]](#), and '[i]n comparison [with women], the form of man's life has changed less.' [\[113\]](#) These observations reflect the fact that the break between the traditional and 'civilised' forms of Thai femininity is significantly greater than the comparable divide between traditional and 'civilised' varieties of Thai masculinity, and that much more cultural 'work' was required to fashion the new Thai women than to mould the new Thai man. We can perhaps understand the intense cultural fascination of Thais with the new norms of feminine beauty, whether enacted by women or by males [*kathoey*], as resulting from the fact that over the past century and a half femininity has been an object of much greater state intervention. As Suwadee notes, under Phibun, 'Women wearing full Western style costume came to symbolise society at the zenith of civilisation.' [\[114\]](#) This identification of Western-styled femininity with civilisation was a general feature of colonial period ideologies and was not unique to Siam. Nevertheless, anthropologists (e.g. Van Esterik) report an especially heightened aesthetic regime in modern Thailand and an intense fascination with the minutiae of gendered beauty unmatched in other Southeast Asian societies.
91. Following Foucault's observation that power incites as well as suppresses, we can expect that the remarkable intensity and scale of state interventions that were required to refashion the stereotype of Siamese femininity from ugly virago to oriental beauty have left a legacy of an equally intense cultural fetishisation of the feminine. As Van Esterik notes, the 'changes in women's roles and appearances introduced Western elements of femininity rather than reinforcing Thai femininity.' [\[115\]](#) Indeed, the civilising changes worked to erase the old 'ugly'

'masculine' Siamese femininity in order to create a simultaneously Westernised and self-exoticised form of femininity that could be 'read' *both* as beautiful in terms of Western norms and yet also remain distinctively 'oriental'. Van Esterik emphasises the dual operation of the Siamese self-civilising project,

With no direct colonial master, Thailand was not close enough to Europe or important enough for Europeans to attempt to control the way Thailand represented itself. No colonial office dictated or crafted Thailand's public face. Thailand learned from European texts and expositions how to represent her own past and present it in a way that demonstrated her exoticism and civilised status simultaneously.[\[116\]](#)

It cannot be emphasised too much that the supposedly 'traditional' oriental beauty of Thailand's women is a modern creation. It has been designed for the dual purpose of representing Thai femininity—and hence Thai civilisation's place in the Western-dominated global order—in terms of aesthetic codes that are comprehensible to Westerners yet which also retain a sufficiently distinctive oriental flavour to signal the Thai desire for autonomy from the West.

92. The focusing of the power of the Thai gender revolution on the project of remaking Thai womanhood has created a society entranced by the seductive power of performances of the historically novel form of feminine beauty that emerged in the aftermath of that cultural revolution. Furthermore, the channelling of power in the Thai self-civilising project to remould public gendered surfaces, presentations, and images rather than to seek to constrain private sexual desires or practices has incited its own fetishisation of surface effects. In modern Thailand the sex of the person who performs the new norms of civilised Thai femininity on the stage of public life matters little. The male who reconstructs the surfaces of his body and the modes of his comportment to successfully realise the new norms of feminine beauty receives almost as much public acclaim as female beauty queens. The distinctive ways that power was deployed in the Thai self-civilising response to the challenges of Western imperialism have produced a society in which the surface effect of feminine beauty is valorised while the sex or body upon which that effect is realised, while not ignored or unremarked, has little impact on aesthetic appreciation. Indeed, this regime of cultural power has genuine force and efficacy in Thai gender/sexual politics. The growing tolerance, but not full social acceptance, of *kathoeyes* in Thailand follows, and in fact derives from, the growing skill of the community of transgender males in successfully enacting the new norms of civilised feminine beauty.

93. We see here a continuation in another domain of the aesthetic norms of the now-defunct genres of Siamese male and female same-sex theatre, in which the stylistic effect of masculine or feminine gender on the stage was the dominant consideration for the audience not the sex of the actor. Early Western accounts report the immense popularity of theatrical performances across premodern Siam, both within the palace amongst the nobility and in the towns and regions

amongst the common people. The dominance of same-sex genres in all forms of premodern theatre appears to provide an aesthetic cultural pattern of valorising the surface effects of gender performance. In other words, pre-existing cultural norms in addition to the exigencies of geopolitics may have led to the effects of 'civilising' power being concentrated upon the surfaces of the bodies of the Siamese people.

94. I do not argue that transgenderism was absent from premodern Siamese society. The silence of the historical record on the matter means that we simply do not know. It may be that Siamese historians of the period, concentrating on recording royal affairs, regarded phenomena such as transgenderism as unworthy of being recorded. However, given the prudish fascination that Western observers evinced towards so many other aspects of Siamese behaviour and customs they considered to be barbarous and horrifying, it is difficult to believe that they would have overlooked passing judgement on transgender *kathoey* if they had been as prominent a phenomenon in earlier centuries as they are today.
95. Given the unisex fashion codes in the premodern period, under which Westerners had difficulty distinguishing gender normative men and women, it is possible that foreign visitors may have failed to see Siamese men who were trying to be like Siamese women, or Siamese women who were living their lives as men. We may speculate that, given the fact that Westerners found Siamese women more masculine-looking than their menfolk, a man who impersonated a woman may not have been seen as effeminate but rather as approaching Western norms of masculinity more closely than other men. Similarly, because foreigners thought Siamese men appeared effeminate, it may have been the case that a woman who impersonated the premodern norms of Siamese masculinity would have been perceived as feminine. Again, we simply do not know.
96. Yet while Siamese historians may not have been interested in recording popular gender culture in the premodern period, and early Western visitors may have been culturally ill-equipped to detect transgender behaviours, it nevertheless appears to be the case that transgenderism has become much more common in modern Thailand as a result of the remoulding of gendered subjectivities. Reflecting the view of many contemporary analysts of gay history, Dennis Altman has described transgenderism as a 'premodern form of sexual organisation'.^[117] In the case of Thailand, however, the contrary seems to be the case. The contemporary form and intensity of *kathoey*-type transgenderism in Thailand is a stunningly recent phenomenon, and rather than being erased or superseded by modernity, it is the processes of Thai modernisation that have, firstly, made cross-dressing possible, and, secondly, incited the recent cultural explosion of transgenderism. If the exponential increase in the imaging of transgenderism accurately reflects underlying trends in Thai gender culture, then it suggests a culture-wide incitement to transgenderism that continues to accelerate to this day. The cross-dressing Thai *kathoey* is not the 'traditional face' of homosexuality

in Thailand, and far from being replaced by 'modern' masculine, gay types of homosexuality *kathoey* continue to increase in number and grow in cultural prominence alongside the equally explosive growth in *gay*, *tom* and *dee* identities. Rather than just one model of same-sex eroticism being incited into being in modern Thailand, multiple differently gendered homoeroticisms have all come into being over roughly the same period.

The Homosexualisation of Cross-Dressing

97. In light of the results of this study, my claim in an earlier work that, '[t]here is a long history for the *kathoey* role among the Thai people'[\[118\]](#) now appears to be mistaken. The linguistic continuity in usage of the term *kathoey* in both the premodern and modern periods masks a major change in the meaning of that term, from 'hermaphrodite' to 'transvestite/transsexual', brought about as a result of the gender revolution. The term *kathoey* does not appear to have assumed connotations of homosexuality, in addition to its original meaning of hermaphroditism, until the twentieth century. The emergence of the now general assumption that the *kathoey* is not only transgender but also homosexual, that is, the homosexualisation of cross-dressing, appears to reflect the impact of the gender revolution on understandings of eroticism. Marjorie Garber argues,

The conflation of 'transvestite' with 'gay' and 'lesbian' is itself a matter of historical contingency, a matter of the [historical] moment in which we—or some of us—now find ourselves. There have been historical moments in the West, as well as the Far East, the Near East, Africa, and elsewhere, in which the matter of sexual orientation has had little or nothing to do with transvestite representation, and vice versa.... Nevertheless, the history of transvestism, and the history of homosexuality constantly intersect and intertwine, both willingly and unwillingly. They cannot simply be disentangled. But what is also clear is that neither can simply be transhistorically 'decoded' as a sign for the other.[\[119\]](#)

98. The Thai gender revolution appears to have effected the sort of transition in the cultural meaning of cross-dressing described by Garber. In the premodern period, cross-dressing was apparent in some contexts, such as the same-sex genres of dramatic performance. However, local audiences did not perceive this stylised transgression of everyday gender norms on the stage as connoting same-sex desire. Today, by contrast, it is difficult for Thai audiences, like modern Western audiences, to avoid assuming that a cross-dressing man is by necessity also homosexual. The genres of same-sex theatre did not become obsolete as a result of state edict. Same-sex theatre was not suppressed under either the absolute monarchy or the Phibun regime. No official intervention was needed to end the custom of men playing female roles and women playing male roles. Rather, the emergence of the thoroughly modern meaning that equates cross-dressing with homosexuality meant that Thai audiences no longer considered it appropriate for two men, or two women, to enact heterosexual love scenes on

the stage, no matter how stylised the costumes, the poses, or the language.

99. Randolph Trumbach reports that a gender revolution in early eighteenth century Western Europe had profound consequences for Western homosexual cultures. He argues that,

a profound shift occurred in the conceptualisation and practice of male homosexual behaviour in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It was *a shift caused by the reorganisation of gender identity* that was occurring as part of the emergence of a modern Western culture.... [European sexual culture] before 1700 was closer to the rest of the world than it was after [emphasis added].[\[120\]](#)

100. Before the Western European gender revolution that took place at the beginning of the industrial revolution, the male libertine, debauchee, or rake, 'had been able to find, especially in cities, women and boys with whom he might indifferently, if sometimes dangerously, enact his desires.'[\[121\]](#) Before 1700, the European libertine may have been seen as a sinner, but he did not lose his masculine status by having a boy on one arm and a female prostitute on the other. Between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries the sodomite had been understood as a man who had sex with *both* boys and women. However, in early modern Europe the sodomite became, 'an individual interested exclusively in his own gender and inveterately effeminate and passive. A man interested in women never risked becoming effeminate as he had once done.'[\[122\]](#) Trumbach argues that 'the appearance of the adult effeminate male as the dominant actor in the [Western European homosexual] subculture occurred only after 1700.'[\[123\]](#)

101. I do not argue that direct parallels can be made between early eighteenth century Western Europe and late twentieth century Thailand, or that Thai erotic culture is repeating precisely the same patterns traced by the history of sexuality in the West. The relevance of Trumbach's analysis for this study is that major shifts in patterns of same-sex eroticism have occurred in tandem with gender revolutions in other societies and in different historical periods, and that the association of effeminacy with homosexuality only occurs in specific cultural configurations of gender.

Conclusion

102. The anthropological finding that gender is so important in modern Thai identities may not reflect the form of 'traditional' Thai culture. On the contrary, this may be a quite recent cultural formation that has emerged as a consequence of the historical intensity of state power in remoulding Siamese genders to match 'civilised' Western norms. An earlier study[\[124\]](#) revealed that the *kathoey* category began to fractionate into distinct 'gay' and 'lesbian' varieties just a few years after Phibun's 'civilised' norms of masculinity and femininity became

institutionally cemented in Thai law, bureaucratic structures, and medical discourses and practices in the 1940s. It was in the 1950s that the cross-dressing *kathoey* first began to be reported extensively in the Thai press, while masculine *gay* identities emerged in the early to mid-1960s, followed in the 1970s and early 1980s by gendered *tom* and *dee* female same-sex identities. It appears that the Thai gender revolution played a significant role in the origins of all these same-sex identities and cultures, which emerged from unintended disruptions of older patterns of erotic desire that accompanied the restructuring of norms of masculinity and femininity. It should be emphasised once again that these identities were not brought into being by a Western-styled regime of homophobic bio-power that sought to expunge homosexuality from the social body but rather by a regime of power that installed new forms of masculine/feminine gender difference.

103. Far from being isolated events in modern Thai history, the emergence of *kathoey*, *gay*, *tom*, *dee* cultures and identities represent one consequence of the dramatic transformation of *all gender performances* and the institutionalisation of new norms of 'mainstream' masculinity and femininity. Thailand is not only a site of new gendered same-sex identities. It is equally a site of new heteronormative masculine and feminine identities. A new Thai 'man' and 'woman' were also fashioned into being as part of the state's efforts at self-civilisation. Rather than being 'marginal' to Thai history, the stories of the emergence of Thailand's transgender and same-sex identities and cultures are revealed to be chapters of the 'mainstream' narrative of the emergence of current dominant forms of gender and eroticism. In this narrative, which begins with the story of Siam's response to Western geopolitical hegemony, the normative Thai 'man' and 'woman' are themselves recent actors on the historical stage. It was as a consequence of the success of the state's project in radically remaking the norms of masculinity and femininity that the new *kathoey*, *gay*, *tom*, and *dee* identities in turn emerged. These latter identities are indeed transgressive, but the norms they violate are not those of 'traditional' Siam but rather of 'civilised' Thailand. It was only *after* the norms of 'civilised' Thai masculinity and femininity had become entrenched in popular culture around the middle of the twentieth century that it became possible for those new norms to be transgressed in the equally modern ways of *kathoey*, *gay*, *tom*, and *dee*.

104. The multiple destabilisations of traditional cultures brought about by the internationalisation of capitalism and the globalisation of communications and travel have indeed incited a proliferation new subjectivities and identity-based cultures around the planet. However, the precise forms of these new eroticised and gendered identities vary, and the particular constellations of power that have incited them into being are equally multiple, complex, and locally nuanced. The Thai case demonstrates that within a context of global change new forms of local cultural difference may emerge that vary just as radically from their own pasts as they do from contemporary Western patterns. Mapping the contours of these new identities and identifying the multiple modernities and the manifold dimensions of

postmodernity that they inhabit requires both laborious investigation of empirical sources and, if need be, a preparedness to re-evaluate the preconceptions of current Western-centric theories of the rise of modernity and its decay into postmodernity.

105. Finally, the admittedly limited comparative data on the role that shifting notions of gender have played in the histories of same-sex cultures (e.g. Pflugfelder on Japan, Trumbach on Western Europe, and this study on Thailand) suggest that modern Western gender cultures may be significantly more hegemonic, both in their global range and local intensity, than Western sexual cultures. Compared with the powerfully seductive allure of the modern West's complex and contested notions of femininity and masculinity, the norms of Western sexual cultures appear much more readily resisted, deflected, and ignored in non-Western societies. In looking for globally effective forms of cultural power that may have incited the international proliferation of homosexual and transgender cultures, the phenomenon Dennis Altman calls 'global queering',^[125] then investigating the globalisation of Western gender cultures may prove more productive than exploring the comparatively episodic impact of Western sexual cultures outside the West. By tracing the history of homosexuality through the lens of gender we may also overcome the artificial and fractious divide that separates queer studies of sexuality from feminist analyses of gender.

Endnotes

[1] See: Peter A. Jackson, 'The Persistence of Gender: From Ancient Indian *pandakas* to Modern Thai *gay quings*', in *Meanjin*, University of Melbourne, 55, 1 (1996): 110-20; Jackson, 'Kathoeay - Gay - Man: The Historical Emergence of Gay Male Identity in Thailand', in *Sites of Desire/Economies of Pleasure, Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp. 166-90; Jackson, 'An American Death in Bangkok: The Murder of Darrell Berrigan and the Hybrid Origins of Gay Identity in 1960s Bangkok', in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 5, 3 (1999): 361-411; Jackson, 'An Explosion of Thai Identities: Global Queering and Reimagining Queer Theory', in *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 2, 4 (2000): 405-24; Jackson, 'Adapt, Resist, Ignore: Thai Sexual Minorities and the Episodic Allure of Queer English', in *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Language, Globalisation, and New Articulations of Same-Sex Desire*, ed. William L. Leap and Tom Boellstorff, Champaign Ill: University of Illinois Press, in press.

[2] See: Dennis Altman, 'Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalisation of Gay Identities', in *Social Text*, 48, 14 (3) (1996): 77-94; Altman, 'Global Gaze/Global Gays', in *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 3, 4 (1997): 417-36; Peter Drucker, 'Introduction: Remapping Sexualities' in *Different Rainbows*, ed. Peter Drucker, London: Gay Men's Press, 2000, pp. 9-42; Neil Miller, *Out in the World: Gay and Lesbian Life from Buenos Aires to Bangkok*, London: Penguin Books, 1992.

[3] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage Books, 1980, pp. 142-43.

[4] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, p. 143.

[5] Peter A. Jackson, 'From *Kamma* to Unnatural Vice: Male Homosexuality and Transgenderism in the Thai Buddhist Tradition', in *Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists*, ed. Winston Leyland, San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1998, pp. 55-89.

[6] In a summary of cases prosecuted under the early twentieth century penal code, *Phraya Niphonphotjanat* lists just one instance of a charge being laid under the anti-sodomy clause, an unsuccessful prosecution for bestiality. ((*Phraya*) Niphonphotjanat, *The Penal Code of RS 127 and Corrections and Additions to the Penal Code up to 1935* (Kotmai Laksana Aya R.S. 127 Kap Phra Ratchabanyat Kae-khai Pherm-term Kotmai Laksana Aya Theung Ph.S. 2478), Bangkok: *Khun Wathithurarak* (name of publisher), 1935, p. 467) This is detailed in a summary of criminal proceedings for 1928 published in the following year. Verdict No. 254 for 1928 describes proceedings determined by the provincial court of Ubonratchathani in which one man, *Nai Duang Sombun*, brought a case against another man, *Nai Uan* (no surname), 'that in the daytime on 19th May 1928 the defendant had sexually violated (*kratham chamrao*) the plaintiff's female buffalo, causing damages (*sia hai*) and bringing ill fortune (*appamongkon*) upon the plaintiff.' The local court sentenced the defendant to four months gaol and imposed a fine of 50 baht under the anti-sodomy clause. However, upon appeal the Supreme Court overturned the conviction and quashed the sentence after determining that 'it cannot be said that the plaintiff is an injured party (*phu-sia-hai*)'. (Anonymous, *Thammasan Vol. 13, Supreme Court Verdicts for 1929* (Thammasan lem 13 kham-phiphaksa dika Ph.S. 2472), Bangkok: Rong-phim Bamrung Nukunkit, 1929 (BE 2472)).

[7] Kittisak Prokati, 'The Chronicle of Homosexuality' ('Tamnan Rak-ruam-phet'), in *Warasan Nitiat* (*The Law Journal*, Bangkok), 13, 2 (1983 [BE 2526]): 85-95.

[8] Peter A. Jackson, 'Thai Research on Male Homosexuality and Transgenderism and the Cultural Limits of Foucaultian Analysis', in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8, 1 (1997): 52-85.

[9] Jackson, 'An American Death in Bangkok'.

[10] Rosalind C. Morris, 'Educating Desire: Thailand, Transnationalism and transgression', in *Social Text* 52/53, 15, 3 & 4 (Fall/Winter 1997): 53-79, p. 74. Note: Morris' several studies contain numerous tensions and in earlier and later publications she presents opposite views of the value of Foucault's analyses in understanding the history of Thai discourses of eroticism. In a 1994 study (Rosalind C. Morris, 'Three Sexes and Four Sexualities: Redressing the Discourses on Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Thailand', in *Positions*, 2, 1 (1994): 15-43) Morris highlights the distinctiveness of Thai discourses and questions the value of Foucault's ideas, while in the 1997 article (Morris, 'Educating Desire') from which the above quote is taken she maintains that Western-styled discourses of sexuality have arrived in Thailand and Foucault's arguments provide 'the most fecund possibilities' for interpreting the local situation. Morris has not acknowledged or addressed this major change of direction, and in citing her studies it is important to keep in mind that her body of work does not present a single, fully consistent theoretical account of Thai cultural history.

[11] See: Penny Van Esterik, 'Repositioning Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Thai Studies', in *Genders and Sexualities in Modern Thailand*, ed. Peter A. Jackson and Nerida M. Cook, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999, pp. 275-89; Penny Van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000.

[12] For male same-sex cultures see: Jackson, 'The Persistence of Gender'; Graeme Storer, 'Rehearsing Gender and Sexuality in Modern Thailand: Masculinity and Male-Male Sex Behaviours', in *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent Boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*, ed. Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan, New York: Haworth, 1999, pp. 141-59; [Graeme Storer](#), 'Performing Sexual Identity: Naming and Resisting 'Gayness' in Modern Thailand', 2 (1999) online *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*; for female same-sex cultures see: Megan Sinnott, 'Masculinity and Tom Identity in

Thailand', in *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent Boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*, ed. Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan, New York: Haworth, 1999, pp. 97-119; Megan Sinnott, 'The Semiotics of Transgendered Sexual Identity in the Thai Print Media: Imagery and Discourse of the Sexual Other', *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 2, 4 (2000): 425-40; Megan Sinnott, 'Gendered Desires: Female Same-sex Sexuality, Transgender Identities and Nationalism in Thailand', PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2001.

[13] See for example: Judith Butler, 'Critically Queer', in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1, 1 (1993): 17-32; Butler, 'Against Proper Objects', in *Feminism Meets Queer Theory*, ed. Elizabeth Weed and Naomi Schor, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997, pp. 1-30; Elizabeth Weed and Naomi Schor (eds), *Feminism Meets Queer Theory (Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies)*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997; Tamsin Wilton, 'Which One's the Man? The Heterosexualisation of Lesbian Sex', in *Theorising Heterosexuality: Telling it Straight*, ed. Diane Richardson, Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1996, pp. 125-42.

[14] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York and London, 1990; Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, London: Routledge, 1993.

[15] John D'Emilio, 'Capitalism and Gay Identity', in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, David M. Halperin, New York and London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 467-76.

[16] Peter A. Jackson, 'Gay Capitals in Global Gay History: Cities, Local Markets, and the Origins of Bangkok's Same-Sex Cultures', in *Postcolonial Urbanism: Southeast Asian Cities and Global Processes*, ed. Ryan Bishop, John Phillips and Wei-Wei Yeo, New York and London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 151-63.

[17] Morris is here referring to Jean Baudrillard's book *Forget Foucault*, see Morris, 'Three Sexes and Four Sexualities', p. 38.

[18] David Halperin, 'Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities and the History of Sexuality', in *Representations*, 63 (1998): 93-120.

[19] See: Peter A. Jackson, 'Space, Theory and Hegemony: The Dual Crises of Asian Area Studies and Cultural Studies', in *Sojourn: Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 18, 1 (2003): 1-41; Jackson, 'Mapping Poststructuralism's Borders: The Case for Poststructuralist Area Studies', in *Sojourn: Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 18, 1 (2003): 42-88.

[20] See: Thongchai Winichakul, 'The Quest for *'Siwila'*: A Geographical Discourse of Civilisation Thinking in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Siam', in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 59, 3 (2000): 528-49.

[21] See: Tamara Lynn Loos, 'Gender Adjudicated: Translating Modern Legal Subjects in Siam,' PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, NY. (UMI Dissertation Services No. 9927372), 1999.

[22] Anna Harriette Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court, Being Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace at Bangkok*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, [1870] 1989, p. 98.

[23] Leonowens, *The English Governess*, p. 25.

[24] Leonowens, *The English Governess*, p. 76.

[25] Scot Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex and Popular Culture in Thailand*, New York

& Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

[26] Loos, *Gender Adjudicated*, p. 50.

[27] Loos, *Gender Adjudicated*, p. 50.

[28] Sulak Sivaraksa, 'New Traditions: Fighting "Wolves" by Donning Their "Clothing"', in *The Nation*, 27 April 1998, [Internet edition](#), site accessed 30 April 1998.

[29] Thongchai, 'The Quest for Siwilai'.

[30] Jacques de Coutre, *Vida de laques de Couttre, Natural de la Cuidad de Brugas*, Madrid 1640, cited and translated in Michael Smithies (ed.), *Descriptions of Old Siam*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 9.

[31] From Count C. de Forbin, *Mémoires*, Amsterdam, Girardi, 1729, cited and translated in Smithies, *Descriptions of Old Siam*, p. 79.

[32] George B. Bacon, *Siam, The Land of the White Elephant as It Is and Was*, New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, [1881] 1892, pp. 239-40.

[33] Suwadee T. Patana, 'The Politics of Women's Dress in Thai Society, 1945-1970', Paper presented to *5th International Conference on Thai Studies*, SOAS, London, 1993, no page numbers in original.

[34] Edmund Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam and Muscat; in the U.S. Sloop-of-War Peacock, David Geisinger, Commander, During the Years 1832-3-4*, Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., (first published in 1837 by Harper and Bros, New York), 1972, p. 248.

[35] Charles Gutzlaff, *Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China in 1831, 1832, & 1833, with Notices of Siam, Corea, & The Loo-Choo Islands*, London: Thomas Ward and Co, c.1835, p. 29.

[36] Florence Caddy, *To Siam and Malaya in the Duke of Sutherland's Yacht 'Sans Peur'*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, first published by Hurst and Blacket Ltd, London, [1889] 1992, p. 126.

[37] J.G.D. Campbell, *Siam in the Twentieth Century, Being the Experiences and Impressions of a British Official*, London: Edward Arnold, 1902, p. 112.

[38] Penny Edwards, 'Restyling Colonial Cambodia (1860-1954): French Dressing, Indigenous Custom and National Costume', in *Fashion Theory*, 5, 4 (2001): 389-416, p. 391.

[39] Edwards, 'Restyling Colonial Cambodia', p. 393.

[40] Suwadee, 'The Politics of Women's Dress', n.p.

[41] Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts*, p. 240.

[42] Leonowens, *The English Governess*, p. 94.

[43] Leonowens, *The English Governess*, p. 85.

[44] Campbell, *Siam in the Twentieth Century*, p. 113.

[45] Lauriston Sharp, Hazel M. Hauck, Kamol Janlekha, and Robert B. Textor, *Siamese Rice Village: A Preliminary Study of Bang Chan 1948-1949*, Bangkok: Cornell Research Center, 1953, pp. 87-8.

[46] 'Tomboy Denial', *Bangkok Post*, 21 Dec. 2002, p. 4.

[47] See Rachel Harrison, 'The Disruption of Female Desire and the Thai Literary Tradition of Eroticism, Religion and Aesthetics', in *Tenggara*, 41 (2000): 88-125.

[48] Niwat Korngphian, 'Eroticism in Thai Murals' [*kamaron nai phap khian Thai*], *Sangkomsat Parithat* [The Social Science Review Monthly], 12, 10 (1972): 50-56, p. 52. Note: Niwat does not provide a source for his quote from Rama IV's directive, nor does he say in what year the King visited the monastery or sent the order to the abbot.

[49] Niwat, 'Eroticism in Thai Murals', p. 52.

[50] Examples of love making scenes are: *Inao*, *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, and *Lilit Phra Lo*. Mattani cites as examples of Thai novelists: Suwanni Sukhontha, Rong Wongsawan, and Usna Phloengtham. See Mattani Moj dara Rutnin, *Modern Thai Literature: The Process of Modernization and the Transformation of Values*, Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1988, pp. 71-2.

[51] Cited in Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, p. 97.

[52] Cited in Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, p. 97.

[53] Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*.

[54] Morris, 'Three Sexes and Four Sexualities', p. 27.

[55] Peter A. Jackson, 'Tolerant but Unaccepting: Correcting Misperceptions of a Thai "Gay Paradise"', in *Genders and Sexualities in Modern Thailand*, ed. Peter Jackson and Nerida Cook, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999, pp. 226-42.

[56] Morris, 'Three Sexes and Four Sexualities', p. 32.

[57] See Van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand*.

[58] See: Niels Mulder, *Everyday Life in Thailand: An Interpretation*, Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1985; Pamela Myers-Moro, *Thai Music and Musicians in Contemporary Bangkok*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

[59] See: Rosalind C. Morris, *In the Place of Origins: Modernity and its Mediums in Northern Thailand*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2000; Ryan Bishop and Lillian S. Robinson, *Night Market: Sexual Cultures and the Thai Economic Miracle*, New York and London: Routledge, 1998; Van Esterik, 'Repositioning Gender'; Van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand*.

[60] See: Peter A. Jackson, 'Offending Images: Gender and Sexual Minorities, and State Control of the Media in Thailand', in *Media Fortunes, Changing Times: ASEAN States in Transition*, ed. Russell H. K. Heng, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002, pp. 201-30; Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002.

[61] Sutham Thammarongwit, "'Silence" and "Speech": The Dissimulations Concerning Sex in Thai Society' [*khwa-m-ngiap' kap 'kan-phut': khwa-m-dat-jarit reuang phet nai sangkhom Thai*], in

Jan Dara: Erotic Drama on the Silver Screen [*Jan Dara: sangwat natakam bon jor ngern*], ed. Duangreuthai Esanachatang Bangkok: Samnak-phim Rawang Banthat, 2001 (BE 2544): 120-27, p. 123.

[62] Sutham, "'Silence" and "Speech"', p. 125.

[63] Carl Bock, *Temples and Elephants: Travels in Siam in 1881-1882*, Singapore and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986.

[64] William Alfred Rae Wood, *Rhinoceros Blood, and Other Stories from the North of Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Trasvin Publications, (1935) 1991.

[65] *Bangkok Kan-meuang*, 18 July 1924, 'Man or Woman?' [*chai reu ying*], by Nai Lert. (Thanks to Scot Barmé for bringing this reference to my attention.)

[66] *Phet* is the Thai term for both 'sex' and 'gender'. See *Thai Thae*, 6 June 1931, 'The method of being a family: the field of young men and women' [*withi khornng khrohp-khrua: sanam ying-sao chai-num*], by Kulap Pa ('Wild Rose', pseud.) (Thanks to Scot Barmé for bringing this reference to my attention.)

[67] Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories*, trans. Chris Turner, London and New York: Verso, 1990, p. 168. Thanks to Rachel Harrison for bringing Baudrillard's remarks on Thai women to my attention.

[68] Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts*, p. 239.

[69] Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts*, p. 239.

[70] Caddy, *To Siam and Malaya*, p. 116.

[71] Caddy, *To Siam and Malaya*, p. 156.

[72] Bacon, *Siam*, p. 278.

[73] Campbell, *Siam in the Twentieth Century*, p. 136.

[74] Sharp et al., *Siamese Rice Village*, pp. 92-3. This raises the fascinating question of whether contemporary Thai feminists are today struggling against 'traditional' Thai patriarchal values or against 'civilised' and ultimately Western forms of sexual inequality that were introduced as part of the self-civilisation process. It is ironic that while nineteenth century Western observers criticised the oppression of the women of Siam under the yoke of traditional 'androcentric' values, the introduction of the values of Western 'civilisation' that supposedly give dignity and honour to women has contributed to the construction of new forms of gender-based discrimination.

[75] Lucien M. Hanks and Jane Richardson Hanks, 'Thailand: Equality Between the Sexes', in *Women in the New Asia: The Changing Social Roles of Men and Women in South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Barbara E. Ward, Paris: UNESCO, 1963, pp. 423-59, p. 447.

[76] Morris, *In the Place of Origins*, pp. 199-200. Morris is here citing: Jao Phraya Thiphphakorwong, *The Dynastic Chronicles: Bangkok Era Fourth Reign*, trans. Chadin Flood, Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1 (1965) p. 5.

[77] Morris, *In the Place of Origins*, p. 210.

[78] Morris, *In the Place of Origins*, pp. 201-202.

[79] Van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand*, pp. 99-100. Note: Van Esterik is here summarising parts of the following text: Walter Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1978.

[80] Varalee Sinlarat. 'Influences, Torn Between East and West, The Weaving of Thai Fashion', *Bangkok Post*, 9 August 1996, [Internet Edition](#), site accessed 10 August 1996.

[81] Chetana Nagavajara, "'Unsex Me Here': An Oriental's Plea for Gender Reconciliation", in *Warasan Mahawitthayalai Silpakorn* (Silpakorn University Journal), vol. 12 (special issue: September. 1992 - February 1993): 250-68, p. 261.

[82] Leonowens, *The English Governess*, p. 101.

[83] Morris, 'Three Sexes and Four Sexualities', p. 33.

[84] Suwadee, 'The Politics of Women's Dress', n.p.

[85] Mattani Mojdara Rutnin, *Dance, Drama and Theatre in Thailand: The Process of Development and Modernisation*, Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, 1993, p. 190.

[86] Morris, *In the Place of Origins*, p. 182.

[87] Thepchu Thapthorng, *A Book of Historical Photographs* [Nangseu Phap Prawattisat], Bangkok: Krung Siam Kan-phim, 1980 (BE 2523), p. 9.

[88] Michael Wright, *Farang Khlang Siam* [The Siam-obsessed Farang], Bangkok: Silapawatthanatham (Art and Culture) Samnak-phim Matchon, 1999 (BE 2542), p. 111.

[89] Thanks to Tamara Loos for this observation.

[90] (*Luang*) Thamrong Nawasawat, "'Concerning Personal Names": The Address of Captain Luang Thamrong Nawasawat, Head of the Committee for Establishing the Principles for Giving Personal Names, Presented at the Department of Propaganda on 25 July 1941' [*reuang cheu bukkhon: pathakatha khornng n. o. luang thamrong Nawasawat prathan kammakan phijarana wang lak tang cheu bukkhon sadaeng na krom khosanakan 25 k.kh. 2484*], *Thesaphiban* [official journal of the Ministry of the Interior], 41, 10 (October 1941 [BE 2484]): 2125-49, p. 2127. Thanks to Michael Connors for bringing this article to my attention.

[91] The continuing influence of Phibun-period policies is reflected in the fact that in 2002 former Interior Minister Purachai Piamsombun cracked down on recreational drug use, underage drinking, and other activities considered immoral in the name of 'establishing social order' [*jat rabiap sangkhom*], a phraseology borrowed directly from Phibun's dicates.

[92] Morris, 'Three Sexes and Four Sexualities', p. 34.

[93] See Mattani, *Dance, Drama, and Theatre in Thailand*.

[94] Voravudhi Chirasombutti and Anthony Diller "'Who Am "I" In Thai?": The Thai First Person Pronoun: Self-Reference or Gendered Self?', in *Genders and Sexualities in Modern Thailand*, eds. Peter A. Jackson and Nerida M. Cook, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999, pp. 114-35, p. 120.

[95] Voravudhi & Diller, "'Who am "I" in Thai?'"', p. 121.

[96] Judith Butler, 'Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism', in

Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left, ed. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, London and New York: Verso, 2000, pp. 11-43, p. 29.

[97] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 95.

[98] Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996, p. 86.

[99] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990, p. 27.

[100] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 27, cited by Wilton, 'Which One's the Man?' p. 137.

[101] Morris, 'Educating Desire'.

[102] Van Esterik, 'Repositioning Gender' and *Materializing Thailand*.

[103] Nerida Cook and Peter A. Jackson, 'Introduction: Desiring Constructs: Transforming Sex/Gender Orders in Twentieth Century Thailand', in *Genders and Sexualities in Modern Thailand*, ed. Peter A. Jackson and Nerida M. Cook, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999, pp. 1-27.

[104] Chris Lyttleton, *Endangered Relations: Negotiating Sex and AIDS in Thailand*, Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2000.

[105] Andrea Whittaker, 'Women and Capitalist Transformation in a Northeastern Thai Village', in *Genders and Sexualities in Modern Thailand*, ed. Peter A. Jackson and Nerida M. Cook, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999, pp. 43-62.

[106] Morris, 'Three Sexes and Four Sexualities' and 'Educating Desire'.

[107] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*.

[108] Paraphrased from Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, pp. 48-9.

[109] Gilbert Herdt, *Sambia Sexual Culture: Essays from the Field*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 8.

[110] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, London: Penguin Books, 1992.

[111] Morris, 'Three Sexes and Four Sexualities', p. 33.

[112] Hanks and Hanks, 'Thailand', p. 446.

[113] Hanks and Hanks, 'Thailand', p. 449.

[114] Suwadee, 'The Politics of Women's Dress', n.p.

[115] Van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand*, p. 100.

[116] Van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand*, p. 119.

[117] Altman, 'Rupture or Continuity?', p. 89.

[118] Peter A. Jackson, *Dear Uncle Go: Male Homosexuality in Thailand*, Bangkok: Bua Luang Books, 1995, p. 193.

[119] Garber, *Vested Interests*, p. 131.

[120] Randolph Trumbach, 'Sodomitical Subcultures, Sodomitical Roles, and the Gender Revolution in the Eighteenth Century: The Recent Historiography', in *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality During the Enlightenment*, ed. Robert Purks MacCuubbin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 109-21, pp. 118-19.

[121] Trumbach, 'Sodomitical Subcultures', p. 118.

[122] Trumbach, 'Sodomitical Subcultures', p. 118.

[123] Randolph Trumbach, 'Gender and the Homosexual Role in Modern Western Culture: The 18th and 19th Centuries Compared', in *Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality*, ed. Dennis Altman, Amsterdam: An Dekker/Schorer and London: Gay Men's Press, 1989, pp. 149-69, p. 151.

[124] See Jackson, 'An American Death in Bangkok'.

[125] Dennis Altman, 'On Global Queering', in [Australian Humanities Review](#), July 1996, site accessed 19 June 2003.