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A Note on Thai Transcription
and Citation of Thai Names

There is no generally agreed system of representing Thai in roman script, and all current systems have some limitations. In this book we follow a modified version of the Thai Royal Institute system. This system makes no distinction between long and short vowel forms; and tones are not represented. We differ slightly from the Royal Institute system as follows: "j" is used for the Thai consonant jar jan, not "ch", and "eu", "eu", "euay" (not "ue", "uea", "ueay") are used for these vowels and diphthongs. Dashes are used to separate the units of Thai compound expressions that are translated as single terms in English, such as khawm-pen-thai for "Thaeness".

We follow the Thai norm of referring to Thai authors by given names, not surnames, and all citations by Thai authors are in alphabetical order in the bibliography and elsewhere according to given names.
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Capitalism, LGBT Activism, and Queer Autonomy in Thailand

Peter A. Jackson

Ambivalent Queer Perspectives on Capitalism and Globalization

Queer studies in the West have had an ambivalent relationship to both capitalism and globalization. Alternative accounts variously emphasize the moments of subjection and exploitation on the one hand, and of autonomy on the other, in the intermeshing of queer gender and sexual cultures with globalizing capitalism. Citing Bernstein and Schaffner, Jeffrey Weeks summarizes these tensions when he observes:

While the spread of global capitalism has exacerbated social inequalities, fragmented families, and severed individuals from traditional social ties, it has also given rise to transnational feminist activism, a burgeoning lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer (LGBTQ) movement, a renewed commitment to international human rights, and myriad forms of eroticism and community. (Bernstein and Schaffner 2005, xi, cited by Weeks 2007, 199)

The studies brought together in Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan’s edited collection Queer globalizations (2002) reflect these tensions in Western queer studies; some contributors see the market as a source of queer subjection and others argue that it provides the basis for movements to enhance queer autonomy in an overwhelmingly heteronormative world. As editors, Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan negotiate these tensions when, in introducing the collection they state:

Queerness is now global. Whether in advertising, film, performance art, the Internet, or the political discourses of human rights in emerging democracies, images of queer sexualities and cultures now circulate around the globe . . . in a world where what used to be considered
the 'private' is ever more commodified and marketed, queerness has become both an object of consumption, an object in which nonqueers invest their passions and purchasing power, and an object through which queers constitute their identities in our contemporary consumer-oriented globalized world. (2002, 1)

Early accounts of cultural globalization by queer studies analysts tended to emphasize two main points, namely, that it was a process of Westernizing cultural homogenization and that subjection to globalizing market processes involves a loss of autonomy. These intersecting views are reflected in Chela Sandoval’s succinct claim, “At the turn of the twenty-first century the zones are clear: postmodern globalization is a neocolonizing force” (2002, 26). More recent studies, including the chapters in this book, challenge the presumption that cultural globalization necessarily entails a neocolonizing Americanization or homogenization of the world’s queer cultures. Cruz-Malavé and Maraliansan (2002, 6) themselves reject the view that globalization equates with cultural homogenization, pointing out that the rise of intra-Asian and other regional gay networks reflects the fact that globalizing processes emerge as much from the non-West as from the West.

As reflected in the chapters here, over the past decade queer Bangkok has arguably been much more influenced by, and become a source of influences for, gay Asia than the gay West. Stuart Koe, co-founder of the Singapore-based gay and lesbian web portal fridae.com, believes that in the 2000s gay America is no longer as important for gay Asians as it was in the 1980s and 1990s, contending that gay Asia is now “feeding off itself” and is increasingly decoupling from Western queer cultures (Interview, 25 February 2008). Dodi Oetomo, founder of Indonesia’s first gay NGO, Gaya Nusantara, argues that Sydney’s Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is a significantly more important cultural influence for gay Indonesians than either the United States or Europe (Interview, 25 February 2008).

However, the studies here provide a less clear-cut answer to the question of whether the market provides more avenues for queer autonomy and institutionalizing LGBT rights or whether it operates as a system of subordination and exploitation. Thailand’s communities of gay men, lesbians, and khaothoey each have somewhat different relations to the market, and their lives and distinctive cultures are not affected in uniform ways by the commodification inherent in capitalism. This diversity and the absence of uniformity among Thai gay, lesbian, and khaothoey cultures is indeed a general feature of their respective relations to Western queer cultures, not only of their relations to global markets and transnational processes (see Jackson 2004c).

Overall, Thai gay and khaothoey cultures are more highly commodified than ton-tee lesbian culture and, at the risk of overgeneralization, it is perhaps the case that Thai gay men are more anxious about their cultural-financial status as consumers than they are concerned about their role as homosexual citizens. Interestingly, as both Megan Sinoott and Douglas Sanders note in this volume, Thai lesbians have been at the forefront of the Thai LGBT rights movement. While increasing numbers of Thai gay men have succeeded in creating a diverse range of commercial niches for themselves, Thai lesbians, suffering from the lower-than-average purchasing power and the cultural restrictions imposed on all Thai women, have made the politicized public space of rights and citizenship much more their domain of action.

At the same time that capitalism provides avenues of opportunity for some Thai gay men, it also erects barriers of exclusion for others. As a highly commodified identity with a middle-class cachet, Thai gay identity comes literally with a price tag, often excluding men with lower incomes from participating fully in this market-based zone of sexual autonomy. In the early 1990s, one working-class welder from a rural background in northern Thailand whom I interviewed in Bangkok made the bitterly ironic remark, “I’m too poor to be gay.” This man was in his early thirties and was certain of his homosexual identity. He was dating a younger man from northeast Thailand who was working as a waiter in a Bangkok restaurant and whom he had met at a cruising spot in a Bangkok park. What he meant was that he could not afford the consumerist lifestyle, that, by the 1990s, had come to mark representations of “gayness” (khom-nayan-gay) in Thailand. In brief, one needs money to afford the gay lifestyle, and poverty is a barrier to full participation in this market-based identity and culture, which are to a significant extent based on consumption.

Transgender khaothoey also have an ambivalent relationship to the market. On the one hand, as Stéphane Rennerman observes in his chapter, the commodification of feminine beauty in Thailand, in the form of mass-mediated transgender/transsexual beauty contests, provides a platform from which khaothoey can challenge disparaging stereotypes and stake a claim for cultural and social recognition. On the other hand, Aaren Alzura points out that the internationalization of Thailand’s cosmetic-surgery industry has inflated the prices of gender reassignment surgery and related technologies of physiological feminization, making it increasingly difficult for Thai khaothoey to afford the self-transforming medical interventions that permit them to perform successfully on the national stage of feminine beauty.
Queer Consumers or LGBT Citizens?

Being a consumer cannot be equated with being a citizen, and market rights to consume cannot be taken as guaranteeing political rights. In reviewing the 2007 book Consumed: How markets corrupt children, infantilize adults, and swallow citizens whole, by Benjamin Barber, who is well-known for his 1996 study, Jihad vs McWorld, Barry Schwarz distinguishes the commercial freedom of consumers from the political freedom of citizens:

We respond to dissatisfaction in the market with exit; We leave a store (or website) and go to another. We respond to dissatisfaction in the state with voice: We march, we write letters to the editor, we work in political campaigns…. It’s a serious mistake… to confuse the two. And it’s an equally serious mistake to assume the success of one implies the success of the other: [Barber states] the victory of consumers is not synonymous with the victory of citizens. McWorld can prevail and liberty can still lose.’ (Schwarz 2007, 10).

It would seem to follow that there must be two forms of analysis of the possibilities for queer autonomy and rights under capitalism. On the one hand, we need to study the market-based aspects of autonomy gained by queer purchasing power, but on the other, we equally need to consider the extent to which market-based societies provide opportunities for institutionalizing queer rights in law. Market-based queer cultures can find niches even in the absence of institutional frameworks, by working within and around restrictive legal and bureaucratic systems, by evading state power (“flying under the radar”, as it is put by queer Singaporeans), or by paying the police and other homophobic authorities to look the other way, as was often the case in Thailand in the twentieth century.

Western gay/lesbian and queer studies, often operating under the residual impact of Marxism and, more recently, of post-Marxist anti-globalization analyses, have at times placed too much emphasis on the exploitative dimension of capitalism. Drawing upon the experiences of the modern West, such analyses do not give sufficient attention to the extent to which capitalism can become a vehicle for enhancing queer autonomy in politically authoritarian Asian states that are nonetheless committed to market-based economies. In their different ways, twenty-first-century China, Singapore, and Thailand each provides an instance of the importance of the market for queer autonomy in authoritarian, market-based economies. Despite the intense political controls exercised by China’s Communist Party, the decades of one-party rule by Singapore’s People’s Action Party, and the abolition and subsequent rewriting of the country’s constitution by the Thai military after the September 2006 coup, all three countries have nonetheless permitted spaces for booming queer commercial scenes. (See Alex Au here on Singapore, and Leung [2008], Ho [2010], and Ching [2010] on China and Hong Kong.) In the early twenty-first century, anti-democratic political authoritarianism takes diverse forms in different Asian societies, but is not necessarily homophobic or anti-gay. On the contrary, in Thailand military governments have at times provided more spaces for queer autonomy than democratically elected governments that have followed populist moral agendas.

The studies here provide standpoints from which to question the Eurocentric assumptions that, in the 1990s, marked both neoliberal and neo-Marxist accounts of cultural globalization. In addition to providing evidence for a critique of the neoliberal, McDomestication view of global queering as emerging from the export of Western cultural models (see Wilson 2006), they also lead us to question the neo-Marxist view that the spread of capitalism necessarily entails the imposition of an alienating, foreign-controlled regime of economic exploitation. In contrast to both these positions, the chapters in this book present pictures of Thai queer cultures as emerging within the economic matrices of both local and emerging intra-Asian regional markets. In contrast to the Eurocentrism inherent in both Western neoliberal and neo-Marxist frameworks, Thailand’s commercial queer scenes are here seen through the lens of local agency as indigenous phenomena, not as the outcome of either Western hegemony, exploitation by foreign capital, or the imposition of alien cultural forms.

The moment of autonomy was in fact foregrounded in one of the earliest and consistently most influential accounts of the relationship between capitalism and queer cultures and communities. According to John D’Emilio, it was American capitalism’s replacement of both the self-sufficient rural household and slave production with wage labour that “gave individuals a relative autonomy, which was the necessary material condition for the making of lesbianism and gayness” (1993, 467). He identified the free-labour system as a key factor that allowed, “large numbers of men and women in the late twentieth century to call themselves gay, to see themselves as part of a community of similar men and women, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity” (1993, 468). D’Emilio’s analysis was first presented in the early 1980s, before the emergence of queer studies in the 1990s. However, his argument can be reformulated in the idiom of queer studies as the proposition that a body of capital precedes the emergence of modern queer bodies. D’Emilio’s analysis is relevant beyond the gay and lesbian histories of the United States and is echoed in a wide range of subsequent studies. In seeking to explain global queering, Dennis Altman has stated that “there is a clear connection between the expansion of consumer society and the growth of overt lesbian/gay worlds” (1996b), and Chris Berry has argued:
Behind the adoption and adaptation of lesbian and gay sexual identities into Asian metropolitan cultures lies the global spread of postmodern consumer capitalism and the construction of identity not around national production but multiple niche markets. (1994, 11)

Peter Drucker (2000) has also drawn on D’Emilio to argue for the primary role of the market and capitalist urbanization in the global rise of new queer cultures and identities: “Involvement in a market economy and a certain minimum income level seem essential in allowing people to become part of lesbian/gay communities in the Third World” (2000, 17).

Ann Pellegrini has sought to disentangle the ambiguities in the relationships between capitalism and the expansion of autonomous social, cultural, and political spaces for queer existence. She looks for relationships between the economic transformation from industrial capitalism to post-industrial or commodity capitalism on the one hand, and the cultural transformation from homosexuality as a minority identity to an alternative lifestyle on the other. She opens her study with the following questions:

[What is the relationship between [queer] legal and social rights, on the one hand, and economic recognition and consummation opportunities, on the other?] ... [What is the relationship between being addressed as consuming subjects ... and becoming full social subjects, subjects, that is, of rights? (Pellegrini 2002, 134-135)]

While the causal linkages require further explication, the chapters here nevertheless show that the two processes—of queers emerging as both publicly acknowledged consuming subjects and as the subjects of legal rights—took place in tandem in early-twentieth-century Thailand. In concluding her study, Pellegrini disagrees with the view that the commodification of gay cultures equates with depoliticization:

[I]t seems to me that commodification is not the end of politics, need not amount to depoliticization, but may actually constitute the starting point for contemporary lesbian and gay politics in the United States. Rather than nostalgically yearning for lesbian and gay identities unmarked by commodity capitalism, what if we acknowledged that lesbian and gay identities have always been in some way marked by capitalism, so too have heterosexual identities ...

There is nothing new about the intimacy of capital and community formation, to the racy capital-identity-community, we might then reply, “So what?” This is not the end of politics, gay, queer, or otherwise, but among its operating conditions and constraints. (2002, 141)

Cruz-Malévé and Manalansan arrive at a similar conclusion, namely, that the current conditions of market-based globalization are not only a site of dispossession but “also a creative site for queer agency and empowerment” (2002, 2). Despite its tendency to reduce the social and political significance of queer sexualities and cultures to commodities in the marketplace, capitalism “has also provided the struggle for queer rights with an expanded terrain for intervention” (Cruz-Malévé and Manalansan 2002, 2). This relation was exemplified in 2007 in Bangkok. As Douglas Sanders details in his chapter, in that year Bangkok’s Novotel Hotel management offered a public apology to a prominent lésbica businesswoman who had been denied entry to the hotel’s popular discotheque because her feminine gender presentation did not match the male gender specified on her official identity card. This apology was offered after the NGO Bangkok Rainbow initiated an international Internet campaign calling for a boycott of the Novotel hotel chain because of its discriminatory policy. In this case, the right to unfettered access to consume entertainment in an up-market venue was linked directly to the broader issue of rights for transgender persons.

Tourist Zones as Spaces of Thai Queer Autonomy

Literature on international tourism in developing countries such as Thailand often focuses on its destructive impact on the local culture and physical environment and the subjection of tourism-industry workers to the dictates of foreign tourists. It is rarely mentioned, however, that some Thais may choose to work in tourist zones such as Pattaya because they offer spaces of relative autonomy from the restrictive cultural norms that obtain in the rest of the country. Timo Ojanen reports that the transgender manager of an NGO in Pattaya dealing in transgender health and rights issues “considered Pattaya to be a territory of freedom” (2009, 22) because it is home to one the biggest communities of transgenders and transsexuals in the country, who provide mutual support and help for each other. Many Thai gays, lesbians, and kathoys find their own society highly restrictive, with tourist zones such as Pattaya and Phuket, which Thai authorities permit to cater for and pander to foreign tastes and cultural expectations, offering an escape from the heteronormative expectations that dominate much of the rest of the country. The “traditional Thai culture” packaged and sold to tourists may not always be experienced by Thais as a source of exotic beauty, but rather as an oppressive expression of state control over everyday life. As historian Kasi Tanapirat observes:

The current rapid ... changes in Thai identity have been brought about by two major forces. First, there is the pervasive process of economic and cultural globalization. On the other hand, there is the attempt of the Thai state to hold on to its cultural and political hegemony; to
control the signification of Thainess amidst the flux of globalization and commodification. Under the pretext of conserving Thainess, the state tries to maintain and reassert its official nationalist authority over an increasingly fluid and complex society and culture. (2001, 164–165)

Designated tourist zones, which contain potentially disruptive foreign cultural influences within highly delimited geographical spaces, may provide Thai queers with places in which they can leave behind Thai heteronormative expectations without leaving Thailand. Rather than being “Westernized” by participating in these zones of commodified cultural escapism, Thai queers may find the space and opportunity to experiment in new ways of being Thai. The development of Pattaya and Phuket as containment zones for international tourism means that they have emerged as spaces in which broader Thai cultural norms may be transgressed, not only by foreign tourists but also by both Thais.

Research on male sex workers in Thailand (e.g. Storer 1999a) has pointed out that, as in other countries, many men engaging in sex work are not homosexual. However, some male sex workers are gay and may not enter sex work merely because they have no other option to make money. For a young man from a poor background who is aware of his homosexual interests, but whose opportunities are limited by poverty and a poor education, sex work may provide a way to participate in the bourgeois Thai gay world—albeit as a service-provider rather than as a consumer. Research on male sex work too often focuses on the element of exploitation while overlooking the capacity of prostitution to provide an avenue for achieving a degree of sexual autonomy, that is, of being able to live a gay lifestyle and participate in the gay scene (sangklam gay). Some poor gay men and kathoey may choose to pay the price of being stigmatized by engaging in sex work to be able to live some form of the idealized Thai gay/kathoey lifestyle.

**Buying Spaces for Queer Autonomy in Thailand**

Witchayane Chunya provides insight into Thai cultural attitudes in which personal wealth can be used to “buy” a space for queer sexual autonomy within a heteronormative culture wherein family ties remain central to queer identity and sense of self-worth. As part of her doctoral research on Thai transgender sex workers, Witchayane interviewed a kathoey sex worker in Pattaya, Ton, aged twenty-eight:

> Ton lived in extremely poor conditions before migrating to Bangkok to work in the sex industry. His family noticed his physical change because of the hormones (he was having injections of oestrogen and anti-androgen) but his father did not complain. Ton said, ‘He shut his mouth up after I gave him money.’ (2008, 95)

Witchayane’s study points to the way that Thai queers may “buy” the right to sexual and gender autonomy within their families by providing financial support. Here a kathoey’s participation in sex work, which, as Sam Winter observes in this volume, is an occupation forced upon many Thai transgenders and transsexuals as a result of discrimination in the job market, nonetheless provided her with the means to evade conforming to heteronormative expectations to live as a man and marry while still fulfilling filial expectations to care for aging parents. Having an independent source of income is therefore important for many Thai queers in enabling them to buy a space to be different within their families. This is not only true for queers from poorer backgrounds such as Ton; it is equally so for middle-class gay men and lesbians who, in taking care of nephews, nieces, and aging parents, demonstrate filial responsibility that, in turn, confers a degree of sexual autonomy that permits them to lead a gay or lesbian life.

It is perhaps for these reasons that Thai queers appear less anxious about the market than many Western observers of global queering. In Asian societies with highly restrictive and gender conformist cultures, often monitored and policed by state bureaucracies, such as Thailand’s Ministry of Culture, the market can provide a zone of relative autonomy from the heteronormative demands of both the state and family. Viewed from the perspective of the queer cultures and communities now maturing on the western shores of the Pacific Ocean, capitalism is more likely to be seen as a force of queer autonomy than of subjection, and of local cultural differentiation rather than Westernizing homogenization.

As Yao Souchou, a Singaporean scholar, observes, the “nation states of Southeast Asia—of both the socialist and liberal democratic kinds—are endowed with awesome coercive power to impose their iron will on their societies” (2001, 4–5). In this context, Kasian argues that commodified popular culture in Thailand, of which Thai queer cultures can be classed as one rapidly growing sector, should be seen as an escape from the “desolate semiotics” (cited by Yao 2001, 19) of the notion of Thainess defined by the Thai state. For Kasian, consumerist consumption provides a means of “cultural liberation from the nationalistic regimes of the past and present, be [they] radical leftist or right-wing authoritarian” (2001, 153), and he concludes:

> The liberating force of consumption and brand names leads to the next logical step: the liberation of identity from the national as defined by the state . . . The manifold freedom from the barriers imposed by national or ethnic self-identity simultaneously allows Thai consumers the possibility of consuming commodities, not for their utility value, but as cultural signs of desired identity. (2001, 156)
Despite the severe economic setback of the 1997 Asian economic crisis, in Thailand post-Cold War neoliberalism provided the means for initially bourgeois LGBT cultures—formed during the country’s earlier Fordist phase of capitalist development—to expand to beyond their middle-class origins and become a new way of life for increasing numbers of working-class Thais. Indeed, as I detail in my earlier chapter here, one striking outcome of early twenty-first-century globalization for Thailand’s queer cultures has been its provision of the means for gyness and other identities to become affordable by the working classes. The market is indeed a zone of both queer autonomy and subordination, providing a means to resist and establish freedom from heteronormative state cultural controls and family expectations at the same time that it subordinates queer people to the vagaries of unpredictable market forces. Nonetheless, the market has provided a space upon which queer rights are being built. In the twentieth century, Thai queers “enjoyed” a begrudging cultural tolerance that was rare in most developing countries, but they were nonetheless minoritized and discriminated against as laughing-stocks who had no guaranteed rights. At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, we see the beginnings of acceptance as they are taken seriously as consuming subjects by marketing agencies and as citizens deserving of legally enshrined rights by the bureaucracy and increasing numbers of politicians. It would be surprising if these parallel developments were not different faces of the same processes of social, economic, and cultural transformation brought about by Thailand’s further integration into both regional and global networks.

Introduction

When describing a cultural or societal pattern of beliefs, it is tempting to slip into a singular narrative. Ascribing a set of attitudes or beliefs to a cultural area reinforces the idea of a discrete, almost organism-like entity that has unity, coherence, and defined borders such that the cultural entity can be compared with other, similarly discrete entities. This model, popular in early anthropology in the form of structural-functional or cultural-personality approaches, has been largely nuanced, if not replaced, with more discursive approaches, influenced by Foucauldian discourse analysis, often combined with a focus on Marxist conceptions of hegemony (e.g. Ortner 1989; Roseberry 1989; Stoler 2002; Williams 1977). These complementary approaches have yielded analysis and appreciation of the fluidity of boundaries and borders in the construction of cultural entities. Studies of the multiple and shifting meanings of sexuality and gender have also been an important dimension of recent Thai studies (e.g. Jackson 1997a, 1997b, 2004d, 2006; Loos 2006; Tersdak 2002; Wilson 2004) and queer anthropology more generally (Blackwood 1998, 2007; Boellstorff 2005, 2007; Leap and Boellstorff 2004; Manalansan 1997, 2003; Wekker 2006). This chapter builds on these approaches by exploring the shifting and contextual discourses of sexuality and gender within two Thai organizations, Anjaree and Lesia, that are devoted to lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender, or LGBT, communities but have particular emphasis on female same-sex sexuality. Here I contrast the distinctive approaches to sexual and gender rights of these two organizations.

Anjaree, Thailand’s longest-standing LGBT rights organization, has been the most consistent in engaging directly with rights-based discourses. While the members and organizers of Anjaree are women, the organization is geared