

Laboratory-assisted reproduction

Add eggs gathered from cloistered places,
From gonads goaded into gravid opulence.
And sperm suffused with ancestral potency.

Then gametes join in dark synthetic climes,
Bear primal plans to present times.

Formed from their infatuated union,
Transferred by my tinker's hands to your waiting womb,
The embryo has its way and names you mother.

I have often probed that fecund place,
And in the dark vista of my sonic vision,
Sought the motion of a nascent heart.

Bearing witness to life,
Beating ceaselessly within us,
Joining all creatures past, present, future
From the first conjugal meeting.

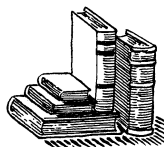
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Shift

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Thailand's miracle: women working on their backs



Night Market

Sexual Cultures and the Thai Economic Miracle
Ryan Bishop, Lillian S Robinson. New York: Routledge. 1998.
Pp 252. \$17.99. ISBN 0-415-91429-9.

The history of the AIDS epidemic in Thailand illustrates how rapidly the disease can spread where risky behaviour is highly prevalent. Between 1987—"Visit Thailand" year—and 1993, HIV prevalence rates skyrocketed throughout the country, reaching 50–70% in groups of commercial sex workers, 30% in young military recruits, and 10% in pregnant women in the northern part of the country. Most transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases occurred in brothels and other locales in Thailand's vast sex industry.

Night Market describes how this sex industry thrives on international sex tourism and traces the historical, cultural, material, and textual traditions that made this tourism a foundation of the developing Thai economy. The book documents the role of tourism

and particularly sex tourism in modernisation strategies, and describes the historical forces that drive men to pursue their sexual fantasies abroad and the related factors that bring women, despite humiliation and fear, to go-go bars and brothels to make these fantasies a reality and a commodity.

We learn that the Thai government's interest in tourism as an economic force began in the aftermath of the Cold War. In the late 1960s tourists spent about \$16 million a year. But this industry got a real boost in 1971, when the World Bank sent its tourism expert to help plan the expanded development of the Thai tourist industry because of the "unstable geo-political situation in China" resulting from the expanding war in Vietnam and the need for American military to find a comfortable friendly country for R & R (rest and relaxation). More than

anything else, this decision set up a demand for a sex and age specific labour force. Young Thai women from rural areas sold in bondage to sex-work establishments became the source of food, housing, and luxuries for millions of Thais at the expense of agricultural development. International pressures did not establish the sex industry in Thailand (prostitution became legal in 1902), but brought it to levels that resulted in enormous economic returns.

What is perhaps most remarkable is how this industry appears to operate within the realm of "cultural aphasia", for to speak openly about it would threaten the public discourse of modernisation. The modernisation process began under King Rama VI 80 years ago and is so aptly illustrated by the change in name of the country from Siam to Thailand (Land of the Free) in 1939. It has come today to mean money, wealth, and Western materialism. As a consequence of this aphasia and decades of media censorship, criticism of the nation is met with refutation or outright denial. Particularly taboo is public comment on the monarchy and the sex industry.