

# From Sex Tourist to Son-in-Law

## Emergent Masculinities and Transient Subjectivities of *Farang* Men in Thailand

by Eric C. Thompson, Pattana Kitiarsa, and Suriya Smutkupt

CA+ Online-Only Material: Supplement A

*Farang* (foreign, Caucasian) men have played a significant role in Thai society for several decades as sex tourists and, more recently, as *farang* sons-in-law, men who marry Thai wives and often settle down in rural Thai villages. While both of these phenomena have received considerable attention, in neither case have the experiences and motivations of the *farang* men involved been adequately examined. Based on fieldwork in Bangkok and the northeast region of Isan, we examine the relationship between emergent masculinities of sex tourist and son-in-law at a societal level and the transient subjectivities of men who experience them. Anthropological theory regularly conflates subjectivities and the cultural and social formations, particularly “identities,” that shape them. On the basis of our analysis, we argue that a distinction between the two is needed in order to adequately theorize changing masculinities. The ways in which men’s subjective experiences of masculinity change are different from the ways in which culturally shared, socially constructed, and politically-economically facilitated masculine identities emerge. We caution that evidence of the former—transient subjectivity at an individual level—is not evidence of the latter—changing or emergent masculine identities at a societal level.

We met Patrick at a café in a small northeast market town in Thailand, where he was drinking beer and whisky alone at midmorning.<sup>1</sup> Speaking slurred English with bits of Thai mixed in, Patrick related a lovelorn tale of woe about his “*mia suay mahk mahk*” (“very, very beautiful wife”). He told us how he had spent some 5 million Thai baht (~US\$150,000) over 4 years living with her and chasing after her. He had married her, built a house in the northeast region of Isan, given money to her parents, and bought her large amounts of gold. He had, by his account, done everything he could to get her to settle down with him in rural Isan. But at the urging of her parents and sister, she had chased him out of the house he bought for her and gone off to Pattaya to find a new, better *farang* (Westerner). Patrick was a large English man and former soldier in his early fifties with several adult children from a previous marriage in England, whose names he had tattooed across his body. He was now living primarily on a military disability pension. His “*mia suay mahk mahk*” was a 23-year-old woman from Isan.

**Eric C. Thompson** is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore (AS1 03-06, 11 Arts Link, Singapore 117570 [socect@nus.edu.sg]). **Pattana Kitiarsa** was Associate Professor in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies of the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. **Suriya Smutkupt** is an independent scholar based in Chiang Mai (smutkupt69@gmail.com). This paper was submitted 24 II 15, accepted 11 IV 15, and electronically published 26 I 16.

Patrick is one of tens of thousands of *farang* men making lives for themselves in Thailand.<sup>2</sup> Across the agricultural hinterland of Isan, in nearly every village, are at least one or two *ban farang* (literally, houses of Westerners). In some villages, there may be dozens or even a hundred such homes, built in most cases by partnerships between *farang* men and Isan women.<sup>3</sup> Bars, cafés, and restaurants in Isan market towns cater to a clientele of middle-aged and elderly *farang* men. Far off to the south, in the entertainment districts of Bangkok and the beach resorts of Pattaya and Phuket, middle-aged *farang* men are visible everywhere in public spaces, frequently accompanied by considerably younger Thai women.

These men and the places they inhabit—from the *ban farang* in villages to the cafés in rural market centers to the tourist entertainment spaces—have over several decades become a familiar, if still conceptually “foreign,” part of contem-

1. Fieldwork was carried out by the authors working singly or in pairs over several years; for the sake of brevity, “we” is used to refer to the researchers. Names and incidental details have been changed to protect informants’ confidentiality.

2. While no precise count exists, we can safely estimate that *farang* men living in Northeast Thailand number in the tens of thousands and that sex tourists (loosely defined) number in the hundreds of thousands annually.

3. In our research, we encountered relatively few instances of similar transnational partnerships of *farang* women and Isan men and of same-sex couples.

porary Thailand.<sup>4</sup> They embody in perceptions, if not always in practice, two figures of masculinity. The first, by now globally recognized figure is that of the sex tourist, who travels overseas from wealthy to less affluent countries in search of cheap and easily available commercial sex (e.g., Brennan 2004; Cabezas 2009; Kempadoo 2004; Manderson 1997; Padilla et al. 2007; Truong 1990). The second, more specific to Thailand, is the *farang* husband (*pua farang*), who is married to or in a long-term conjugal relationship with a Thai “wife of a foreigner” (*mia farang*; Boonmathya 2005; Lafferty and Maher 2014; Lapanun 2012, 2013; Mix and Piper 2003; Sirijit 2013; Sirijit and Angeles 2013).<sup>5</sup> In the Isan context, *farang* husbands are also, importantly, in-marrying *farang* sons-in-law (*kiew farang*) of matrilineal, matrilocal Isan families.<sup>6</sup>

Both the sex tourist and *farang* son-in-law are emergent masculinities and recognizable “figures of modernity” of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in Thailand (cf. Barker, Harms, and Lindquist 2013). We can sketch only in broad strokes here the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions within and through which these contrasting masculinities have emerged. In doing so, we point to the articulation between these emergent masculinities and the transient subjectivities of men who embody, practice, and, in particular, move through them. We theorize change as occurring both in terms of emergence with regard to identities or public masculinities and transience with regard to subjectivity, arguing that these are distinctive sorts of change, which other theorists frequently conflate.<sup>7</sup>

The emergence of sex tourists and of *farang* husbands—cum—*farang* sons-in-law in the late twentieth century are a matter of sociocultural change. While they are embodied by particular men in relationship to particular women and their kin, these formations of masculinity emerge through the coming together of political-economic forces (global capitalism, neoliberal citizenship, and the like), and social-cultural forces (including Isan matrilineal traditions, devaluation of patriarchal masculinity in the West, and recreational tourism, among oth-

ers). The shift some men make from embodying, if not necessarily identifying with, these masculine identities—from being a sex tourist to being a son-in-law—involves changing subjectivities, in other words, how particular men feel about their position vis-à-vis particular assemblages of masculine identity. But subjective transitions do not necessarily involve any change in that identity or assemblage itself. The importance of this distinction, which we will return to below, is that conflating the two may result in misleading perceptions of, and, possibly, misleading prescriptions for, changing gendered beliefs, ideas, and practices.

Sex tourism and the phenomenon of in-marrying *farang* sons-in-law are deeply intertwined. There are many relationships between *farang* husbands and Isan wives that do not intersect with Thailand’s sex tourism—in other words, many of the men have never been sex tourists, and many of the women have never been sex workers. That said, the majority of couples interviewed in our research in Isan met either in a tourist destination, particularly Pattaya or Phuket, or in Bangkok. Even for those who met in Isan or overseas, the chain of relationships leading to their introduction through friends and relatives can often be traced to someone’s involvement in the tourist or sex industries. Our focus here is not on who met whom under what circumstances, nor do we aim to make a general statement about all Thai-*farang* couples, as many such couples fall far outside the sorts of experiences recounted here. Rather, we seek to understand the relationship men who fit these descriptions of “sex tourist” or “son-in-law” have to these social identities (even or despite the fact that they may not identify with the category in question).

Patrick, as we met him that day in a *farang* café, exemplifies the troubled subjectivity frequently accompanying men’s transition into, through, and out of the liminal spaces and masculine performances of sex tourism. We encountered many such distraught, unsettled figures during fieldwork in both Isan and Bangkok. But most *farang* men we came to know in Isan had more settled relationships and personal narratives, one aspect of which was carving out a space and self-identity that distinguished them from *farang* sex tourists.

In order to understand *farang* men’s changing, subjective relationship to identities of sex tourist and husband—cum—son-in-law, as well as the sociocultural articulation of these interrelated masculine identities in Thailand, we find it necessary to critically engage with recent formulations of “emergent masculinities” in gender studies and anthropology (e.g., Inhorn and Wentzell 2011). Our primary argument, to be detailed below through the case of *farang* men in Thailand, is that masculine subjectivities and masculine identities (or assemblages of masculinity) change in distinctive ways.<sup>8</sup> Anthropological and gen-

4. Researchers consistently note that academic attention tends to be about the women involved in both transnational marriage and sex work, with a dearth of serious attention given to men’s experiences and motivations (e.g., Dahles 2009; Weitzer 2009). While the current article cannot provide a comprehensive explanation of the “men’s point of view,” it does aim to address this lacuna in academic research as well as in popular understandings of sojourning *farang* men.

5. The trend of Western men settling in Thailand as husbands, while better known inside rather than outside Thailand, has gained some international media coverage, for example, “A Thai Region Where Husbands Are Imported,” *New York Times*, September 24, 2010.

6. Matrilineal, matrilocal traditions are also typical of Northern Thailand (the regions around Chiang Mai) but not of Central Thailand (around Bangkok).

7. Our use of “public” here does not refer to a public/private distinction in the realm of the social but rather in Geertz’s (1973) sense of culture as “public” webs of significance.

8. Our use of “assemblage” in this article is mainly descriptive, while intentionally indexing nonlinear constructionist theory, derived largely from Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Ortner (2006) uses the word “formations” (107). Another widely used but theoretically underspecified

der theory regularly conflate subjectivities and the cultural and social formations that shape them (e.g., Inhorn and Wentzell 2011; Ortner 2006:107). We argue for the necessity of distinguishing between the subjectivities and identities (in this case, gendered masculine identities) in order to understand two different kinds of change: changing or transient subjectivities experienced by individuals and changing or emergent masculine identities, which are intersubjective, “public,” sociocultural assemblages.<sup>9</sup>

Our arguments draw primarily on two research projects conducted by the authors. Prior to and since the specific projects referred to here, the authors have worked in Northeast Thailand for several decades, dating to the 1970s for Smutkupt, the 1990s for Kitiarsa, and the mid-2000s for Thompson. The first research project, jointly conducted by Thompson and Kitiarsa, included interviews with a loose-knit network of women from Isan working as “freelance” sex workers in a *farang*-oriented entertainment district of Bangkok and with their male *farang* clients and partners. The interviews, along with observed interactions, were conducted with core members of this network over a period of more than 2 years in 2007 to 2009, during which we were able to follow the ongoing, shifting relationships among these Isan women and *farang* men.<sup>10</sup>

The second research project, jointly conducted by Kitiarsa and Smutkupt between December 2008 and August 2009, focused on *farang* men living in Isan. Over three periods of fieldwork, the authors traveled to villages in Khon Kaen, Sisaket, and other provinces, identifying *ban farang* mainly by word-of-mouth.<sup>11</sup> We conducted 144 open-ended interviews in market towns and villages: 43 with *farang* husbands, 22 with Isan wives, 19 with *farang*-Isan couples together, and an additional 60 interviews with others, including affinal Isan relatives of *farang* men, unrelated villagers, shop own-

ers, local officials, and several *farang* women and *farang* men who were not in long-term relationships with Isan women. Altogether, substantial information was gathered about 99 heterosexual *farang*-Isan couples, a systematic analysis of which was conducted by Thompson (see CA+ online supplement A). In all cases, interviews were conducted in a combination of English, Thai, and Isan dialect. Field notes based on observations and encounters in the course of both projects as well as interview transcripts were recorded in English and Thai and reviewed collectively by all three authors.

Bernstein (2007:3) notes that early twentieth-century “sex-ologists” pathologized women’s engagement in prostitution while explaining men’s patronage of prostitutes in terms of social-structural conditions. In scholarship today, this has largely been reversed. Women’s involvement in sex work as well as in transnational relationships is largely explained in social-cultural (e.g., conditioned by patriarchy) and political-economic terms (e.g., conditioned by neoliberalism or neocolonialism), while men’s involvement is cast largely as a matter of pathological dominance drives and sexual desires (e.g., Herdt and Polen-Petit 2011:514; cf. Hoefinger 2013). Our arguments here seek to reorient such ideas toward a better specification of the relationship between masculine subjectivity and the structural or systemic social, cultural, and political-economic forces within which subjectivities are embedded.<sup>12</sup> We begin by laying out our ethnographic encounters with sex tourism in Bangkok and *farang*-Isan marriage in Northeast Thailand as well as the social, cultural, and political-economic conditions through which the assemblages of “sex tourist” and “*farang* husband/son-in-law” emerged, before returning to broader theoretical questions of the articulation of masculine subjectivity and emergent masculinities.

To illustrate the transient subjectivity of *farang* men, we first draw on evidence from fieldwork in Bangkok. Over the course of several years, including 4 months during which Thompson lived adjacent to two of our key informants (Marco and Thong, discussed below), we had the opportunity to interview and interact with about two dozen women and more than half a dozen men. We focus, in particular, on those whom we had contact with over the entire period of the research. Their stories are not unusual, based on our own broader observations and interviews as well as those of other researchers (e.g., Cohen 1993; Johnson 2007:163–175). Our ongoing contact with these individuals provided particularly detailed and rich understandings of their changing feelings and relationships.

## Sex Tourism and Its Discontents

Thong and Daeng were both about 30 years old when we met them in a tourist and sex-oriented entertainment district of

---

term would be social and cultural “constructs.” Some readers associate assemblage narrowly with science, technology, and society studies and actor-network theory (e.g., Latour 1997) or with Ong and Collier (2005). Our own use is more influenced by Delanda’s (2006) theorizing assemblage in relation to complexity theory, where assemblage is compatible with but not confined to the sociotechnological assemblages (cf. Leve 2011).

9. For a review of the theoretical development of “identities” within anthropology as categories that imply sameness across a group, rather than the “self-sameness” of an individual over time and of the way that the “subject” and subjectivity maps onto the individual “self” in light of poststructuralist theory, see Sökefeld (1999:417–419). Contra Sökefeld, we do not use the construct of “self” in this article because it remains ontologically problematic in fixing an essentialized logos. Nevertheless, Sökefeld is useful in demonstrating that the “self” and “subject/subjectivity” are not the same as (group) “identities” or categories of persons.

10. For details, see the acknowledgments.

11. Isan consists of 20 provinces, conventionally divided into upper (northern), central, and lower (southern) Isan. Khon Kaen is near the geographic center of Isan. Sisaket is in lower (southeast) Isan.

12. In this respect, our analysis continues the ongoing analytical work of reconciling insights of Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxian political-economic theory, as outlined by early feminist theorists such as Rubin (2011[1975]).

Bangkok, where they solicited for customers along with a loose network of other Isan women. They rented inexpensive apartments or sometimes stayed in cheap hotel rooms not far from their preferred locale for work. During the day, they would meet up to play cards with others of their network, or “team,” as they called it. In the evenings, they would get made up and go out looking for customers. They preferred going out in the late evening to early morning, when the bar scene was winding down. We initially met them, along with a couple others of their team on their favored corner, or “office,” as they called it, early in our 2007–2009 research into gender and migration of Isan men and women to Bangkok. Cheerful and outgoing, they agreed to assist us with our fieldwork.

Thong, Daeng, and the other freelancers we interviewed generally preferred “short time” encounters with new customers, meaning that they would follow the customer to a hotel for sex, finish the transaction as quickly as possible, and return to their friends as well as the possibility of further customers. At the same time, members of the team universally sought to become *mia farang* in the long term and would go for extended rather than short-time periods with repeat customers, staying with them for days or weeks at a time (cf. Cohen 1982:421–422). Both Thong and Daeng had multiple complex, longer-term relationships with *farang* men over the years we met up with them. It was through them that we got to know some of the men with whom they were involved as well as hear related stories of numerous other men whom we did not meet directly. These narratives and the broader life histories within which they are situated speak to the unsettled subjectivities and liminality of men in the “contact zone” that the figure of the sex tourist inhabits.

In 2007, Thong was already in an unregistered marriage to Marco, a German man in his fifties. Initially a tourist, Marco subsequently came to Thailand on a 3-year work contract in the late 1990s. He was legally married to another Isan woman, whom he also first met through commercial sex. Marco had taken his first Isan wife back to Germany and had bought several midpriced apartments in Bangkok under her name. At the period of research, Marco was still married but estranged from his first Isan wife, who continued to live in Germany. He and Thong were not legally married, but he had accompanied her to her village in Isan, and they had gone through customary wedding rites, which included Marco giving substantial bride-wealth cash and gifts (*sin sod*) to her parents. Thong spoke often of how good and loyal Marco was.

Illustrating our attention here to transient subjectivity, Marco had previously indulged excessively in the Bangkok bar scene. In his words, “I used to fuck around the world,” referring to the practice of going to bars and taking out each of the women there in turn for sex (cf. Bishop and Robinson 1998:164). But by the mid-2000s, he had less enthusiasm for the bar scene and preferred his ongoing, sustained relationship with Thong, despite its many ups and downs. At times, they would be living together, and Thong would be largely absent from the freelance scene. At other times, they would fight, and either she would leave or he would kick her out. Some of

these altercations derived from interpersonal tensions, others from issues related to Marco’s first wife, and yet others from Thong’s continuing involvement in sex work and relationships with other men, particularly Nick (cf. Cohen 1982:417–420).

Nick was an American, in his late thirties, married to another freelance sex worker. He worked part of the year in the United States and lived part of the year, for as long as his savings would allow, in Bangkok. He described his Thai wife as very businesslike and goal-oriented—very good at saving and managing her money. Nick was open about the fact that he had problems with impotency and was only occasionally able to perform sexually. His Thai partner, after she saved enough and quit sex work, wanted to have a baby. He wanted to give her that but was concerned about his ability to get her pregnant. At the same time, he was particularly close to Thong and visited her with some frequency when she was not living with Marco. Thong declared that she was in love with Nick rather than Marco. As she put it, “Nick is good for love, but Marco is good for sex,” referring to Nick’s impotence. In addition, Nick offered her very little financial or material support in comparison to Marco.

From time to time, Marco would seek out Thong in the freelance scene to spy on her activities, in particular to learn whether she was still seeing Nick. Marco’s attachment to and, at times, obsession with Thong fits with interpretations of other writers who read similar emotional expressions as objectification and possessive treatment of Thai women as property (e.g., O’Connell Davidson 1995). Garrick (2005:498–501), for instance, drawing on the work of feminist scholar O’Connell Davidson (1995) and journalist Seabrook (1996), among others (e.g., Lytleton 2000; Manderson 1997), portrays an attitude of objectification and disposability among *farang* men toward Thai women. In our interactions with Marco and other men, we did not come across expressions of ownership so much as strong emotional attachment and difficult feelings of jealousy related to their knowledge of their partner’s ongoing sexual relationships with short-time customers and other men.

With diminishingly few exceptions, research reported about sex tourists is based on observations and brief one-off interviews in tourist sex-entertainment zones (e.g., O’Connell Davidson 1995; Seabrook 1996) or anonymous postings in internet forums (Bishop and Robinson 2002). Our research, along with the few cases of other research that report more intimate or sustained observations outside of sex-entertainment sites (Cohen 1982, 1986, 1993; Hoefinger 2013; Johnson 2007), leads us to suggest that work emphasizing men’s possessive, objectifying attitudes is, at best, a partial, if not seriously biased, interpretation of men’s subjective desires. In our fieldwork, we found such attitudes of objectification and disposability expressed mainly, if not exclusively, in contexts of macho posturing or in response to unrequited desire.

For example, during one of our interviews with a *farang* man named Tommy, who had ties to Thong and Daeng, he paused at one point to call up friends to ask about looking for some “cocaine whores” (who would have sex for drugs rather than



money). He did so midway through a long, rambling confessional about his love for Daeng—a moment that highlighted the ambiguity, uncertainty, and stress of long-term relationships in the contact zones of Bangkok. A tattooed English “lad” in his midforties with a wiry, muscular build, Tommy fit the mold of the callous “Macho Lad” described by O’Connell Davidson (1995) and Garrick (2005). He had traveled and lived extensively across Asia. In the mid-2000s, he was living in Bangkok and working in the underground economy. He was originally one of Thong’s customers. Through Thong, he met Daeng, to whom he became deeply attached. Daeng, for her part, had several long-term relationships with *farang* men before and during the times we met her. Tommy bemoaned the fact that he had “fallen in love with a prostitute” but became obsessed with Daeng. She, likewise, was very drawn to Tommy. Similar to Thong and Marco, Daeng and Tommy’s relationship ran hot and cold.

Tommy struggled with feelings of jealousy about Daeng’s freelance sex work. He appreciated the money she earned, which was more than he could earn in Bangkok. They would regularly party together when she got lucky with a big-spending customer. But the longer the relationship lasted, the more possessive he became. He began to aggressively pursue Daeng in her freelance work, using threats and intimidation to scare off her customers. Eventually, Daeng became pregnant with his child and carried the baby to term. She also, for the most part, disappeared from the freelance sex-work scene. The last we heard of them, Tommy and Daeng had a plan to return to England, where he was due to inherit a house from his parents.

These accounts of Marco, Nick, and Tommy resonate with interviews of *farang* men in Isan. Many (though not all) talked of living in Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket, or other contact zones for a number of years before relocating to Isan. They nearly universally commented on their initial attraction to and then eventual dislike of these tourist areas. Beyond a common trope that such places were “not the real Thailand,” the *farang* husbands recounted how living in Pattaya, Bangkok, or elsewhere “drove them crazy.” The original male fantasy land becomes subjectively reconstituted as a space of lies and deceit as well as overly expensive. As Cohen earlier observed (1982:420–421), the sex tourist’s initial wonder turns over time to a jaded and disillusioned view of Thai sex workers or even of Thai women in general. At the same time, we found men who were deeply attached to particular women, with whom they established long-term relationships.

Based on research among male clients of commercial sex workers in Los Angeles, Bernstein argues that the men are not experiencing alienated sexuality but rather constructing a positive desire for “a sexual connection that is premised on bounded authenticity” (Bernstein 2007:127; cf. Lindquist 2010:113). While this may be sustainable for some, the ability to maintain such boundaries proved impossible for men such as Marco, Nick, and Tommy. In the transnational context of sex tourism, in particular, such boundaries are premised in large part on maintaining the liminal position of “tourist.” As men extend their stay

within contact zones and their liaisons with women working there, the power and privilege afforded them through global hierarchies of political economy, race, and gender are dissolved and sometimes inverted in the context of personal interactions and local social dynamics.<sup>13</sup> As Cohen points out, the women are operating with superior local knowledge and linguistic competency, which empower them vis-à-vis their *farang* partners in various ways (Cohen 1986:124). Men, for their part, develop affective attachments to particular women and no longer experience Thailand’s entertainment zones as consumers with vast choice in a cheap market. For many, particularly those who remain for longer periods in Thailand, the dilemma is resolved by transitioning from the fraught spaces of tourist contact zones to more settled lives in the countryside as in-marrying sons-in-law.

### Sex Tourist and Son-in-Law as Emergent Masculinities

The conditions through which the sex tourist and *farang* son-in-law have developed into recognized figures of masculine performance and identity are in some, but not all, respects similar. Both owe their conditions of possibility to the postcolonial, developmental Cold War, and later globalizing, neoliberal political economies of the late twentieth century. Gross disparities in wealth and median incomes of average citizens between more and less affluent nations over the past century are one obvious condition that facilitates *farang* men in performing these masculinities in Thailand’s entertainment districts as well as in remote villages. A number of other conditions during the last two decades of globalization (ca. 1990–2010), such as relatively cheap telecommunications and air travel, have also made the emergence of these two alternative masculinities possible.

Male, heterosexual sex tourism in Thailand is one small part of a much broader phenomenon of global sex tourism involving male, female, transgender, and variously sexually oriented customers and an equally broad range of sex workers (see Dalhes 2009:223–226 for an extensive review of this literature). Moreover, sex tourism is a particular aspect of globalized, transnational desires and relationships occurring within a generalized “commodification of intimacy” (Constable 2009). Even within the narrow range of male, heterosexual sex tourism, the expectations, practices, and subjective experiences of those who would be considered sex tourists, either by the tourists themselves or by others, vary widely.

Everywhere, outside of the limited spaces that cater to sex tourists (e.g., contact zones and internet forums), sex tourists are construed as social and sexual deviants. In a recent textbook

13. We do not have the scope or, for that matter, the evidence to discuss here the majority of male tourists who return to their own countries after one or more short visits. Cohen has written extensively about the difficulties of such men in leaving Thailand and Thai women behind and resuming their “normal” lives back home (Cohen 1982, 1986, 1993).

on human sexuality, for example, sex tourism is equated with rape and pedophilia and attributed to a sexual fetish of “seeking sex with enslaved peoples” (Herdt and Polen-Petit 2011: 514). In a typological analysis of British sex tourists based on interviews and fieldwork in Thailand, O’Connell Davidson (1995) makes frequent asides, offering her judgment as a European woman that the European men in Pattaya are “less than appealing,” lacking confidence, “physically repellent,” “enormously overweight,” “disfigured or disabled . . . or too old to be considered sexually attractive” (52–54). Mix and Piper (2003) offer a similarly unflattering portrayal of German men who marry Thai women, interpreting evidence in such a way as to present the men in these relationships as little more than predators and pimps.<sup>14</sup> Bishop and Robinson (1998:165) paint an equally bleak picture of sex tourists as figures of abject alienation.

In Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand and the Philippines, most authors trace a continuity from American military men’s rest and relaxation (R & R) practices to the entertainment zones and sex tourism boom that expanded rapidly from the 1980s onward (e.g., Truong 1990). Likewise, researchers who have studied *farang*-Isan transnational marriage trace its modern beginnings to liaisons between Isan women and American military personnel stationed at bases in Thailand (Boonmathya 2005; Sirijit and Angeles 2013; although Lapanun 2013 takes a somewhat broader view, citing earlier liaisons between Thai women and Chinese, Western, and other foreign men). While there are some direct links, there are also important differences between the conditions of commercial sex oriented toward soldiers and tourists and the longer-term relationships that emerged out of those conditions. One of these is that the American GIs were almost all young men, serving in a regimented organization, whose R & R was bounded by the rules of that organization. Later tourists, by contrast, tend to be older, operating within an open-ended, transnational economy of commodified relationships. While the American GI on R & R may have laid conditions for the emergence of the *farang* sex tourist, the two are distinct assemblages of masculinity.

With regard to transnational marriage and the *farang* son-in-law, our findings suggest differences between the earlier and later patterns as well. In our 2008–2009 fieldwork in Isan, 4 of the 99 couples we learned about had met prior to the 1980s. These four *farang* husbands were either ex-GIs or “ex-hippies.” These were cases of young couples of similar age (one in which the woman was 7 years older), marrying in their twenties, living together in the United States, where they raised children together, and much later returning to Thailand (cf. Lafferty and Maher 2014:334). The rest of the 99 *farang* husbands living in Isan had first come to Thailand after the 1980s, with numbers accelerating into the 1990s and 2000s. The median age difference between *farang* husbands and Isan wives was 20 years and

ranged from one case in which the Isan wife was 14 years older than the husband (one of only three cases in which the wife was older) to a *farang* husband 40 years older than his wife. Eighty percent of husbands were 10 or more years older than their Isan partners. The husbands ranged in age from 28 to 80 years old, with a median age of 60. Their wives ranged in age from 20 to 70 years old, with a median age of 39.5, and more than 80% were 30 or older.<sup>15</sup>

While there is a great deal of diversity and many atypical relationships, the demographic profile culled from our interviews reflects the predominant pattern of a *farang* man of advanced or advancing age married to a middle-aged Isan woman. Close to three-quarters of the men had been married and divorced before coming to Thailand and had adult children from those marriages. Only about a third had children with their Isan partners. But the large majority of their Isan wives, about 80%, had children from previous relationships whom their *farang* husbands supported financially and, in many cases, informally adopted.

The husbands are mainly from Europe (more than 80%), more specifically, from Northern and Western European countries with strong social welfare systems. The rest came from the United States, Australia, and Canada. Disparity in wealth and differential cost of living between these countries and Thailand facilitate *farang* men’s position in relationship to Isan women and their families, as do systems of wage earning, capital accumulation through savings, and retirement pension systems. For about half, their main sources of income were retirement funds, retirement pensions, disability pensions, or other savings.

The other half derived income from a variety of business and work. Those who were still working (a quarter of those we interviewed) were younger, middle-aged men who only visited or lived part of the year in Isan, returning to their countries of origin to work. Those interviewees earning their money from business had usually invested considerable savings to establish *farang*-oriented bars and cafés, general provision shops, or agricultural ventures. Many of these men, while still active in running their businesses, were retired from earlier careers and drew on pensions or other retirement savings.

The financial capital that these *farang* men command has made them desirable husbands for Isan women. As the several detailed studies of *mia farang* in Isan explain, and our own research corroborates, many Isan women, particularly those in their thirties and older, actively seek *farang* husbands (Boonmathya 2005; Lapanun 2012; Sirijit and Angeles 2013). Moreover, many parents and other family members actively encourage them in these endeavors. In the 1960s, liaisons between American servicemen and Isan women were more often than not met with parental disapproval. Such attitudes still exist, and some *mia farang* told us of how their relationships with *farang* men had alienated them from their families, though more commonly from their children rather than parents. Positive rather than

14. See Nick Mai’s (2013) argument on the problems, both analytically and in policy making, associated with moral panics and selective focus on particular cases of victimization among sex workers.

15. For a detailed statistical breakdown and analysis of the trends described here, see CA+ supplement A.

negative attitudes toward *farang* husbands were more common among the mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, and other affinal relatives we interviewed.

A *farang* husband (*pua farang*) is at the same time a *kiew farang*—a *farang* son-in-law. We highlight the latter in the title and argument of this article because integration as sons-in-law into traditionally matrilineal, matrilocal Isan families is another important condition enabling this emergent masculine identity. It is not necessarily a masculine identity that *farang* men identify with, but it is a socially recognized masculinity within Isan that facilitates *farang* men's integration into Isan society. Earlier ethnographic studies of Isan and of Thailand documented traditional agrarian matrilineal, matrilocal patterns in which daughters stayed at home and sons left their natal families to marry. They lived with and provided wealth and labor to their wives' families (Keyes 1984). These patterns transformed in the late twentieth century into a migrant ethic focused on daughter duty (Angeles and Sirijit 2009; Jongwilaiwan and Thompson 2013; Mills 1999).

Rather than stay on the land, daughters ventured out to Bangkok and elsewhere in order to materially provide for parents back in the village (Mills 2005; Muecke 1984, 1992). Daughters provide for their parents through their own work and by marrying husbands of means. And *farang* men are widely assumed to be relatively wealthy. These multiple, complex conditions—from global political economies and ethno-racial ideologies to matrilineal sensibilities—make the *farang* husband and son-in-law socially desirable and positively valued by many Isan women and their families, in sharp contrast to the negative image of sex tourists.

The *farang* husband-cum-son-in-law and the sex tourist are distinct and very differently valued figures of masculinity, both of which have largely emerged, at least in their current configuration, only in the past several decades. But in many cases, the same men inhabit these masculine identities at different times in their lives. How do *farang* men understand their place in Isan? How is the *farang* husband-cum-son-in-law related to, yet distinct from, the sex tourist? We focus in the next two sections on the transient subjectivities of men who move through these juxtaposed, alternative masculinities.

### *Farang* Men in Isan: Unsettled and Settled Subjectivities

*Farang* men have brought new sensibilities of privacy into the space of Isan villages (cf. Boonmathya 2005:19). These sensibilities are most obvious in the architecture and location of the *ban farang* they build along with their wives. Typical Isan villages are built as densely packed clusters of houses, surrounded by extensive paddy fields. *Ban farang* are commonly located on paddy-field land stretching along roadways leading out of towns and villages. Like their houses, *farang* men are distributed widely and, for the most part, sparsely across Isan. Our interactions with these widely dispersed *farang* husbands,

and others occurred mainly during visits to their homes and at gathering spots such as market-town cafés.

A fuller account of the lives of *farang* men in Isan remains to be written (cf. Lafferty and Maher 2014). Here, we focus more narrowly on these men's subjective relationship to the figure of the sex tourist and their own position and practices as *farang* husbands and sons-in-law. In contrast to the unsettled, liminal position of sex tourists, *farang* husbands in Isan are seeking a settled and sustained place for themselves. The accounts we heard speak to an interrelated series of issues with regard to their social position and subjectivities: differentiation from sex tourism; being a good man or, at least, avoiding negative labels; negotiating their senses of self, money, provisioning, and relationship to their wives and others; and finally, for most, contemplating their retired, twilight years.

Sixty-six-year-old Andrew, who runs a *farang* café and has lived in a provincial Isan town since 1989, was one of many who distanced themselves from sex tourists through expressions of hostility and disdain:<sup>16</sup>

I hate *farang* men who come to Thailand only for sex and their own pleasure. Once I was on a plane to Bangkok full of European men. They only talked about visiting Pattaya for sex. They said something like, "Yes, we are going to fuck all the Thai ladies in Pattaya." They asked for my advice too. I told them to avoid Pattaya. Go somewhere nicer. However, as soon as we landed in Bangkok, they all went straight to Pattaya.

Yet, more important for most men, rather than differentiating themselves from *farang* sex tourists, is to differentiate their Isan partners from Thai bar girls. As one Norwegian man of 60 who met his 39-year-old wife through a friend flatly stated, "My village wife is no bar girl. She is a good woman."

In many accounts, the origin of the relationship was unrelated or only peripherally related to the places and practices of sex tourism. Others admitted directly or indirectly to the nexus between sex tourism and their current place and relationship in Isan but nevertheless drew lines between the two. George, 52, and another small-business owner in Isan, recounted his first encounter with his Isan wife in Phuket: "I knew that I loved her right away. Even though she slept with other *farang* men, I did not call her a prostitute, because I understood why she had to do it. We married and decided to move back here."

On occasion, in market-town cafés and bars, we observed performances of masculinity that echo the practices and posturing of men in sex tourism's contact zones, such as sexual joking or recounting tales of "whoring around." But in our experience before, during, and since the 2008–2009 fieldwork, these seem mostly limited to such prescribed spaces as *farang* cafés and peripheral to the lives that most *farang* men lead in

16. O'Connell Davidson (1995) and Garrick (2005) both note that men classified by researchers as sex tourists differentiate themselves from the category of sex tourist or from less acceptable types of sex tourists, such as those engaging same-sex or child sex workers.

Isan. And even in *farang* cafés, ribald references to the entertainment zones of Bangkok or Pattaya are often as not treated with ambivalence rather than encouragement by audiences made up of other *farang* men. We cannot generalize this observation to all of the tens of thousands of men living in Isan but rather point out that the interactions we observed and stories we heard differ markedly from those who focus on sexual entertainment venues or internet forums (e.g., Bishop and Robinson 2002; O'Connell Davidson 1995).

*Farang* men in Isan face a new set of conditions and challenges in making a place for themselves in rural, Isan society, some of which resonate with *farang* men's experiences in sex tourism but most of which are very different. All involve negotiating sometimes fraught, subjective senses of self and the men's relationship to others around them, including but not only with their Isan wives. A general condition, echoed through many interviews, is the men's desires and attempts to position themselves as good men. Those who fail are subject to being labeled "*farang khii nok*" (literally, bird-shit *farang*).<sup>17</sup> Forty-year-old Philip, who lived in Isan on a disability pension, had a rocky relationship with his 42-year-old Isan wife, and drank heavily, related, "It is too difficult for me to trust anyone . . . here now. I am only a *farang khii nok*. I have been labeled as a *farang khii nok* around here. You know, a *farang* man does not have any status except to become a money pump, to keep pumping huge amounts of money into Thailand."

Negotiating the relationship between their money and their selves, in their own eyes and in the eyes of others, was among the most frequent themes throughout our interviews with *farang* men in Isan (cf. Thai 2014). The notion that they are reduced to being a "walking ATM" is among the men's most frequent complaints (cf. Lafferty and Maher 2014:340–341; Stanley 2012:10). Barney, an American in his sixties who sold all he owned back home after meeting his thirtysomething Isan wife and moving permanently to Thailand, jokingly recalled,

My wife was real mad at me one time at home. I made my own paper headband. I wrote in English "BANK OF AMERICA ATM." I wore it on my forehead around the house. That was after my wife demanded more money from me. After seeing it, she was real mad and told me to take it off and to get rid of the damn thing. . . . She, of course, won. I took it off and got rid of it real fast.

At the same time, men's ability to provide financially for their Isan wives as well as extended families is a key source of self-worth for *farang* husbands. Many are keen to point out that the financial resources they provide did not materialize out of nowhere; they were irked to find, however, that their wives and in-laws often seemed to act as if they did. Fredrik, a

17. *Farang khii-nok* is a term used in reference to *farang* men who fail to perform the role of wealthy benefactor, are overly crass, dress poorly, and/or too frequently consume alcohol or drugs.

Scandinavian man in his sixties living on a state pension, expressed his exasperation with an Isan neighbor who insisted he find a *farang* husband for her:

Thai people all think that *farang* people have big money. They see many *farang* men who visit Thailand and stay for a 1-month vacation. They spend and spend money for everything: food, drinks, traveling, and women. They do not know that any *farang* man who can afford a 1-month vacation in Thailand may have to work and work very, very hard for 1, 2, or 3 years. . . . I try to explain to Thai people that *farang* men do not live this vacation time in Thailand in their [own] country. . . . Thai people do not believe me.

While the presence of *farang* men in Isan reproduces a long-standing pattern of in-marrying sons-in-law, many men themselves are, at best, only vaguely aware of this tradition. For some, their relationship with their partner's parents and other relatives is tense and filled with mutual disapproval; relatives regard the *farang* men as stingy, and the men regard their wives' parents, other relatives, and even their wives as greedy. Other men assume the role of provider positively, although they tend to understand their position more as a first-world patron to third-world poor rather than as a filial son-in-law.<sup>18</sup> While the men identify with roles of husband and patron more than son-in-law, the Isan assemblage of masculinity around *kiew farang* (son-in-law) as much as *pua farang* (husband) facilitates their integration into Isan society and kin networks.

While money is important in almost all cases, these relationships are mediated by more than money. This is especially true with regard to the men's wives' children from previous relationships. *Farang* men frequently, though usually informally, adopt their wives' children, especially when the children are school-age or younger. As one 40-year-old Isan wife of a 57-year-old British man named Timothy recounted,

My daughter is a Down's syndrome child. My British husband is very good to her. He and I drive her to school in the morning and get her from school back to our house in the afternoon. My Thai husband left me because of her Down's syndrome. However, my British husband knew about my daughter before he married me. He has a special feeling for her and is very gentle with her. He behaves so different from her biological father. I am very grateful for the situation.

Giving rides and other forms of day-to-day social and even emotional support is recounted by many *farang* men regard-

18. Similarly, scholars writing about *farang* men in Thailand, as sex tourists but also as husbands, represent (and disparage) their position as "first-world patron" or "white knight" (e.g., Garrick 2005; Lafferty and Maher 2014) while not acknowledging their position as matrilineal son-in-law.



ing their relationships with in-laws and others in Isan. While some experience negative alienation as “*farang khii-nok*,” many others speak of their positive, warm relationships with relatives and villagers, particularly the sorts of friendly, everyday greetings they exchange with Isan residents of villages and market towns. Even closer relationships exist as well. Timothy, for example, regularly goes fishing with a group of Isan men from his village neighborhood. These relationships are everywhere marked by *farang* men’s racialized identities as *farang* and the expectations—financial and otherwise—that flow from that identity, but this does not necessarily make their relationship with in-laws and others negative or even distant.

Lafferty and Maher (2014) argue that *farang* men in Isan lead isolated “expat” lives. While their analysis based on fieldwork and interviews by Lafferty is not incorrect and parallels many of the arguments we have made here, it is incomplete in two important respects. First, it does not acknowledge the rearticulation of matrilocality, in which men are expected to leave their “own place” and enter into their wives’. And second, the *farang* men in Isan overwhelmingly report past experiences of personal isolation “back home,” due to failed marriages, children leaving home, working-class subalternity, and a general feeling that social change, especially though not only with respect to gender relations, has produced societies in which they no longer have a place (cf. Bourdieu 2007; Cole 2014:S88).

Writing on matrilocality in Northern Thailand, Katherine Bowie (2008) describes the social networks and political roles of both in-marrying sons-in-law and their wives. Bowie identifies the men’s peripheral isolation vis-à-vis their affinal family as a motivating factor in taking up public roles in local politics. In-marrying *farang* men in Isan are comparable to Northern Thai men in developing extrafamilial social networks. Some are with Isan men, such as Timothy and his fishing partners. More often, they are with other *farang* men. Unlike Northern Thai or Isan men who marry into their wives’ families and villages, *farang* men are not able to participate directly in local political life, although in at least one case we came across, a *farang* husband was actively involved in supporting his wife’s political career at the local and subdistrict (*tambon*) level. Many of the men interviewed had extensive opinions on both national Thai politics and local Isan village politics, but none saw themselves as having any direct involvement in local politics; in this sense, Thailand and Isan remained a “foreign” place they observed but did not participate in.

The same was not the case in terms of socioeconomic and, to some extent, cultural fields. *Farang* husbands support the local economy through patronage of house-construction contractors, furniture and appliance stores, and car and motorcycle dealerships, as well as by infusing cash into the local economy that is spent in locales such as provisioning shops. About half of those we interviewed in Isan actively participated in entrepreneurial ventures. They are also visible supporters of local organizations, particularly Buddhist village temples. Much

of this activity is mediated by their wives, who offer alms to monks, attend ceremonies, engage in ritual activities, and provide large donations for renovating temple buildings on behalf of themselves and their husbands, though in some cases, the *farang* husbands directly participate in these activities as well (cf. Angeles and Sirijit 2009).

*Farang* men subjectively relate to all of the fields above—political, socioeconomic, cultural—in different ways but always with respect to their foreignness in Isan, either accepting it or seeking to overcome it. Acceptance or even reinforcement of the social distinction between *farang* men and the local community is the more prevalent mode through which the men express their place within Isan (cf. Lafferty and Maher 2014:338–340). A few become deeply integrated, through fluency in Isan dialect and practicing a highly localized lifestyle, such as one man we interviewed who had ordained as a Buddhist monk. But most see themselves as set apart from, though rarely antagonistic toward, Isan society.

As with men in the liminal, unsettled space of sex-tourist contact zones, those in Isan experience ongoing, subjective negotiation with the place and people around them. It resolves, however, not in ongoing liminality or transition out of that unsettled space but rather in the search for and, in many cases, in finding a sense of contentment with their lives in Isan.<sup>19</sup> As older men, overwhelmingly in their fifties, sixties, or beyond, the most common sentiment expressed by the men is that Isan is where they have finally settled after long, unsettled, often lonely lives and that Isan is where they now expect to remain, to die in their old age, and to be cremated according to local Buddhist custom. Such a settled sense of contentment felt by many *farang* men in Isan was summed up best by Brian, a 79-year-old European married to a 47-year-old Isan woman:

[In my own country,] I was pretty much alone for 35 years besides having my daughter, who lived with my ex-wife. I began to think about getting old alone. I did not realize until then that I am alone and that I am nobody. . . . Of course, I had some friends who I saw socially. The fact was that I was alone and would be alone for the rest of my life. . . . I lived alone and cooked meals for myself. That is my past. It is over now. I am very, very happy with my beautiful wife, dogs, garden, and home. This is my life here and now. I am very lucky to have my present life and many *farang* friends.

19. Here our interpretation varies significantly from that of Lafferty and Maher (2014), who portray *farang* men in Isan as more similar to liminal “sex tourists” due to their “expat,” foreign status in the society. We would suggest that while *farang* men’s “foreignness” remains marked, it does not preclude a degree of integration into Isan society. As noted from the outset, *farang*, and particularly *farang* men as sex tourists and sons-in-law, have become a recognized part of Thailand’s ethnoscape.

## Emergent Masculinities and Transient Subjectivities

Along with Hoefinger (2013:3–6), we see a need to depathologize transnational relationships of Isan women and *farang* men. For the most part, our encounters in the field suggest to us that these are largely ordinary women and men, albeit in less-than-ordinary situations. We have sought to frame the men's experiences through attention to the distinction and articulation between emergent masculinities and transient subjectivities. Numerous researchers use the term "emergent masculinities" to signal the notion of changing masculinities over time (e.g., Gallo 2006; High 2010; Inhorn and Wentzell 2011; Zhang 2008). Given diverse, changing masculinities, a central question becomes, what is the source of these diverse masculinities, and how and why are they changing? In order to theorize changing masculinities across times and in different contexts, we need to specify what we mean by "masculinities." We have suggested that masculinities are best seen as socially constructed cultural concepts and have referred to these as "assemblages" of masculinity. Masculinities, as such, do not reside inside any particular man (cf. Nye 2005:1955). Masculinities are performative, intersubjective, and public in the sense that Geertz (1973) argued that culture is public.

Gender and sexuality theory often conflates masculinity as both sociocultural and a property of particular men; for example, in Connell's formulation, "Masculinity is institutionalized [in structures of gender relations] as well as being an aspect of individual character or personality" (Connell cited in Gerholm 2003:402). In order to explain the position of *farang* men in Thailand, we argue that masculine identities and masculine subjectivities should be distinguished in order to account for two sorts of change—first, of emergence (as well as dissolution) of particular assemblages of identity and, second, of transient subjectivity existing in relationship to and, in some cases, moving through, across, or between such assemblages. The latter is an important sort of change, but one of subjectivity rather than assemblage. In simple terms, culturally shared constructs of masculinity change, and how individuals subjectively relate to such constructs change, but these are different sorts of change.

The tendency to refer to masculinity as a property of particular men, of "his" or "their" masculinity, is most often found in the context of masculinity being questioned or lost (e.g., Gallo 2006:367; High 2010:764; Kannaneh 2005:263; Zhang 2008:495). Lipset (2004), for example, describes both damage to the sociocultural complex of Murik masculinity through a variety of historical forces (211–213) and the questioning, challenging, and compromising of particular men's masculinity (215–216). Yet it is one thing to undermine particular men's subjective and socially perceived relationship to ideals of masculinity, to cast a particular man as a "bird-shit *farang*," for instance, and quite another to transform sociocultural assemblages of masculinity. In fact, it is precisely through reference to publicly available notions of masculinity that particular men are

"emasculated" and found lacking (e.g., Elliston 2004:618; Gallo 2006:362). Arguably, this only reinforces the powerful position of the assemblage rather than undermine it.

In Inhorn and Wentzell's (2011) account of masculinity and reproductive technologies in the Middle East and Latin America, the authors propose "emergent masculinities" as a means to move beyond the limits of Connell's well-established concept of "hegemonic masculinity" (cf. High 2010:766; McKay 2007: 618–619). In defining "emergent masculinities," they state that

emergent masculinities—intentionally plural—embraces social history, globalizing geographies, masculine embodiment, new masculine dynamics, and social movements in a way that hegemonic masculinity cannot. Whereas hegemony emphasizes the dominant and hierarchical, emergence highlights the novel and transformative. When applied to manhood, emergence encapsulates change over the male life course as men age, change over generations as male youth grow to adulthood, and changes in social history that involve men in transformative social processes. (Inhorn and Wentzell 2011:803)

The problem with Inhorn and Wentzell's formulation with respect to understanding changing masculinities is that they conflate change over the male life course with change over generations and in social history. To put it simply, aging and cultural change are not the same thing; they are not even similar processes. Aging follows a predictable arch—from childhood through youth and middle age to old age. Experiences of aging are culturally conditioned and far from exactly the same for everyone. But aging is not an open-ended, complex system in the way that sociocultural notions of masculinity are. The disconnect in Inhorn and Wentzell's analysis, which bears highlighting here, is that their main theoretical inspiration, Raymond Williams (1977:121–127), offers a theory of cultural change and power (i.e., hegemony), while Inhorn and Wentzell's analysis focuses on men's "emergent" responses to new reproductive technologies, primarily with reference to individual men's changing relationship to masculinity over their life course (i.e., as they age).

As sociocultural assemblages, masculinities consist of socially performed acts and intersubjectively shared ideas. These ideas and practices crystallize in particular spatial and temporal contexts into recognized "identities." It is these assembled identities that are meant when we refer to "masculinities," such as those of the sex tourist and the *farang* son-in-law.<sup>20</sup> Our research among *farang* men has highlighted the interplay between subjectivity and the sociocultural masculine assemblages of sex tourist and *farang* son-in-law. In particular, we

20. Our use of "crystallize" does not mean to imply that such identities are fixed; they remain open to contestation and change. At the same time, naming and typing of masculinities—or femininities—is part of the process by which they come to be systemically powerful within sociocultural systems.

have argued that the position of the sex tourist engenders liminal, unsettled subjectivity that at least some men resolve by transitioning into the more settled subjectivity in their lives as husbands and Isan sons-in-law.

As with masculinity, the analytical construct of the “subject” and “subjectivity” are often theoretically underspecified. Following Foucault (e.g., 2007), Butler (e.g., 1990), and others (e.g., Silverman 1983), the analytical construct of the “subject” breaks from that of the modern, liberal “individual,” in that subjects do not stand apart from the sociocultural order but rather are produced by it through subjectification—the workings of sociocultural, political-economic, and similar forces on particular men and women in shaping their understandings of, experiences in, and orientations toward the world. Traditional psychoanalytical theory, while speaking to the significance of sex-gender systems, is frustratingly narrow in its focus on early childhood and universalizing theorization (e.g., of the Oedipus complex; Rubin 2011:48–50). Men such as Marco, Tommy, and many of the *farang* husbands we met in Isan find their sexual selves reoriented much later in life, through experiences of sexual indulgence that are at first pleasurable but soon become disillusioning (cf. Barton 2002; Cohen 1993). This suggests to us that sexual subjectivity is not fixed early in childhood but continues to change throughout one’s lifetime and in relationship to particular and diverse experiences.

## Conclusion

The masculine assemblages of sex tourist and of in-marrying *farang* husband-cum-son-in-law in Isan emerged through multiple forces and agencies. In this article, we have focused on transient subjectivities as they articulate with the emergent masculinities of “sex tourist” and “son-in-law.” Transient subjectivities, we have argued, are important in theorizing gender, sexuality, and specifically, in this case, heterosexual masculinities. Men’s subjective relationship to notions of masculinity changes in ways different from those in which alternative and hegemonic masculinities emerge. The same principles of subjective transience in relation to emergent assemblages would, of course, apply to femininities, transgender, and other identities as well. Moreover, the distinction is important if we are going to be able to assess kinds as well as sources of change with regard to diverse, cross-cultural ideas and practices of gender and sexuality.

Masculine subjectivities and desires are themselves one important locus of agency (Sökefeld 1999:424). Masculine sexual subjectivities are not shaped only by the workings of hormones and other brain and body chemistry but also by social relations, cultural ideals, media, and especially existential experience over a lifetime. Many scholars cast masculine subjectivities and desires as almost singularly causal, particularly when it comes to what they see as dysfunctional and exploitative sexual relations and cultures (e.g., O’Connell Davidson 1995). Bishop and Robinson (1998), for example, write that sex tourists “in general

possess a sexual subjectivity so alienated as to naturalize the purchase of sex on a regular basis and an entire international industry to support it” (165). In our view, masculine subjectivity needs to be placed as one locus of agency among others, including social relations, cultural ideals, and political economies, in the production of masculinities and masculine identities. In this particular case, the transient movement of men from enacting practices of sex tourism to settling down in matrilineal, rural Isan villages demonstrates the articulation of these two alternative masculinities but does not produce a substantial change in either of the two assemblages; in other words, sex tourists are not on the decline and *farang* sons-in-law on the rise. If anything, the two are mutually reinforcing despite their antagonisms, particularly of the latter toward the former.

Masculinities operate across multiple scales, temporalities, and contexts. In attending to subjectivity, we cannot lose sight of the operations of power and hierarchy with regard to alternative and emergent masculinities. Hegemony, with regard to intersubjective, cultural constructs, refers to their power to compel a response and to interpolate particular persons within society (e.g., Connell 1987). Both “sex tourist” and “son-in-law” masculinities have powerful effects vis-à-vis *farang* men. The men in our study by turns indulge in and distance themselves (and their Isan partners) from the sexual license afforded the male sex tourist. Likewise, by reproducing the role of matrilineal Isan son-in-law, albeit in an altered and transnational form, *farang* men are subject to intense demands of extended kinship obligation while also gaining respect as good providers and the care and attention of their Isan wives and other kin (cf. Angeles and Sirijit 2009). Both of these notions of *farang* masculinity—sex tourist and son-in-law—have gained a degree of hegemony, in the sense that they are ideals that *farang* men in Thailand are compelled to live up to (or, in the case of the sex tourist, live down). At the same time, such hegemonic status of these forms of masculinity is obviously contextually specific, related, among other things, to socioeconomic conditions and ethno-racial ideologies in contemporary Thailand (cf. Jackson and Cook 1999; Sirijit 2013; Sirijit and Angeles 2013; Wilson 2004).

Emergent masculinities—as socially, culturally, politically, and economically constructed complexes of ideas and practices—and transient subjectivities of the men who by turns embody and contest such masculinities have distinct implications for theorizing changing gendered ideologies and practices. Masculinities emerge and crystallize (as well as dissolve) through processes of open-ended, complex systems of social relationships, economics, power, and cultural imaginaries. Men’s subjective experiences of masculinities also change over time, but such change should not be conflated with sociocultural and political-economic emergent change. Rather, as we have argued, men’s changing relationship to multiple masculinities is “transient” rather than “emergent” and follows a pattern not of open-ended complex adaptive systems but rather of life-course trajectories grounded in the men’s existential experiences, their

emotional histories, and their own diverse and ever-changing male bodies.

### Acknowledgments

We are deeply indebted to anonymous reviewers and colleagues—too numerous to list—who provided invaluable feedback on this article. Research was funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation's International Collaborative Research Grant, National University of Singapore Academic Research Fund Grant R-111-000-076-112, and the "Thai-Farang Intermarriage in Northeast Thailand" project of the Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region (CERP) at Khon Kean University. This article is dedicated to the memory of our friend and colleague Pattana Kitiarsa.

---

## Comments

### Marcia C. Inhorn

Department of Anthropology, Yale University, 10 Sachem Street, Room 202, PO Box 208277, New Haven, Connecticut 06511, USA (marcia.inhorn@yale.edu), and Council on Middle East Studies, The MacMillan Center, Yale University, 34 Hillhouse Avenue, PO Box 208206, New Haven, Connecticut 06520, USA. 14 IX 16

Thirty years have passed since Raewyn Connell and colleagues introduced the concept of hegemonic masculinity in a *Theory and Society* essay entitled "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity" (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985). Since then, the term "hegemonic masculinity" has been used repeatedly in gender scholarship to index the culturally valorized forms of manhood that legitimize patriarchy and the dominance of some men over others.

As a feminist anthropologist of the Middle East, I, too, have used the term "hegemonic masculinity" in my scholarship—that is, until I began studying Middle Eastern men's lives directly. I soon realized that Middle Eastern men were poorly understood as men, because most of the gender scholarship in the region had focused almost exclusively on women. Furthermore, stereotypical portrayals of Middle Eastern men were common in both scholarly and popular discourse. When my ethnographic evidence failed to conform to the "toxic trait list" of Middle Eastern hegemonic masculinity—namely, men who were purportedly patriarchal, misogynistic, religiously zealous, and violent—I was compelled to rethink the concept of hegemonic masculinity, searching for a new and more ethnographically sensitive term.

In 2011, I introduced the term "emergent masculinities" in an article in *American Ethnologist*, which was written with my former student Emily A. Wentzell (Inhorn and Wentzell 2011). In that essay, we argued that the hegemonic masculinity concept had led to sterile reifications of men's lives in our

field sites (the Middle East and Mexico). Thus, we offered the term "emergent masculinities" in an attempt to capture the dynamism and transformations of manhood that were abundantly apparent in our research settings.

Wentzell went on to publish a book, *Maturing Masculinities: Aging, Chronic Illness, and Viagra in Mexico* (Duke University Press, 2013), which focused on Mexican men's aging and their experiences with erectile dysfunction. In it, she coins the term "composite masculinities," which she defines as "contingent and fluid constellations of elements that men weave together into masculine selfhoods" (Wentzell 2013:26). Composite masculinities are thus about changing performances of masculinity over the male life course. In the case of older Mexican men, these changes entail new notions of respectable marriage, family life, and practices of self-care, which may or may not involve "medicating" sexuality with Viagra.

I, too, published a book, *The New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East* (Princeton University Press, 2012, which has gone on to win several awards). In it, I develop further my concept of emergent masculinities. Drawing on Marxist scholar Raymond Williams's (1977) definition of "emergence" as "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship [that] are continually being created" (123), I define emergent masculinities as encompassing three aspects of masculine change: change over the male life course as men age; change over the generations as male youth grow to adulthood; and changes in social history that involve men in transformative processes. As I also note, emergent masculinities entail new forms of masculine practice that accompany these social transformations.

In the Middle East, emergent masculinities are abundantly apparent. For example, individual men in the Middle East are clamoring to in vitro fertilization clinics, where they have learned to accept their male infertility diagnoses and adopt new reproductive technologies. On a generational level, companionate marriage is a new normative aspiration in the Middle East, with men now desiring romantic commitments and loving relationships with wives who they consider to be friends. Emergent masculinities also entail massive social change, such as the Arab protest movements, in which men's activism has unseated brutal male dictators, while at the same time leading to irreversible changes in men's lives as political subjects. In short, I view emergent masculinities on all of these levels—as masculine change that is, at once, individual, generational, and sociopolitical and historical in nature.

The authors of this article on foreign men in Thailand adopt my concept of emergent masculinities while, at the same time, arguing that I, like Connell, have conflated men's individual, embodied subjectivities with sociocultural and political change. Men's aging, they argue, is not "emergent" in the same way that "sex tourists" or foreign "son-in-laws" are becoming newly recognized and "public" masculine identities. In their view, changes over the individual male life course are "transient"



and “subjective.” Thus, they offer the term “transient subjectivities” to separate masculine embodiment and experience from changing manhood on a more visible, societal level.

Whether “transient subjectivities” is a better way of describing male life-course change and whether a new term is needed at all remain open questions, ones that readers of this article may choose to debate. In my own view, “emergent masculine subjectivities” might serve as a compromise, given that masculine life-course change is not necessarily “transient” and evanescent.

Ultimately, the point is that anthropologists need to offer new tropes, thereby adding to the conceptual lexicon through which men’s changing lives can be described, analyzed, and debated. In this regard, Thompson, Kitiarsa, and Smutkupt’s article is quite provocative, offering a rich ethnographic and conceptual account of the way aging Western *farang* men now occupy a liminal space in Thailand as no-longer-sex-tourists, but not-quite-son-in-laws. Clearly, these men’s masculine subjectivities, whether transient or not, do not fit neatly into emergent masculine forms. The article refuses to flatten *farang* men’s experiences into hegemonic masculine types or to vilify them as sexual predators and oppressors of Thai women. Certainly, this kind of nuanced gender scholarship is very important if we are to understand men’s changing lives and their emergent masculinities in the twenty-first century.

---

### Patcharin Lapanun

Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region (CERP), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University, 123 Mittraphab Highway, Amphoe Muang, Khon Kaen 40000, Thailand (Lapanun@gmail.com). 14 IX 15

The article provides a way to conceptualize and theorize masculinity in transnational contexts, especially transnational marriage and desire and transnational tourism. Through exploration of two figures of masculinity, *farang* son-in law and sex tourist (*farang* men involved in transnational sex tourism), the authors argue for the distinction between and articulation of transient masculine subjectivities experienced by individual men and emergent masculine identities that are intersubjective, “public,” and sociocultural assemblages. According to the authors, conflating the two may lead to “misleading perceptions of, and possibly misleading prescriptions for, changing gendered beliefs, ideas, and practices.”

The arguments draw on extensive ethnographic data collected during 2007–2009 at various research locations in Thailand, including a transnational tourist destination in Bangkok and several villages in Isan provinces where *farang* men have resettled with their wives, many of whom the men first met at transnational tourist sites. By employing the approach of a “multisited ethnography” (Marcus 1995), the authors followed the dynamic relationships among these men and Isan women as well as the ideas, feelings, and experiences of these *farang*

men in spatial and temporal contexts where their masculine identities are (re)produced and where their subjectivities are embedded. The fieldwork also included affinal relatives of *farang* men and other villagers.

The narratives about the associations between *farang* men and women working at a tourist sex-entertainment site, as provided by the authors, reflect the multiple, complex, and shifting relationships. Such relationships involve not solely economic transactions and sex but deep attachment and intimate relations. The stories also highlight the unsettled subjectivities and liminality experienced by these men in such a “transnational contact zone.” At the same time, the ethnographic accounts of current transnational marriages in Isan and the *farang* sons-in law present varied categories of these men—associated with their age, nationality, and economic capital—and a great deal of diverse and transformative masculine identities and subjectivities. A socially recognized masculinity, that of the good provider, is particularly emphasized. Those who fail in carrying out such an expectation are subject to being called a “*farang khii nok*” (bird-shit *farang*). This labeling speaks to conditions and challenges that these men have to encounter and contest in making a place for themselves in Isan society. On another score, it acknowledges the rearticulation of matrilocality in the face of local and global articulations.

The article addresses how money is important to relationships between *farang* men and their wives—though this kind of transnational relationship is not mediated by money alone. The term “walking ATM” is used by the men to demonstrate how they see themselves in the context of their conjugal and extended families in rural Isan villages. An economic aspect of this kind of transnational relation is noted in academic and popular documents and media; it is worthwhile to further discuss what the practices and ideas of being a “walking ATM” mean for these men. What are the factors/conditions on which such a moral commitment developed? Was it founded in love or concern for and the desire to help their partner? Was it based on a wish to create good relationships and a good retirement life with their partner in her natal village? Furthermore, an understanding of emergent masculinity and subjectivity of the *farang* son-in-law and sex tourist can be well expected from deeper elaboration of gender relations and expectations of women (and men) in Thai society. Earlier studies of Thai society (Keyes 1984; Kirsch 1985; Mills 1999; Muecke 1992; and some of the literature cited by the authors) documented how cultural ascriptions of gender create different expectations with regard to family obligations and social roles for Thai women and men. Specifically, the highly valued cultural idea of a “dutiful daughter” who supports her parents and natal family is a powerful factor shaping gender relations and expectations toward Thai women (Mills 1999; Rabibhadana 1984). Undoubtedly, this gender culture influences masculinity and subjectivity of in-marrying *farang* men in matrilocal societies. Such explanations reveal another layer of the complex contexts in which masculine identities and subjectivities are emerged and embedded.

It is noted that among various factors, existential experiences over a lifetime are a condition shaping masculine subjectivity and desires. Thus, it is important to extend the analysis beyond the ideas and experiences of the *farang* men while they are involved in transnational marriage relation(s) and in the sex industry so as to include the experiences of these men in their home countries, especially regarding gender relations and previous relationship(s) with Western women. Masculinity (and femininity) can be better captured in the context in which gender relations are taken into account. In this case, most of the *farang* men included in the study had previous relationships with Western women, thus it is essential to see how such relationships shape their masculinities and subjectivities. Also, we can look further to how feminist ideas and practices, especially in Western societies, on the one hand, and the position of “real white men” drawing on masculine ideals from their home countries (Maher and Lafferty 2014), on the other, combine and influence *farang* men’s desire, justification, and engagement in transnational sex tourism and marriage and how these shape and reshape their masculine identities and subjectivity.

The article contributes to the existing literature, particularly on gender studies, in two major ways. First, it speaks to the shift in scholarship on gender studies, which tends to focus on women’s experiences, ideas, and practices, to men’s experiences and points of view. Second, it provides a way to conceptualize masculinity and highlights the complex processes of the ongoing changes to gendered ideologies and practices. In doing this, the authors argue that we should carefully pay attention to the distinctions between masculine identities and transient subjectivities. Extended elaborations on these multi-layer and complex contexts would make the theoretical approach for conceptualizing emergent masculinity and transient subjectivity, especially in transnational contexts, even more convincing.

---

### Johan Lindquist

Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, SE-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden (johan.lindquist@socant.su.se). 8 IX 15

### The View from the North

In 2010, Swedes made nearly half a million trips to Thailand, a remarkable figure for a country with a population of less than 10 million people. As the flow of tourists increased steadily beginning in the 1990s, effects were soon obvious in Sweden. By 2002, Thailand had become the number one country of origin for female marriage migrants (Haandrikman 2014). In connection with the rise of marriage migration, Thai seasonal laborers increasingly became part of the rural berry-picking industry, as highly publicized cases of exploitation clashed with national labor laws (Hedberg 2013). Television serials such as *30 Degrees in February*, based on Swedish ex-

patriate life in Thailand, have made their way into Swedish popular culture, while Thai fast food restaurants have increasingly replaced hot dog stalls across the country. The 2004 tsunami was a national tragedy as more than 543 Swedes died, nearly all of them in Khao Lak.

I take the relationship between Sweden and Thailand as an entry point for suggesting some of the broader repercussions of Thompson, Kitiarsa, and Smutkupt’s stimulating article. The authors’ juxtaposition of the “sex tourist” and the “son-in-law”—two public “assemblages of masculinity”—in relation to the “transient subjectivities” of the *farang* men living in the Northeast effectively problematizes the ethical binaries that structure contemporary scholarly discussions concerning sex tourism, while illuminating how a strict focus on the sex industry closes off important routes of inquiry. As such, the article suggests that a critical engagement with emergent forms of masculinity—and femininity, I might add—across a complex transnational space demands not only ethnographic specificity but also a broadened research imaginary.

From this perspective, the article can be most clearly read together with Mary Beth Mills’s (1999) *Thai Women in the Global Labor Force*, which engages with a comparable but more familiar set of gender assemblages (in line with the authors’ own terminology), the Thai female “factory worker” (to this we could add the “sex worker” or a cognate term) and the “good daughter,” across the same geographical landscape between Bangkok and the rural Northeast. Taken together, their work points to the importance of considering the production of different ethical boundaries and spaces that rely on a distinction between what Bloch and Parry (1989) have called short-term and long-term transactional orders, in which the former is morally undetermined and the latter is concerned with the reproduction of the long-term moral order. What Thompson and his colleagues show is how within various migratory processes, the short term and the long term are not strictly contained within separate spaces—for instance, Pattaya or a Northeast village—but are in a constant gendered interplay across space and time.

The Swedish case raises similar kinds of questions within a different frame. On the one hand, relationships between Thai women and Swedish men are publicly, primarily via mass media but also by way of increasing numbers of Swedes’ encounters with Thai tourist areas, understood in relation to familiar forms of masculine or feminine assemblages, the former arguably in somewhat more complex terms. The Swedish man with a Thai wife is generally viewed as Caucasian, rural, working class, unattractive, and aging, thus outside the domestic marriage market, both because of the depopulation of rural Sweden and individual characteristics—clearly reminiscent of the “sex tourist” imagery that Thompson and his colleagues critique. The Thai woman is contrasted to the “modern,” “independent” Swedish woman as “subservient,” “passive,” and a “dedicated” wife and mother but also, in line with dominant views on prostitution, “exploited” (Webster and Haandrikman 2014). Both of these gender assemblages are

emergent and relatively recent in practical terms in Sweden but are, of course, rooted in globalized stereotypical identities.

In fact, however, we have very limited knowledge of the subjectivities, transient or otherwise, of either Thai women in Sweden or of their Swedish partners, and as Thompson and his colleagues suggest, we should remain skeptical of conflating public identities with individual subjectivities and life trajectories. Webster and Haandrikman (2014) offer a rare and preliminary view of Thai women in Sweden, many of whom end up in rural areas and become successful entrepreneurs while retaining connections with Thailand. Furthermore, by 2008, Thai women had become the most common binational marriage partner for second-generation Swedish men, thus disturbing racial stereotypes (Haandrikman 2014). My initial description of the wide range of relationships and economies that have developed in Sweden in the wake of tourism to Thailand supports this more complex and diverse perspective.

One of the great strengths of Thompson, Kitiarsa, and Smutkupt's article is that placing the figure of the sex tourist and the son-in-law in the same frame and indeed on the same individual helps to unravel many of the overly predictable empirical forms and analytical concepts that structure not only our understanding of particular gendered identities but also how we might approach, in ethnographic terms at least, the wide-ranging relationships and economies that follow from, but cannot be reduced to, sex tourism.

---

#### Sirijit Sunanta

Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University, 999 Phuttamonthon 4 Road, Salaya, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand (sirijit.sun@mahidol.ac.th). 21 X 15

Approximately 80% of white Western (*farang*) residents of Thailand are male (Howard 2009), and *farang* men who spend an extended period of time in Thailand without *farang* female partners are often assumed to be long-stay sex tourists or sons-in-law of rural Northeastern Thai (Isan) families. The post-Cold War growth of Thai-*farang* transnational marriages in Isan, the most economically and culturally marginalized region of Thailand, has developed out of Thailand's sex tourism. The stereotype of the *farang* son-in-law of Isan is that of a former sex tourist who met his much younger Isan wife in a bar in a tourist area. *Farang* men's identities in Thailand as sex tourists and Isan sons-in-law are, therefore, heavily loaded with gender, age, race, class, and sexuality. This article by Eric Thompson, Pattana Kitiarsa, and Suriya Smutkupt makes an important contribution to the study of Thai-*farang* marriages in Northeast Thailand by providing much-needed Western men's perspectives on a body of literature dominated by experiences of Isan transnational wives—the *mia farang*. Prominent anthropologists of Isan, the authors offer important insights into the cultural processes that *farang* men go through as they

transform from sex tourists to sons-in-law of matrilineal Isan households and communities.

Through extended fieldwork in Thailand's urban red-light districts and Isan village settings, the authors provide a rich ethnography of *farang* men's lifeworld, their relationships with Isan women, and the Isan kin-based community. The article focuses on the men's negotiation of the imposed and newly acquired identities of sex tourist and son-in-law. The authors' ethnographic data are in line with contemporary scholarship on prostitution and sex tourism that complicates the very terms "sex work" and "sex tourist," highlighting that commercialized sex and emotional attachment are not mutually exclusive in intimate liaisons between sex workers and their customers-cum-boyfriends (e.g., Bernstein 2010; Cohen 1993). While the transition of female sex workers/entertainers to wives had been noted in earlier studies (e.g., Faier 2014; Mix and Piper 2003), the transformation of men from sex tourists to husbands and sons-in-law had not received scholarly attention and thorough investigation. The authors fill this important knowledge gap by providing original and nuanced descriptions of *farang* men whose relationships with Isan sex workers fall between those of patron/customer and boyfriend/husband.

The authors examine *farang* men's self-making in the men's struggle to find their place in Thai society. According to the men's narratives, the negative stereotype of *farang* men as lower-class sex tourists is a prominent image from which the men seek to dissociate themselves. This is congruent with Husa et al.'s (2014) study in which individual white Western male retirement migrants interviewed asserted that they were different from most *farang* men in Thailand who live the sordid life of foreign sex tourists. It would be particularly interesting if the authors deepened their analysis of *farang* men's subjectivity by outlining the cultural processes in which the men craft their gendered and sexualized subject as they settle more permanently in Thailand. The social scripts the men draw on, the conditions under which they narrate their transnational life, and the implications of their subject-making processes could be explored further. For example, in both the authors' and Husa et al.'s studies, *farang* men try to place themselves in a positive light by expressing their disgust for or disapproval of Western sex tourists at the expense of further stigmatizing the very stereotype that constrains them and other Western men in Thailand. In a study of former Filipina hostesses in Japan who are married to their Japanese male customers, Faier (2007) argues that the profession of "love" for their Japanese husbands is a form of agency in which the Filipina women claim "a sense of humanity, countering the stigma associated with their work in the bars, and articulating a sense of themselves as cosmopolitan, modern and moral women who possess emotional interiority" (149). A study of similar processes for *farang* customers-turned-husbands in Thailand could offer an equally interesting analysis.

The authors suggest that *farang* men in Thailand move from the "sex tourist" to the "son-in-law" identity to gain a more settled position in Thai society. It is important to note

that this process is not linear and unproblematic. The two identities are overlapping and are distinguished not by the men's legal marital status but rather by the spaces they inhabit and their length of stay in Thailand. Identifying *farang* "sons-in-law" as reformed "sex tourists" who had left the bar scene in tourist destinations to settle down in the village with their wives, the authors might have glossed over the circular mobilities that *farang* men and their Isan partners undertake. In many cases, *farang*-Isan couples do not cut themselves off from urban spaces, tourist destinations, and the entertainment scenes. Outside the village, in urban settings and in tourist destinations, the identity "son-in-law" is of limited use to alleviate the men's respectability. In mainstream Thai society, a general perception is that only a *farang khii-nok*—low-quality *farang*—has the taste for rural Isan women, whose rural class background and physical appearance are lowly regarded in urban-centric Thai society. Their longer stay and experience with transnational life in Thailand allows "sons-in-law" to assert themselves as wise old-timers who are savvier than naïve short-term sex tourists in regard to relationships with Thai women and Thai society.

Unlike articles by Maher and Lafferty (2014) and Stanley (2012) on white Western masculinities in transnational settings in Thailand and Shanghai, respectively, this article hardly spells out what manliness entails for the *farang* men under study. Although the authors emphasize the *farang* men's desire to be a good man, the qualities that make one a "good man" are not clearly laid out. The authors have not yet explained the processes in which a particular set of meanings of a "good/real man" is constituted, performed, and articulated.

All in all, the article offers invaluable original data and a rich ethnography of the lifeworld of *farang* husbands in Thailand. The focus on subjectivity and masculinity is important and timely, consistent with contemporary academic work on gender, mobility, and transnationalism (Yeoh and Ramdas 2014). I just note that *farang* men's way of narrating the self and articulating masculinity could be analyzed further to reveal discursive practices at work in the process.

---

## Reply

We are grateful to the commentators (as well as anonymous reviewers) in taking time to carefully consider and provide invaluable feedback with regard to the article published here. In our response, we mainly wish to highlight and expand on these key interventions.

Inhorn precisely identifies the crux of the theoretical debate we have raised by framing our analysis in reference to Inhorn and Wentzell's earlier contribution (2011; subsequently developed in Inhorn 2012; Wentzell 2013). In our reading of the original article, and in Inhorn's engagement with our work here, we believe that our theoretical treatments of changing

masculinities are overwhelmingly in agreement. That said, the very specific but not inconsequential point we seek to emphasize with this analysis is that change operates differently across Inhorn's three "aspects" or "levels" of masculinity. Our theoretical frameworks and concepts need to account for that difference.

Our thinking is informed by a Foucauldian framework of subjectification, in which "subjects" are produced within systems of knowledge (we might even suggest that this framework has appealed to anthropologists because it corresponds to less fashionable but still influential notions of how "culture" and "enculturation" work; but Foucauldian subjectification simultaneously emphasizes power while evading out-of-date notions of timeless, hermetically sealed "cultures"; cf. Abu Lughod 1991). In any given place and time, men (and women) are subject to gendered discourses that reference particular constructs of masculinity (and femininity, as well as others that "queer" this binary). We have used the term and idea of "assemblages" of masculinity (more broadly, gender and sexuality) to identify these constructs. At the same time, in our view, the subject is a site of agency and autonomy within, though not independent from, systems of knowledge. We would further suggest that this distinction, as well as relationship, between "transient" subjectivities and sociocultural assemblages of masculinity described in our article could be used to investigate other sorts of identities (of gender or beyond) in order to theorize change.

Inhorn makes an important point, raised but never fully resolved in earlier comments of anonymous peer reviewers, regarding the relationship between our *analytically* distinct "levels" of (transient) masculine subjectivities and (emergent) sociocultural assemblages of masculine identities. We agree that these are empirically related and feed back into each other in ways that are mutually constitutive. Inhorn's example of many individual men "clamoring to in vitro fertilization clinics" and accepting and adopting new fertility treatments is a provisional example of how "transient" subjective agency, enacted en masse, may play a crucial role in giving rise to new "emergent" sociocultural assemblages of masculinity (i.e., Inhorn's "new Arab man"). Similarly, *farang* men's individual desires, subjective senses of self (including their sense of marginalization in their countries of origin), and their agency within the contemporary globalized, transnational political economy are principal factors in the emergence of the figures of the sex tourist and the *farang* husband-cum-son-in-law.

We are nevertheless arguing, based on the case of *farang* men in Thailand, that evidence of change in one of Inhorn's levels is neither necessarily indicative of nor necessarily causally linked to change at another level.<sup>21</sup> In our case, we

21. We would also note that our own framework—for better or worse—implicitly conflates the second and third of Inhorn's aspects or levels.



see evidence that while individual men's subjective relationships to "sex tourist" and "son-in-law" change over time, this does not appear to be a primary or singular cause of the "emergence" (or dissolution) of one or the other of these forms of masculinity. It may be argued that the phenomenon of the in-marrying *farang* son-in-law may owe its emergence in large part to the development of sex tourism in the late twentieth century. But the emergence of the former does not equate with the dissolution of the latter. At present, these two figures of *farang* masculinity appear to exist in a somewhat symbiotic relationship in Thailand. Individual men "move through" these forms of masculinity as their subjective relationship to embodied performances of the forms changes over time. But at a social and cultural level, the "son-in-law" is not replacing or displacing the "sex tourist."

Inhorn also usefully highlights the question of our terminology and conceptual lexicon, citing the interventions that she and Emily Wentzell, along with our article, have made regarding changing forms of masculinity, gender relations, and sexuality. Wentzell's "composite masculinity" (cited by Inhorn), for example, would appear to us to be a useful way to model how *individual* men assemble their own sense of masculine self out of multiple, competing, and often contradictory sociocultural models of masculinity, models that are themselves public, intersubjective assemblages. With regard to "transience" and "emergence," both are specific terms for change. Our inclination is to use emergence specifically to model complex adaptive systems (e.g., DeLanda 2006). By this limited definition, men's (and women's) finite lives are not the same sort of open-ended, emergent systems that sociocultural systems are. Our use of "transient" to mark this difference is meant mainly for emphasis. As with Inhorn, we are happy to leave it open to readers to choose whether to adopt this particular vocabulary or not.

Sunanta similarly highlights important issues that the current article does not fully address. In part due to the divergent nature of the two research projects we draw on, we have perhaps overly dichotomized the urban, entertainment contact-zone sited "sex tourist" and rural, village-based "*farang* son-in-law." Although our own research and data do not speak to this directly, we expect that there is much more to be said about the ongoing "circular migrations that *farang* husbands and their Isan partners undertake." It is undoubtedly the case, as Sunanta suggests, that *farang*-Isan couples continue to engage with urban and transnational settings, even if they are primarily settled in rural Isan. Sunanta's comments provide an interesting, speculative glimpse of how *farang* men who have settled in Isan may draw on local knowledge and networks within Thailand to position themselves advantageously vis-à-vis short-term tourists and others.

Sunanta also echoes our own point that, to date, "a fuller account of the lives of *farang* men in Isan remains to be written" (Thompson, Kitiarsa, and Smutkupt) and that we only have a rather partial view of "what manliness entails for *farang* men" (Sunanta). Our own contribution here, while not directly

focused on men's sense of what makes a "good man," does point to ideas of material provisioning, "first world" patronage, and care and support for affinal kin as some elements in such a construct (cf. Lafferty and Maher 2014; Maher and Lafferty 2014).<sup>22</sup> Here, as well as with regard to the ongoing entanglements with urban and transnational places and constructs of masculinity, reference to Wentzell's "composite masculinities" may again be of particular value. The *farang* men in Isan would appear to be in a position to draw on a very complex range of ideas and practices of masculinity in constructing their own senses of self. Moreover, as Sunanta suggests, these are likely to be highly situational across different urban, rural, and transnational regimes of value, figured in relation to sex-gender, racial, and other hierarchies (cf. Hoang 2015).

Lapanun emphasizes the importance of linking our analysis back to situations and constructs of masculinity in the men's home countries and with men's past experience, particularly with ex-wives and other Western women. Lindquist's comments allude to this—at least in stereotyped Swedish imagery—of men who are "outside the domestic [marriage] market" due to age, lack of affluence, rurality, unattractiveness, and other characteristics that create if not "oppression" then felt senses of marginalization.<sup>23</sup> The close ethnographic work of both Lapanun and Sunanta, among others, has gone a long way toward demonstrating the ways in which low-status Western men and Isan women, both marginalized in their "home" contexts, come together and, in the best of circumstances, mutually benefit from enhanced subjective well-being and social standing—a sort of mutual hypergamy, if you will.

Finally, Lindquist makes a good point about ethics and temporality. Untangling the theoretical relationship between "short-term and long-term transactional orders" and their ethical entailments is well beyond our scope here. In our analysis, we have consciously eschewed the discourse of moral panic within which the experiences of *farang* men in Thailand is commonly framed. Yet that does not mean that ethical issues are insignificant, only that analyses framed by a priori moral judgments (be they feminist or traditionalist) are unlikely to yield useful insights into the complex moral orders within which actual subjects live and act. Lindquist also echoes others, particularly Lapanun and Sunanta, emphasizing that these processes of change and masculinities cannot be understood solely through investigation of discrete places (such as rural Isan or urban Bangkok). Lindquist highlights the multiple tem-

22. Lafferty is completing a PhD at the University of Melbourne focusing on *farang* men's experiences in Isan. We expect this will represent a significant contribution and treatment of these men's experiences beyond that contained in single journal articles or book chapters.

23. We find it hard to see the men in our study as "oppressed." In general, predator/victim and oppressor/oppressed dichotomies, while they may be discursively effective (e.g., in promotion of "anti-human trafficking" campaigns), obscure more than they reveal about actual human relations. We need a more nuanced conceptual lexicon to describe temporally and spatially variable terrains of privilege and marginalization.

poral dimensions of analysis as well, which certainly bears much deeper consideration. While many questions remain, we are encouraged by the four commentaries. We hope these interventions along with our own work will make a significant contribution to understanding both transnational relationships and ever-changing gendered experiences and subjectivities.

—Eric C. Thompson, Pattana Kitiarsa,  
and Suriya Smutkupt

## References Cited

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. Writing against culture. In *Recapturing anthropology: working in the present*. R. G. Fox, ed. Pp. 137–162. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- Angeles, Lenora, and Sirijit Sunanta. 2009. Demanding daughter duty. *Critical Asian Studies* 41(4):549–574.
- Barker, Joshua, Erik Harms, and Johan Lindquist. 2013. *Figures of Southeast Asian modernity*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Barton, Bernadette. 2002. Dancing on the Möbius strip: challenging the sex war paradigm. *Gender and Society* 16(5):585–602.
- Bernstein, Elizabeth. 2007. *Temporarily yours: intimacy, authenticity, and the commerce of sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2010. Bounded authenticity and the commerce of sex. In *Intimate labors: cultures, technologies, and the politics of care*. Eileen Boris and Rhacel S. Parrenas, eds. Pp. 148–165. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. [SS]
- Bishop, Ryan, and Lillian S. Robinson. 1998. *Night market: sexual cultures and the Thai economic miracle*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2002. How my dick spent its summer vacation: labor, leisure and masculinity on the Web. *Genders* 35, [http://www.iav.nl/ezines/IAV\\_606661/IAV\\_606661\\_2010\\_52/g35\\_robinson.html](http://www.iav.nl/ezines/IAV_606661/IAV_606661_2010_52/g35_robinson.html).
- Bloch, Maurice, and Jonathan Parry. 1989. Introduction: money and the morality of exchange. In *Money and the morality of exchange*. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry Cambridge, eds. Pp. 1–32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [JL]
- Boonmathya, Ratana Tosakul. 2005. Cross-cultural marriages and transnational gender mobility: experiences of village women from Northeastern Thailand. Paper presented at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), Kyoto University.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2007. *The bachelor's ball: the crisis of peasant society in Béarn*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bowie, Katherine. 2008. Standing in the shadows: of matrilocality and the role of women in a village election in Northern Thailand. *American Ethnologist* 35(1):136–153.
- Brennan, Denise. 2004. *What's love got to do with it? transnational desires and sex tourism in the Dominican Republic*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Cabezas, Amalia L. 2009. *Economies of desire: sex and tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Carrigan, Tim, Bob Connell, and John Lee. 1985. Toward a new sociology of masculinity. *Theory and Society* 14(5):551–607. [MCI]
- Cohen, Erik. 1982. Thai girls and farang men: the edge of ambiguity. *Annals of Tourism Research* 9:403–428.
- . 1986. Lovelorn farangs: the correspondence between foreign men and Thai girls. *Anthropological Quarterly* 59(3):115–127.
- . 1993. Open-ended prostitution as a skillful game of luck: opportunities, risk and security among tourist-oriented prostitutes in a Bangkok soi. In *Tourism in South East Asia*. M. Hitchcock, Victor T. King, and Michael J. G. Parnwell, eds. Pp. 155–178. London: Routledge.
- Cole, Jennifer. 2014. Producing value among Malagasy marriage migrants in France: managing horizons of expectation. *Current Anthropology* 55(S9): S85–S94.
- Connell, R. W. 1987. *Gender and power: society, the person and sexual politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Constable, Nicole. 2009. The commodification of intimacy: marriage, sex, and reproductive labor. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 38:49–64.
- Dahles, Heidi. 2009. Romance and sex tourism. In *Tourism in Southeast Asia: challenges and new directions*. Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King, and Michael Parnwell, eds. Pp. 222–235. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- DeLanda, Manuel. 2006. *A new philosophy of society: assemblage theory and social complexity*. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A thousand plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Elliston, Deborah A. 2004. A passion for the nation: masculinity, modernity, and nationalist struggle. *American Ethnologist* 31(4):606–630.
- Faier, Lieba. 2007. Filipina migrants in rural Japan and their professions of love. *American Ethnologist* 34(1):148–162.
- Foucault, Michel. 2007. *Security, territory, population: lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gallo, Ester. 2006. Italy is not a good place for men: narratives of places, marriage and masculinity among Malayali migrants. *Global Networks* 6(4): 357–372.
- Garrick, Damien. 2005. Excuses, excuses: rationalizations of Western sex tourists in Thailand. *Current Issues in Tourism* 8(6):497–509.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gerholm, Lena. 2003. Overcoming temptation: on masculinity and sexuality among Muslims in Stockholm. *Global Networks* 3(3):401–416.
- Haandrikman, Karen. 2014. Binational marriages in Sweden: is there an EU effect? *Population, Space and Place* 20(2):177–199. [JL]
- Hedberg, Charlotta. 2013. “Grapes of wrath?” Power spatialities and aspects of labour in the wild berry global commodity chain. *Competition and Change* 17(1):57–74. [JL]
- Herdt, Gilbert, and Nichole C. Polen-Petit. 2011. *Human sexuality: self, society and culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- High, Casey. 2010. Warriors, hunters, and Bruce Lee: gendered agency and the transformation of Amazonian masculinity. *American Ethnologist* 37(4):753–770.
- Hoang, Kimberly. 2015. *Dealing in desire: Asian ascendancy, Western decline, and the hidden currencies of global sex work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hoefinger, Heidi. 2013. *Sex, love and money in Cambodia: professional girlfriends and transactional relationships*. New York: Routledge.
- Howard, Robert W. 2009. The migration of Westerners to Thailand: an unusual flow from developed to developing world. *International Migration* 47(2):193–225. [SS]
- Husa, Karl, Christian Vielhaber, Julia Jostl, Krisztina Veress, and Birgit Wieser. 2014. Searching for paradise? international retirement migrants in Hua Hin and Cha-am, Thailand. In *Southeast Asian mobility transitions: issues and trends in migration and tourism*. Karl Husa, Alexander Trupp, and Helmut Wohlschlagl, eds. Pp. 137–167. Vienna: Department of Geography and Regional Research, University of Vienna. [SS]
- Inhorn, Marcia C. 2012. *The new Arab man: emergent masculinities, technologies, and Islam in the Middle East*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. [MCI]
- Inhorn, Marcia C., and Emily A. Wentzell. 2011. Embodying emergent masculinities: men engaging with reproductive and sexual health technologies in the Middle East and Mexico. *American Ethnologist* 38(4):801–815.
- Jackson, Peter A., and Nerida M. Cook, eds. 1999. *Genders and sexualities in modern Thailand*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm.
- Johnson, Andrew A. 2007. Authenticity, tourism and self-discovery in Thailand: self-creation and the discerning gaze of trekkers and old hands. *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 22(2):153–178.
- Jongwilaiwan, Rattana, and Eric C. Thompson. 2013. Thai wives in Singapore and transnational patriarchy. *Gender, Place and Culture* 20(3):363–381.
- Kanaaneh, Rhoda. 2005. Boys or men? duped or “made”? Palestinian soldiers in the Israeli military. *American Ethnologist* 32(2):260–275.
- Kempadoo, Kamala. 2004. *Sexing the Caribbean: gender, race and sexual labor*. New York: Routledge.
- Keyes, Charles F. 1984. Mother or mistress but never a monk: Buddhist notions of female gender in rural Thailand. *American Ethnologist* 11(2):223–241.
- Kirsch, Thomas. 1985. Text and context: Buddhist sex roles/culture of gender revisited. *American Ethnologist* 12:302–320. [PL]
- Lafferty, Megan, and Kristin H. Maher. 2014. The expat life with a Thai wife: Thailand as an imagined space of masculine transformation. In *Contemporary socio-cultural and political perspectives on Thailand*. P. Liamputtong, ed. Pp. 329–245. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Lapanun, Patcharin. 2012. It's not just about money: transnational marriages of Isan women. *Journal of Mekong Societies* 8(3):1–28.

- . 2013. *Logics of desire and transnational marriage practices in a Northeastern Thai village*. PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.
- Latour, Bruno. 1997. *Reassembling the social: an introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Leve, Lauren. 2011. Identity. *Current Anthropology* 52(4):513–535.
- Lindquist, Johan A. 2010. *Singapore's borderlands: tourism, migration and anxieties of mobility*. Singapore: NUS.
- Lipset, David. 2004. Modernity without romance? masculinity and desire in courtship stories told by young Papua New Guinean men. *American Ethnologist* 31(2):205–224.
- Lytleton, Chris. 2000. *Endangered relations: negotiating sex and AIDS in Thailand*. Australia: Harwood Academic.
- Maher, Kristen H., and Megan Lafferty. 2014. White migrant masculinities in Thailand and the paradoxes of Western privilege. *Social and Cultural Geography* 15(4):427–448, doi:10.1080/14649365.2014.893703. [PL, SS]
- Mai, Nick. 2013. Embodied cosmopolitans: the subjective mobility of migrants working in the global sex industry. *Gender, Place and Culture* 21(1):107–124.
- Manderson, Lenore. 1997. Parables of imperialism and fantasies of the exotic: Western representations of Thailand—place and sex. In *Sites of desire, economies of pleasure: sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*. L. Manderson and M. Jolly, eds. Pp. 123–144. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marcus, George E. 1995. Ethnography in/of the world system: the emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24:95–117. [PL]
- McKay, Steven C. 2007. Filipino sea men: constructing masculinities in an ethnic labour niche. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33(4):617–633.
- Mills, Mary Beth. 1999. *Thai women in the global labor force: consuming desires, contested selves*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- . 2005. Engendering discourses of displacement: contesting mobility and marginality in rural Thailand. *Ethnography* 6(3):385–419.
- Mix, Prapairot R., and Nicola Piper. 2003. Does marriage “liberate” women from sex work? Thai women in Germany. In *Wife or worker? Asian women and migration*. Nicola Piper and Mina Roces, eds. Pp. 53–71. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield. [SS]
- Muecke, Marjorie A. 1984. Make money not babies: changing status markers of Northern Thai women. *Asian Survey* 24(4):459–470.
- . 1992. Mother sold food, daughter sells her body: the cultural continuity of prostitution. *Social Science and Medicine* 35(7):891–901.
- Nye, Robert A. 2005. Locating masculinity: some recent work on men. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30(3):1937–1962.
- O’Connell Davidson, Julia. 1995. British sex tourists in Thailand. In *(Hetero) sexual politics*. Mary Maynard and June Purvis, eds. Pp. 42–64. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Ong, Aihwa, and Stephen J. Collier, eds. 2005. *Global assemblages: technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Ortner, Sherry B. 2006. *Anthropology and social theory: culture, power, and the acting subject*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Padilla, Mark B., Jennifer S. Hirsch, Miguel Muñoz-Laboy, Robert E. Sember, and Richard G. Parker, eds. 2007. *Love and globalization: transformations of intimacy in the contemporary world*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Rabibhadana, Akin. 1984. Kinship, marriage and the Thai social system. In *Perspectives on the Thai marriage*. Apichat Chamratrithirong, ed. Pp. 1–27. Bangkok: Mahidol University. [PL]
- Rubin, Gayle S. 2011 [1975]. The traffic in women: notes on the “political-economy” of sex. In *Deviations: a Gayle Rubin reader*. Pp. 33–65. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Seabrook, Jeremy. 1996. *Travels in the skin trade: tourism and the sex industry*. London: Pluto.
- Silverman, Kaja. 1983. *The subject of semiotics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sirijit, Sunanta. 2013. Gendered nation and classed modernity: perceptions of *mia farang* (foreigners’ wives) in Thai society. In *Cleavage, connection and conflict in rural, urban and contemporary Asia*. Tim Bunnell, D. Parthasarathy, and Eric C. Thompson, eds. Pp. 183–199. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Sirijit, Sunanta, and Leonora C. Angeles. 2013. From rural life to transnational wife: agrarian transition, gender mobility, and intimate globalization in transnational marriages in Northeast Thailand. *Gender, Place and Culture* 20(6):699–717.
- Sökefeld, Martin. 1999. Debating self, identity, and culture in anthropology. *Current Anthropology* 40(4):417–448.
- Stanley, Phiona. 2012. Superheroes in Shanghai: constructing transnational Western men’s identities. *Gender, Place and Culture* 19(2):213–231.
- Thai, Hung Cam. 2014. *Insufficient funds: monetary circulation in low wage transnational families*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Truong, Thanh-Dam. 1990. *Sex, money and morality: prostitution and tourism in Southeast Asia*. London: Zed.
- Webster, Natasha, and Karen Haandrikman. 2014. Thai women in Sweden: victims or participants? Stockholm Research Reports in Demography 2014:9, [http://www.suda.su.se/SRRD/SRRD\\_2014\\_9.pdf](http://www.suda.su.se/SRRD/SRRD_2014_9.pdf), accessed September 8, 2015. [JL]
- Weitzer, Ronald. 2009. Sociology of sex work. *Annual Review of Sociology* 35: 213–234.
- Wentzell, Emily A. 2013. *Maturing masculinities: aging, chronic illness, and Viagra in Mexico*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. [MCI]
- Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, Ara. 2004. *The intimate economies of Bangkok: tomboys, tycoons, and Avon ladies in the global city*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yeoh, Brenda, and Kamalini Ramdas. 2014. Gender, migration, mobility and transnationalism. *Gender, Place and Culture* 21(10):1197–1213, doi:10.1080/0966369X.2014.969686. [SS]
- Zhang, Everett Yuehong. 2008. The birth of *nanke* (men’s medicine) in China: the making of the subject of desire. *American Ethnologist* 34(3): 491–508.