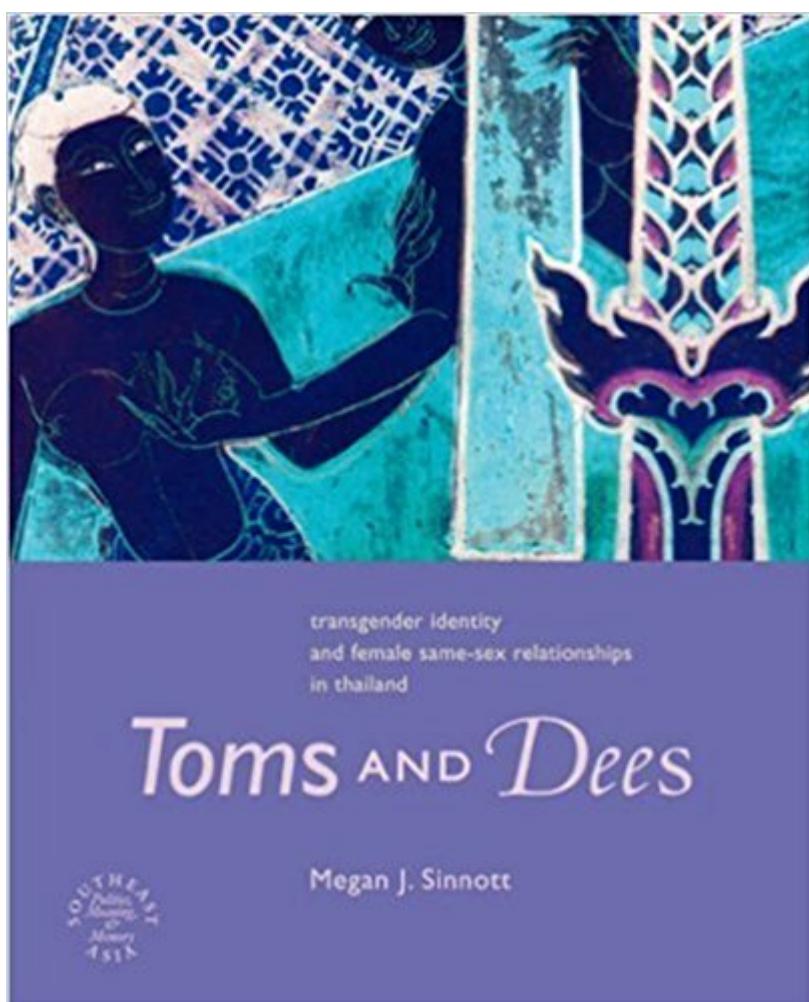


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Toms And Dees: Transgender Identity And Female Same-Sex Relationships In Thailand (Southeast Asia: Politics, Meaning, And Memory)



Synopsis

A vibrant, growing, and highly visible set of female identities has emerged in Thailand known as tom and dee. A "tom" (from "tomboy") refers to a masculine woman who is sexually involved with a feminine partner, or "dee" (from "lady"). The patterning of female same-sex relationships into masculine and feminine pairs, coupled with the use of English derived terms to refer to them, is found throughout East and Southeast Asia. Have the forces of capitalism facilitated the dissemination of Western-style gay and lesbian identities throughout the developing world as some theories of transnationalism suggest? Is the emergence of toms and dees over the past twenty-five years a sign that this has occurred in Thailand? Megan Sinnott engages these issues by examining the local culture and historical context of female same-sex eroticism and female masculinity in Thailand. Drawing on a broad spectrum of anthropological literature, Sinnott situates Thai tom and dee subculture within the global trend of increasingly hybridized sexual and gender identities.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"An engagingly written and fascinating account grounded in extensive fieldwork and a rich interdisciplinary literature." -- Michael G. Peletz, Colgate University "Sinnott's highly accessible presentation makes it equally useful as an academic text and as an undergraduate teaching text." -- Peter Jackson, Australian National University -- This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Megan J. Sinnott teaches anthropology at the University of Colorado, Boulder. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Good read on how gender and sexuality is defined in the south east

I got this book for an Ph.D. anthropology class. I found it fairly booring, but it was an easy read and had a lot of decent information on same-sex relationships in Thailand. I wouldn't recommend it for pleasure reading!

Dennis Altman asked whether gays in developing countries are adopting Western gay rights, nomenclature, and culture or do they view it as imperial. Sinnott notes that his focus is upon gay men, rather than women-loving women. She looks at Thailand to investigate these matters. For those that don't understand the essentialism-constructivism debates, this book will help to explain everything. Sinnott discusses "toms" and "dees" and doesn't even bring up the Western term "butch-femme" until the latter half of the book. According to Sinnott, gay and homophobic Thais both embrace and reject the West. Homophobes will say homosexuality is a sign of Western decadence but then also say, "Let's hide Thai gays so that our Western heroes don't look down upon us." Lesbian Thai activists strive to show others that Thai lesbians have existed for centuries, but gay rights is also seen as modern and glamorous given its Western origins. Again, both activism and bigotry are different over there. It's considered impolite to be confrontational and "in your face" a la Queen Nation in the 1990s in Thailand, especially for women of any sexuality. Thus, this book includes several examples of Thai lesbians letting comments slide that Western lesbians would not. However, the author continually repeats that Thai parents would rather see their daughters involved romantically with women than "losing face" by being with unmarried men. As much as the author makes Thailand look greener than the America has been to lesbians, there are instances when Thailand seems dare I say "primitive" for lack of a better word. The author states that Thais only see hyperfeminine gay men and butch lesbians as liking their own sex. They have no knowledge or recognition of manly clones or "lipstick" lesbians. Anybody who has taken a women's studies or gay studies class will find it hard to understand how Thais fail to differentiate between sexual object choice, gender identity, and biological sex. In the US, the division between gays and transsexuals is very clear. One doesn't need the Empire State Building or Disneyland to see that. So it's hard not to look at this blind spot as kind old-school. Further, Thai tolerance of lesbians doesn't seem to erase self-loathing. Many of the toms here say they are being punished for bad deeds in a past life. Many

of these butches see themselves as second-rate men, so different from the proud American butches that Judith Halberstam analyzed. Sinnott stated that heterosexually-active sex workers are more politicized and unapologetic than Thai lesbians are. I thought of two topics this book fails to bring up. The author repeats that dees have no identity and community outside of their tom lovers. Why aren't they influenced by the bisexual rights movement in the West? Don't they see bi-curious acts and statements by Madonna, Christina Aguilera, Pink, or Janet Jackson? Female bisexuality is BIG in the US, it hasn't floated over to Thailand?! Second, lesbians in the US have said, "If you don't come out or wear things that are coded as lesbians, straight men will hit on you until you're blue in the face!" In this book, though dees are pressured by their parents to marry men, no interviewee states that she is out or acts tom in order to deflect attention from straight males. Finally, I wish the author had said more about herself. In my high school, there was a Thai-American guy named Joe who was really named Sinat. I wonder if the author's last name is just another spelling of that. Is the author Thai-American? I hear Thai is incredibly difficult for Westerners to learn. When studying gay men in developing countries, writers like Joseph Carrier and Manuel Fernandez-Alemany had to have sex to get into circles where gay men would open up to them. Did this female anthropologist have to do the same thing? Is the author butch- or femme-identified? I think that would sway how toms and dees related to her. Does the author not practice butch-femme? What would Thai lesbians say of Western counterparts that do not "take a role"?

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