

Political Economy of Thailand's Third Gender

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Background

Sao brapheht song translates to a second type of woman and refers to male to female transgendered individuals. Although Thailand is often praised for its tolerance of other gender categories (Jackson, 1995), narratives of kathoey individuals reveal that Thai attitudes toward the third gender are often negative and unaccepting (Matzner, 2001). While there have been studies about the construction of the *sao brapheht song* identity and attitudes of Thai people toward *sao brapheht song*, little research has been conducted to analyze how these affect opportunity for *sao brapheht song*.

Research Questions

To what extent are economic and social opportunities granted to or withheld from *sao brapheht song* in relation to Thai attitudes toward the third gender?

Methods and Materials

This study utilized the textual narrative method (Costa and Matzner, 2007), ethnographic research, personal essays, and other forms of personal accounts in assessing the lived experiences of *sao brapheht song*. Further evidence was taken from Thai current events and media to gain an understand national sentiments toward *sao brapheht song*.

- Personal Essays
- Academic Journals
- Past Research
- Podcasts
- Interviews
- News Outlets
- Historical Events
- Entertainment



Top Left: *Sao Brapheht Song* at a café in Chiang Rai, Thailand

Top Middle: *Sao brapheht song* Performer at nightclub Maggie Choo's in Bangkok Thailand

Top Right: *Sao Brapheht Song* with a friend at restaurant in Chiang Rai, Thailand

Left: *Sao Brapheht Song* contestants in the Miss Satellite Pageant at Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Rai, Thailand

Future Research

Although most workplaces in Thailand are typically unwelcoming of *sao brapheht song*, many *sao brapheht song* still choose to work outside of the areas of beauty, entertainment, and sex work where they are accepted. This invites researchers to take a more activist approach on future topics such as workplace discrimination and work experiences of *sao brapheht song*.

References

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Discussion

Opportunities for *sao brapheht song* are most often found in three economic sectors:

Beauty

Pageant Models, Make Up Artists, Hair Designers

- Believed to have naturally superior talents for art, beauty, and performance
- Distinguished in beauty pageants world wide

Entertainment

Singers, Actresses, Cabaret Performers, Comedians

- Permitted to speak on taboo subjects that are seen as comedic and entertaining.
- Seen as loud and outlandish characters.

Sex Work

Street sex workers, Club/Bar workers, Independent sex work

- At higher risk for HIV due to low education of safe sex practices and prevention methods
 - Limited in their ability to request safe sex practices and condoms during sexual activity
- Sao brapheht song* who wish to work outside these three areas often cannot find a job due to discrimination by Thai business owners

Conclusion

Economic and social opportunities for *sao brapheht song* are most often limited to the areas of beauty, entertainment, and sex work. *Sao brapheht song* who seek opportunities in other areas often must change their physical appearance or endure teasing and discrimination (Claese, 2011). Most companies offer no protections or anti-discrimination policies for *sao brapheht song* which often results in unjust treatment in the workplace.