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While rarely discussed
in public, the
"reverse anal fuck"
is something
for which *katoey*
are known.

tions. Moreover, *katoey* attract men who want to be penetrated. Although some *katoey* covet complete sex change surgery, just as many have no desire to lose their male organ. While such graphic erotic details are rarely discussed in public, the "reverse anal fuck" is something for which *katoey* are known.

Certainly, the hate-motivated bashings and murders found in the United States are largely absent in Thailand, as are religious teachings which interpret transgenderism as a sin. Nevertheless, a great deal of pain lies beneath the *katoey*'s beauty. Thai society is not nearly as tolerant as it seems to outsiders, or as utopic as romanticized press portrayals sometimes make it appear.

While Buddhism does not condemn transgenderism as sinful, many Thais believe that a person born as a *katoey* committed adultery in a former life. This working through of one's bad karma engenders pity, rather than hatred, but it still creates a stigma. While some families promote their sons' development as *katoey*, others feel deeply ashamed. I have spoken with Thais who say that they admire *katoey* and have them as friends, yet can't stand the thought of having one as a child. And I have heard too many stories of parents who attempt to rid their sons of effeminate

behavior through violent beatings.

Katoey also face job discrimination. While working as a shopkeeper or hairdresser is socially acceptable, *katoey* who aspire to jobs as teachers, doctors, government workers or other professions

From top: A go-go dancer worms up; a young man with his girlfriend (left) and best friend (right); a prostitute on the beach in Pattaya. Some to an estimated twenty thousand members of her trade. Opposite: A traditional dancer and prostitute.



DOUBLE VISION

Feminine but
not female, Thai
transsexuals
seduce the eye.

By Andrew Matzner

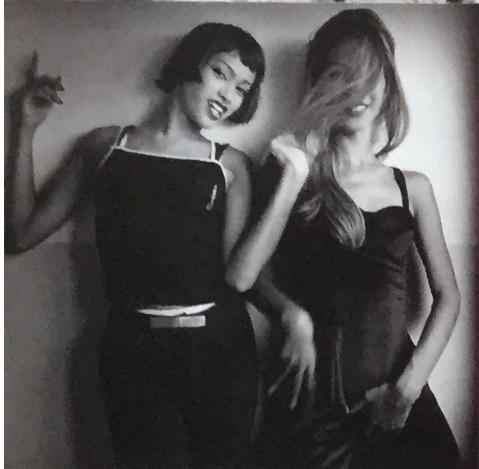
Photographs by
Francesca Galliani

Every expat living in Bangkok or Chiang Mai has his own set of anecdotes to trot out for fellow Westerners—stories of cross-cultural misunderstandings and confusions. But there's a favorite among men: the time he took home a stunning woman, only to discover (or be told by friends the next day) she wasn't born that way. Given the international reputation of Thai transsexuals (known as *katoey*) for feminine beauty, it's easy to sympathize with the bewildered bloke.

A prostitute poses at the squatters' motel she lives in. She is partially supported by an Austrian boyfriend who met her while touring Bangkok.

Thais themselves debate who is more beautiful, "real" women or *katoey*. A few years ago, the promoters of the Miss Tiffany *katoey* pageant began staging their





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often find their way blocked by deep-seated prejudice. And while there are no laws which curtail the freedom of *katoey* to dress or live as women, there is one regulation that can be problematic: Thais are not permitted to change their sex on official documents. Even if a *katoey* undergoes a complete sex change operation, she will legally remain a "Mr." on everything from her driver's license to her passport.

Life can be difficult for a *katoey* who wants to settle down with a man, since Thai society places a high value on traditional family and children. Apasara, a *katoey* in her early twenties, once told me, "It's very hard for people like me to find true love. A man would like children, and I cannot be a mother. No matter how beautiful we are, no matter how close we are to being a real woman—one day a man will want to find a real woman to be the mother of his children."

For Apasara, who once made it to the finals (out of two thousand applicants) of a spokesmodel search only to be dismissed once the judges heard her voice, Thailand is no paradise. For her, heaven seems to lie across the ocean, in the United States. "I feel more comfortable around foreign men," she muses, combing her long black hair and sighing. "That's why I want to go

From top: The former "Miss Phuket" in the room she shares with eleven others; dancers in Bangkok, where the most beautiful girls work; taking a moment between jobs in Phuket. Opposite: Half-Thai, half-Malaysian, with new breast implants.

to America, to find a man to protect me, who can be my husband, my boyfriend. Sex... It's not unimportant, but I'd like someone to take care of me, to see that I am a good person—that I will always be faithful in my love." ●

