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# “Dream Boy” and “Hotmale” The Semiotic Landscape of Queer Space in Bangkok

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## Abstract

Gender and sexuality have gradually become the focus of more semiotic landscape research, however, studies relating specifically to sex tourism spaces are limited and with those in the Thai context even more so. Therefore, this paper examines the discursive construction of Phatphong 2, one of the famous destinations for sex tourism in Bangkok among male homosexuals, as queer space. Drawing on code preference and inscription (Scollon and Scollon 2003) and visual social semiotics (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996), we analyze the linguistic and semiotic resources in sexed signs. Findings reveal that Englishization, particularly the terms “boy” and “Bangkok” in shop signs, creates a globalized and international queer identity for Phatphong 2. The salience of the lean male muscular body and marginalization of transwomen in promotional signs unveil the hegemonic masculinity in queer sex tourism spaces. The study concludes that sexed signs in sex tourism spaces are semiotic aggregates of global queer culture.

## Keywords

semiotic landscape – sex tourism – Bangkok – queer

## 1 Introduction

During the past decade, semiotic landscape research on gender and sexuality has received more scholarly attention (Piller 2010; Kerry 2016; Baudinette 2018; Motschenbacher 2020). While it is acknowledged that a semiotic landscape can contribute to the construction of gender/sexual identities and their intersection with power and politics (Milani and Levon 2016), research focusing on sex tourism destinations is relatively limited. Viewing these spaces as potentially significant sites of investigation, this paper focuses on Phatphong 2 – a sex tourism area in Bangkok – from a semiotic landscape perspective. Specifically, we examine sexed signs' linguistic and semiotic resources and attempt to elucidate the discursive practices that make up Phatphong 2 as an international queer space.

Sex tourism destinations are places where frames of power, identity and meaning are constantly constructed (Pritchard and Morgan 2000a). However, a linguistic investigation of sex tourism spaces might allow for a better understanding of the discourses that are imbricated in them (Borba 2016). A linguistic investigation of sex tourism spaces may also reveal the intersections of language, gender, sexuality, place and agency in constructing the discursive formation of identities and further situate these sites as productive sites for semiotic investigation (Rowlett 2019).

In this study, we use a multimodal approach to interrogate the role of linguistic and semiotic resources in constructing an international queer space. We discuss the use of language choices in indexing globalization (Selvi 2016), portraying internationalness (Piller 2010) and in characterizing queer identity. We also offer some qualitative explanations on the way semiotic choices objectify and sexualize the male body, processes which ultimately aim to produce spaces of explicit erotic desire. Towards the end, we provide further details on how sexed signs are a semiotic aggregate of global queer culture and explicate how scholarly activities on gender and sexuality in semiotic landscape research can be applied to the Phatphong 2 context.

## 2 Gender and Sexuality in the Semiotic Landscape

Growing interest in discussions of gender and sexuality have solidified their place as a topic in semiotic landscape research. Gender and sexuality were not originally key issues investigated in the linguistic landscape tradition, with some scholars even arguing that these areas were deliberately neglected (Milani 2013). However, the field's rebranding as 'semiotic landscape' which is defined as, "any (public) space with visible inscriptions made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making" (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010, 2), allows for the importance of mapping gender and sexuality in a semiotic landscape to be asserted. Recent studies of semiotic landscapes have since focused on aspects of gender and sexuality. For example, Piller's (2010) pioneering work on Basel, a sex tourism destination in Switzerland, observed the visibility of signs advertising sex tourism in the airport, checkpoints, central stations and on public transport. Having analyzed shop fronts, advertising in local newspapers, online platforms and graffiti to reveal the sexualization of a travel destination, Piller (2010) was able to claim that multilingual signs in both virtual and physical spaces served as quality indicators of high-class sex services.

Like Piller (2010), several semiotic landscape studies focus on landscape in terms of the construction of place identity. Kerry (2016) used examination of signs in a CrossFit "Cave" gym facility, to show that an identity of hegemonic masculinity is well-established in the gym. This was found through textual and visual resources used on signage which displayed cues of stereotypical masculinity which are associated with strength and success, and ultimately create a space where men are higher in the heteronormative hierarchy. Another example is Motschenbacher (2020), who looked at the discursive construction of sexual identities in the linguistic landscape of shops in Wilton Manors, Florida. His analysis of 300 signs showed that various semiotic resources such as rainbow flags, hearts and ribbons were used throughout the area to index gay culture and contribute to the sexual identity of the place. For example, both visual and verbal elements of storefront signs were interpreted as being used to indicate that the shops were LGBT friendly, to normalize homosexuality and to target gay male customers.

Tourism spaces have also recently become the subject of gender construction inquiry within the semiotic landscape perspective. Milani and Levon (2016), for example, investigate the pinkwashing of Israel through its marketing tourism discourse of homonationalism. Through analysis of promotional junkets and marketing campaigns, which targeted males and the LGBT market, symbolic displays of sexual equality were shown to be used in constructing

the idea of Israel as a safe place for both heterosexual and homosexual tourists. Closer to the concerns of this current paper, sex tourism spaces have also begun to be explored, such as Baudinete (2018)'s study of tourists' queer identity in Shinjuku Ni-chome, Tokyo's red-light district. Baudinete found that signage which uses English indexes the cosmopolitanism and sophistication of gay men, while use of Japanese indexes more old-fashioned or unsophisticated connotations. Baudinete also holds that each identity is influenced by different kinds of desire, so that Japanese gay men who fetishize a foreign partner relate more positively towards English signs, while in contrast, those desiring a Japanese partner prefer Japanese signs.

Beyond just exploring the indexicality of languages with gender identities, the issue of language choice – particularly the use of English – has been linked to factors of internationalization and globalization. The study of the international and global value that English brings to places is not a new (Kachru 1994; Shibata 2004; Bolton 2012) but it remains an important topic. "Englishization" as Kachru (1994) calls it, is a linguistic phenomenon which underlines the predominant use of English in certain spaces. With regard to identity construction, Englishization, has been seen as taking on two different forms. First in its use in creating international community spaces which provide "cross-cultural and cross-linguistic indicator(s) of change and acculturation" (Kachru 1994, 1), signaling the change into a multilingual space (Bolton 2012). The other form is the assertion of English's power over other languages, such as in Shibata (2009)'s contention that Englishization is "a social phenomenon where English exerts its influence over other languages and transforms them according to its rules" (pg.1). Given the global rise of English and its natural place as the *lingua franca* for international tourists, it is therefore not surprising that processes of Englishization can be found when exploring the semiotic landscape of sex tourism spaces.

### 3 Sex Tourism

Sex tourism is traditionally defined as encompassing the travel, activities and interests of tourists who are mainly interested in seeking sex (Blackburn et al. 2011; Clift and Carter 2000; Wonders and Michalowski 2001) and in watching erotic performances (Sanders 2010). However, this definition has also been considered as being too narrow (Opperman 1999), as it appears to limit the relationship between sex and tourism to their stereotypical identities. Opperman (1999, 263), on the other hand, suggests that researchers pay attention to other

dynamics concerning sex tourism in order to expand its perspective and move beyond stereotypical outlooks. For instance, Graburn and Jafari (1991) noted that the historical trajectory of the "tourist" is primarily linked to men, with definitions of a tourist as someone seeking exotic pleasure, being based on characteristics typically linked to masculinity (Enloe 1989). Similarly, Pritchard and Morgan (2000a) hold that sex tourism has always depended upon the male gaze, where women are objectified objects of sight. However, they also allow that sex tourism can still be a complicated gendered space which can continually be re-negotiated due to its inherent multi-faceted sexualized and gendered characteristics.

While some of the activities the sex tourist could be referred to as mere prostitution (Jeffreys 1999), it has long had negative connotations due to links to sex-trafficking (Brooks and Heaslip 2019). Despite its negative reputation and these connotations, sex tourism continues to propagate as it is a viable source of economic gain. And though not entirely legal in many contexts, it still often provides a source of income to economically challenged individuals and can contribute to the broader economic development of nations (Bunn 2011). Beyond just economic factors, sex tourism ultimately can play a role in the identity construction of a place, whereby the services and practices (i.e., sexual ones) in certain areas contribute the location's branding (Nuttavuthisit 2007).

Sex tourism also has a long history in Southeast Asia, and Thailand has famously been known for its sex tourism industry (Kempadoo 1999). Beginning in the 18th century with mass migration of male Chinese immigrants (Lim 1998), the later growth of prostitution was the result of American tourists in the post-Vietnam War period (Peltonen 2016). Technically, for Thailand, prostitution has been illegal ever since the 1960 Suppression of Prostitution Act. And while those convicted of prostitution could normally face both imprisonment and fines (Khruakham and Lawton 2012), the revised Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act of 1996 marked something of a shift from criminalization to rehabilitation whereby convicted prostitutes are given opportunities to join vocational programs. And though technically under Thai law, businesses offering actual sexual services are liable to punishment, locations with sexually explicit "entertainment" venues are overlooked by officials. These then end up becoming tourist hotspots and remain prevalent in many places. Recent rebranding of Thailand has aimed to mitigate the negative connotations about the country (Åsvik and Åsvik 2004). Nuttavuthisit (2007) claims a negative image of Thailand stemming from sex tourism is thought to be disadvantageous, so some newer promotional campaigns have aimed to emphasize

the natural beauty and local hospitality of the country. Despite these efforts, sex tourism still remains a major reason predominantly among male tourists and, recently, even female tourists (Sanders 2011) to visit Thailand. Assessing the situation at large, it is clear that sex tourism in Thailand has earned its popularity through significant boosts to the economy, which ultimately leaves the government unable to completely curb its proliferation.

Thailand accommodates a number of sex tourism areas in Bangkok and other main cities. In Bangkok, as claimed by Peltonen (2016), three famous places are known to be for men seeking women - Phatphong 1, Cowboy Alley, and Nana Plaza. Phatphong 1 is an area in Silom frequented by tourists seeking out the local night market and bars. Cowboy Alley is a small alley situated in the Asoke area, a business district where famous malls and restaurants are located. Nana Plaza is a three-storey building which is designed as an adult entertainment complex, located on Sukhumvit Road alongside many other types of business establishments. These areas are all surrounded by street vendors and other attractions drawing in both local and non-local people. The nearby areas, Silom 4 and Phatphong 2 are known as areas for men seeking men. Of these two places, Phatphong 2 is the focus of this paper. (More about Phatphong 2 is provided in the next section). Major sex tourism places outside Bangkok include Pattaya and Phuket (Peltonen 2016). Pattaya, a seaside city located in the Chonburi province, has also been dubbed as the sex capital of the world (Hulme 2017), with sex tourism areas mainly found on the walking street, a large alley mushroomed by bars. Phuket, a large southern island, is similarly known for its beaches and adult nightlife (Know Phuket 2006–2021). Despite the technical illegality and discomfort of some at how sex tourism affects Thailand's image, sex tourism still serves a large and complex social web which deserves further investigation.

#### 4 Methodology

The signs subjected to analysis were observed in Phatphong 2 (see Figure 1), a famous adult entertainment area in the Silom area of Bangkok. Centrally located in Thailand's capital, Silom has two faces; during the day it is a bustling business hub, while during the night it transforms into one of the main sex tourism areas. Around the sex tourism areas of alleys Phatphong 1, Phatphong 2 and Silom 4 a number of other tourist establishments, such as hotels, massage parlors, restaurants, and bars contribute to a lively and vibrant neighborhood.

Phatphong (see Figure 2) is considered to be an entertainment district and one of the three oldest "red-light districts" in Bangkok (Bangkok112 2015). Of



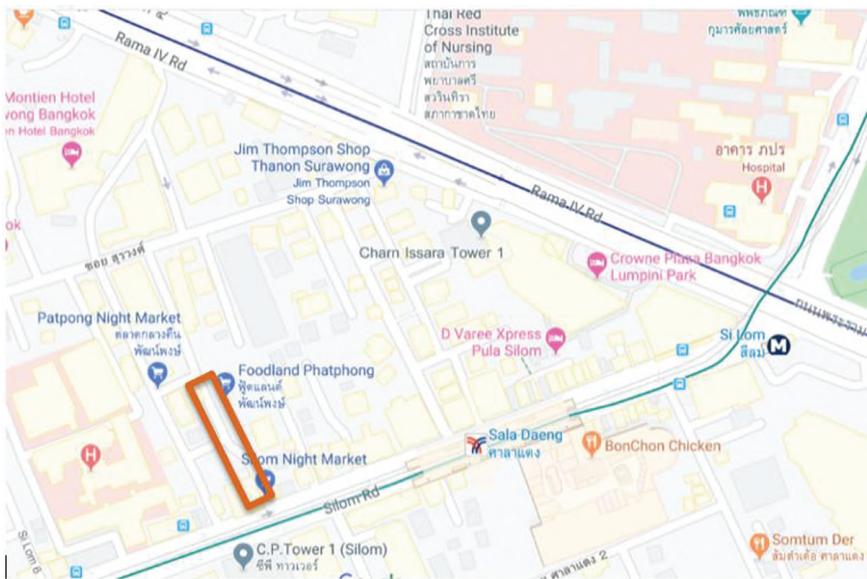


FIGURE 1 Map of Phatphong 2 (Google n.d.)

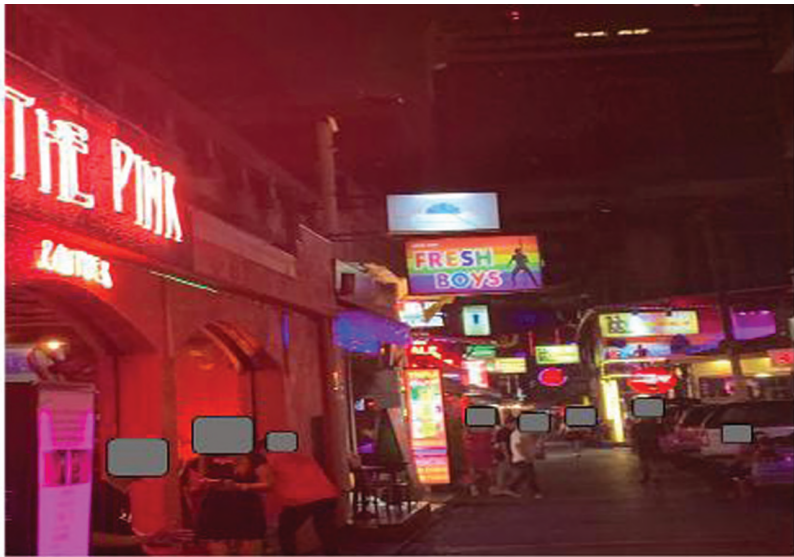


FIGURE 2 Phatphong 2 from the Vantage Point of Surawong Road

these districts, it is considered to be one where a more revealing sex-industry is practiced (Bangkok.com 2019). Phatphong has two different sub-areas that target different customers. Phatphong 1 targets customers who are heterosexual

men. Phatphong 2, the area on which we focus in this paper, targets foreign and local gay men (Bangkokeyes 2019).

The present study employs a qualitative approach to the analysis of linguistic and semiotic resources in the data. The signs collected meet two criteria to be considered as sexed signs: first, signs should be displayed in bars; second, the signs contain linguistic and visual element attributed to gender and sexual identities and activities. The data of this study comprises 29 signs including shop signs and promotional signs, which were observed by the first author on August 7–8, 2020. Shop signs are those that carry the name of the bars, which are usually placed at easily viewable points in front of the establishment. Shop signs are fabricated through various means (e.g., painted, commercial printing or LED lights) and include shops' logos or thematic colors.

Promotional signs contain more detailed information including photographs, schedules of shows, types of services and advertisements and can appear in various places. In the data, we found three major types and placements of promotional signs - wall stickers, tarpaulin signage and carry-on signs. Wall stickers are placed on the doors and walls of establishments to advertise and provide information about activities and shows organized by the bars. Tarpaulin signage contains performer images and information and are usually placed in front of the bars. Carry-on signs are small hand sized cards used within the establishments to promote services and, to some extent, the performers in the bars. They may also contain information on food and drinks available in the bar.

We began the analysis with the identification of the language choices through frequency counting to establish the premise of the study. For a closer examination of the linguistic resources, we employed the concepts of code preference and inscription (Scollon and Scollon 2003) as analytical tools in order to examine linguistic elements in multilingual shop signs and their contribution to a queer identity of place. Code preference illustrates the interaction of languages occurring in multilingual signs via each language's relative positioning. Inscription is used to "cover all of the meaning systems that are based on the physical materiality of language (but also other code systems) in the world" (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 103). These analytical tools were used to establish the role of linguistic resources as elements of aggregates.

The second part of the analysis was a close examination of semiotic resources through visual social semiotics (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996) which was used to analyze the promotional signs. Visual social semiotics is "the description of semiotic resources, what can be said and done with images (and other visual means of communication) and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted" (Jewitt and Oyama 2001, 136). Kress and Van Leeuwen



(1996) propose three dimensions of meaning making. Representational dimension is used to uncover the depiction and the relationship of the things around us through two processes, namely, the process narrative which concerns the interaction of actors and actions that unfold in the images and the conceptual process which concerns the somewhat static structure/meaning. Interactive dimension is used to determine the interaction between the viewers and the producers of the image communicated via gaze, size of frame and camera. Gaze is the presence or absence of direct eye contact between the represented participants and the viewers. The size of frame presented in close, medium or long shot suggests the varying distance between the represented participants and the viewers. The difference in camera angle suggests involvement and power between the participants. Compositional dimension is the understanding of the elements used to make up a whole meaning, particularly with regard to how representational and interactive dimensions contribute to the meaning-making process in terms of information value, salience and framing. This analytical tool was adopted to capture the interaction of the semiotic elements that make up the sexed signs as semiotic aggregate.

## 5 Englishization, Male Body and Queer Space in Phatphong 2

Language choice in a semiotic landscape serves to establish the identity of a place. It indexes linguistic territories in space and signifies symbolic values in a community. Language choice also indicates the language spoken in the place and the people who live in it, as well as the identity that language brings (Landry and Bourhis 1997). In this section, we focus on the choice of language on shop signs and its pattern of occurrence in terms of code preference and inscription.

Figure 3 illustrates the prevalence of English both on shop signs and promotional signs in Phatphong 2. Basically, English appears on every sign and most of the signs are written only in English. The rest are occurrences of English with Thai, and English with other languages (e.g., Chinese and Japanese). The predominance of English in the Thai context is unsurprising. Huebner (2006) found that English and its combination with Thai is pervasive in public transportation and commercial areas that advertise various products and services. This is not surprising either as these areas cater to, probably, more non-Thais than Thais as they are situated within Bangkok's tourist district. This is also the case in Phatphong 2 too, which is mainly visited by foreign tourists. In this area, English is instrumentally used to communicate with the foreign tourists and thus creates an international identity. The growing prevalence of English has

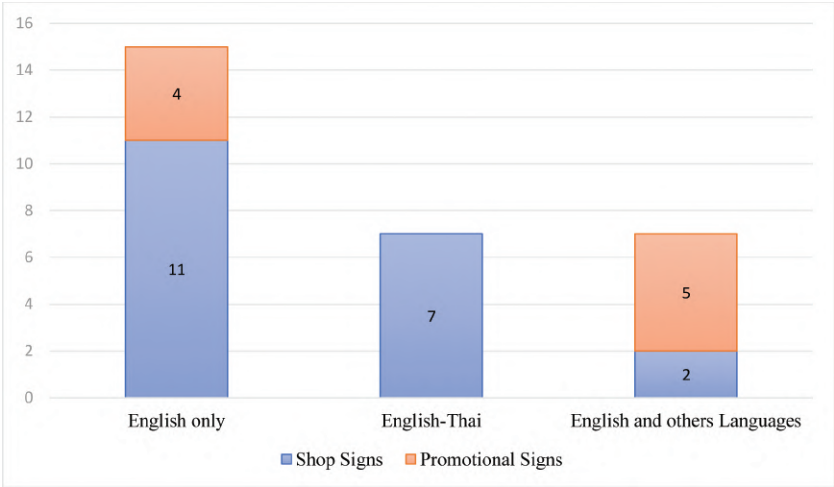


FIGURE 3 Language choice in Phatphong 2

been observed in most tourist areas, and thus constitutes a trend of commercial signs in Bangkok (Prapobratanakul 2016). This trend in Bangkok, in which English brings a global image (Selvi 2016) and international appeal (Piller 2010; Suttinaraphan 2016), coincides with similar contexts throughout East Asia. The main point here is that use of English in these contexts has surpassed its mere communicative function and is also being used as an aesthetic tool (Tan and Tan 2015) to transform places into cosmopolitan, modern or luxurious cities, particularly in places like South Korea, China and Taiwan (see, for example, Baratta 2014; Baudinette 2018; Lawrence 2012). Also, the inclusion of English in the East Asian landscape contributes to the creation of a multicultural identity (Curtin 2009).

Phatphong 2 is known to be a place dedicated to a more specific queer audiences, i.e., male homosexuals. It is very common for bars to employ shirtless muscular men to attract visitors. While they have the practical role of greeting and inviting customers into the establishment, these men also serve as visual displays by which to attract their homosexual clientele. Similarly, the signs displayed in the area are directed towards attracting a male homosexual audience. The objects of desire for male homosexual customers, the intended clientele, can be found reflected particularly in the explicit use of the word “boy” and depictions of male figure in the sexed signs. However, subtle differences in signage may aim to target more particular affinities of the larger customer base. For example, Baudinette (2017) speaks of how one gay space in Tokyo displayed the word “boy” in a cursive script indexing *kawaii-kei*, a ‘cute type’ of young effeminate man. In contrast, the word “boy” in Phatphong 2 appears in upper case and is accompanied by the muscular male figure.



FIGURE 4 Shop Sign: Fresh Boys

The sign for the “Fresh Boys” establishment in Figure 4 demonstrates the use of English and the image of a male silhouette to create an international space offering male sex workers. First off, consider that English is the preferred code indicated by the center position of the shop name compared to its Thai transliteration (เฟรช บอย), placed in the top left most corner of the sign. Additionally, the English name is in larger capital letters of various colors, giving it more visual weight compared to the smaller white font of the Thai transliteration. The term ‘fresh boy’ is a derogatory term for someone who is effeminate (Kralia 2006), and contrasts the typical sexualization of men as masculine and tough. Since *fresh* is scarcely used as a modifier of ‘boy’ in English, we interpret *Fresh Boys* here as an attempt to describe young and innocent men. Both the unconventional collocation and the sexual connotation can be attributed to translocality (Rubdy 2014) and the localization of English (Manan et al. 2017). Additionally, semiotic elements which participate in the construction of a queer identity include the colorful shop name foregrounded with a rainbow, a symbol widely perceived as associated with the LGBTQI+ community, serving as the background. Also on the right there is the silhouette of a male figure who is holding a pole, an object used in erotic dance performances.



FIGURE 5 Shop Sign: Dream Boy Bangkok

The shop sign in Figure 5 contains both English *Dream Boy Bangkok* and a Thai transliteration (ดรีมบอยแบงค็อก). Having the Thai script on top suggests that Thai is the preferred code. However, both languages are equally salient as the Roman and Thai scripts are of the same size and color. The underlying meaning behind the term *Dream Boy* alludes to idea of sexual objects so attractive that they “come out of a dream”. The dream-like quality is further emphasized with a depiction of a muscular cupid in revealing attire, which contributes to the projection of fantastical elements. The use of *boy* and the muscular physique of the cupid represent objects of desire. Taking these together, the sexed sign *Dream Boy* aims to signal a place where potential homosexual customers may find the figurative “man of their dreams”. Besides just the semiotic cues offered by signs here there can be other cues for the audience targeted by the bar, such as rainbow coloring, a well-known LGBTQI+ representation which further signifies the queer identity of the area. Together, linguistic and semiotic tools along with other semiotic elements in the peripheral work together in orchestrating an ensemble of queerness signification.

The shop sign in Figure 6 contains three languages in three different degrees of salience. The English name *Lucky Boys Bangkok* and the Chinese name 好运男孩 *hǎo yùn nán hái* ‘lucky boy’ (it is worth noting that the Chinese name does not contain “Bangkok”) are in the top position. The Thai transliteration (ลักกี้ บอยส์ แบงค็อก) of the English name, however, is at the bottom. Also, note that both the English and Chinese names are larger in size while the Thai name, as with the sign in Figure 3, is noticeably smaller. The kneeling gesture of the male figures are in the pose of an erotic dance, moreover one which conforms to the ritualization of subordination (Goffman 1978), a subordinate position typically associated with women. Like the sign in Figure 5, the establishment in Figure 6 has another layer of meaning emerging from the use of rainbow painting on the actual exterior of the premises. Such interaction creates a



FIGURE 6 Shop Sign: Lucky Boys Bangkok

multimodal ensemble (Kress 2010), which contributes to the signaling that the shop is a place for gay men seeking men.

Besides an international and queer space, Phatphong 2 is a case of glocalization through transliteration and inclusion of *Bangkok* in signs. The signs under study demonstrate the transliteration of shop names into different languages which, as claimed by Kanchanawan (2006), is a strategy of globalizing the Thai language. In addition, the presence of *Bangkok* in shop names creates a dialogical relationship with local and global culture and identity which Robertson (1995, 40) calls glocalization, i.e., the "creation and the incorporation of locality, processes which themselves largely shape, in turn, the compression of the world as a whole." *Bangkok* itself is transliterated into the Thai alphabet displaying the pronunciation of *Bangkok* in English, rather than being indicated by the term *Krung Thep* which is the Thai name of Bangkok. Bangkok operates as a source of local culture and identity while transliteration is a linguistic practice linked with global production. Thus, their interaction in signs forms a semiotic aggregate of a global queerness.

We argue that Phatphong 2 is a glocalized place where Englishization of sexed signs is practiced, creating an international and global image (Selvi 2006; Suttinaraphan 2016) of queer space. The prevalent language choice and the preferred code, the English language and the term "boy", suggesting young age and innocence, are used along with male figures in shop signs to construct the ideal male identity and the international queer identity of the space. The use of male figures particularly sexualizes the area and creates a space for desire. Despite its association with the international sphere, shop signs in Phatphong



2 illustrate the incorporation of the use of *Bangkok* for shop names, a choice which provides connection to the local context.

## 6 Commodification of the Male Body and Sexualization of Queer Space

In the previous section, we discussed how the English term “boy” and images of male silhouettes on shop signs contributes to the construction of a queer space. In this section, we demonstrate how the male body in a Thai sex tourism context is visually constructed in promotional signs, more specifically how promotional signs portray the “boy”. As observed during the fieldwork conducted by the first author, male workers are typically young looking and have a lean muscular body. They are observed to be displays as they stand in front of the bar to attract customers. We argue that the male body is commodified contributing to the sexualization of queer space.

Signs in Figure 7 show promotional signs belonging to the *Dream Boy* establishment (see Figure 5). Consistent with the cupid figure on the shop sign, the logo in Figure 7 includes a depiction of wings, maintaining the bar's thematic association with dreams. Wall stickers in Figure 7 contain both text and visuals which give more detailed information about the place. Additionally, there are two pieces of paper adhered next to the English text. The small one specifies the 40-person capacity of the place, while the bigger one states the laws regarding opening times, the age restriction for visitors and the prohibition of drugs and weapons. A chalkboard showing the drink menu available in the bar is provided completely in English. These layerings (see Scollon and Scollon 2003) provide interesting additional information.

The wall sticker indicates an ideal-real structure where the information provided at the top serves as the ideal, and the images of the performers in the bar occupy the bottom position. While the texts provided in Chinese and English indicate the scheduled entertainment, the Chinese text and the English text are not equivalent in their literal meaning. One difference is the way that the Chinese text specifies the variety of sexualities of male performers in this place – 男 *nán*, 直男 *zhí nán*, 同志 *tóng zhì* ‘man, straight, gay.’ However, the texts in both languages only refer to men and guys – 帅哥 *shuài gē* ‘handsome man’ in Chinese and *Handsome Man & Good looking Guys* in English - while descriptions of transwomen are absent. Notably these linguistic descriptions show the highlighting of men and the ignoring or downplaying of transwomen indicating hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) and further reveals the covert hierarchy among homosexual males.





FIGURE 7 Promotional Sign (Wall Stickers): Dream Boy

Photographs of performers indicate an analytical structure of conceptual process allowing the viewer to see the possessive attributes of the performers serving as the carriers in the process. They are presented with a medium shot focusing on the body from head to waist. Medium shots convey a distance which allows viewers to be far enough to see large portions of the body, yet the figures are close enough to be reachable. The promotional signs in Figure 7, however, do not present men and transwomen with equal prominence. Compositionally, men are positioned in the center while transwomen are placed in the margin which suggests not only the dominance and preference of men but also the demotion of transwomen. There is also more to the way the topless males are objectified (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). The men picture here are sexualized through types of body displays (Kang 1997) which are typically associated with women, such as a high degree of nudity and feminine

touch (Goffman 1979), a technique associated with caressing an object. Body displays and feminine touch are strategically used to give prominence to the lean male body by being topless and by flexing the biceps.

These sexualization techniques found in the promotional signs here are also magnified through the use of a strong stare (Jewitt and Oyama 2001) or a demand (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996) by using photographs of men who are looking directly at the viewers, a technique strategically used to capture the viewer's attention. In contrast, the depicted transwomen do not reveal their bodies in the same way and are obstructed by the males. They also indirectly interact with the viewer by looking away, the kind of gaze through which the represented participants offer themselves, as Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996,119) put it these depictions create "items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case." From these promotional signs we can see examples of the favoring of gay masculinity, which has been found to be linked with other global queer spaces (Hubbard 2011). Though this is rooted in Western queer culture, it is evident also in Asia, for example, in Ni-Chome, Japan (Baudinette 2017).

Figure 8 is another example of a promotional sign which makes use of photographs of the male body. The logo itself is semiotically rich. Similar to the shop signs we have discussed in the previous section, the logo uses the image of a male silhouette, signifying the kind of body available in the place.

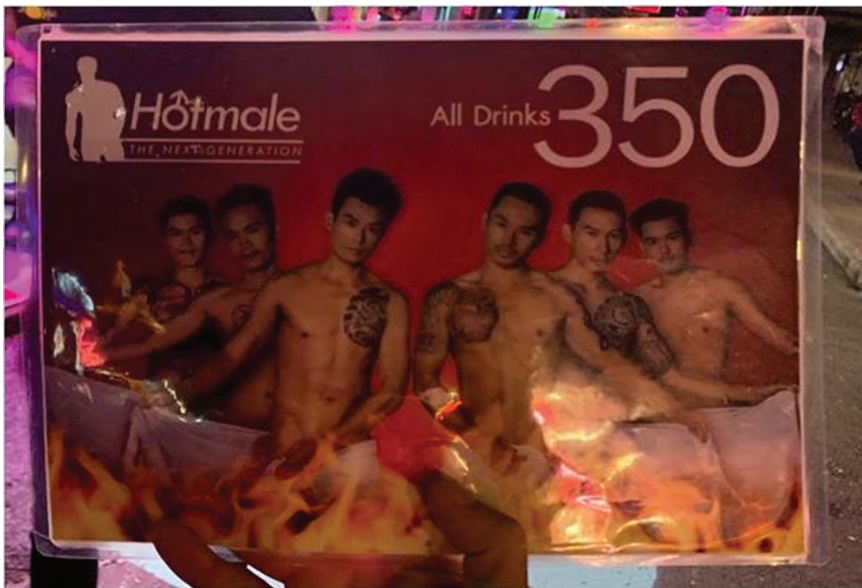


FIGURE 8 Promotional Sign (Carry-on Poster): Hotmale

The shop name *Hotmale* also explicitly states that the entertainment venue involves men. The shop name utilizes the Mars symbol "♂" which is typically associated with the male gender in lieu of the *o* letter in the *hot*, and is ultimately congruent with the queer identity constructed by other linguistic and semiotic elements in the logo. The bottom section of the sign portrays men in the nude. Like in Figure 7, Figure 8 makes use of body display (Kang 1997) as a sexualization technique to explicitly highlight sexualized male bodies. Figure 8 illustrates the act of "doing something", hence a narrative process. The male models seem to show a motion of enticement, with the models holding the towels with one hand away from their bodies. The gesture suggests a potential vector as the participants are possibly moving the towels towards or away from their bodies. Although the direction is not visible, the open towel alludes to sexually explicit activities. The connection is also accentuated by images of fire eliciting associations to the heat of strong sexual desire.

Promotional signs are highly eroticized and play an important role in the sexualization of queer space. The lean muscular male body is a key semiotic resource used to provide information to the viewer regarding the service or entertainment available in a place. This is consistent with the first author's observation during the fieldwork where the presence of the lean muscular body is very visible in the bars. Employees either sit or stand in front of the bar. Just like their visual representation, where they display their bodies to entice potential customers. They are treated as a product available for consumption by the viewer, making their young looking and lean bodies a preference among queer audiences. Thus, the male body is objectified and commodified in promotional signs. However, transwomen remain in the periphery, even erased in the two signs here, compared to masculine gay men. The use of body displays (Kang 1997) is instrumental in revealing covert hierarchies of identities. The muscular body eroticizes the space and demonstrates the discourse of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). We therefore argue that Phatphong 2 is a queer space favoring masculine male homosexuals.

## 7 Conclusion

The present study demonstrates some aspects of the discursive construction of Phatphong 2 as a queer space. We argue that sexed signs in sex tourism are not unassuming; instead, they are semiotic aggregates of global queer culture that transform Phatphong 2 as an international queer space dedicated to male homosexuals through Englishization, commodification and sexualization. We find that linguistic resources such as "boy", "male" and "Bangkok" in shop signs

serve as an element of a semiotic aggregate that suggests queerness and globalized sex tourism space. The analytical tools employed in the study unveil the privileging of masculine gay men and suggest that Phatphong 2 subscribes to the Western-influenced global queer culture with distinct characteristics of Bangkok context, i.e., favoring young lean men. These findings provide an explanation of the potential of sexed signs in constructing sexed tourism spaces and unravelling discourses in place (Scollon and Scollon 2003). The significance of lean muscular bodies in promotional signs reveals the sexualization and commodification of the male body which is privileged in global queer culture and sex tourism spaces. The present study unpacks some of the role of language and visuals in the construction of gender and sexuality in public spaces, and contributes to the growing literature in the sociolinguistics of sex work (Borba 2016).

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