

BOOK Reviews

March 31, 2006 by Bernard Trink

A five-year expert

Lady of Pattaya

by Michael Schemmann

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Leading bookstores, 350 baht

An Old Thailand Hand twice over (40+ years) covering the nitory entertainment scene, I learned the basics early on: that prostitutes chose the profession, with few exceptions, because it offered substantial rewards for little work. And they might well get a *farang* [foreign] husband out of it. The vast majority of them came from Isan. More than a few were mothers.

Rather than admit that the underlying cause for going on the game was laziness – who wants to be at the mater's beck and call from dawn to dusk as a maid, stand on their feet all day as a salesgirl, do mind-numbing piece work in a factory for peanuts? They have needs and wants and they want it now. Using sex to fulfill heir desires is as old as human history.

They come up with excuses to tug at the heart: mum has an illness requiring expensive treatment; dad had an accident; buffalo dropped dead; brother can't afford tuition; drugs were planted on her sister who needs a lawyer; the family dwelling in the village is in imminent danger of collapse. The lasses hat selling themselves, but as the breadwinner what else can they do?

In my Nite Owl columns, I ceaselessly warned my readers to take these tear-jerking tales with a grain of salt. Barmaids are consummate liars. Apart from shopping, they spend their earnings on gambling. Only a fraction is sent to the family upcountry. Nevertheless farang expats keep falling for the sob stories. And they react like the naifs they are: Stop! I'll save you from this fate worse than death. How much do you need?

The fallen women are grateful. I love you too much! 50,000 baht [US\$1,500] will make an honest woman of me per month. Better yet, marry me and I'll be devoted to you for life. If he does, she'll pick his bones before discarding him for another farang, then another. Exceptions are rare. Books by farangs who went through the wringer are a glut in the market-place.

Lady of Pattaya is one of the most recent in the genre. The author is a Canadian expat Michael Schemmann, who arrived in the Land of Smiles this century. A teacher who previously penned a book about his three-year marriage, has since wed again (both wives from Isan). He believe he knows enough about local women and prostitutes to inform the reader about them, telling how other marriages fared as well as his own.

The author doesn't offer any insights longtime residents don't already know, but tourists and wet-behind-the-ears expats may have their illusions jolted that tender loving care and the folding stuff are all that's needed to reform the prostitutes. If you believe that, you'll believe anything. Get is through your head that Isan nymphs aren't victims. OK photos. A mention of the Russian ladies of the night in Pattaya would not have been amiss.