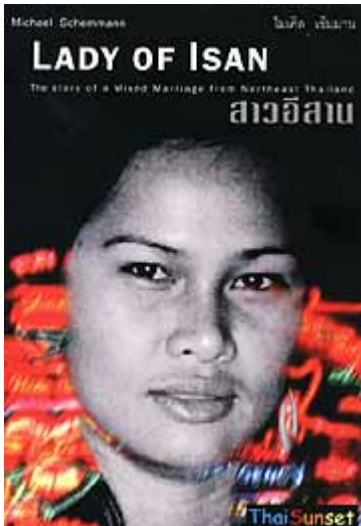


# Book Review: *Lady of Isan*

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The *Lady of Isan* (ISBN 974-615-174-6, ThaiSunset publications) has the subtitle 'The story of a Mixed Marriage from Northeast Thailand'. Written by Michael Schemmann, in his introduction he mentions the family of the 19 year old girl (the Lady of Isan) with whom he had just spent a night of passion. "Your penniless 42 year old mother and your father for whom you work the nights away in Pattaya in the arms of farangs like me. 'Phom rak khun.' You are so easy to love." The last sentence says it all, prophetically.

The book is a diary of the intense personal feelings of a middle aged farang, who falls for this 19 year old Isan girl. The author, and narrator in the story, had been living a life of abstinence for nine years, following the demise of his second marriage. He could be considered as 'ripe for the picking', but I do not feel his Lady of Isan actually 'chose' him. Rather he self-selected himself, and then only later could find it within himself to question and examine his own motives.

For the first few years the author deludes himself that everything in his new marriage is fine. After all, he was doing well in his lecturing, and his young wife appeared to be well accepted in the hallowed halls of academia. They went on overseas trips together and spent weekends on tropical islands. His Lady of Isan was also studying to complete her high school education, bettering herself in his eyes.

What he did not see until much later were the needs of a young woman. Her need for independence which can strengthen a relationship, unless the other party in that relationship is insecure or even co-dependent. Financial security as well, is more than the husband handing out money. With her needs not met, she leaves and returns to the sex trade in Pattaya. (The ending, I will leave to the reader's point of view, but I have to say, I remain unconvinced.)

The book is distributed by Asia Books and has an RRP of B. 350, so it is not an expensive salutary lesson, and certainly very much cheaper than author Schemmann's lesson in Thai life.

It will not grace the lists of literary masterpieces of the decade, especially with so many 'typos' all the way through. (Note to the publisher: Duznt ennybodee prufe reed any moar?) I got the impression that this was a cathartic diary for the author, and although the back cover does say the story is based on fact and fiction, I believe the book would have been better served by sticking to the factual side - the story is strong enough to stand up on its own, without the GPS episode.

It does effectively show some of the many differences between (North) East and West, and does also show a side of the 'poor' Isan families that does not sit well with the often quoted lack of choices experienced by the Thai girls from that area. Rose coloured glasses will be broken, and for that fact alone, this book is worth reading.