

Good Thai girls learn to striptease

For foreigners visiting Bangkok, it is hard to avoid a tour of at least one of the capital's many night entertainment strips, such as Patpong, Nana Plaza or Soi Cowboy, where the chief attraction is scantily-clad women go-go dancing.

The Thai 'stripper' has therefore become ingrained in Bangkok's somewhat notorious international image. However, that image is a foreign one to many Thais.

Thai society, at least at the middle and upper strata, is deemed quite conservative, and sexually suggestive dancing is definitely frowned upon.

'Thai society is extreme. One side is very conservative while another side is very open,' said Busakorn Vorameth, 36, owner and chief instructor of Rumpuree Dance Studio, located on the fifth floor of the upmarket Amarin Plaza, in central Bangkok.

'I believe that conservative people want to express their emotions as well but they can't,' said Busakorn, who graduated with a Masters Degree in design management from Harvard University in the US.

Busakorn, who works as an architect during the day, decided to open the Rumpuree Dance Studio less than a year ago to share her passion for dancing with others at night.

Six months ago she began offering classes in erotic dancing and striptease, which she had taken classes in for fun while working as an architect in New York.

'At first I didn't dare to open a striptease class because I was not sure if Thai people could accept it,' said Busakorn. 'It could have drawn criticism.'

Instead, her classes drew a lot of media attention and plenty of interested customers, mostly educated, upper-middle-class career women between the ages of 20 to 50 who have found that erotic dancing helps them reduce their stress levels.

'I'm learning striptease because I love dancing,' said Kewalin Sukapiboon, 33, a nurse at a leading private hospital. 'It is fun, like I am playing a role. In daily life, I never do that, so my stress is released. I feel relaxed. Besides, this kind of dancing is a good exercise because it uses a lot of muscles.'

During the first half hour, Busakorn relaxes her students with soft music and dim lights in the room while teaching them to stretch their muscles.

Then the music is turned up in tempo, and she starts teaching her pupils how to make sexy dance steps and enticing movements in front of the mirror.

There was plenty of laughter as these career ladies watched themselves in the mirror.

'The striptease I am learning is not like what saucy nightclub entertainers are doing,' said Reiko Sakamoto, 36, a manager at the Senju Metal Trading Company. 'They do something a bit similar

with the expressing of sexiness but it's not the same.'

In Busakorn's opinion, women are sexy when they feel relaxed. 'Sexiness is always from inside. Nobody can pretend to be sexy. Especially, in such a plastic world today, it is hard to get back to the nature,' she opined.

'This is why this dancing is different from others. Striptease isn't only about learning a pattern of body movement but emotional expression which is sexually explicit,' she said.

'This is the principle of the striptease. To get people to feel free to express themselves,' she said.

Busakorn insisted, 'Striptease is an art, not just a dirty dance to arouse man's sexual desire. Striptease makes a dancer feel more comfortable to their bodies and also has psychological benefit.

Many women are not self-confident, feeling uncomfortable to express their feeling, but inside they really want to do so. Striptease makes them think that to release their emotion is not a bad thing.'

Busakorn's striptease philosophy, unfortunately, may be lost on the thousands of go-go girls engaged in erotic dancing in Bangkok for a living, rather than as a hobby.

Busakorn said she understood that these women were dancing for money, and probably couldn't afford her classes at 300 baht (\$8.50) an hour, but she refuses to call what they do art.

'I don't think Thailand has a real striptease, even at Patpong. I don't see girls in Patpong dancing, they just move their bodies a bit,' she said.

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