

French Ad Campaign for Axe Shower Gel offensive to Thai massage

By Junnon Mérioux

THAI became aware of a demeaning advertising campaign in France because of a THAI Practitioner member, Ms. Junnon Merigoux, who wrote us saying she was offended, and that she wished to do something to shed light on the problem. She and Bob Haddad were able to research several of the offensive ads, and locate e-mail and physical addresses so that all THAI members can lodge complaints in writing to the company.

THAI has already sent written complaints to the customer service divisions of Unilever Corporation in France and in the USA. If you are offended by the sexual connotations to Thai massage in this ad campaign, feel free to send written letters and e-mails expressing your opinions and your decision to not buy Axe Shower Gel products. What follows is Junnon's account of the Axe Shower Gel ad campaign. - Editor

Sawasdee ka from France

I live in France where, as in most of the world, football (soccer) is the most important sport. During the recent world cup frenzy, my husband bought copies of a French sport magazine called France Football, which is widely circulated throughout the region. One day as we were looking through the large glossy magazine, we came across an advertisement for a shower gel called Axe. This awful advertisement featured

images of Barbie-like dolls (a white male and a conspicuously dark-haired Asian-looking female) engaged in sexual poses, and suggesting that these were poses and positions of traditional Thai massage.

I thought to myself "C'est pas possible!" (It's not possible), but unfortunately it is sadly true. In France, the massage industry is years behind other countries with regard to standards and professional practice, and unfortunately, this kind of insensitive publicity is able to circulate freely. My husband bought the magazine every two weeks, and I don't know how many variations of the ad were published, but obviously it was an entire campaign built around shameless exploitation of sex through Thai massage in order to sell their products. Here was our beloved Thai massage, a healing tradition with an intimate link to ancient Buddhist teachings and traditional medicine, being exploited

in order to sell shower gel. These ads may never have been allowed to be published in other countries, but



One of the many variations of advertisements linking Thai massage with sexuality. The captions read: Posture number 157, The Resting Crab. New Axe Thai Massage Shower Gel."

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*Another variation in the Axe "Thai Massage" ad campaign.
"Posture number 93, The Parade of Serpents."*

communities to better promote and propagate the traditional Thai massage we love and respect so much. We could begin to use the words "Nuad Boran" more often when referring to Thai massage on our business cards, brochures, websites, etc. Why couldn't we begin to eliminate the words "Thai massage" and replace them with "Nuad Boran?" It seems a natural and plausible way of beginning to change the general public's idea of "massage", and associating it with our ancient healing art, which is not like western massage at all. If all practitioners of "Thai massage" started calling it "nuad boran", and offering an explanation of our ancient healing art, we would be contributing to positive reinforcement of tradition. It might take several years for the term to become widely known in the west, but if schools, teachers and governing bodies in Thailand also stop referring to it as "Thai massage", the corrected identity would spread even more quickly throughout the world.

the situation here in France is awful. Those of us who study and practice traditional Thai healing are taught to chant "Om Namo Shivago" as a link to the respectful chain of connection with ancient traditions. Nuad Boran connects us to thousands of years of traditional healing, all the way into the 21st century.

When I first saw the ads, I became angry, but then I became very sad. I felt that something should be done about this. Thai massage should never be associated with commercial exploitation through sexuality. So I wrote to THAI, and we began the investigation into the Axe company and its parent company, Unilever. I learned that most of Axe's marketing revolves around sexual connotations, and that in various parts of the world, some of their TV commercials have been banned. These ads need to be stopped immediately, and those of us who love and honor Thai massage should speak out, and do whatever we can do to make our voice known.

In accordance with vipassana teachings, instead of trying to change others, we need to change ourselves and our

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In the short term, we can address this situation with AXE shower gel by sending our comments and letters and e-mails to the addresses below. (And we hope you will do so). But long term change requires ongoing education and the increased use of the words "nuad boran" to identify our healing art. I hope to hear many students and teachers' insights on this topic. We need some "spiritual activism" here!

Send your comments and voice your disapproval to both e-mail addresses below:

comments.Axe@unilever.com (USA)

Service.Plus@Unilever.com (France)

Or, write to:

UNILEVER FRANCE
Service Consommateur
7 rue Emmy Noether
93484 St. Ouen Cedex
FRANCE