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The world's window on Thailand

Examining the legal oddities of alcohol

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En route to a mid-afternoon barbecue a few weekends back, I rushed in to a shop to pick up the obligatory bottle of Amarone and was politely reminded that I was both too early and too late to do so. Whether it's a prohibition on giving alcohol to a moose (Alaska) or it being illegal to become intoxicated while in possession of a cow (Scotland), the world is full of liquor laws that make one wonder "why?"



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Thailand is no exception, and today we will examine a few of its alcohol consumption laws that leave many scratching their heads.

NO AFTERNOON DRINKING

The sale of alcohol, other than by bars, restaurants and hotels, is banned in Thailand between midnight and 11 am, which is standard practice in much of the world. I've never felt the need to complain about this; if you are trying to buy booze at 3am, you probably have already had too much to drink and we'll all benefit from you being thwarted in your efforts. However, the sale of alcohol is also banned between 2pm and 5pm. This ban only applies to so-called Type 3 and Type 4 sellers _ those who are licensed to sell liquor and spirits in quantities below 10 litres per occasion. Thus, retail shops such as 7-Elevens and Big C supermarkets are put in the same position as wholesalers (being Type 1 and Type 2 sellers) and can only sell in quantities above 10 litres, while bars, restaurants, and hotels remain exempt. Because you were wondering, that's at least 30 beers or 14 standard bottles of wine.

If your mother tries to buy a bottle of Irish Cream with which to fortify the coffee for her afternoon bridge club, she'll be thwarted; if your university-aged son wants to buy ten cases of beer, he will sail right through. Really?

The reason given in the text of the relevant Ministerial Regulation is to enhance "the government's policies towards controlling the consumption of liquor and tobacco for the benefit of society, in the case of liquor by decreasing the times for retail liquor sales". Yet the choice of the hours of 2pm to 5pm must have had a more specific purpose than that. One popular school of thought is that it is designed to help prevent underage drinking. Classes typically finish for the day by 2pm, and the theory is that wayward students might then run to the nearest 7-Eleven and start drinking.

Yet the ban is in place seven days a week. If it were designed only for students, wouldn't it be okay to buy a cold beer on a hot Saturday afternoon?