

**WOMEN'S ROLE IN TOURISM INDUSTRY  
IN THAILAND: A SOCIOLOGICAL  
PERSPECTIVE**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru  
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**ANUJA**



**Southeast Asian Studies  
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Pacific Studies  
School of International Studies  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi-110067  
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CENTRE FOR SOUTH, CENTRAL, SOUTHEAST ASIAN & SOUTH WEST PACIFIC STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**

NEW DELHI - 110 067

Phone : 26704350  
Fax : 91-11-2671 7586  
91-11-2671 7603

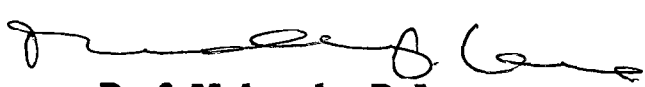
19 July 2005

**CERTIFICATE**

Certified that this Dissertation entitled "**WOMEN'S ROLE IN TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THAILAND: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**" submitted by me in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is my original work and has not been previously submitted for the award of any other degree of this or any other university.

  
**(Anuja)**

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



**Prof. Mahendra P. Lama**

**(CHAIRPERSON)**  
**CHAIRPERSON**

Centre for South, Central, South East  
Asian and South West Pacific Studies  
School of International Studies  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi-110067



**Dr. Ganganath Jha**

**(SUPERVISOR)**  
**SUPERVISOR**

Centre for South, Central, South East  
Asian and South West Pacific Studies  
School of International Studies  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi-110067

*Dedicated*  
*To*  
*My Parents*

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**19 July 2005**

  
**Anuja**

## **PREFACE**

Tourism has become a global phenomenon today, both in terms of its penetration into hitherto unknown new parts of the world and in terms of the number of people participating in this sector. It has gained importance because it has assumed the major form of economic development. A small country like Thailand received by far the largest share of international tourists' arrivals and foreign exchange earnings among the Asian nations. In terms of relative impact, however, the socio-economic significance of tourism industry is much higher in this country. Earning from tourism related activities in Thailand rank on the top and tourism is considered as the second leg of the national economy.

There are innumerable factors that have made Thailand the most attractive tourist destination in Asia and the Pacific region. Among them tourists attraction towards women of Thailand is an important factor. Every year millions of tourists arrive here for recreation and sex. That is why sex-tourism in Thailand is on peak. And this has also become the source of economy in Thailand.

This dissertation is an attempt to analyse Women's Role in Tourism Industry in Thailand from a systematic sociological perspective. The two key methodologies have been used here to

analyse the reason why women of Thailand are known as a productive economy in tourism sector? The methodologies adopted are analytical and historical. The emphasis on analytical method has led to survey the uneven process of women involved in Tourism Industry with the help of the contemporary sociological studies. The historical method in this work was necessitated which has been drawn from the Thai history and also some kind of sociological historiography.

The analytical and historical methods cover the entire gamut of the Thailand's social phenomena and its realities. Women's role in tourism industry begins from the emergent and endogenous sources, or through contact with forces outside the systems. The conceptual paradigm that have been used to analyse women and tourism, not only seeks to integrate most conceptual formations about economic activity in Thailand, but is also intended to render them systematic and broad-based.

In this dissertation the whole analysis has been divided into four chapters besides conclusion.

The first chapter is "Introduction", which gives a brief account of tourism, its meaning and definition and development in the world.

The second chapter, "Women in Thai society: a historical perspective", examines the position of women in Thailand on the basis of historical background. It also lay out the impact of religion on the



women of Thailand, which tries to clear out how women from domestic workers become sex workers.

The third chapter, "Role of women in tourism and hotel industry as a productive economy", explores the real status of women in Thailand. This chapter also tries to deal with how tourism plays a prominent role in Thailand's economy and provides opportunities for employment and helping economic growth.

The fourth chapter, "Golden Triangle: a new tourism Mecca of Thailand", says that the relationship between tourism and drug is not only fundamental, but a mutually dependent one. This chapter shows both positive and negative impacts of tourism. The positive economic impacts include an impressive growth of GDP and GNP, foreign exchange earning, national income generation, employment, poverty alleviation and other socio-economic benefits. While excessive growth of tourism has sealed negative impact too. In this chapter it has been showed that how tourism development and its rapid growth have damaged the country's environment. And the worst part of tourism is that it has increased the demand of prostitutes in Thailand, which have spread many diseases like HIV/AIDS, etc.

The last part is "Conclusion", which contains some of my observations on the contents of the above mentioned chapters.

# *Chapter 1*

## *Introduction*



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The word "tourism" which is widely accepted and recognized in common parlance, is, nevertheless, a term that is subject to diversity of meanings and interpretation. Tourism is not a new phenomenon; it has grown up in the post-1945 period. Its scale and extent of contemporary international travels demand the attention of geographers, researchers and academicians concerned with the study of tourism.<sup>1</sup> It is the area of study with a range of disciplines i.e. geography, economics, sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, business and marketing. The differing conceptual structures within these disciplines lead inevitably to contrast in perspective and emphasis.<sup>2</sup>

There are some basic definitions of tourism as given by various forums and organizations. The League of Nations defined in 1937 the term foreign tourist as:

*"Any person visiting a country, other than that in which he usually resides for a period of at least 24 hours".*

According to this definition the following persons were to be considered tourists:

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen William, *Tourism Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.2.

- Person traveling for pleasure, for domestic reasons, for health purpose etc.,
- Person traveling for some meetings or in a representative capacity of any kind i.e. scientific, administrative, diplomatic, religious and athletic,
- Person traveling for business purpose and,
- Person arriving in the course of sea cruise.<sup>3</sup>

A revised definition given at the UN Conference on International Travel and Tourism held in Rome in 1963 which described,

*“Any person visiting a country other than that in which he has his usual place of residence, for any reason other than following an occupation remunerated from within the country visited”.*

This definition covered:

- Tourism i.e. temporary visitor staying for least 24 hours in the country visited and purpose of whose journey can be classified as:
  - (a) Leisure i.e. recreation, holiday, study, religion and sports,
  - (b) Business, meeting, convention and family.
- Excursionists i.e. temporary visitors, staying less than 24 hours in the country visited.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kunal Chattopadhyaya, *Economic Impact of Tourism Development: An Indian Perspective* (Delhi: Kasniska Publications, 1995), p.10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

These definitions were again revised and updated at the World Tourism Organization (WTO) conference in Ottawa in 1991. The most popular and widely accepted definition of tourism given by WTO is:

*“The activities of a person traveling to a place outside his/her environment for less than a specified period of time and whose main purpose of travel is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited”.*<sup>5</sup>

This definition explains the following purposes:

- (a) for pleasure i.e. holiday, leisure, sports etc.,
- (b) for religious and social functions,
- (c) study and health,
- (d) meeting and conventions, and
- (e) business and trade

Tourism department of Thailand has also adopted tourism definitions, which, is very similar to Rome conference, and WTO's definition. The definition given by the department of tourism, Thai government for foreign tourism is,

*“Any person visiting Thailand for any reason other than to exercise remunerated activity within the country. The person must stay at least one night, but not longer than 90 days and the purpose of his/her journey can be classified under one of the following: leisure (recreation, holiday, health, study, and religion), business, family, mission meeting”.*

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen William, n. 1, p.3.

According to this definition following persons have been considered as a foreign tourist:

- (a) Pleasure seekers i.e. sight seeing, recreation, adventure, hunting, religion and sports.
- (b) Person visiting for business and commercial purpose and also to attend meeting as a representation capacity,
- (c) Persons traveling for family and meeting relatives,
- (d) Persons coming for education, health etc., and
- (e) Person arriving in the course of a sea cruise.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, from the above definition we can say that tourism is the sum of the relation and services connected with a temporary and voluntary change of residence for various purposes.<sup>7</sup>

Tourism is perceived as an economic activity which accrues to the recipient countries a definite source of foreign exchange and national income, creates jobs to reduce unemployment, fosters entrepreneurship, stimulates production of food and local handicrafts, speeds up communication facilities, cultural exchanges and, above all, contributes to a better understanding of the country. Tourism has emerged as an important economic activity at the global as well as regional levels. Due to these physical and cultural attributions, the South-East Asian nations have magnetic holds over

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<sup>6</sup> TAT Statistical Report, Bangkok, Thailand, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Kunal Chattopadhyaya, n. 3, p.7.

attracting people from many other parts of the world, especially from the west. The historical and cultural monuments e.g. the imperial palaces, beautiful households and water lilies, the palm-fringed beaches of the Southeast Asian realm among the main factors, attracting the huge tourist traffics in the region.<sup>8</sup>

So far, Thailand has been the most effective beneficiary in absolute economic and financial terms. It has been receiving a large share of international tourists as well as foreign exchange. In terms of assessing the relative impact, however the economic significance of international tourism is much greater in the case of Thailand. Foreign exchange earnings in Thailand rank on the top of the nation's revenue earnings.<sup>9</sup>

### **Tourism as a source of economic development in Thailand**

Tourism is one of the most emerging sectors for Thailand's economy.<sup>10</sup> Thailand's tourism creates about 12% of its overall GDP. It has created jobs in these areas, and has been a major part of the economy since 1982. Thailand has struggled to keep tourism thriving along these pristine beaches – and has ended up hunting the environment because of the lack of coordinated economic efforts.<sup>11</sup>

Since 1987, tourism has become a major earner of foreign

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<sup>8</sup> Motiram, *International Tourism* (New Delhi: Sonali Publications, 2003), pp. 1-2

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> "Thailand's Tourism Development, Past, Present and Future" <http://www.nationmultimedia.com>



exchange occasionally outdistancing even Thailand's largest single export textile, with receipts as high as USD 9 Billion. GDP in 2000 is estimated at USD 413-Billion with the real growth of 4.2% GDP per capita is estimated at USD 6,700. And inflation is estimated at 2.1% International and local financial institutions estimated a GDP growth of 2.4% by the end of 2002 with an inflation of 2.2%. An estimated 20% of Thai citizens control 60% of the wealth- most of these people are residents of Bangkok.<sup>12</sup>

Tourism industry also contributes a considerable amount of total GDP and reduces its Balance of Payment (BoP) as well as seeking a new pace of development in the country. Its importance as an instrument for economic development and employment generation activity, especially in the remote and backward areas has now been well-recognized in Thailand. Apart from this, it is also important to note that tourism has become an instrument for sustainable development in the country such as:

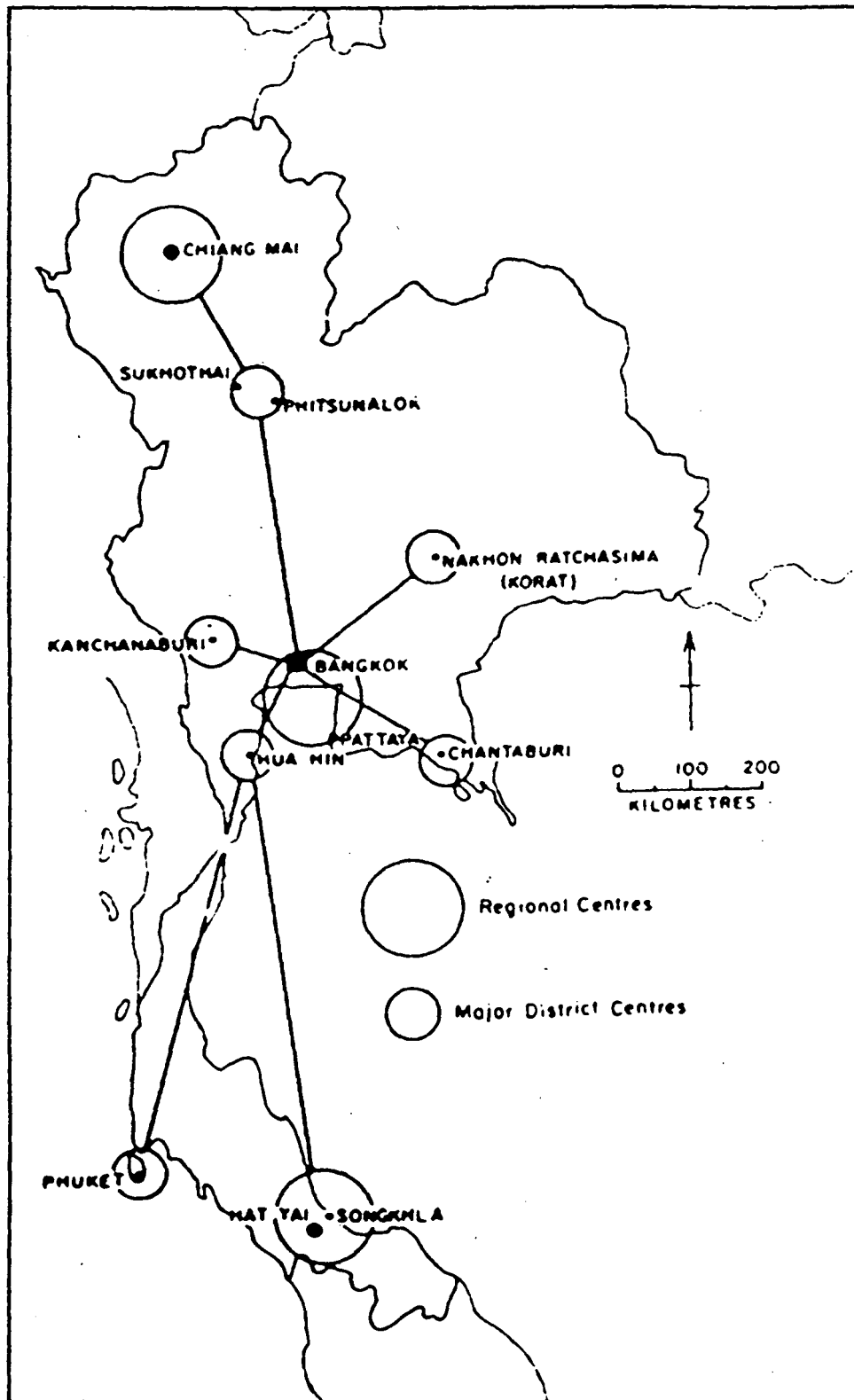
- Elimination of poverty,
- Creation of job,
- Education of regional imbalances,
- Advancement of other disadvantaged groups and women and
- Environment generation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Thailand" <http://www.bot.or.th>

<sup>13</sup> Motiram, n. 8, p. 22.

# Major Tourist Places in Thailand



Source: Tourism Development—Topics in Applied Geography

Tourism industry is the only alternative for the survival of expanding population in Thailand around 62 million. Every year millions of tourists visit Thailand for holiday tour, excursion, sun lust, trekking, sight-seeing, shopping and business etc. Although tourist destination Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket, Ko Samui, Hat-Yai and Chiang Mai are the main tourist destination of Thailand. **(See Map)**<sup>14</sup>

Thailand has very rich resources of tourist attraction such as natural features, landscapes, climate, flora-fauna, its varied cultural and social characteristics, development of tourist infrastructures and technology as well as political stability and government policy. All these factors and resources motivate millions of tourists to land up in the country.<sup>15</sup>

In Thailand Tourism has been developed or existing for long time but it is has rapidly developed in 1970s and 1980s. In the early 1980s and its development pace was slow but after mid-1980s it has grown very fast. As has been pointed out earlier there are so many attractive factors which make Thailand the most favourite destination in Southeast Asia.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp. 22-23.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## **Thailand Tourism development Past, Present and Future**

Thailand is situated and has easy connections to other countries in the region. These factors enabled the tourism industry to grow very quickly. In addition, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has tried to facilitate tourists' visits through the revision of immigration rules and formalities for greater convenience.<sup>17</sup>

### **Past**

The Tourism Authority of Thailand was set up in 1960. At that time it was called Tourism Organization of Thailand (TOT). This happened in the year when there was rapid development in the country. Initially, the TOT's main task was promoting and doing Public Relations (PR) for the Thai tourism industry, which was being done seriously for the first time.<sup>18</sup>

As Thailand was still developing economically, the infrastructure in most tourist destinations especially in the different regions was not good enough to receive international visitors. This caused most of the tourism flows to be focused on Bangkok. Using tradition and culture to add value to tourism is a good practice. It allows the community to appreciate the value of their own culture and traditions while at the same time getting economic benefits from it. However, it must be done with the understanding that culture can

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<sup>17</sup> "Tourism" <http://www.thailand.prd.go.th.com>

<sup>18</sup> "Thailand's Tourism Development Past, Present and Future" <http://www.nationmultimedia.com>

only be created and flourish when it provides benefits to that community. Only then should it be used as a means to attract tourism. The tourism industry experienced rapid growth, especially between 1965 and 1973. International visitor arrivals grew from 200,000 to one million by 1973, a five-fold increase. Tourism revenue increased from 500 million baht in 1965 to 3,500 million baht, a seven-fold increase in a span of less than ten years.<sup>19</sup>

The first National Tourism Development Plan was formulated with the help of the Netherlands Institute of Tourism Development Consultants in collaboration with the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and TOT. It was strongly recommended that it was necessary to change TOT into a ministry of tourism to give it more authority and power to facilitate integration, development and cooperation with other agencies. Tourism development was included in the National Economic and Social Development plan for the first time in Plan 4 covering the years 1997-1981. The government recognized the importance of the tourism industry, which generated the third largest foreign exchange revenue after exports of rubber and rice and helped to lessen the burden of losses incurred from trade. Changing the TOT to TAT in 1979 also gave it a higher legislative. The TAT was assigned the responsibility of overseeing the planning and development of the industry and also structured accordingly. The

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

first National Tourism Development Plan in 1976 led to the creation of a master plan along with feasibility studies in many major tourist destinations in 1979.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Present***

A tourism strategy was set up with a goal to make Thailand the Tourism Capital of Asia with a total of 20 million visitors by 2008. The government carried many international market campaigns similar to 'The World Our Guest' though in the early stages the main theme was still Amazing Thailand and those campaigns were taglines. The campaign slogan now has changed from Amazing Thailand to 'Happiness on Earth'.<sup>21</sup>

The same was done for domestic tourism. A campaign called Travel Thailand - Can Go Every Month (2002) was introduced and then changed to Unseen Thailand. For every year, a new campaign was introduced, for example, Tour Thailand - You Won't Know If You Don't Go and One Day Fun Trip. The government focused on PR in both the foreign and domestic markets to encourage travel and show tangible results of its work in terms of actual numbers. Many large-scale activities were implemented like Maha Songkran Grand Festival,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Grand Lanna Festival, Film Festival, International Sports and the Elite Card project.<sup>22</sup>

In the field of development, one important project was the development of Koh Chang. A Special Tourism Development Organization was set up to develop the island in an integrated way. It is expected to get the status of a special economic zone. The government has stressed its relationship with neighbouring countries, extending cooperation and support in marketing and development to sub regional groups like the Emerald Triangle of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, Heritage Necklace of Southeast Asia, connecting cultural tourism products like Phukam of Burma, Nan of Thailand, Luang Prabang of Laos, Hue of Vietnam and Siem Riep of Cambodia and other tourism projects under GMS and ACMEC cooperation.<sup>23</sup>

Even though the crises of the past such as terrorism, SARS, bird flu, Iraq war, southern violence and the tsunami have been managed well, there are still weaknesses that need to be improved such as lack of readiness to tackle the problems, lack of good systems, planning and authority to act and take responsibility, and crisis management centers. The result is a slow early-response, confusion in operations and towards the end, excessive and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

unnecessary efforts that result in more losses, wastage and duplication of budget usage.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Future***

The future of Thai tourism industry can be divided into two parts. The first is the vision to be pursued. The second is reality that is reflected by the current situation and the opportunities to fulfill the vision. The vision of Thai tourism is that of a sustainable industry, which means a sustainable approach, combining economy, ecology and society and not just investment in business and economic growth. There can be no tourism industry if the culture, society and environment are not preserved.<sup>25</sup>

The government target to double visitors by 2008 again is giving more importance to quantity. In a way, this is good because it will generate more revenue and could help boost tourism and spread it around the country. But if there isn't any clear policy related to management and preservation, balancing the supply-and-demand and carrying capacity of tourism destinations, improving service standard, security and Human Resources (HR), the rapid growth of visitors will not be appropriate for an industry that has problems accumulated

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



over many years. This will create only more loss in the long term and will affect the community's economy and society.<sup>26</sup>

According to statistics by the TAT (The Tourism Authority of Thailand) Thailand received 10.3 million visitors in the year 2000. The country was ranked 21 in the world. The majority of visitors came from East Asia with 60.57%. Europe accounted for 22.19% and the Americas for 6.12%.<sup>27</sup> An average of 8 days is spent by foreigners in Thailand with an average expenditure of 4,000. - Baht (approx. USD 95.) per day, which was an increase of 6.16% from the year before. An estimated 55 million trips were undertaken by Thais in Thailand who spend an average of 1,730. - Baht (approx. USD 41.-) per person per day. Revenue from domestic trips increased by 13.5%. An estimated 2 million Thais traveled overseas in 2001 spending an average of USD 1000. - Per person.<sup>28</sup>

With the planned opening of the new airport Suvarnabhumi or 'Nong Ngu Haul' (Cobra Swamp) in 2004 on the Bangna Trat highway, it is expected that in- and outbound tourism will grow with more than 10% per year. <sup>29</sup>

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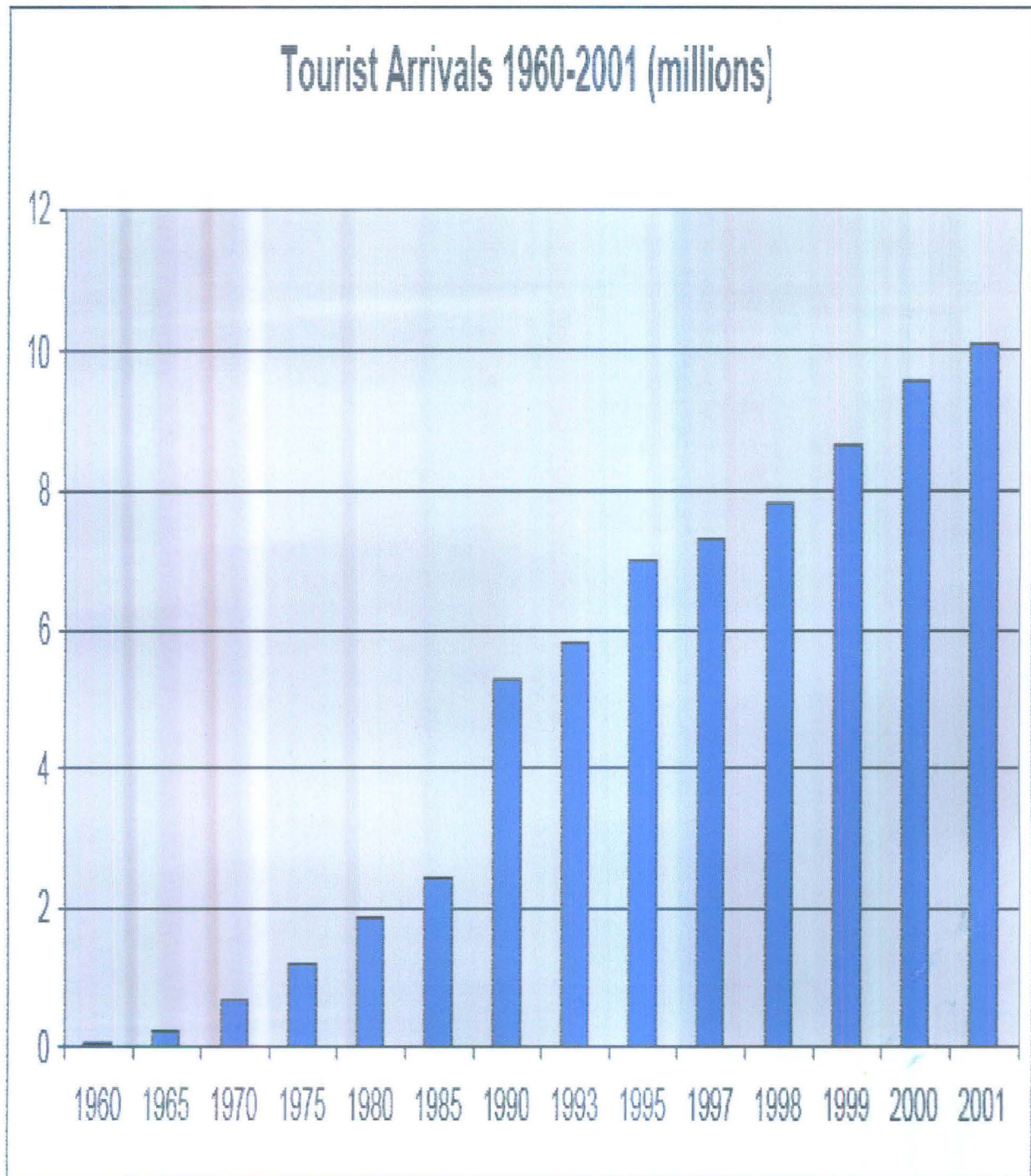
<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "Tourism Authority of Thailand" <http://www.tourismthailand.org>

<sup>28</sup> "Thailand's Tourism Development Past, Present and Future" <http://www.nationmultimedia.com>

<sup>29</sup> "Tourism" <http://www.suvarnabhumiairport.com>

FIG : 1



Source: TAT

**Table: 1**

| <b>Years</b> | <b>Tourism Arrivals (in millions)</b> | <b>Percentage Growth Rate</b> |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1981         | 1.97                                  | + 7.5                         |
| 1985         | 2.43                                  | + 23.1                        |
| 1990         | 5.29                                  | +117.3                        |
| 1991         | 5.05                                  | - 4.0                         |
| 1992         | 5.93                                  | +1.6                          |
| 1993         | 5.76                                  | +12.3                         |
| 1994         | 6.16                                  | +6.9                          |
| 1995         | 6.95                                  | +12.8                         |
| 1996         | 7.19                                  | +3.5                          |
| 1997         | 7.22                                  | +0.4                          |
| 1998         | 7.76                                  | +7.5                          |
| 1999         | 8.65                                  | +10.6                         |
| 2000         | 9.57                                  | +11.5                         |
| 2001         | 10.0 (Target)                         | +4.5 (Target)                 |

*Source: Immigration Bureau, Police Department, 2000, Bangkok, Thailand.*

**Table: 1** also shows the growth rate of international tourism. The tourism rate in Thailand is growing gradually except in 1991 when there is negative growth rate. This negative growth is due to Gulf War. After that there has always been a visible growing tendency especially after mid-1990s. This can be seen in **figure: 1**<sup>30</sup>

**Figure: 1** charts the basic patterns of increase in the foreign tourists from 1960, when it was just 1 million and mostly from within the Southeast Asian nations itself. But in 1995, 6.95 million tourists drawn from across the globe and crossed the Thai border. The graph also emphasizes that the rate of expansion of international tourism to

<sup>30</sup> Motiram, n. 8, pp. 25-26.

Thailand has tended to increase through time, especially from mid 1990s. Explanation for this pattern can be as:

- The enhanced accessibility by low cost, long-haul air services from foreign markets particularly, Europe and North America.
- The increase cost in competing destination, making Thailand an affordable holiday choice.
- The reduction in the attractive of older destinations.
- The diversity and range of the Thai tourist products, including beach tourism, a distinctive historic-cultural heritage and sex tourism.<sup>31</sup>

Although there is a continuous growth rate in Thailand, the highest growth rate was registered in 1985, 1990 and 1995 when it was 23.1, 117.3 and 12.8 per cent respectively. This is mainly due to persistent efforts of government to promote tourist destination in the overseas markets. That is why, within one decade (1981-91), there is 156.3 per cent increase in growth rate, while 1991-2000 growth rates are only 89.7 per cent. In 2000 growth rate has recorded 11.5 per cent over previous year 1999. Thai government is taking several initiatives to maintain this growth rate.<sup>32</sup>

Tourism has emerged as an important economic activity at the global as well as at the regional level. Due to their physical and

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen William, n.1, p.64.

<sup>32</sup> Motiram, n. 8, p.27

cultural attributes the Southeast Asian nations, particularly Thailand has a magnetic hold over attracting people from many parts of the world, especially from the west palaces, beautiful households, water lilies and the palm-fringed beaches of the country are among the factors attracting the huge influx of tourists in Thailand.<sup>33</sup>

Thailand's history with tourism as an industry began in earnest during the late 1950s. Before that there were only approximately five cruise ships per year docking in Bangkok with 500 passengers. The Tourism Organization of Thailand was established during the 1950s to economy the development of the industry. But the most important boost for tourism was the Vietnam War. Due to its proximity and relative safety, Thailand became the main Rest to Recreation (R&R) destination for American Soldiers, as well as stationing over 40,000 men in bases around the country.<sup>34</sup>

As the large of source of income on the Island, tourism has great impact on the livelihood of the local community. The range of establishment's accessory to successfully run the industry is astounding, including hotels restaurants, dive shop, travels agencies, etc. The tourism industry in Thailand as whole after the financial

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>34</sup> "Thailand: Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation for Tourism in Phuket" <http://www.iadb.org.com>

crisis, TAT aggressively marketed Thailand as a “great value for money” destination.<sup>35</sup>

Tourism development in Thailand shows distinctly different trends and patterns of tourism partly due to its differing physical characteristics and partly to its socio-cultural and political history.<sup>36</sup>

The socio-cultural environment is a man-made environment which includes the values, beliefs, behaviours, morals, arts, law and history of communities. The socio-cultural environment of Thailand is very popular and rich such as opera and ballet which includes folk popular, contemporary and native expression. These social and cultural factors have profound influences on tourism in Thailand. Among these sex tourism and tribal life and their cultures are very important. Large numbers of tourists are attracted only by this every year.<sup>37</sup>

Sex tourism also plays an important role to attract foreign tourists in Thailand. Sex tourism is an overt component of the tourist's alternatives to employment and to earn foreign exchange, the nation sells its beauty to earn much needed foreign exchange. According to an official report, about 70 to 80 per cent of male tourists who travel from Japan, Australia, and USA and Western European countries to Thailand go solely for the purpose of sexual

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Motiram, n. 8, p. 48

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

entertainment.<sup>38</sup> Sex tourism in Thailand has become a multinational sex industry. Although it is officially illegal in the country, it is a major factor for tourist attraction.<sup>39</sup>

Sex tourism is fully localized which gives employment to unskilled female workers who have no job. The majority of the women work by the motivation of providing family support, and lack of the self-esteem. According to an official report, there are around 7,00,000 (seven lakh) women engaged in this sector generally occurs on the beaches and hotels and is provided by call girls on a chartered basis to overseas tourists. Recently it has declined by the threat of AIDS, but it still continues to be a major force of tourist attraction in Thailand.<sup>40</sup>

However, the positive tourism related economic development is associated with negative aspects in the ecological and social spheres. With the increase in tourism, there has been a significant rise in the incidence of prostitution and criminality. The focus of the study is based on women's role in tourism industry in Thailand. How and why women are playing a significant role in promoting tourism? The study can better be revealed through the historical perspective of women in Thai society and their role in productive economy.

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<sup>38</sup> T. Thanh Dam, "The Dynamics of Sex Tourism: The Case Study of South-East Asia", *Development and Change*, vol.3, 1983, p.593

<sup>39</sup> Motiram, n. 8, p. 59.

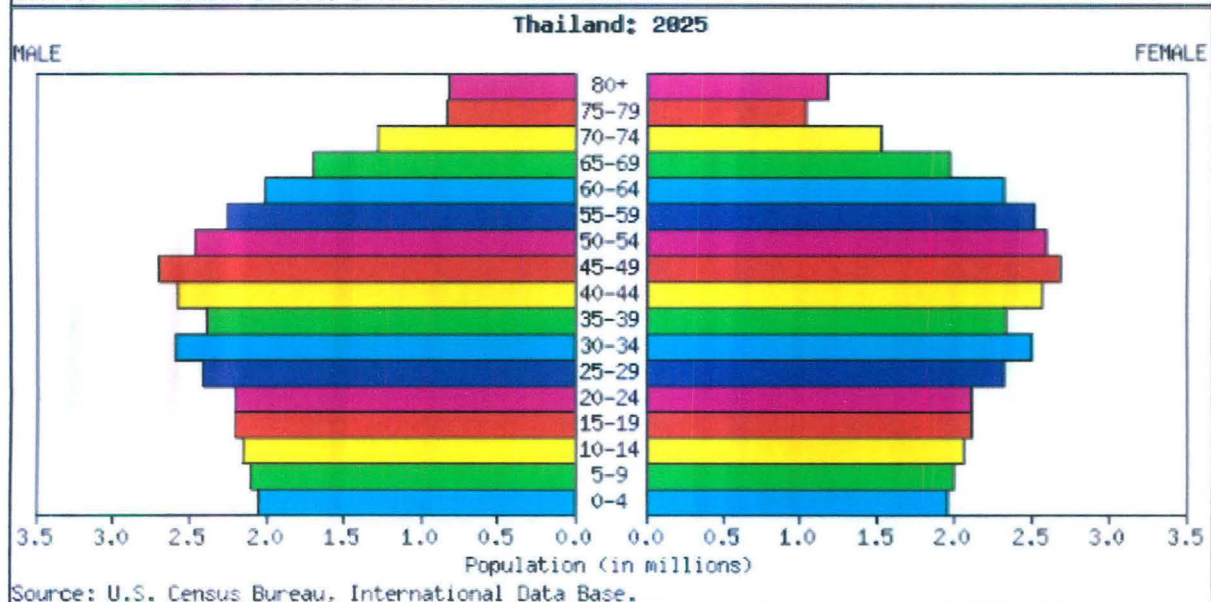
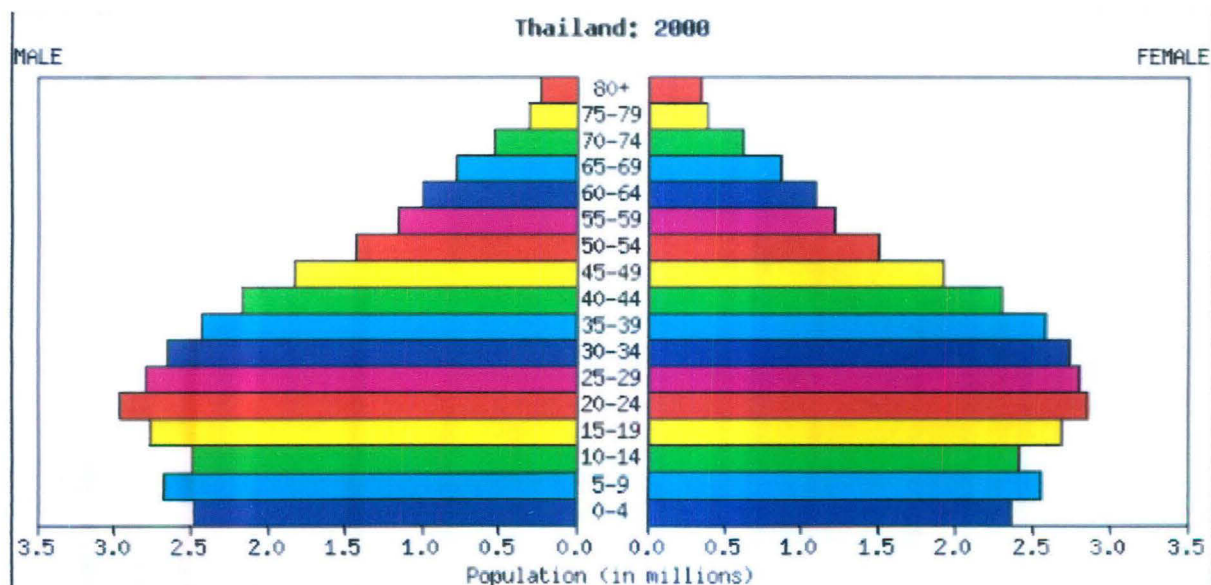
<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

## *Chapter 2*

# *Women in Thai Society: A Historical Perspective*



## Population Pyramid Summary for Thailand



## CHAPTER 2

### WOMEN IN THAI SOCIETY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Thailand, “Land of the Free” has been a subject of great scholarly interest in the recent years. The reason is that the country is successfully combining the traditional values, and values of Theravada Buddhism, with elements of modernity—a synthesis of the old and the new. This enables the country to preserve a strong sense of the Thai national identity, while making a significant progress in its efforts to modernize the country and improve the well-being of its people.<sup>1</sup> Buddhism, the national religion, is followed by 95 per cent of the population. There is a total religious freedom in the country and other faith such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism are practiced by small minorities.<sup>2</sup>

Thailand is ethnically not a homogeneous country. Its 62 million people (**See Map**) consist of Mons, Khmers, Chinese, Vietnamese, Malays, and Indians, and more recently, many small groups from the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> Thai society is essentially based on agriculture, 80% of its population living in the villages. However, in the last two decades

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandra R Kapur-Fic, *Thailand Buddhism, Society and Women* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Robert N. Kearney, *Politics and Modernization of South and Southeast Asia*. (New York: Shenkman Publishing Company, 1975), p. 220.

Thailand has diversified in both light and heavy industry. Thailand is also attracting foreign investments.<sup>4</sup> Thailand was never colonized by any foreign power. As a result the Thai society has never been decultured by the imposition of foreign values and, in fact, the Thai people have been quite successful in preserving and protecting their culture, religion, traditions and other values of their national heritage.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike India and many other former colonial countries, Thailand never faced a challenge of “Forced Modernization”, with its both positive and negative aspects, and hence allowed many modern day problems to go unresolved; some grew, like child prostitution and special problems related to women. As primarily a male dominated society, until recently no females were permitted to enter important positions in business, trade, government, science and many other fields. Many men whom this writer had the opportunity of encountering still firmly believed that it should remain so. Moreover, at present there are no female members in the national parliament to influence the legislative process.<sup>6</sup>

Most differences among women and men are created by society and relate to behavioural patterns, which are influenced by the position and condition of women must be analyzed within a gender

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<sup>4</sup> Alexandra R Kapur-C, n. 1, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

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perspective in order to understand the issues that need to be addressed. There is a popular saying in Thailand: "Man is the front foot of the elephant, while woman is the back one". This reflects the general view that women are secondary different cultures of different societies. These are known as "gender" differences. Gender inequity results from a set of attitudes, beliefs and practices, which are barriers to equality between women and men.<sup>7</sup> Inequality between male and female becomes obvious by observing Thailand's population (See Map).



Women in Thailand are known to have played a significant role. But their roles have changed over time due to both internal and external influences. Researchers seem to be in agreement that Thai women have enjoyed a more active role and better status than women in other developing countries.<sup>8</sup> However it does not free Thai women from discrimination experienced by women around the world. To understand the present roles and status of Thai women, it is necessary to understand their roles and status in the history and how

<sup>7</sup> "Promoting sustainable women's cooperative group business in Thailand" [http:// www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)  
<sup>8</sup> UNESCO, *Status of Women: Thailand*, RUSHSAP Series on Monographs and Occasional Papers No. 26 (Bangkok; UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 1990); Bencha Yoddumnern-Atfig et al, *Changing Roles and Statuses of Women in Thailand: A Documentary Assessment* (Bangkok, Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 1992) and Amara Pongsapich, *Occasional Papers on Women in Thailand* (Bangkok: Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University, 1998).

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these roles and status changed over time along with the country's socio-economic development and modernization.<sup>9</sup>

### **Historical Perspective**

*Man is paddy.*

*Woman is rice.*

Most studies on Thai women reveal the equal status of the wives to that of their husbands in the Sukhothai period (13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> century) of Thai history. The above proverb represents the traditional Thai attitudes towards male and female roles. That is, they are complementary to each other.<sup>10</sup> Since ancient times, this proverb has been assigned to men and women in different ways. The male roles were “the bread winner, the head of the family, the ruler and the protector of the country”, while the women “looked after the home, the children and the men folks and managed the family budget”.<sup>11</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that Thai women have always had an inferior status to men. In fact, Thai women held high esteem and were treated well according to the illustration from the Sukhothai era seven centuries ago:

“Women, especially intelligent women should control expenditure of money, men who are husbands should listen”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Roles and Status of Thai Women: From Past to Present” [http:// www. busakorn. addr. com](http://www.busakorn.addr.com)

<sup>10</sup> Bencha Yoddumnern- Atfig et al, *Changing Roles and Status of Women in Thailand*, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Vipa Chulachata, “Introduction”, in *Aspects of Thai Women Today* (Bangkok: National Commission on Women's Affairs, 1980), cited in UNESCO, *Status of Women: Thailand*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

In the Ayuthaya Kingdoms of Thailand (1350- 1767), the status of women began to deteriorate. By 1361, the “Law on Husband and Wives”, men were allowed to practice polygamy and punish their wives physically. In this period, the status of women was characterized by the saying, “Women are buffaloes. Men are humans.”<sup>13</sup>

The extreme legal oppression of women continued until the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the current Rattanakosim period. In 1804, a set of laws consolidated the laws of the Ayuthaya era, known as the “Laws of Three seals.” These laws uphold the practices of polygamy and classified wives into the following three categories; (a) major wife (b) minor wife (c) slave wife. These laws were in effect until a century ago when king Rama IV prohibited men from selling wives and parents from compelling their children to marry. The status of women was further improved when king Rama V abolished slavery, legalized prostitutions to protect women from unscrupulous men, and gave women more decision making powers in family matters.<sup>14</sup>

His son, king Rama VI, instituted programs of compulsory education for all Thais, including women. He also declared his support for monogamy. He suggested that “good” Thai women should refuse to marry those who treat women like “flock of chicken.” This

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> “Roles and Status of Thai Women: From Past to Present” [http:// www. busakorn. addr. com](http://www.busakorn.addr.com)

<sup>15</sup> Alexandra R Kapur-Fic, n. 1, p. 461

initiative to change the status of Thai women was not considered of any significance and did not receive the attention it deserved.<sup>15</sup>

### **Religious Dimension**

However, the question of the status of women in Thailand has a historical and religious dimension to it.<sup>16</sup> Buddhism the national religion cast as worldly, lacking virtue and even as temptation to the purity of the monastic order. Although to be ordained as a monk represents the highest form of making merit in Theravada Buddhism in Thailand, the doctrine does not allow ordination of women. Because women are central to the stability and the well-being of a Thai family and are perceived as being more attached to worldly possessions, particularly their children, they are not considered as meeting the necessary conditions for ordination as monks.<sup>17</sup>

Some of these negative perceptions about women in Thailand have been attributed, to some extent, to the influences of the Chinese and Indian cultural and Buddhist religious values. According to the traditional Chinese thought women are easily manipulated, always unsatisfied, jealous, insulting and of lesser intelligence. Indian cultural values echoed, to some extent, somewhat similar values and attitudes. Women are always to be protected and guided by the men during their different stages of life, i.e., first father, then older brother

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 432.

after father's death, then husband when she marries and, finally, her own son, if she becomes a widow.<sup>18</sup>

On the depiction of women as a sexual temptation has also received considerable attention. There is a strong image of women as oversexed temptress. This perception of women as temptation can be found in the story of the enlightenment of the Buddha. In this figuring, a women is placed alongside, temptations as objects of desire. It is this image that implies women may be a threat to the purity of the monastic order. This image also supports the spread of prostitution in Thailand.<sup>19</sup> The teachings of Buddhism can be effective tools in coping with the problem of prostitution. Buddhist history and tradition have set an example for us. Many well - known prostitutes during the time of the Buddha benefited from the teaching, and their understanding of Buddhism led them to give up prostitution. Some joined the Sangha as bhikkhunis and excelled in spiritual development. Some became enlightened and a strong force for the propagation of Buddhism.<sup>20</sup>

But Buddhist teaching may not always perfectly reflected in the Buddhist institution, the Sangha. There are prevalent attitudes that continue to lead Thai society to see prostitute, and women in a negative light. The Sangha maintains a very reserved attitude towards

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<sup>18</sup> Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991), p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Alexandra R Kapur-Fic, n. 1, pp.432- 481.

<sup>20</sup> "Buddhism and Prostitution" [http:// www.sexwork.com](http://www.sexwork.com)



social issues in general, including the issue of prostitution. This social denial is partly due to the understanding, or misunderstanding, that the Sangha should not interfere in the "worldly concerns" of laypeople. With such an attitude, it is indeed difficult to expect any meaningful or constructive involvement from the Sangha.<sup>21</sup>

**Here is a view that says Buddhism encourages prostitution:**

Buddhism, the national religion of Thailand, is a major reason that women become prostitutes. The teachings of Buddha are inherently engrained into the Thai culture, which are carefully followed in order to keep their karma pure. The doctrine of karma maintains that each human act carries its own merit or demerit. The Thai people believe that during their lives, they are in the process of being born again. When they die, they will either be promoted to a higher karma, or, if their soul is impure, they will be punished and reincarnated to a lower form of life where they must learn to cleanse their karma.<sup>22</sup>

With every act they do, by helping someone, by showing gratefulness to their parents, they are making merit, or, in other words, they are performing actions which will purify their soul. If Thais do something which will bring dishonour or shame to themselves or their families, they will have made a "stain" on their

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> "Sex Industry Report" <http://www.soc.culture.thainewsgroup.com>

karma and must therefore redeem themselves by performing good actions, thereby cleansing their karma once again. The trade in women in Thailand arose from social conditions which were external to Buddhism as a body of thought, but has been consolidated by the biases inherent in Buddhism.<sup>23</sup>

It is this very fact that women want to purify their soul by doing work which will help their families, not to escape them. The daughters feel that by showing their gratefulness to their parents for what they have been given, they not only have an opportunity to alleviate financial pressures on their family, but also as a chance to purify their karma and as one more step to reaching nirvana (the highest level of enlightenment). The Buddhist view of women is one which puts them on a lower level than men. Women are looked down upon especially by monks who view them as merely dangerous objects that provoke sexual interest in men. Buddha advises his disciples not to look at them or talk to them. Buddhism acknowledges the view that women's natural role is for having children, but it excludes the notion of women being sexually desired or attractive.<sup>24</sup>

The fragmented conception of the female body and the process of biological reproduction may be regarded as one of the major sources of gender bias which has implications for the social position

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

of women. Although this bias does exist in Buddhist thought, the girls enter prostitution knowing that they are not being judged by their family... they know that they are taking the opportunity to make merit for their family and to purify their karma. While Buddhist attitudes prevail about women as inferior beings, their status is karmic, or fated, and not due to a personal failing or moral flaw. Temporary work in the sex industry may be seen as fate or karma, not a moral flaw in the girl herself, or it may be seen as work for her family that gains her karmic merit.<sup>25</sup>

#### **Transformation of Female domestic workers to sex workers**

Social dislocation has brought about a continuing decline of rural social structures, tradition, and culture, and has created the problem of overpopulation in the big cities. Most of the young male migrants have become low-wage laborers in construction, factories, and service businesses; since the 1980s, many have left to work in the Middle East, Taiwan, Brunei, and Singapore. Many young women from the countryside, particularly from the north, have become prostitutes in Bangkok and other cities. More recently some have traveled to Japan and elsewhere to work in prostitution.<sup>26</sup>

Thailand has world-wide fame- or rather shame -- for its well-

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> "Toward a Buddhist social ethics: The case of Thailand Conduct of life" <http://www.sino-sv3.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/FULLTEXT/JR-ADM/tavivat.htm>.

established prostitution and sex industry. Many Western and Japanese male tourists go to Thailand simply for a "sex tour." Although Thailand has over a quarter of a million monks in thousands of monasteries throughout the land, it still has more prostitutes than monks. A great number of young women in Thailand, desperate in their search for a better life, have been drawn into the sex industry. Prostitution, of course, is against the teachings of the Buddha, but the Thai Sangha hierarchy has said virtually nothing about this issue.<sup>27</sup>

Prostitution is basically a byproduct of unjust economic and social structures and the most obvious form of gender oppression. Although the phenomenon is well-known in Thailand, few Thai people talk about it in public. Tod and Buddhist social activists are beginning to speak up in defense of the rights of their mothers, sisters and daughters, reminding society that prostitution represents a distortion of traditional cultural values and is caused by modern structural poverty. Prostitution and other economic, social, and political problems must be addressed by a new systematic code of Buddhist social ethics which encompasses the whole range of national issues, including human rights, drug abuse, economic exploitation, and environmental degradation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

In Thailand Prostitution became a public issue during the reign of Rama I.<sup>29</sup> Although prostitution is illegal in Thailand it is widespread and represents one of the most serious problems of the country. In the past a family would be sad if a daughter was born, but now it rejoices. Poverty is the most common reason given for the increase in the numbers of prostitutes and other related activities, and therefore many young women from villages come to cities looking for jobs with none or little education and no employable skills. They end up as prostitutes to earn money to support their poverty stricken parents in the village.<sup>30</sup>

The sale of sexual services by women illustrates the interplay between women's difficult economic situation, their economic dependence on men, their sexual subjugation and the social definition of women's sexuality. Almost all women in the slum were economically and socially dependent on men and on the sexual services they provided for men. The difficult economic conditions drove women to prostitution.<sup>31</sup> Other reason can be that many women or girls come under pressure because parents want material goods. Some parents

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<sup>29</sup> Alexandra R Kapur-Fic, n. 1, p. 456.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 457.

<sup>31</sup> Susanne Thorbek, *Voices From the City: Women of Bangkok* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd), pp. 79-80.

often pressurize their daughter to bring money and this led them to become a prostitutes.<sup>32</sup>

The majority of sex workers in Thailand come from poor, rural families from the country's north and northeast regions. Most migrate to Bangkok or the other urban centers as a means to support their families; others are simply bored of village life and enter the flesh trade driven by a craving for the latest gadgets and brand name products.<sup>33</sup>

This problem is not related to women only but also faced by the children of Thai society. As is the experience of developing economies around the world, child prostitution is one of the manifestations of a range of social ills brought on by unbalanced economic and social development. Poverty is the principle reason why children in rural communities in Thailand are driven into the sex trade. For survival, children from impoverished families are forced to drop out of school in order to help their parents earn a living. When children enter the 'labour pool' early in life, their fate is sealed and they are likely to remain the cycle of poverty and illiteracy. This leads to an ever-ready supply of child labour, a situation that fuels the child sex trade. The growing demand for child sex tourism is another contributing.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Alexandra R Kapur-Fic, n. 1, p.458.

<sup>33</sup> "The Sex Industry in Thailand" <http://www.thai-info2004.com>

<sup>34</sup> "Thailand in The Global Fight against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of the Children (CSEC)" <http://www.world-tourism.org>

Social pressures, parental expectations, poverty, and a lack of educational and employment opportunities can put girls at risk of economic and sexual exploitation. Each year thousands of young women flock to Bangkok and other urban areas in search of work. Many young women without appropriate skills end up working for bars, massage parlours, and brothels. Some girls are even sold into prostitution by parents and relatives. Research conducted by the Office of the National Commission on Women's Affairs in 2000 indicates that there are between 22,500 and 40,000 girls under the age of 18 are engaged in commercial sex work.<sup>35</sup>

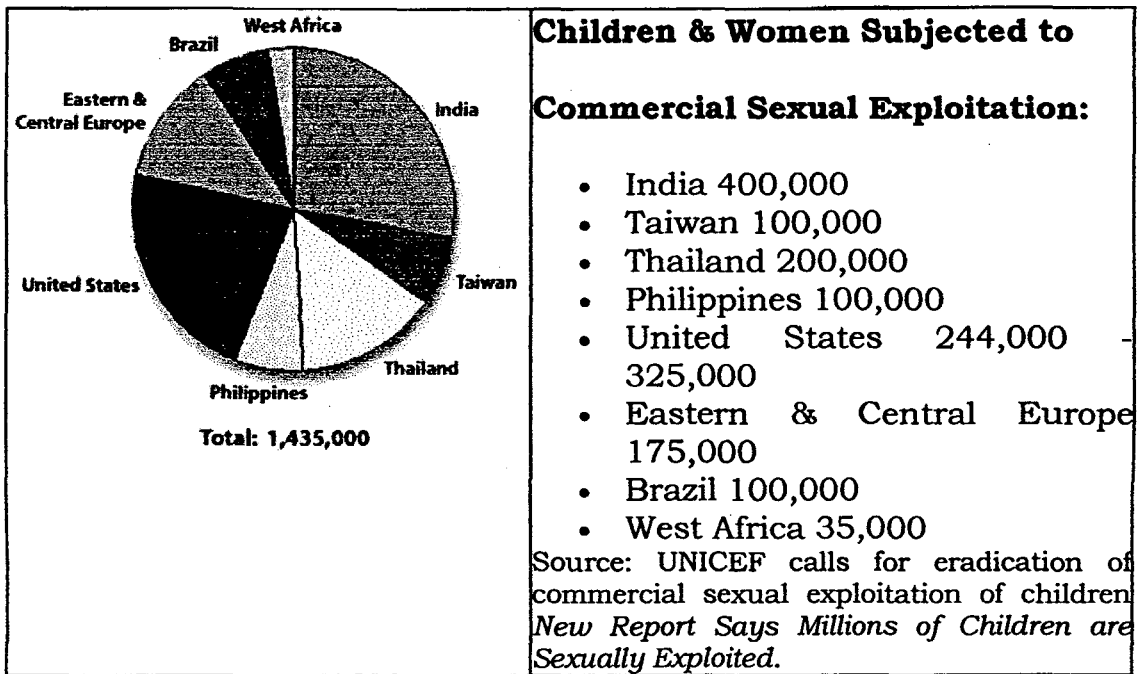
The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) has increasingly become an issue of global magnitude attracting major global concern. Worldwide, an estimated one million children (mainly girls) enter the multi-million dollar commercial sex trade every year. "Millions of children throughout the world are being bought and sold like cattle and used as sex slaves," declared UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy. "This is an utterly intolerable violation of children's rights."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "Children and Women Subjected to Commercial Sexual Exploitation" <http://www.unicef.org/newsline/01pr97.htm>

**Figure: 2**



Thus the perpetuated poverty of the rural areas encouraged migration to cities; and with this migration process, the peasantry made its contribution to Thailand's industrial development.<sup>37</sup>

In the 1950s, these immigrants shows that the most notable change has been the increased proportion of females migration to Bangkok, especially single migrants 10-19 years old.<sup>38</sup> In Thailand there has been both migration within the country - from farm to city - and immigration from outside the country. Farming cannot provide a living anymore. Many farmers even go to work in other countries to keep their families from starving. Many women come to Thailand from

<sup>37</sup> Douglas Porpora and Mah Hui Lim, "The Political Economic Factors of Migration to Bangkok," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1987, p.78.

<sup>38</sup> Sukanya Hantrakul, "Dutiful daughters on society's lower rungs," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 123, 5 January 1984, p. 39.



other countries because they want to improve their standard of living, and to support their families. Many of these young women are attracted by the promise of work, only to find themselves locked up in a brothel where they have to earn their release. Most of these young women come from countries in the region where employment is most difficult to secure. Because immigration has encouraged prostitution more and more young women, or girls, are being imported from neighbouring countries. That society has denied or failed to acknowledge the oppression, exploitation and abuse of women.<sup>39</sup>

The forced migration of rural women, girls in many cases, to the cities cannot be solely explained in terms of coercion. Many women “find their way with open eyes, drawn by the prospects of much higher rewards than they could ever earn even in a government job, let alone doing unskilled work in industry or agriculture.”<sup>40</sup> In a 1982 study by Pasuk Phongpaichit, a Thai sociologist, for the International Labour Organization “estimated the income of sex workers at twenty-five times that attainable in other occupations. Entire families in the country side are supported on the earnings of one daughter in Bangkok, and entire rural villages are made up of such families.”<sup>41</sup> Prostitution, in some sense, allows the women that are able to take advantage of it the opportunity to live the American dream, to enjoy

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<sup>39</sup> “Child Prostitution in Thailand” <http://www.siriratp@ksc.th.com>

<sup>40</sup> Sukanya Hantrakul, n. 38, p.40.

<sup>41</sup> Lillian S. Robinson, “Touring Thailand’s Sex Industry,” *The Nation*, 1 November 1993, p. 495.

and extend increased consumerism to their families: “modernization and sophisticated advertisements have also brought new desires for consumer goods to villagers and a shift towards a cash economy.”<sup>42</sup>

Women in Thailand have played a central role as income earners for their families and as financial supporters of their elders. In terms of social liberties, males in Thailand occupy a much more advantageous position than females. Young men are often given few responsibilities and allowed considerable personal and social freedoms. In contrast young women must follow strict behavioural guidelines and must assume most of the family and household responsibilities, while sacrificing their own freedoms. Compounded by rural poverty and a lack of educational economic opportunities, such a heavy financial burden pushes a large number of young women into the sex industry to earn income for their families. Performing their expected duties, young women from Thailand’s poverty stricken north and northeast often go willingly with employment agents to work in Bangkok massage parlours and other sex industry establishments. Commercial sex as a means for income has become a standard for many rural communities in Thailand.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Steven Erlanger, “A plague awaits,” *The New York Times Magazine*, 14 July 1991, p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> “Thailand and Sex Industry” <http://www.hangoverguide.com>

These are the few factors, which led women to get infected with venereal disease.<sup>44</sup>The physical suffering borne by these women is often unbearable without the aid of drugs. A United Nations study of a thousand Thai prostitutes revealed that a quarter were regular users of speed, barbiturates and heroin.<sup>45</sup>

Thus it is clear from the above discussion that Thailand which was a former centre of Buddhism has become the global centre of sexploitation. With a rich complex cultural past, it has become a country of cultural anomie and moral decay. In the new international division of labour in this 'interdependent global economy' the Thai state functions as the pimp and procurer for the leisure world of advanced capitalism.<sup>46</sup>

Indian Labour Organization (ILO) describes how prostitution in the region has developed into a lucrative business that influences employment and national income and contributes significantly to the region's economic growth. "The scale of prostitution has been enlarged to an extent where we can justifiably speak of a commercial sex sector that is integrated into the economic, social and political life of Thailand and the countries of Southeast Asia."<sup>47</sup> The sex industry has

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<sup>44</sup> Freddie Balfour, "Looking for AIDS, Joe?" *Far Eastern Review*, April 9, 1987, p. 113.

<sup>45</sup> "Prostitution in Thailand and Southeast Asia" <http://www.links.net/vita/swat/course/pros-thai.html>

<sup>46</sup> James Petras and Tienchai Wongchaisuwan, "Free Market, AIDS and Child Prostitution", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 March 1993, p. 442.

<sup>47</sup> "Southeast Asia: prostitution" <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/Hughes/seasia.htm>

grown in Southeast Asia due in part to the surge in recent years in the number of women in Asia's migrant force.<sup>48</sup>

Thailand is comprised of an array of markets which involve women as sellers, consumers, and also as symbols. Noting that women's engagement with markets is long-standing or even 'traditional.' Thai women identities are, and have been, defined by and through market relations.

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<sup>48</sup> Elif Kaban, "UN labour body urges recognition of sex industry," *Reuters*, 18 August 1998.

# *Chapter 3*

## *Role of Women in Tourism and Hotel Industry as a Productive Economy*

## CHAPTER 3

### ROLE OF WOMEN IN TOURISM AS WELL AS HOTEL INDUSTRY AS A PRODUCTIVE ECONOMY

Many developing countries perceive tourism as a fast track to economic growth. They assume that tourism development requires less investment than other industries; and they believe tourism to be an effective means of creating job opportunities and increasing local income. This gives an impetus to national income as well as to individual's income. This sector creates demands for services and consumer goods, which stimulate the production sectors bringing with it an automatic increase in national consumption.<sup>1</sup>

Thailand has long ascribed to this point of view; and it has devised a tourism marketing approach, which encourages low-medium-, and high-cost mass tourism to nearly all regions of the country. With the ubiquitous "Land of Smiles" advertising slogan promoted around the world, Thailand has become one of the best known, and most sought after, international tourist destinations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher J. Holloway, *This Business of Tourism* (London: Macdonald and Evans, 1985), p. 223

<sup>2</sup> Mingsarn Santikarn Kaosa-ard, "Thailand's Tourism Industry—What Do We Gain and Lose?" *TDR/Quarterly Review*, vol. 9 no. 3 September 1994, pp. 23-26.

## **Tourism Industry of Thailand**

Today tourism has gained importance and developed all over the world. There are several key factors, which are responsible for the spread and development of international tourism. Even there are several causes why tourism takes place or what the purpose of visit is. These causes can be discussed as the form of tourism:

- First is the destination, which provides the purpose for visit the area.
- Second is the characteristic of tourism.
- Third cause is the incidental of the destination became the purpose of travel.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the analysis of tourist arrivals in Thailand according to the purpose of visit has a variation, because tourists visit this country for various purposes. For example, some people come here for pleasure and holiday others choose this place for business purposes.<sup>4</sup>

However, above facts stimulate tourism in Thailand, which gave rise to different forms and purposes of tourism. Therefore, following forms of tourism exist in Thailand according to purpose of visit:

- Pleasure and holiday,
- Business,
- Convention and official commitment and

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Williams, *Tourism Geography* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Motiram, *International Tourism* (New Delhi: Sonali Publications, 2003), pp. 37-38.

- Others<sup>5</sup>.

So it can be said that the economic condition of the country is very favourable for tourism development. The country's economy is less developed and other economic sectors like industry, agriculture and trade are not that much progressed, hence the tourism industry is the only alternative for the survival of the expanding Thai population. At the same time the country has unemployment and poverty problems as well as regional imbalances.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, tourism is the best alternative to solve these problems and reduce regional imbalances. Nowadays tourism has become Thailand's highest income generator and it has occupied the top position.<sup>7</sup>

### **Women's Role in Tourism Industry as a Productive Economy**

From 1960 to 1990, Thailand experienced rapid industrialization. Thai trade shifted from dependence on agricultural exports to manufactures and sex tourism.<sup>8</sup> Most liberal economists explain Thailand's rapid growth as the outcome of the World Bank's

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> R. Jackson and L. Hudman, *Geography of Travel and Tourism* (USA: Delman Publishers Inc., 1994), p. 545.

<sup>7</sup> Motiram, n. 4, pp. 54-56.

<sup>8</sup> James Petras and Tienchai Wongchaisuwan, "Free Market, AIDS and Child Prostitution", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 March 1993, p. 440.



export strategy and 'open economy' based on foreign investment.<sup>9</sup>

Thailand's rapid growth is based on three components:

- (1) State repression of political and economic movements of workers and farmers, denying their political and economic rights through coercion. Coercive private-enforcers complement repression public force: gangsters, pimps and hit men.
- (2) The Thai state plays a direct role in depressing agriculture prices, allowing landowners and moneylenders to exploit small farmers and accumulate capital.<sup>10</sup>
- (3) The 'free-market' strategy includes private accumulation based on illegal exploitation of coerced labour of women and children, particularly in the tourist sex industry. Thailand has one of the highest rates of child and female labour in the world.<sup>11</sup> In 1969, 5 million children and young people aged 11-19 represented 31% of the labour force.<sup>12</sup> The secret of Thai growth is economic activity, which is very profitable and has a specialized niche in the global market place: prostitution, the child sex trade and child labour.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> International Labour Office, *Year Book of Labour Statistics*, various issues.

<sup>12</sup> David Elliott, *Thailand Origin of the Military Rule* (London: Zed Press, 1978), p. 128.

<sup>13</sup> James Petras and Tienchai Wongchaisuwan, n. 8.

Thailand and the Sex Industry in Thailand a web of cultural, historical and economic factors has served to make the sex industry a blooming sector of capitalist growth. For centuries, brothels, and the practice of concubinage have existed in Thailand, but over the past few decades the sex industry has expanded rapidly and has become an integral part of the Thai economy and society.<sup>14</sup>

The idea of creating designated areas for sex tourism in Asia dates back at least for as pre-communist China, where brothel trains, given the euphemism of 'comfort wagons' were a long accepted part of social life.<sup>15</sup> But it was to be the Japanese who set up the most comprehensive network of "comfort wagons" staffed by forced prostitutes, or "comfort women". Many women lived as captives of the military beginning in 1932, when Japan invaded China, to the end of the war in 1945.<sup>16</sup> Forced to have sex with Japanese soldiers, the women were drawn from the Asian countries conquered by Japan and included "Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Filipinos, as well as Dutch women captured in Indonesia then a Dutch colony."<sup>17</sup>

While the Japanese had fostered prostitution on a limited scale to serve their own needs, "the boom in Southeast Asia started with the

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<sup>14</sup> "Thailand and Sex Industry" <http://www.hangoverguide.com>

<sup>15</sup> Raymond Lamont-Brown, "No Compensation for the Comfort Women", *Contemporary Review*, vol. 262, February 1993, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> James Sterngold, "Japan admits army forced women into war brothels", *New York Times*, 5 August 1993, late New York edition: A2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. A2.

U.S. presence in Vietnam; there were 20,000 prostitutes in Thailand in 1957, by 1964, after the United States established seven bases in the country, that number had sky rocketed to 400,000.” It was this boom and the resulting slaves after the war that was taken up by tourism, which introduced prostitution as a large-scale business to the regions.<sup>18</sup>

The sex industry developed along with US military bases in Thailand during the Indo-China war, expanding rapidly after a treaty, signed in 1967, allowing the US soldiers in Vietnam to come on ‘rest and recreation’ leave to Thailand. By 1974, there were over 20,000 entertainment places including bars, nightclubs, teahouses and brothels.<sup>19</sup> In 1975, a World Bank report highlighted the growth potential of tourism as part of its ‘export strategy’ with full knowledge of its links to prostitution. A National Plan of Tourist Development commissioned by the Thai government in 1975 was explicitly designed to support the sex industry in the name of tourism. As a result, the sex industry turned to new markets: the growth of tourism with the ‘sex package’. Its ‘success’ resulted in a rapidly rising demand of new prostitutes, which led to large-scale recruitment of child prostitutes.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “Prostitution in Thailand and Southeast Asia” <http://www.links.net/vita/swat/course/pros-thai.html>

<sup>19</sup> Thanh-Dam Truong, *Sex, Money, and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1990), p. 159.

<sup>20</sup> “World Bank Encouragement”, *Bangkok Post*, 23 February 1984.

In the late of 1980s, prostitutes became lucrative export-earners. The sex industry became global. The Thai godfathers, generals and entrepreneurs who run the industry have expanded their networks into Burma, Cambodia, Laos and China, recruiting new prostitutes, including children, to meet the growing demand from Japanese, German and English 'tourists'.<sup>21</sup> A beautiful country, beautiful women, and inexpensive living enable the sex industry to annually earn ever more money. There are two parts to the Thai policy of promoting tourism:

- One is to sell the physical and cultural beauty of the country;
- Second is to promote the Thai people, which of course include sex-related services.

"Amazing Thailand," the tourism campaign from 1998-99, promoted to foreign men to come and see Thailand's beautiful women...and to enjoy the thriving sex industry.<sup>22</sup>

Tourism has had a particularly influence on making the sex industry a common economic option for poor women in Thailand. Even though foreign men are a small portion of sex industry's total clientele, they generally pay more for commercial sex services. Thus sex tourists help fuel the fire by making sex work more profitable and glamorous. The Thai government has promoted tourism to become a

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<sup>21</sup> James Petras and Tienchai Wongchaisuwan, n. 8, p. 441.

<sup>22</sup> Sirirat Pusurinkham, "Child Prostitution in Thailand" <http://www.siriratp@ksc.th.com>

major income-earning industry include hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, food and beverage stalls, and entertainment – all places where sex is sold.<sup>23</sup>

As is the experience of developing economies around the world, prostitution is one of the manifestations of a range of social ills brought on by unbalanced economic and social development. Poverty is the principle reason why women in rural communities in Thailand are driven into the sex trade. For survival, children from impoverished families are forced to drop out of school in order to help their parents earn a living. When children enter the 'labour pool' early in life, their fate is sealed and they are likely to remain the cycle of poverty and illiteracy. This leads to an ever-ready supply of child labour, a situation that fuels the child sex trade. The growing demand for child sex tourism is another contributing factor.<sup>24</sup>

Social pressures, parental expectations, poverty, and a lack of educational and employment opportunities can put girls at risk of economic and sexual exploitation. Each year thousands of young women flock to Bangkok and other urban areas in search of work. Many young women without appropriate skills end up working for bars, massage parlours, and brothels. Some girls are even sold into

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<sup>23</sup> "Thailand and Sex Industry" <http://www.hangoverguide.com>

<sup>24</sup> "Thailand in the Global Fight against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)" <http://www.world-tourism.org.com>

prostitution by parents and relatives. Research conducted by the Office of the National Commission on Women's Affairs in 2000 indicates that there are between 22,500 and 40,000 girls under the age of 18 are engaged in commercial sex work.<sup>25</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the rise of the world marketplace. In this new world market, Thailand has recently stepped in to play the role of warehouse to the world. This is facilitated by developing agents having disregarded the development of women's opportunities for economic independence, leaving prostitution as the highest paying job available to many of the women of Southeast Asia. While these countries have benefited from the tourist presence and the resulting foreign exchange, the women who actually put themselves out for their countries development process are to large extent victims of three fold oppression on the basis of gender, class and the particular role of their homeland in the games of international political economy.<sup>26</sup>

Thailand is a source, transit and destination country for persons trafficked into sexual exploitation and forced labour. Economic disparity in the region helps to drive significant illegal migration into Thailand from its neighbours, presenting traffickers opportunities to move victims into labour exploitation and,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> "Prostitution in Thailand and Southeast Asia" <http://www.links.net/vita/swat/course/pros-thai.html>

particularly women and children, into prostitution. International trafficking victims come mainly from Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and China. Many victims are from stateless ethnic tribes in Northern Thailand and the surrounding region. Widespread sex tourism in Thailand encourages trafficking for prostitution.<sup>27</sup>

The trafficking of women sex services has increased in this present age of globalization for three major reasons:

- The push factors in the sending countries,
- The demand in receiving countries,
- The resulting profitability, which creates incentives for agents.<sup>28</sup>

A study by the foundation for women showed that the reasons for migration have been changing over time. In the 1960s it was straightforward poverty, which forced young Thai women to migrate to cities to seek cash work so that they could send remittances back home to assist their families. In the 1970s as rural households became used to the higher standard of living underwritten by the remittances sent back by their daughters, parents began urging their

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<sup>27</sup> "Sex Tourism, Human Trafficking in Thailand" <http://www.japan.usembassy.gov.com>

<sup>28</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit, Sungsidh Piriyarangran and Nualnoi Trurat, *Guns, Girls, Gambling and Ganja: Thailand's Illegal Economy and Public Policy* (Bangkok: Silkworm Book, 2000), p. 186.

daughters to seek work in the urban sex industry for financial rewards.<sup>29</sup>

In 1980s and 1990s Thailand's high economic growth raised the demand of sex services abroad. In the mid 1990s traffickers began to diversify their sources of supply. Thailand became a centre for both importing and exporting. In 1997, business and officials looked to labour export in two ways:

- Sex trade and sex tourism and
- The national policy of exporting labour.<sup>30</sup>

The International Labour Organization in Geneva surveyed 50 women who had made the migration to Bangkok to work in massage parlours to examine the women's rationale behind their work in the sex trade. Their findings summarize the economic thinking behind their decisions:

"The migration gave them an earning power which was simply astounding relative to normal rural budgets. A couple of years of work would enable the family to build a house of a size and quality which few people in the countryside could hope to achieve in the earnings of a lifetime. They were engaging in an entrepreneurial move designed to sustain the family unites of a rural economy. ILO survey clearly showed that the girls felt they were making a perfectly rational

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 186-187.



decision within the context of their particular social and economic structure.”<sup>31</sup>

Thailand is well known throughout the world for its highly organized and diverse commercial sex businesses. Many tourists visit Thailand for this special interest, although many others are obviously drawn by the culture and nature of Thailand as well as the charming hospitality of Thai people. Tourism caters to men seeking sex in Thailand, and this aspect, which most Thais are not proud of, has been openly acknowledged and advertised. Through the assistance of tour guides or hotel services, commercial sex is available to any male tourist as it is for Thai men. Even outside of Thailand, a large number of Thai sex workers have been working in European countries and Japan since the 1980s; an estimate of 70,000 Thai women are working in commercial sex in Japan alone.<sup>32</sup>

Sex workers can be roughly divided into four categories depending on the underlying motives, which propel them to enter the market and the conditions under which they operate.<sup>33</sup>

The first group includes those who are under some form of restraint. They may be sold into the trade by their parents, or trapped by agents. The second groups are those under heavy economic

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<sup>31</sup> “Prostitution in Thailand and Southeast Asia” <http://www.links.net/vita/swat/course/pros-thai.html>

<sup>32</sup> “Thailand” <http://www.2.hu-berlin.de/scology/IES/thailand.html>

<sup>33</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit, Sungsidh Piriyaranggan and Nualnoi Trurat, n. 28, pp. 208-209.

compulsion to work to support dependents. The third group includes women who are young, attractive, and entrepreneurial and who have entered the trade of their own free will because of the financial incentive. The fourth group consists of the part timers, the semi professionals, who may be students or have regular jobs as sales girls or factory workers.<sup>34</sup>

The exploitation of children and women in the sex industries was not only very profitable but also became a mechanism to reduce social tensions in the countryside and to deal with macro-economic imbalances in external trade. Between 1960s and 1980s, most villagers became heavily indebted and many were facing loss of their land.<sup>35</sup> The sex industry provided a means by which small producers and peasants could avoid ruin: by selling young daughters into prostitution. Sex tourism also reduced the problem of the trade deficit.<sup>36</sup>

One consistent finding across many studies of female and child sex workers is that a large number come from the northern provinces of Thailand. It has been theorized that these young women are especially in demand because of the long-held admiration for their lighter skin compared to their counterparts in the northeast or the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Marx A Bonacci, *Senseless Casualties: The AIDS Crisis in Asia* (Washington DC: International Voluntary Services, 1992), pp. 68-69.

<sup>36</sup> James Petras and Tienchai Wongchaisuwan, n. 8.

south of the country. Others have theorized that working in the sex business is a tradition long present in the north. Formerly part of the kingdom of Lanna, this part of the country was more often at war with other kingdoms and had a history of being colonized. It was the custom to use women from the area to placate the occupying forces through the offering of sex services.<sup>37</sup>

From the above discussions it is absolutely clear that the position of women in tourism industry is very significant but they are not the only cause of tourism expansion in Thailand. There are other reasons like physical environment, climate, flora and fauna, which have also attracted the tourists from different countries.

### **Impact of Women and Tourism on Hotel Industry**

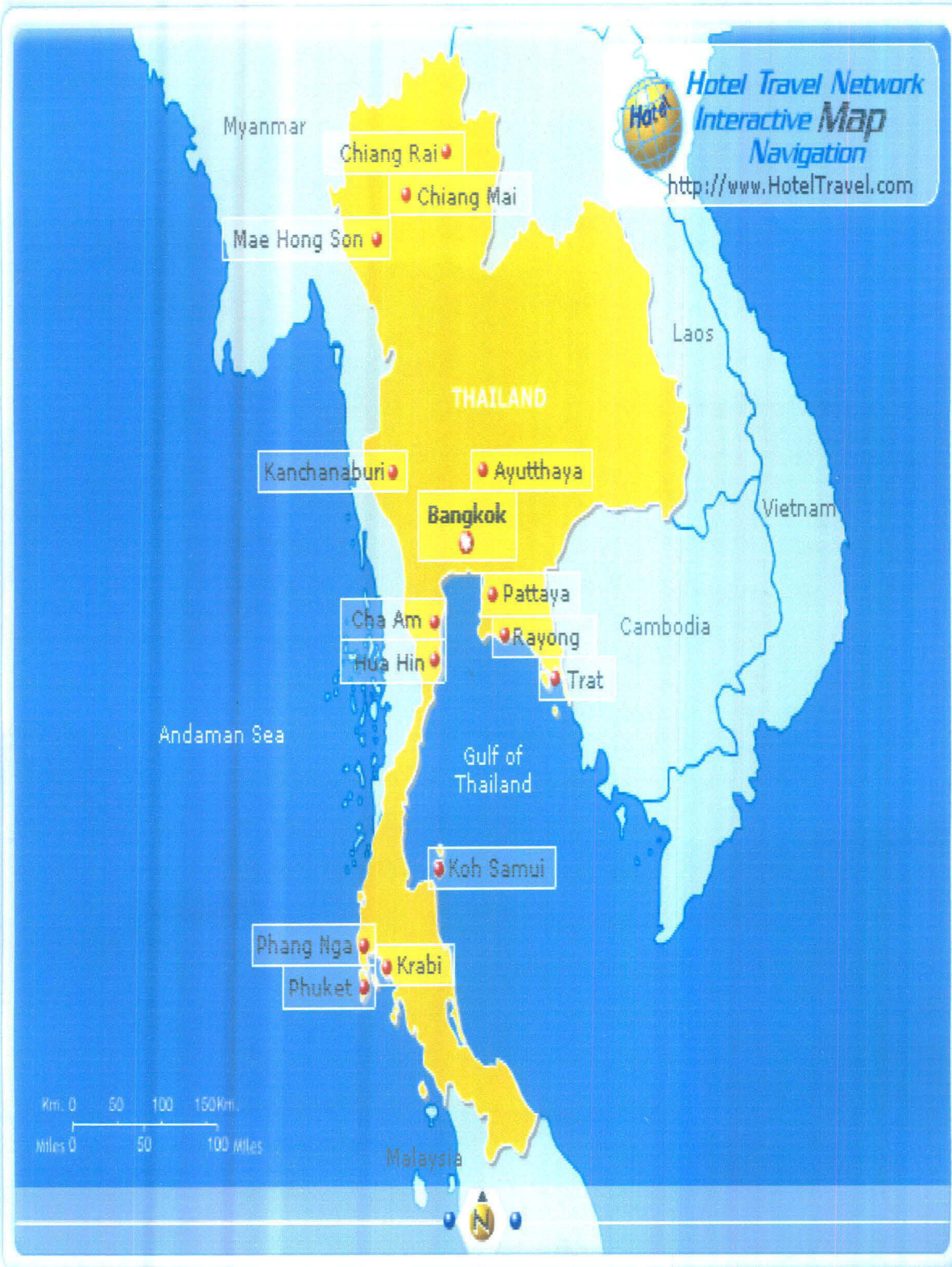
Department of Communicable Disease Control and Ministry of Public Health have classified Thailand's sex service establishments into 19 categories including brothels, hotel/motels, tea rooms, nightclubs, beer, dancing bars, restaurants, coffee shop, cocktail lounges, pubs, massage parlours, beauty salons, barber shops and others.<sup>38</sup>

The most important physical attractions, which motivate tourism in Thailand, are:

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<sup>37</sup> "Thailand" <http://www.2.hu-berlin.de/seology/IES/thailand.html>

<sup>38</sup> "Thailand and the Sex Industry" <http://www.hangoverguide.com>



- (a) Its landscape and
- (b) Its excellent beach resorts.<sup>39</sup>

Due to its liveliest beach resort, Thailand has become the second most visiting destination.<sup>40</sup> This has also enhanced the development of infrastructure of the country like hotels, restaurants, blue show club facilities, the garlic bars and many such entertainment places. And it is also true to say that women have played there important role to increase the economy in this field also.

The relationship between tourism and many forms of infrastructure is fundamental. Therefore, if tourism development programme is to succeed, it is necessary to examine life support through a tourism environment and a number of infrastructure environments provide suitable facilities as well as services available in Thailand. Tourism environment provides suitable and favourable environment, tourism development and its sustainability is not possible. Whereas infrastructure availability and facilities comprise the system of services and utility which are necessary to guide and stabilize tourism development trends.<sup>41</sup>

The hotel is the traditional form of accommodation. As a major economic activity, it creates direct and indirect employment and

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<sup>39</sup> Motiram, n. 4, p. 53.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

provides an important source of foreign currency. The growth of the hotel trade has come about as a result of the traditional industry adapting to current conditions and modernising. For instance, the creation of integrated hotel chains and of new concepts in commercial accommodation, catering for different segments of tourism demand.<sup>42</sup>

Accommodation supply is determined by the specific nature of the tourism industry. The hotel trade displays features associated with both heavy and labour-intensive industries:

- Investment in hotel construction tie up large amounts of capital for medium to long term periods, a typical features of heavy industries;
- The activities connected with running a hotel are those of a service industry, which is labour intensive. The ratio of employees to the number of rooms is very high, particular in superior category establishments.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from this accommodation facilities such as starred hotels, holiday villages, apartment houses and tourist villages are other factors which have given another boost to international tourism. According to UN statistical yearbook there are 220 starred hotels and more than 1,000 unstarred hotels. All these hotels have first class

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<sup>42</sup> WTO, *International Tourism in East Asia and the Pacific, 1970-1993*, January 1994.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

hotel facilities, which are the additional factors for tourism development in Thailand.<sup>44</sup>

Accommodation development in the form of hotel, apartment, huts, guesthouse, and tourist villages are very important which give life supports to tourism development. Therefore, the accommodation is a fundamental necessity in any tourist destination. Large and starred hotels providing good services and facilities have played tremendous roles in the rapid growth of mass tourism in the country.<sup>45</sup>

**Table 2: Number of Accommodation Establishments and Rooms In Thailand (1995-2000)**

|                    | 1995 | 1996   | 1997   | 1998   | 1999   | 2000   |
|--------------------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| (a) Establishments | 4744 | 4744   | 4738   | 4762   | 4789   | 4837   |
| Growth Rate        | -    | -2.18  | -0.12  | +0.50  | +0.56  | +1.0   |
| (b) Rooms          | N.A. | 255573 | 265542 | 272993 | 279070 | 279943 |
| Growth Rate        | -    | +3.84  | +3.90  | +2.80  | +2.22  | +0.31  |

Source: TAT Statistical Report, 1999, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>44</sup> Motiram, n. 4, p. 58.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

The growth in number of hotel establishments and hotel rooms during the period of 1995-2000 is represented in table 1.2. It is evident from the table in case of the number establishments and rooms; there is a tremendous increase in both the sectors except in 1996 and 1997 when there is slight decline in accommodation establishments. But from 1999 there is a spectacular rise in accommodation establishments as well as the number of hotel rooms. This is mainly because of the increasing numbers in tourist arrivals.<sup>46</sup>

The attraction of Thai ladies has gone to such extremes that overseas tour operators, particularly in Germany and Japan, have organized “sex-tours”. Deals are set up with bars, hotels and nightspots to have a constant stream of girls on tap of these all male parties. In truth if Thailand didn’t offer these services to visitors, the country’s economy would drop alarming and realistically Thailand would be in deep financial trouble. Although sex is widely sold all over the country, it is Bangkok that takes all the headlines. The influx of foreigners attracted by this industry generates over 50 billion Baht (\$1.25 billion) in currency exchange every year. Despite the law Thailand cannot afford to stop this business.<sup>47</sup>

Sexuality in Thailand, like the country's peaceful yet interesting coexistence of peoples and cultures, is a convergence of values and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>47</sup> “Bangkok - the Sex Industry” <http://www.backpackthailand.com>



practices resulting from admixing of cultures over the centuries. In recent years, these sexual attitudes and behaviours have undergone enormous changes influenced by the rapid economic growth, urbanization, exposure to Western cultures, and, most recently, the HIV epidemic.<sup>48</sup>

Prostitution and sex tourism fall under a more general category of sexual exploitation. It is difficult to estimate how many people are working in this job because so many women working as waitress, hotel maids, salesclerks, bar girls, and golf caddies are forced into prostitution as part of their work.<sup>49</sup> Prostitution of course means selling one's body for sexual use and exploitation. A fundamental human relationship between two human beings is debased to profit making, in violence of the Will of God. Sex tours encourage men to do something in a foreign country that they would not do in their own country. Sex tours degrade a country's reputation. Sex tours are immoral. Sex tours spread disease. Sex tours treat girls and women like things, not person—not like they are children of God.<sup>50</sup>

What would be the effect on the prostitutes? Disease is a constant threat to these prostitutes, some of whom have sex with upwards of eight or nine men a day. Studies have shown that in some

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<sup>48</sup> "Thailand" <http://www.2.hu-berlin.de/seology/IES/thailand.html>

<sup>49</sup> "Third World Women's Reality: Prostitution and Sex Tourism" <http://www.arches.uga.edu/~haneydaw/twwh/traf.html>

<sup>50</sup> Sirirat Pusurinkham, "Child Prostitution in Thailand" <http://www.siriratp@ksc.th.com>.

locales, more than forty percent of the prostitutes have venereal disease.<sup>51</sup> Also, when, as is often the case, they are started young, “boys and girls are more vulnerable to infection.”<sup>52</sup> Perhaps what will be the final arbiter in the struggle over prostitution is the advent of AIDS to the brothels of Thailand.<sup>53</sup>

Today thousands of whorehouses, bars and other ‘entertainment’ centres sell not only sex but also everyday death. With AIDS spreading rapidly, the brothels serve as a kind of death row for women and children—waiting to be afflicted.

Sex trade more or less has given rise to drug-trafficking in Thailand. Many of the minority ethnic groups living in Thailand are engaged in opium poppy production, linked to the international trafficking of heroin and many of their members are themselves often opium addicts. This is the other big reason for parents to sell their daughters into the sex trade in order to get cash to maintain their opium habit.

There is evidence to suggest that drug trafficking, injecting drug use, and HIV infection are woven closely together and that tourism and HIV follows drug trafficking routes.

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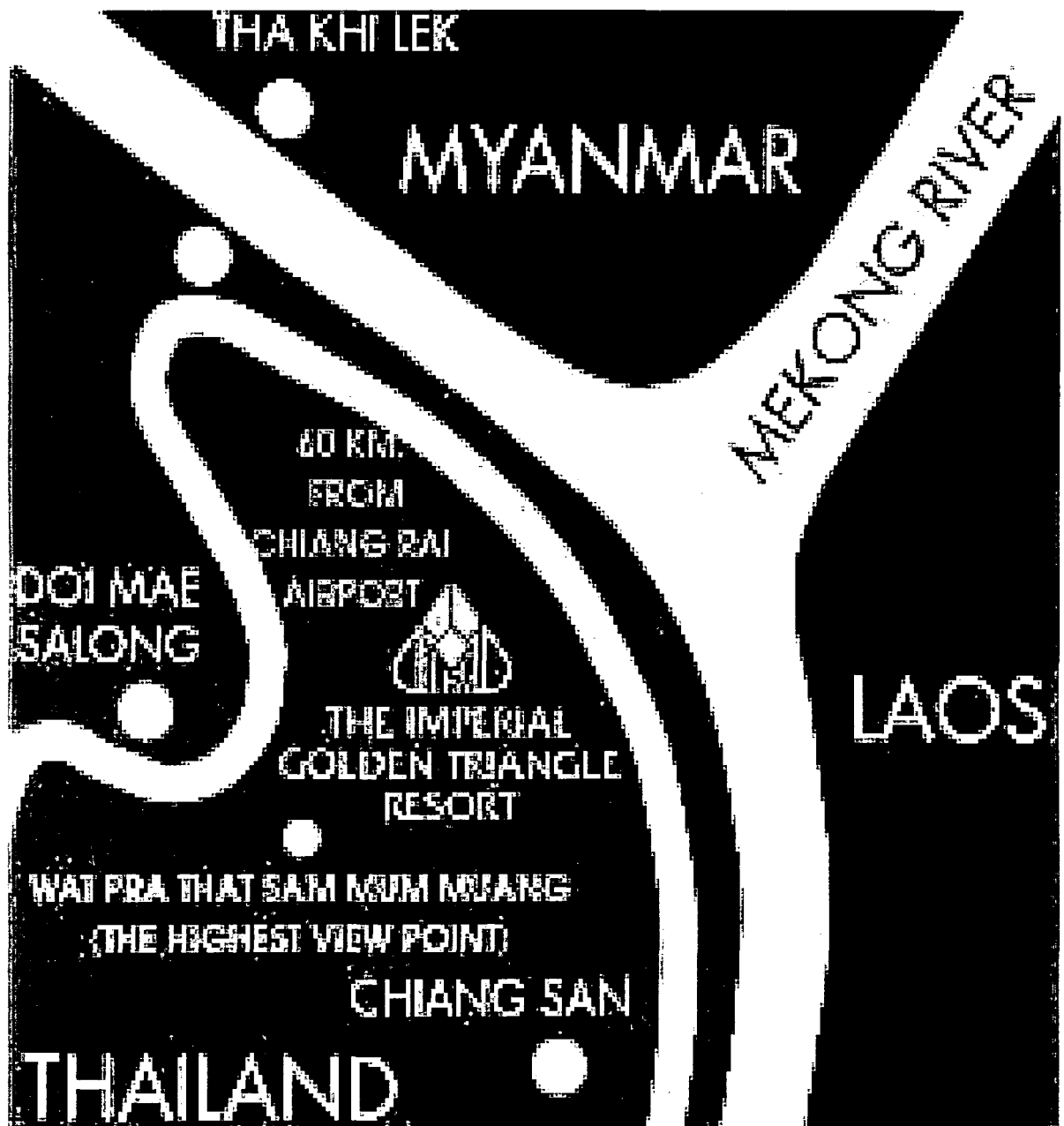
<sup>51</sup> Jill Gay, “The Patriotic,” *The Progressive*, February 1985, p. 36.

<sup>52</sup> Michael S. Serrill, “Defiling the Children,” *Time*, 21 June 1993, p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> Freddie Balfour, “Looking for AIDS, Joe?,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 April 1987, p. 112.

## *Chapter 4*

# *Golden Triangle: A new Tourism Mecca of Thailand*



Source: <http://www.sino.com>

## GOLDEN TRIANGLE

## CHAPTER 4

### GOLDEN TRIANGLE: A NEW TOURISM MECCA OF THAILAND

The Golden Triangle, nests in the highlands of northern Indochina, which is known to be a historical place of illicit opium production. It overlaps the three states whose mountainous peripheries constitute it: Myanmar (formerly Burma), Laos and Thailand. The emergence of the Golden Triangle from the tropical mountains of northern mainland Southeast Asia is an altogether recent phenomenon, and the opium production that exists there is frequently and erroneously thought as being an old traditional activity.<sup>1</sup>

The Golden Triangle is one of Asia's two main illicit opium-producing areas. It is an area of around 350,000 square kilometres that overlaps the mountains of three countries of mainland Southeast Asia: Burma (Myanmar), Laos, and Thailand. Along with Afghanistan in the Golden Crescent (together with Iran and Pakistan), it has been one of the most important opium-producing area of Asia and of the world since the 1950s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, "Drug Diversity in the Golden Triangle", *Crime and Justice International*, vol. 15, no. 33, October 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, "Golden Triangle", *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*, pp. 442-443.

The term first appeared in 1971, referring to the shape of Burma, Laos, and Thailand when taken together. The gold of the triangle is most probably that which the first opium merchants of the region used in exchange for the crops. Although the opium production that exists in the Golden Triangle is frequently and erroneously thought to be an old traditional activity, in fact, opium production is an altogether recent phenomenon. It is only at the end of the nineteenth century that the poppy-growing tribal populations began their southernmost forced migration from China toward the highlands of mainland Southeast Asia. There they scattered and settled, having brought with them the practice and techniques of farming the opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*).<sup>3</sup>

As World War II drew to a close, this area was producing less than eighty tons of opium per annum. All that changed when China clamped down on opium production and addiction, spurring Southeast Asia to take over production. The sudden suppression of opium production in Iran in 1955 further reinforced the transfer toward Southeast Asia.<sup>4</sup> It is only in 1971 that the expression "Golden Triangle" appears, apparently coined by the U.S. As for the gold of the triangle, it is most probably that which the first opium merchants of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre-Arnaud Chauvy, n. 1.

the "three border areas" used in exchange for their cargo at the actual checkpoint of Tachileck - Mae Sai, on the Thai-Burma border.<sup>5</sup>

Asia has a long history of dealing with psychoactive substances. Many of them have existed from time immemorial all over the continent. Various places established traditional uses for some drugs and even integrated them into social codes. However, today's drug trade in Asia threatens the health and safety of its population as well as the stability of its countries. The drug trade is shaped and spurred by mercantilism and grows on the fertile and complex terrain of poverty and armed conflicts. In fact a direct relation between drug production, poverty, and war appears to exist. Thus drug production and trafficking can be perceived as the outcomes of economic as well as political events.<sup>6</sup>

The first stage in the Asia commerce in drugs was probably the opium trade along the numerous and far-reaching precursors of the Silk Road and the early Chinese maritime trade that reached Africa by the first century BC. However, the opium poppy, *Papaver Somniferum* L., most likely a European plant, was spread throughout Asia mainly by the Arab traders who transmitted it to the Indians in the seventh century and to the Chinese a century later. It is questionable whether the Arabs themselves actually introduced the opium poppy into these

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

areas, since early Indian traders or Buddhist pilgrims may have done it, but Arab traders undoubtedly were the main contributors to its commercial spread as a cash crop.<sup>7</sup>

The next stage in the opium commerce was taken by European maritime colonial powers, who used it to balance their trade in spices and tea with Southeast Asia and China: first by the Venetians (in the fourteenth century), then by the Portuguese and the Dutch in the sixteenth century, and finally by the British from the seventeenth century and on. Through their powerful East India Company (founded 1600), the British brought to China opium originating in the poppy fields of India, where it had long been produced the Mughal rulers. This led, in the mid-nineteenth century, to China's two Opium Wars, first with the British and second with a British-French coalition. The treaty of Nanjing (1842), which ended the first war, gave Hong Kong to the British; it went on to become the world's heroin hub. China, confronted with exploding opium consumption, eventually fostered local poppy production as a way to balance its growing trade deficit.<sup>8</sup>

After the southern migration of some opium poppy growers from Yunnan, pressured by imperial political repression and, later, by the enforcement of communist prohibition, opium production spread from China into Southeast Asia, which became the Golden Triangle

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



(Burma, Laos, Thailand), a precursor to the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan). Opium was integrated as a trade commodity, but it needed improvements to increase its global marketability. Consequently, after heroin was synthesized from opium in 1898, producers were able to transform opium into heroin, a product with a greater efficacy that was easier to trade than the bulky opium.<sup>9</sup>

Poppy plant is known as the “golden plant” and the countries involved in its plantation are known by the shape of the area they occupy along with the adjective ‘golden’ such as “Golden Crescent”, “Golden Triangle”, etc. as gold is costliest of all the metals, poppy is the costliest of the accessible plants in the world. Almost 80 per cent of the world’s production of opiates comes from the “Golden Triangle” with the introduction of Vietnam, Cambodia and Nagaland-Manipur (India) recently.<sup>10</sup>

In Golden Triangle area, Myanmar is the largest producer of opium and remains so even at the world level. Though officially poppy cultivation is banned since 1948, it continues to produce more than 3,000 metric tones of opium.<sup>11</sup> Thailand, once amongst the largest producer of opium has now reduced the production to a minimum.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Drug Control Programme, *Chemical Control in the Fight Illicit Drug Production: The South and South-West Asia Scene*, UNDCP, 1998, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Laos is the third largest producer of opium with approximately 500 metric tones.<sup>12</sup>

Opium poppy cultivation expanded to almost everywhere in Asia, from Turkey in the Near East to Japan in the Far East, along the succession of mountain ranges that stretch across Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Burma (Myanmar), Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and China, as well as in Russia and the Central Asia republics. Nonetheless, the opium poppy is of course not the only psychoactive plant thriving in Asia. *Cannabis sativa* L., consumed as either marijuana or hashish, is prevalent as well. In fact Lebanon, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Thailand, and Cambodia are among the most internationally renowned producers and exporters of cannabis. Kazakhstan for its part boasts the world's largest area of wild cannabis.<sup>13</sup>

### **Opium Trade in Thailand**

Thailand's role in the opium and heroin trade began around the time of the Vietnam War. The trading network stemmed from the US army bases and was linked to the opium/heroin trading network in Indo-china. When the war ended, the network expanded with the extension of better roads and other communication infrastructure in

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.4.

<sup>13</sup> Pierre-Arnaud Chauvy, n. 1.

the Triangle area. Thailand has co-operated with the US government to suppress the drug trade, and its role in this suppression has been recognized. But according to the Officers of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) report on the drug suppression plan for 1997-2001, the increased co-operation among different countries in the Triangle areas to promote trade, investment, and economic development may further expanded drug trafficking.<sup>14</sup>

In the Eight Plan period (1997-2001) some of the economic policies which aim to accelerate economic growth may further facilitate the expansion of drug trade in the Indochina region. These are:

- The plan to develop sub regional and border areas in order to open up economic ties between Thailand and neighbouring economies, whether they be the economic triangle linking Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand; the economic hexagon linking Cambodia-Laos-Burma-Thailand-Vietnam-China; or the economic co-operation with the subcontinent linking Thailand-India-Sri Lanka-Bangladesh-Burma;
- The development of the Eastern Seaboard, the new highway routes linking Thailand's north-eastern region with Indochina countries;

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<sup>14</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit, Sungsidh Piriyananran and Nualnoi Trurat, *Guns, Girls, Gambling and Ganja: Thailand's Illegal Economy and Public Policy* (Bangkok: Silkworm Book, 2000), p. 89.

- The development of the Southern Seaboard which will facilitate the link with other countries via the Indian Ocean; and
- The plan to develop Bangkok metropolitan area, the Eastern Seaboard communities, the northern and western sub-regions in order to facilitate the economic links among all these sub-regions.<sup>15</sup>

All these development plans involve making the northern areas, such as Tak, Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son more accessible. These are the heartland of the network of the transport network of chemicals for the processing of heroin.<sup>16</sup>

Thailand is now emerging as a pioneer in new drug consumption patterns as amphetamine-type stimulants overtake heroin in the kingdom, with Burma massively producing such synthetic drug in its Shan state. Drug production and trade in Asia thus evolve and adapt to the market, be it opium, heroin, amphetamines, or ecstasy. These types of trade and consumption, ancient phenomena, have benefited from world globalization and conflicts. Rooted in poverty, the drug trade quickly grows on the ruins of development and its related political conflicts. Wars have proven to nurture the drug trade, and drug profits prolong wars.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre-Arnaud Chauvy, n.l.

Thailand is not the only country involved in the network of heroin trading. In recent years China has entered the scene. After the surrender of Khum Sa, some of the opium and heroin which used to be transported to Thailand was diverted through China and Laos/Vietnam. But it is believed that Thailand is still one of the major routes of heroin from the Golden Triangle because of its convenience. The goods leave Thailand as air cargo or are hidden on bodies of passengers at Don Muang airport; or travel by sea via Khong Toey port; or cross the Thai-Cambodia border at Ko Kong; or cross the Thai-Malaysia border in the south.<sup>18</sup>

Later, due mainly to the internal protracted Burmese conflicts and ethnic and communist rebellions, the Golden Triangle's opium production literally exploded, exceeding 3,000 tons in 1989, with Burma alone producing more than 2,500 tons in 1996 (U.S. State Department estimates). The narcotics trade linked a marginal and isolated Southeast Asian region with principal cities in the Western world. The United States became the main destination of the Golden Triangle's heroin, the so-called China White, or heroin No 4, renowned for its 98 percent purity.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of the twentieth century, the Golden Triangle was clearly dominated by Burmese production (800 metric tons in 2002,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp. 90-91.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

according to the United Nations), Thailand had suppressed almost all its poppies, and Laos as still fighting the battle. But a new scourge had arrived in the region: an explosion in methamphetamine production in Burma and a large population of addicts in Thailand.<sup>20</sup>

### **Relationship between Drug and Tourism in Thailand**

The drug has a fascination for many tourists. The common name for the region the "Golden Triangle", conjures up an exotic vision of drug warlords, mule trains, fields of pretty flowers and the intrigue of the opium den. In fact, the crop is a threat to all who are involved in its production or use. Up to 30 per cent of the male population are addicted. The typical addict will smoke twenty or thirty pipes a day. They cannot work efficiently or at all, life expectancy is reduced and families are pushed into malnutrition and misery. The production of opium has been illegal since 1959, but despite the attempts of the government to eliminate it, the drug is still produced in large amounts. However, in Thailand the size of the crop has been reduced by 80 per cent in the last ten years, but Thailand is still an important conduit for opium from Burma and Laos, where production is still rising.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> John R. Davies, *Touring Northern Thailand* (Salisbury: Footloose Books, 1991), p. 54.

The problem related to drugs and narcotics present a dilemma to a large number of nations and states all over the world. They are increasing in scope and intensity and have political, economic, and military, health, environmental and psychological consequences that pose threat to the sovereignty, political stability, economic and social equilibrium in many societies. The illegal narcotics manufacturing and trafficking is the most profitable and successful business with the annual profit of about \$ 350 billion followed closely by the small arms industry.<sup>22</sup>

The problem of drugs is always three-fold; its illegal production, illegal trafficking and drug abuse. Drug trafficking as stated before, is the most lucrative business with profits higher than any other business even the entire oil industry.<sup>23</sup>

According to United Nations statistics, illegal business worldwide generates an income of around US\$600 billion, of which drug trafficking contributes US\$400 billion. In Thailand, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) estimated that the profits from drug trafficking amounted to US\$85 billion a year. This is 21 percent of the world total and twice Thailand's earnings from exports.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Beenalakshmi Nepram, *South Asia Fractured Frontiers: Armed Conflicts, Narcotics and Small Arms Proliferation in India's North East* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp. 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit, *Sungsidh Piriyarangran and Nualnoi Trurat*, n. 14, p. 86.

The Golden Triangle, the area around the junction of the borders of Thailand, Burma (Myanmar), and Laos, is still a major site of opium and heroin production. Traders from Laos, Burma, and various minority groups transport drugs out from the Golden Triangle.<sup>25</sup>

Drug production and trade in Asia thus evolve and adapt to the market, be it opium, heroin, amphetamines, or ecstasy. These types of trade and consumption, ancient phenomena, have benefited from world globalization and conflicts. Rooted in poverty, the drug trade quickly grows on the ruins of development and its related political conflicts. Wars have proven to nurture the drug trade, and drug profits prolong wars.<sup>26</sup>

The term, "Golden Triangle" generally refers to an area where the borders of Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand converge and the point where the Sop Ruak tributary flows into the mighty Mekong River. Considered one of the world's remaining wild places, the area remains largely inaccessible. The name conjures up alluring images of mist-shrouded mountains with forested slopes overlooking the mighty Mekong River, home of hill-tribe villages. Its mystical reputation

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>26</sup> Pierre-Arnaud Chauvy, n. 1.



attracts hundreds and thousands of tourists, year after year, particularly adventure seekers.<sup>27</sup>

The Golden Triangle, however, has a darker side. It is one of the areas of the world where opium is grown, processed into heroin, and smuggled out, and is the source of half the world's illegal heroin.<sup>28</sup> For more than a decade, in Bangkok, tourists come here to stay and eat cheaply and to have budget level fun. But along these legal attractions, illegal drugs are a part of the lure of this tourist area. The anecdotal evidence of narcotics law violations in Thailand is overwhelming. Guesthouse owners estimate that at least half of the European, American and Japanese budget tourists who stay there smoke marijuana at least once.<sup>29</sup>

Travelers themselves report similarly high estimates of the amount of drug use. Many of them apparently believe that trying marijuana, amphetamines, heroin, or other drugs adds to the fun and "exoticism" of Thailand. The cheap price of drugs and the easiness to get and consume them without having to worry too much about the police are other reasons why tourists buy narcotics in Thailand. Guesthouses in and around Bangkok Road some-times compete for

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<sup>27</sup> "Tourism Authority of Thailand News Room" <http://www.tatnews.org>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> "Briefing on Tourism, Development and Environment Issues in the Mekong Subregion", *New Frontiers*, vol. 5, no. 3, May-June, 1999.

tourists by providing access to drugs. Some the researchers explained that some guesthouses resort to selling drugs and open their places for guests to consume drugs... to survive the economic hardship. But not only Thais, also tourists have been found trading in drugs, including marijuana, hallucinogens and heroin.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, the menace of drug tourism is spreading to the provinces, particularly in the Northern Thailand. The Trekking Tour Association of northern Thailand said that from 1998 to 2001, the association had surveyed foreign tourists on trekking tours in Chiang Mai and found that out of 3,000 respondents, 45 per cent said that drugs were offered during their treks. The survey also revealed that trek-king guides often urged tourists to try the drugs, particularly opium and marijuana. About 15 per cent of respondents said they would go on a trek again and buy illegal drugs.<sup>31</sup>

The tourists mostly consume narcotics along trekking routes that are beyond the control of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and other government agencies. The drugs are sold to tourists while they trek in the forest or stay at remote hill tribe villages, police investigation confirmed that some guides are drug addicts themselves. Some become addicted by repeatedly taking foreign visitors to smoke opium in village huts. The guides must first demonstrate to tourists

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

how to smoke the drug properly. In such small rooms, the guides inevitably inhale the fumes. Doing this many times, it is inevitable that they become addicted to the drugs.<sup>32</sup>

Also, many foreign drug addicts arrive as tourists in Bangkok and directly contact illegal guides for drug tours in the North. The Tourist Police, who has been investigating connections between tour operators in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, reported: that some of the guides come from the South, where drug tours have been suppressed. They came north and tried to open new trekking routes for the drug-addicted tourists. There is cooperation between guides in Bangkok, tour agencies, and some village leaders.<sup>33</sup>

### **Relationship between Drug Trafficking and Sex-Tourism**

Some tourists were those whose motives for visiting the island were drugs and more specifically 'sex'. The nearby island of Thailand has attracted worldwide notoriety for rampant drug use during monthly "full moon parties. The government is never at a loss for ideas and bold new initiatives to keep tourists flocking to Thailand and leaving as much money as possible behind. But critics say it is typical of law enforcement and tourism promotion bodies to pay lip service and take little or no action towards better development

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

controls, environmental improvements and the like. There are no beaches in Thailand today, which have escaped the tourism onslaught. A blind eye continues to be turned to prostitution and crimes related to tourism.<sup>34</sup>

All around Thailand, at border checkpoints with neighbouring countries, there is an illicit trade of drugs and of course of people, a constant flow of girls to do sex work in Thai bars and brothels and of cheap labourers to hundreds of farms and factories of all kinds. Children are bought and sold like cattle. Thailand has become a boom town - a magnet for the rural unemployed from poverty-stricken. On weekends, the influx of visitors from Thailand, where casinos and gambling are illegal, reaches 2,000 people a day. Six large casinos have been built in recent years, and three more are being built or have been approved.<sup>35</sup>

In the shadows of the town's new casinos, the 'slave' trade in young sex workers is rampant. The children are victims of a highly lucrative, illegal industry. Youngsters are bought or leased for use as 'professional' street hawkers and members of begging groups on the tourist strips in Bangkok, or beach resorts like Pattaya, Phuket and Hua Hin.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> "Increasing concern over Child Trafficking and Prostitution", *The Nation*, July-August 2001.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Widespread rural poverty and corruption, plus low levels of education and vocational training are root causes why Thailand has become a hub for human traffickers. One Cambodian NGO estimates up to 800 women and children are smuggled into Thailand a month. Many of them are taken to brothels in Pattaya and Bangkok. Child-sex tourism encouraged trafficking in children for the purpose of commercial sex. The demands of tourists of drug and sex add to the local demand and, thus, require an increased supply of victims as well as drugs. The high price paid by tourists or tour operators was a strong incentive for procurers to lure more children into prostitution and also to enhance drug trade in the country.<sup>37</sup>

An estimated 16,423 foreign commercial sex workers is active in Thailand, of whom 30 percent is under 18 years of age. Cambodia and Yunnan province in China are both at the sending and receiving end. At least 3,000 Vietnamese children and women have been trafficked to Cambodia for sexual exploitation and to China for domestic work. The majority of the 7,000 unsolved trafficking cases from Yunnan Province in China have been trafficked internally and to Thailand, mainly for prostitution purposes. The average age of the girls has dropped to 15 years. Cambodian children are trafficked to Thailand mainly for

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

begging and soliciting; about 500 Cambodian children are known to work for gangs in Thailand.<sup>38</sup>

The recent concern about child sex workers in Thailand seems to have been fueled by the awareness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the growing anguish about child victimization around the world. Initially, the pressure for a governmental policy towards child sex workers came from foreign sources, with the pressure more recently internalized.<sup>39</sup>

HIV was first detected in Thailand in 1984.<sup>40</sup> The government was slow to respond to the pandemic and its entry into Thailand. Economic pressures created by the need for tourist dollars and the early low numbers of actual AIDS cases slowed the government's response to the pandemic.<sup>41</sup>

This slow response caught Thai governmental officials and health care providers unprepared for the rapid explosion of new cases of HIV infection and AIDS. Infection rates remained quite low through 1987, mostly affecting men who had sex with men. Then, there was a rapid increase in seroprevalence among injecting drug users (IDUs). In

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<sup>38</sup> Hans van de Glind, "Trafficking in Children and Women in the context of Labour Exploitation", *ILO-IPEC's perspective*, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Hornblower, "Child Sex Workers", *Time*, 1993.

<sup>40</sup> Y. Siristonapun, A. Limsuwan and S. Kanapa, "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome in Thailand: A Report of Two Cases." *Journal of the Medical Association of Thailand*, Vol. 69, 1986, pp. 164-169.

<sup>41</sup> P. Sricharatchanya, "Scare Stories Spur Thailand into Action." *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 5, 1987, p. 52.

1988, 86 per cent of known seropositive cases were among IDUs, 4 percent were men who had sex with men, and 2 percent were heterosexual women. By 1990, another shift had occurred and shortly thereafter female sex workers showed extremely high seroprevalence rates. This phase of the pandemic was first detected in northern Thailand in 1989.<sup>42</sup>

As injecting drug use was shown to be very rare among sex workers, heterosexual intercourse was then identified as a potentially effective mode of HIV transmission in Thailand. In 1991, the HIV seroprevalence among urban brothel sex workers in a northern province rose to 49 percent (Ministry of Public Health, 1991). Because many Thai men have unprotected sex inside and outside of their marriage, high rates of HIV infection were soon detected not only in sex workers, but also in their clients, pregnant women, and newborns. The 1994 national median prevalence rates of HIV infection were 8.5 percent among men attending STD clinics, and 1.8 percent among women attending prenatal clinics.<sup>43</sup>

A series of studies have focused on the men newly conscripted to the military in order to infer the extent of HIV infection among Thai

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<sup>42</sup> B. Limanonda, P. Tirasawat, and N. Chongvatana, *The Demographic and Behavioral Study of Female Commercial Sex Workers in Thailand*. (Bangkok: Institute of Population Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1993), publication no: 207/36.

<sup>43</sup> Division of Epidemiology, "Statistics on Reported Cases of AIDS, ARC and HIV Seropositives", Thailand: Office of the Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Public Health, 1984-1993.

men at large. Prior to 1993, the HIV-seroprevalence rates in these northern conscripts ranged between 10 percent and 13 percent<sup>44</sup> considerably higher than the rates among conscripts from other parts of the country. Some unique sexual patterns of the young men in northern Thailand have been linked to their greater risk of HIV infection. When compared to men from other provinces, upper-northern young men were more likely to have initiated sexual activity at a younger age - before age of 16 - to have had their first experience with a female sex worker, to have had more frequent sexual contacts with sex workers, and to have reported a history of STDs.<sup>45</sup>

Estimates have indicated that the number of persons living with HIV totals several hundreds of thousands.<sup>46</sup> The forecast is grim in terms of further HIV infection and its socioeconomics impact on the entire country. At the end of 2002, of the estimated 42 million people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, more than 7 million were from Asia and the Pacific. Of the Asia and the Pacific numbers, more than 1.6 million were from the 5 GMS (Greater Mekong Sub-region) countries

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<sup>44</sup> C. Beyrer, S. Eiumtrakul, D. D. Celentano, K. E. Nelson, S. Ruckphaopunt, and C. Khamboonruang. "Same-Sex Behavior, Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV Risks among Young Northern Thai Men." *AIDS*, No. 9, 1995, pp. 171-176.

<sup>45</sup> T. Nopkesorn, T. D. Mastro, S. Sangkharomya, M. Sweat, P. Singharaj, K. Limpakarnjanarat, H. Gayle, and B. Weniger. "HIV-1 Infection in Young Men in Northern Thailand." *AIDS*, No. 7, 1993, pp. 1233-1239.

<sup>46</sup> Division of Epidemiology, "Statistics on Reported Cases of AIDS, ARC and HIV Seropositives", Thailand: Office of the Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Public Health, 1984-1993.



Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and including Yunnan, Province of China.<sup>47</sup>

Several factors have converged in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) to provide this fertile breeding ground for the spread of HIV/AIDS. First, injecting drug use is a serious problem throughout the region. The “Golden Triangle,” encompassing parts of Burma, China, Lao PDR, and Thailand, represents a leading supplier of opiates, particularly heroin. Drug trafficking routes dissect the GMS and provide easy access to illicit drugs. Another contributing factor is the degree and nature of mobility both within and between countries in the region.<sup>48</sup>

The border and urban areas are also sites for the booming sex industry in Thailand. Related to this industry is the problem of human trafficking, which involves the transport of people (women, children, and men) - generally by coercion or deception - for the purpose of exploitative labor in a new location. The mobility of people to and from areas providing access to sex work and illicit drugs increases the potential risk for HIV infection.<sup>49</sup>

The local police claim that they are trying hard to suppress drug and human trafficking in Thailand. But there does not seem to be

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<sup>47</sup> “HIV/AIDS, drug use and human trafficking” <http://www.unescobkk.org/culture/trafficking>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

great will or desire to crack down on the trade because, to some extent, the availability of drugs draws tourists to Bangkok and a major police action against drug abusers would hurt all sorts of legal and illegal businesses and involve considerable financial losses.<sup>50</sup>

The drug and human trafficking have given rise also to many crimes in the country. Border crossings from Thailand into Laos, Cambodia and Burma are being reviewed after complaints that the main function of them is to facilitate the movement of gamblers and criminals to Thai-owned casino resorts across frontiers. The move came after a subcommittee of the Thai Parliament visited a crossing in Chiang Rai province to investigate whether it could worsen gambling, smuggling, drug trafficking and other crime in the area.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, from the above discussion it becomes clear that the growth of tourism, combined with the indigenous attitudes toward sexuality, commercial sex, and homosexuality, drug trafficking and crime have provided fertile grounds for the commercial sex industry to flourish in Thailand despite its illegal status. Exploitation of children for commercial sex purposes, and the high rates of HIV infection among sex workers and the population at large, is some of the many

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<sup>50</sup> "Briefing on Tourism, Development and Environment Issues in the Mekong Subregion", *New Frontiers*, vol. 5, no. 3, May-June, 1999.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

problems that have followed. The rise of HIV infection has caused Thai people to question and challenge many sexual norms and practices.

The problem of drug trafficking and sex-tourism in Thailand has been a regional and international problem for decades. This issue must be approached as an economic and social problem rather than a political or military one. The approaches must be multinational and multi-discipline, taking into accounts the economic, commercial, political and social issues that force the cultivation of the opium poppy and the production of illegal drugs.

# *Conclusion*

## **CONCLUSION**

Tourism has become one of the major industries in the present world and its emergence since the Second World War has brought new revolution in the economic field. It is viewed as being a natural renewable resource industry with visitors portrayed as coming only to admire and not to consume the landscapes, customs and monuments of a destination area. Its importance as an economic factor is also evident from its being a multi-billion dollar activity. Today tourism sector contributes 10.2 per cent to world's GDP and employs 10.6 per cent of the global workforce. Apart from removing regional imbalances and opening new growth centres, it provides employment opportunity for sustaining trades like handicrafts and related small-scale industries.

Women of Thailand are not only involved in Tourism Industry but there are many such aspects where they are playing their important role to enhance the economy of the country. In examining the status of women in a society, attention is paid to positions of leadership in business or in politics, or, alternatively, to the role of women at the village level. It is understood that the women in Thailand have been better off than women elsewhere in Asia because of their skills and abilities. Their role in management, accounting and

public relations are exceptional. Thai women were able to succeed not only in trade, but also as diplomats, warriors and rulers. The women plough the land; they sell and buy in the cities. This also meant that women were involved in the economic roles and men in political and bureaucratic professions. Workingwomen have to carry double burden of job and home, there are few social welfare programmes to ease their situation. Economic situation often requires married women to work. Due to these reasons, women are known to be the productive economy of Thailand.

Tourism has brought several socio-economic benefits in Thailand. But at the same time it is often being attacked as a cause of socio-economic and cultural decline in the country. Tourism development in the country has also contributed to an increase in crimes and other social problems as well as socio-economic inequalities. Not only moral problems but also so many social and cultural issues arise from the impact of tourism in Thailand. For Example, the situation has become more strained with the setting of sex tourism in most parts of the country, especially in the "sex capital" of the world, encouraging foreign tourists to come especially for this reason.

Several million people earn their living either directly or indirectly from the activities of the prostitution industry. In fact, a

1998 report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), entitled *The Sex Sector*, says Thai prostitution has grown so rapidly in recent decades that it has become a "commercial sector," one that contributes significant employment and national income. Yet the government's budget, statistics, and development plans do not recognize the trade, putting this lucrative business in an economic and legal twilight zone. In addition, Thai commerce laws sanction prostitution as a "personal service," even though it is illegal under the penal code. The law thus recognizes the investment privileges of the sex trade while technically making its workers criminals.

The simple truth is that prostitution is a big business, well entrenched in Thailand's economy, and it is having a devastating effect on countless young girls--at least a third of all Thai sex workers are under the age of 18, the international legal standard for child labour. Teenagers are the most in demand with clients, and the majority of adult prostitutes entered the trade as children themselves. As the industry has grown, so has the problem of trafficking, defined as the illegal movement of people into sex work through deceit, coercion, or force. Although it's primarily girls who are trafficked in Thailand, in recent years boys have also been forced into the tourist sex trade.

Thailand's sex industry is organized along two parallel tracks, with one market for Thai and immigrant workers who pay in local currency and a second for foreign tourists who bring with them badly needed foreign cash. Most researchers agree that Thailand's local sex trade employs far more people than the tourist trade. For centuries, Thai men have viewed visiting brothels as almost a national pastime. Prostitution is an accepted form of entertainment that men introduce their sons to and expect their wives to tolerate. A recent Ministry of Public Health study says that roughly three quarters of all Thai males regularly visit prostitutes and those prostitutes initiate almost half of all teenage boys into sexual activity.

The international sex market, however, is a more prestigious and intoxicating lure for families who expect to earn money through their daughters and for young girls desperately seeking a way out of poverty. Male tourists and business travelers from around the globe come to Thailand to indulge themselves at bargain prices in a freewheeling atmosphere, unconfined by taboos against sex with minors or the threat of arrest. The money they spend on sex, hotels, meals, gifts, transportation, and tourist extras is a major source of Thailand's foreign currency exchange.

This paper set out to provide some empirical data on the attitudes, motivations and activities of male sex tourists, rather than



to develop a theoretical analysis either of these men or of the phenomenon of sex tourism. In particular, the present study aims to take issue with those analyses which give primacy to the concept of patriarchy in discussions of sex tourism and prostitution, for it seems that this concept alone is not enough to explain the attitudes, motivations and activities of male sex tourists. Radical feminists hold that 'sexuality is gendered as gender sexualized... the eroticization of dominance and submission creates gender... Thus, the sex difference and the dominance-submission dynamic define each other.

Although it is believed that sex tourists provide a very clear example of how a masculine identity can be expressed, reinforced and constructed through a given sexual practice, it would be wrong to conclude that the power these men exercise is simply or even primarily patriarchal. Their power is also 'radicalized' and its currency is economic, and it is only if we recognize this that we can develop analyses of sex tourism that can accommodate the unpalatable fact that not all sex tourists are heterosexual and not all sex tourists are men. It is also clear that male sex tourists are not the only group of people to derive benefits from sex tourism. Its economic benefits for national and international capital are equally, if not more, striking. As well as being part of the planned economic development of a number of South East Asian countries, providing a vital source of foreign

exchange and substantial profits for local entrepreneurs, national and international travel, tourist and leisure companies, it can be said that sex tourism plays a broader economic role, contributing to an on-going process of primitive accumulation.

A number of Marxist theorists have argued that non-capitalist modes of production have been artificially preserved in under-developed countries, and that these household economies supply cheap labour to the capitalist system. According to the requirements of capitalism, [the worker] is either incorporated - in various ways - into the capitalist productive process or thrown back into the household. This household feeds the worker during unproductive periods and thus reproduces the worker's labour power.

In this way, reproduction takes place at no cost to capital. In Thailand, it seems that a prostitution economy serves precisely this same function, for not only are women thrown into this economy whenever their labour is surplus to capital's requirements, but also women's sexual labour often wholly or partly supports the households that furnish both national and international capital with a cheap, disposable workforce.

To argue that sex tourism, or indeed any other form of prostitution, exists in order to ensure that men can buy 'the sex act' and so exercise patriarchal rights of access to women's bodies deflects

attention from these economic and social relations, yet it is precisely upon these relations that the power men exercise over Thai prostitutes rests upon. The patriarchy as the locus of social power, also create political problems when applied to sex tourism. If prostitution is seen as a form of sexual oppression rather than of economic exploitation, it follows that 'Free prostitution does not exist, whatever the means of exercising it... prostitution of women [is] always by force... it is a violation of human rights and an outrage to the dignity of women.

In reality, the term 'prostitution embraces an enormous range of activities undertaken on very different terms and under very different conditions, and for reasons of political strategy it is vital to distinguish between them. This study generates the view that while sex tourism must be recognized as first and foremost a form of economic exploitation, it should also be seen as a unique and distinctive form of exploitation. There are fundamental differences between capitalist employers and purchasers of sex, which must be borne in mind in any programme of political resistance.

The relationship between capital and labour is characterized by a mutual dependence as well as antagonism. Without a class of wagedworkers, capital accumulation cannot take place. But though sex tourists exercise economic power over prostitutes, there is no mutual

economic dependency between the two groups. Thai prostitutes need sex tourists in order to subsist but sex tourists would not actually starve, wither or die without Thai prostitutes.

Since sex tourists as a collective group are not locked into a dialectical relationship with these women, it would be extremely difficult for prostitutes to win concessions through struggle with these men, who can simply move their custom elsewhere. It is not sex tourists but governments, international travel companies, hoteliers, local business people and so on who have an economic interest in maintaining the flow of sex tourists, so to engage in direct action against sex tourists satisfying as it may be, will not necessarily improve the lot of the women who sell their sexual labour.

It may be easier to identify "bad" tourists. If bad tourists are those who come to buy sex, or come to trade or consume illegal drugs, they should be banned. The relevant policies should not tolerate such practices. Drastic action should be taken to eliminate such services. The responsibility for ending "bad tourism" would thus be shifted from TAT to the Ministry of Interior.

In 1988, Royal Highness Princess Srinagarindra, The Princess Mother, late mother of Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, initiated a development project in Chiang Rai, the northernmost province of Thailand, with the aim of rehabilitating the forests and

improving the lives of the people living in the heart of the Golden Triangle in Thailand, ending their dependence on opium cultivation and use. By helping villagers to become self-sufficient through the introduction of crop substitution programmes, and the creation of alternative employment such as the establishment of a cottage industry in handicrafts, hill-tribe villagers generate sufficient income to supplement earnings from agricultural and horticultural production. They are no longer dependent on opium cultivation for their livelihood.

HRH the Princess Mother also realised that education is an equally vital component in efforts to eradicate opium cultivation and use. Royal Highness believed that by providing knowledge about the history of opium in The Golden Triangle and in other parts of the world, and by promoting better awareness and understanding of the uses and effects of opium, morphine, and heroin, and the dangers and consequences of its use, fewer people would be tempted into drug use. Shrinking demand would eventually reduce supply.

In order to gain commitment from all levels of society to join in the fight against illegal drugs, HRH The Princess Mother thus initiated a project designed to help provide knowledge to the people of the world about the history of opium in The Golden Triangle and in other parts of the world, and to raise public awareness that narcotics and

other illegal drugs are a problem not just for the countries and people of the Golden Triangle, but for societies worldwide.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the international NGO End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT) have developed a Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism. UNESCO has launched *Impact*, a series of in-depth studies to promote responsible tourism. Each report will feature one heritage site and focus on ways to develop its tourist potential while preserving its integrity.

The Amazing Thailand campaign has brought with it a big push for eco-tourism. For instance, a comprehensive community development programme, initiated by the King in the midst of economic woes, aims to develop eco-tourism - along with other economic activities such as farm produce processing, medicinal herb planting and traditional Thai medicine - in 15,223 villages, involving more than 300,000 families and a population of more than 700,000.

The widespread of tourism in Thailand has not only increased drug and human trafficking in the country but also shaken the liberal society and system. Unfortunately, the majority of population are involved in this trade, though it is illegal, government not trying to stop the growing effects because, this is known as the main source of economy. In Thailand socio-economic backwardness is the main

cause to grow the influx of sex trade. Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, inadequate housing is a few factors that are directly or indirectly responsible for the youth to be drawn into the world of crime.

As the sex tourism industry flourishes, the Thai ruling class has never expressed concern about its effect on the cultural, social and moral fabric of Thai society. The operation of thousands of brothels, massage parlours, bath-houses, bars, clubs, tea houses and even barber shops which serve as fronts for the selling of sex has resulted in cultural decay, especially for the youth. Violence, drugs and commercial sex have replaced intimacy and social solidarity. Violence is an integral part of everyday Thai urban life. On the per capita basis, the Thai murder rate is one of the highest in the world, twice the US rate and 10 times that of Japan. In the 1970s drug users in Thailand were few and far between. By now the country had a very large addicted population? Most of the drug-addicts are the poor who live in urban slums. Official Thai ministry of health statistics showed that 85 percent of sample of 1,000 HIV-positive individuals were drug-users.

Where at one side tourism plays a prominent role in Thailand's economy and provides opportunities for employment and helping economic growth there on the other side, influx of mass tourism has caused great threat for country's physical, environmental, ecological,

economic, and socio-cultural as well as political environment. Both positive and negative impacts of tourism in Thailand have been experienced. The development of handicrafts and cottage industries has positive correlation with another area of tourism development. On the other hand, the haphazard development of mass tourism has caused in spoiling the fragile environment resorts etc. in various parts of Thailand. The rapid growth of casinos, bars and prostitution, use of drugs in several tourist destinations are the declining signs of morality. Because all these tourists sites in the country are famous for accommodations and facilities for foreign tourists with wine, casinos and sex. Therefore, tourism promotion needs pertinent care so that tourism activities and infrastructures are planned on sound efficacies.



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