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## SEWING OR SEX?: LABOR MIGRATION IN THAILAND

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### INTRODUCTION

Suppose you are a young woman living in a small village in Thailand. Upon entering adulthood, it is your responsibility to honor your parents by repaying them through gifts, money, or some other form of respect. How easy will this be, though, when you are stuck in a small village where your family pretty much runs your life, decides whom you should marry, and about the only jobs available involve planting and harvesting crops? Many young men can fulfill filial obligations, the repayment of respect to parents, by becoming Buddhist monks. Young women, however, cannot become monks, so it is necessary to find another means for repayment. Typically this involves migrating to an urban area such as Bangkok, the hub of commercial activity in Thailand; industrial estates across provincial cities; or to resorts along the coasts, where women generally take jobs in one of two sectors: factories or the tourist industry—and sometimes even both as a way to fulfill filial obligations.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike their male counterparts, females are more limited in the ways in which they can fulfill their filial obligations. While these are not the only options open to young women, the export service industry has an abundance of jobs just waiting to be filled by eager, docile, ambitious young women. It might be hard to imagine any situation where working long

hours in a sweatshop or selling sex are actually considered viable options. In Thailand, however, young women often choose to migrate to urban areas and take jobs in the export service industry rather than continue their education, stay in villages to start families, or search for jobs that lead to careers. What factors lead them to make this choice?

### PART I: BACKGROUND

#### *Political and Economic History*

Thailand was one of the few countries not colonized by European powers. The Kingdom of Thailand maintained its sovereignty, but remained fairly underdeveloped, until it became of strategic interest to the United States during the Cold War. In the interest of containing Southeast Asia against the spread of communism, the United States promoted democracy in Thailand through an alliance that promoted trade and investment in the country, while at the same time fortifying it with U.S. military bases. Stationing troops in Southeast Asia also helped to spur economic growth, particularly because U.S. military personnel were paid in U.S. dollars. Their presence increased demands for more local goods and services which, in turn, promoted small and large businesses alike in the region. As the U.S. military personnel took rest and relaxation (R&R) time, the demand for vacation sites, exotic women, and other amenities—particularly during the Vietnam War—led to the development of the sex tourist industry in Thailand's capital city of Bangkok, along with resorts on its southeastern beaches. U.S. invest-

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ment also encouraged industrialization for the export industry, with the United States in 2005 still the leading importer of Thai goods, receiving 15.4 percent of its total exports.<sup>2</sup>

Investment in the late 1970s prompted urban development in manufacturing, enticing foreign companies to provide even more money and build production facilities, with the allure of low-cost conditions offering cheap, readily available labor. Previously a largely rural-based, agrarian society, Thailand was changing, forcing the government to focus on educating its population, making infrastructure improvements, and addressing health issues. By increasing literacy across the country, improving the country's infrastructure, and bettering the health of its citizens, the government was able to draw investment into the country to promote its industrialization. As a result, Thailand's rapid development earned it the status of a newly industrialized country (NIC), thus considerably increasing the availability of work for women in urban areas during the last several decades. As a result, in five years the average household income increased 38 percent, with a per capita income of \$2,959 in 2006, giving Thai consumers purchasing power estimated at about \$8,877 in 2006.<sup>3</sup> Despite having to weather some hard times after suffering from the Asian flu crisis in the late 1990s, incomes rebounded across all regions, both urban and rural. Thailand's recovery rate by 2004 was a 6.1 percent gross domestic product (GDP) growth, with about a 5 percent growth in 2005, and then a leveling off at about 4 percent since—comparable to growth in other Southeast Asian countries, despite weathering rising oil prices, drought, and a change in political climate.<sup>4</sup>

Even with the occasional military coup d'état, investments steadily moved into Thailand's economy. In 2004, the UN Commission for Trade and Development rated Thailand as the fourth most attractive country for foreign direct investment (FDI). Businesses have a multitude of reasons to invest in Thailand, ranging from

social and political stability, to high rates of literacy, relative transparency, sufficient infrastructure, and a convenient location in Southeast Asia, making Thailand's FDI second only to China's.<sup>5</sup> FDI has facilitated growth in employment in the industrial sector, particularly by establishing industrial estates, Thailand's form of export processing zones (EPZs). By 2007, thirty-four EPZs, resembling mini-cities, provided tax incentives; infrastructural necessities including water supply and filtration systems, flood protection, communication facilities, and electricity; and sufficient transportation access.<sup>6</sup> Lax enforcement of labor laws, corruption, and the absence of trade unions are also attractors for corporations looking for a favorable business environment. For a country that was agrarian in the not-so-distant past, Thailand no longer relies on agriculture, which now only accounts for about 10 percent of the country's workers. Forty-six percent of jobs are in the service industry and 44 percent in manufacturing, making Thailand heavily dependent on its export industry to contribute to its GDP, steadily increasing from 48.6 percent in 1998 to 56.9 percent in the third quarter of 2003.<sup>7</sup> Despite the previous threat of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the avian flu, and the devastating effects of the 2005 tsunami on the resorts, growth in 2006 in Thailand was 5 percent. Furthermore, even with violence in the south and a military government, a 4.7 percent increase in GDP is still expected for 2007.<sup>8</sup>

### *Social History*

Thai people are influenced by norms and traditions, some that are more specific to their culture, such as filial obligations and their perception of beauty, while others, such as women's status, that are more common worldwide. Migration is also a social practice that has a place in Thai history, though intra-country migration is also prevalent in other developing economies. As is typical in rural areas, traditions are slow to change, with mores and practices that define relationships and roles in households and villages. These social factors influence young women as they make decisions about their futures.

### *Filial Obligations*

Embedded in Thai culture is the practice of repaying filial obligations. Once they become young adults, sons and daughters are expected to pay tribute to their parents. Traditionally, a young man

honored his parents by entering the monastery to become an ordained monk before moving on to secure work, get married, and start a family. A young woman typically repaid her parents by entering into an arranged marriage, after which she would have children and care for her parents as they aged.

Becoming an ordained Buddhist monk is the highest respect males can pay to their parents, particularly their mothers. Since women are denied access to Buddhist ordination in Thailand, mothers rely on their sons to earn religious merit on their behalf. Because Buddhist values remain strong in Thailand—especially for rural families—having a son become an ordained monk is particularly rewarding. Giving up just a few months for religious service to satisfy their obligation is preferred by parents because it not only benefits the mother and makes the father proud, but also because men are less likely to remit monetary or material gifts. Men are generally more selfish with their money, often spending on nonessentials such as alcohol and tobacco for themselves, especially since indulging in these is largely taboo for women.<sup>9</sup> As they prepare to get married and have their own children, young men are also less likely to remit money to their parents.

While young men continue to rely primarily on religious service as a way to please their parents, industrialization, capitalism, and globalization unquestionably have changed the ways in which young women have sought to repay their filial obligations. As the urban demand has grown for laborers, more and more men and women, particularly younger generations of workers, have migrated within the country to urban areas. As a result, even the most remote villages have been affected by government policies that featured less investment in agriculture programs in order to draw more labor to urban areas. In 2000, agriculture accounted for only 12 percent of the country's overall GDP.<sup>10</sup> Of the 65 million people in Thailand, about 85 percent claim permanent residence in rural areas, from which about four million people regularly migrate within the country.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, in just ten years, between 1985 and 1995, the number of workers in the manufacturing sectors doubled to five million, with women constituting half of the total workforce.<sup>12</sup>

Because young women have limited means to pay respect to their parents, many have turned to labor migration in order to earn money to remit or to send material goods to their parents.<sup>13</sup> As younger generations of women have relocated for

urban jobs, they have become more resistant to returning to rural areas to enter into prearranged marriages. Increasingly they have turned to providing monetary and material gifts as a way to honor their parents. In addition to sending remittances, daughters are more likely than their brothers to take vacation time to return home during the harvest season or help care for aging parents. Even though young women are more likely to end up in lower-paying, less secure jobs, they are a much more reliable source of material remittances than the young men. In poor rural families, remittances by children (mainly daughters) to those who barely live above the subsistence level, or even for those who are relatively better off, can make a substantive difference in their quality of life.<sup>14</sup>

### *Migration*

Under the monarchy, it was customary for men to “volunteer” their services to royalty for several months each year. Under this system of “corvée” (unpaid) labor, women had to manage the household and fields on their own, finding ways to make ends meet when the family budget did not balance.<sup>15</sup> Without the technology to plant or harvest crops efficiently, both men and women, and even children, continue to be essential to farming.<sup>16</sup> In addition to doing field work and managing the household, women are also responsible for completing household domestic chores, providing child-rearing services, and maintaining a fairly extensive social network. Nevertheless, their many contributions, women are still subordinate to male heads of household.<sup>17</sup>

Men’s migration, under the corvée labor system, is a part of Thailand’s history. The transition to allowing young men to migrate to get an education came fairly easily. Young women, on the other hand, have received less encouragement to continue their education rather than fulfill their filial obligations. The best opportunity to fulfill such obligations, nevertheless, also necessitates migrating in order to take advantage of the light-industry jobs in urban areas. Having arranged marriages, however, leads to the expectation that these jobs are temporary, not careers such as those that their brothers seek. Since females are also expected to take time off from their jobs to help reap the harvest in the rural communities, women are also at a disadvantage in finding a stable job, let alone a career, as women experience relative inequality in choosing their field of employment, seeking upward mobility and pay, and receiving good work conditions.

### *Culture of Beauty*

A “culture of beauty” is rooted in Thai tradition. In rural areas, this tradition is a standard that defines not only how women should physically look but also how they should behave. For a woman to be beautiful, she must exhibit an image of goodness, morality, and virtue, because these qualities supposedly reflect someone who will be both a good wife and mother.<sup>18</sup> Young women are socialized into believing that the more “beautiful” they are, the greater will be their chances for achieving happiness, prospective husbands, and success.<sup>19</sup> While “boys will be boys,” drinking and smoking, gambling and gallivanting around, young women are expected to be modest, well groomed, and well behaved.

With industrialization, however, came an urban, modernized version of the ideal woman in the form of *than samay* which means being “up-to-date.” The modern urban woman must strive for “style and independence, [being] fashionably dressed, stylishly coifed, [and] carefully made-up.”<sup>20</sup> The push for consumerism and materialism that accompanied industrialization helped to spread this ideal into provincial areas. As young women began migrating to urban areas decades ago to fill the demand for labor, they were exposed to a whole new world. When they returned to their villages to visit or to help in the harvest, they sported the latest fashions and hair styles, and brought the most modern electronics and appliances. As these same rural areas became more developed, with access to electricity and communication systems, young women in rural areas were bombarded with even more examples of *than samay* images.<sup>21</sup> The desire to immerse themselves in an urban version of the “culture of beauty” has had a strong influence on young women, giving them added incentives to migrate to urban areas.

### *Women’s Status*

Though all family members are needed to work in the fields, a division of labor is prevalent in Thai culture. On the one hand, young men are groomed to become heads of household, which might include learning carpentry, metal working, machine repair, loom construction, and fishing. Men are also likely to introduce their sons to village politics. On the other hand, young women are expected to follow in their mothers’ footsteps, learning to manage the household; organize and attend social events; and participate in domestic chores like weaving, sewing, and cooking.

In a study that spanned three decades of Thai government programs, researchers found that

women were encouraged to participate in rural development programs, yet the support they required was not provided.<sup>22</sup> Often the women were given no training, received inadequate resources, or had problems marketing the products the government encouraged them to make. These problems largely resulted from the government's approach that mostly focused on heads of households (i.e., men). While the government has made at least a token effort to promote rural development programs, these efforts have proved ineffective because women were either not considered in conceiving the projects or, when the projects were targeted at them, the projects failed to promote opportunities for women outside their domestic roles. In evaluating its progress, the government acknowledged that cultural norms in Thailand have continued to subordinate and oppress women.<sup>23</sup> The Thai National Statistics' 2005 report's section on "Gender Statistics" explained that:

[A]lthough women's contribution in national socio-economic development is crucial for Thai society, women remain unequal partners and gain unequal benefit from the development process. This is so mainly because there is inadequate gender awareness in the policy and planning process for national development as women's roles are always stereotyped by social values. Thus Thai women, who account for half of the country's human resources, are unavoidably devalued and overlooked.

Women are consistently classified as "not being in

the workforce" because their work takes place in the informal economic sector, that is, in agriculture and cottage industries like handicrafts. Moreover, housewives' contributions either go unrecorded, or the women are described as "economically inactive."

Women's views about their own economic activities and how they identify themselves are shaped by sociocultural norms. It is not uncommon for women to consider themselves as not being in the workforce (i.e., the formal economic sector) or as being economically inactive, even though they are responsible for maintaining the household and often generate income from informal sector activities because of what is viewed as economic activity in Thailand. Women, moreover, are not considered heads of household, regardless of their income, unless they are living alone or there are no adult men in the house. In all, only 24 percent of Thai households are headed by women, and over half of those women are widowed.<sup>24</sup> Evidence that women's work is not equally valued as that of men is that women earn sixty-one cents to every one dollar that men earn.<sup>25</sup>

For rural families in general—and rural women in particular—both formal and informal credit sources are scarce.<sup>26</sup> The situation in rural Thailand is rather unique in that while men are considered heads of household, formal creditors also recognize that women control the household budgets; thus creditors rarely make loans to a husband without his wife's knowledge of the agreement.<sup>27</sup> Yet at the same time, creditors are reluctant to provide loans directly to women, making it more difficult for women to become more autonomous.

## NOTES TO PART I

1. The phenomenon of migration is not limited to intrastate migration within Thailand. Women will also migrate to other countries to fill available positions in the service industry, either in hotels or restaurants or as sex workers. Allowing a temporary relocation to countries like Japan, Australia, the United States, and various Middle Eastern and European countries, migration provides another option for young women to remit money and material goods home from jobs abroad.

2. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)-Australia, "Thailand Fact Sheet, 2006," at <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/fs/thai.pdf>.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), "Macroeconomic Indicators," 2005, at [http://www.aseansec.org/macroeconomic/aq\\_gdp21.html](http://www.aseansec.org/macroeconomic/aq_gdp21.html); "No Room for Thai Complacency," *Asia Times*, May 30, 2006, at [\[www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\\_Asia/HC30Ae04.html\]\(http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\_Asia/HC30Ae04.html\); and "Once Bitten," \*The Economist\*, May 31, 2007, p. 50.](http://</a></p>
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5. Thailand Board of Investment (BOI), "Thailand's Advantages," 2006, at [http://www.boi.go.th/english/why/thailand\\_advantages.asp](http://www.boi.go.th/english/why/thailand_advantages.asp).

6. See Industrial Estates in Thailand Web site for map with regional sites and information, at [http://www.ieat.go.th/menu02/2.0.0.0.0.0.0.0.0\\_en.php3?1a=en](http://www.ieat.go.th/menu02/2.0.0.0.0.0.0.0.0_en.php3?1a=en).

7. National Statistical Office (NSO)-Thailand, *Thailand Development Indicators, 2003* (NSO: Bangkok, Thailand), at [http://web.nso.go.th/eng/THA\\_Indicat/THA\\_Indicat2003.pdf](http://web.nso.go.th/eng/THA_Indicat/THA_Indicat2003.pdf).

8. "Thai Growth To Be Slowest in Southeast Asia," *Bangkok Post*, April 19, 2007, Business News.

9. NSO, *Thailand Development Indicators, 2003*, p. 35; NSO, *Statistical Yearbook Thailand, 2004* (NSO: Bangkok, Thailand), pp. 137–38, at <http://web.nso.go.th/sybl>

syb2004/syb2004\_eng.pdf; and Mary Beth Mills, "From Nimble Fingers to Raised Fists: Women and Labor Activism in Globalizing Thailand," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31 (1) (2005: (e-version, p.13).

10. Phusadee Arunmas, "Harvest of Fear and Anxiety," *Bangkok Post*, 2001, at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/yereview2000/agriculture.html>.

11. NSO, *Statistical Yearbook Thailand, 2004*, p. 38. For more on migration, see Keiko Osaki, "Migrant Remittances in Thailand: Economic Necessity or Social Norm?" *Journal of Population Research* 20(2) (1999); and Anne Clausen, "Female Labour Migration to Bangkok: Transforming Rural-Urban Interactions and Social Networks through Globalization," *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* 17(3) (2002).

12. Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand, Economy, and Politics*, 2nd ed. (NY, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002).

13. While studies show that young women tend not to remit money with any regularity (See Mills, "Contesting the Margins," p. 50), more than 25 percent of them do send remittances to their parents, with females far more likely than males to remit and to continue to do so even as many as ten years later (See Osaki, "Migrant Remittances," p. 217). If parents need extra money to make it through a rough period, young women can be relied upon (especially over their brothers) to help out their parents. Remittances have shown to improve the overall household welfare of the recipient families (See Osaki, "Migrant Remittances," p. 218). No doubt that as parents recognized the potential for a better quality of life, they increasingly encouraged their daughters into labor migration.

14. Chai Podhisita et al., "Women's Work and Family Size in Rural Thailand," *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* 5(2) (1990): p.48; and Osaki, "Migrant Remittances."

15. Marjorie A. Muecke, "Make Money Not Babies," *Asian Survey* 24(4) (1984): p. 464.

16. United Nations Development Fund for Women

(UNIFEM), *Gender and Development in Thailand*, sec. B, part 2, 2000, at <http://www.unifem-eseasia.org/resources/others/gendev/sectionb1.htm>.

17. Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Women in Thailand Country Briefing Paper* (Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 1998).

18. Niels Mulder, *Inside Thai Society: Religion, Everyday Life, and Change* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkwood Books, 2000), p. 70.

19. Juree Vichit-Vadakan, "Women and the Family in Thailand in the Midst of Social Change," *Law & Society Review* 28(3) (1994): p. 520.

20. Mills, "Contesting the Margins," p. 43.

21. Clausen, "Female Labour Migration," p. 72.

22. Orapin Sopchokchai and Twatchai Yongkittikul, "The Basic Minimum Needs Approach to Poverty and Gender Issues in Thailand," in *Gender, Economic Growth and Poverty: Market Growth and State Planning in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Heyzer and Sen (Utrecht: Netherlands, International Books, 1994), pp. 314-15.

23. National Statistical Office (NSO)-Thailand, "Gender Statistics," 2005, at <http://web.nso.go.th/eng/stat/gender/gender.htm>.

24. NSO, *Thailand Development Indicators, 2003*, sec. 2.

25. This compares to women earning sixty-two cents to every one dollar of men in the United States, a country heavily criticized for its pay inequality (See United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], "Country Fact Sheets: Building the Capabilities of Women," *Human Development Reports*, 2005, at [http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/country\\_fact\\_sheets/cty\\_fs\\_THA.html](http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_THA.html)). Note that this is formal sector work that overlooks the large number of women in informal sector work that is less prevalent in the United States.

26. UNIFEM, *Gender and Development*; Mills, "Contesting the Margins," p. 10.

27. ADB, *Women in Thailand*, p. 25.



## PART II: WOMEN'S OPPORTUNITIES

The extent to which Thailand's emergence as a newly industrialized country has benefited women's development is under debate. On the one side are advocates such as those within the Thai government who argue that industrialization and deeper immersion into the global economy only serve to improve people's lives. The Thai standard of living has increased in both urban and rural areas, with almost universal literacy, higher life expectancy rates, and fewer people relying on agriculture for their primary source of income. This kind of development is what developing countries strive for, with Thailand as proof that a backward country can turn itself around in just a few decades.

On the other side, however, are those who argue that rapid development has an ugly side to it that advocates choose to ignore. The less desirable effect of NIC status, argues Thai national Sinith Sittirak,<sup>1</sup> is that advancement has come a high price. Western influence and the push to industrialize have resulted in the promotion of consumerism and materialism that feed the desire to become up to date. Economic advancement, moreover, has done a disservice to society by forcing young women into a dilemma of whether to stay with their families or migrate to urban areas. Since the jobs women fill are typically low-paid work, rather than careers with opportunities for promotion, rapid industrialization only reinforces women's positions as secondary to men.

As women's abilities and the qualities associated with them are economically undervalued in their own society, it is not surprising that foreign industries come in and exploit this labor very cheaply. Women are considered temporary, nonskilled laborers, appropriate for light-industry work that entices business interests. Cheap labor supplies, in turn, attract foreign direct investment.

The debate over the effect that becoming ever more integrated into the global economy is having on women in Thailand can be examined by considering the economic opportunities available to women. In rural areas, women are largely limited to working in the fields to support themselves and their family. In some instances, as is the case with Thailand, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have stepped in to offer additional economic opportunities to women in rural areas. Almost universal literacy gives more women the option to seek higher education. Pursuing a degree, however, requires relocating to an urban area. Gaining employment in the majority of professional work, manufacturing

jobs, and service industry positions also requires migrating to the cities and resorts.

### *Agriculture and Handicrafts*

Even though almost every young person in Thailand is literate and graduates from high school, work opportunities in rural areas are largely limited to continuing the work and traditional production of goods of their parents. In addition to farming and raising animals, selling cottage industry goods can supplement the household income. Women traditionally made products like baskets, cloths, jewelry, and clothing for household use or to sell at roadside stands to tourists or others who might be passing through their village.<sup>2</sup> Nongovernmental organizations, however, provide more rural women with new opportunities to sell their handmade artisan products on a larger scale to buyers both in Thailand and abroad.

A few NGOs, including ThaiCraft, Crafts Manufacturing Project, and Northeast Thailand Rural Development Association, seek to preserve traditional handicraft-making while at the same time giving women opportunities to supplement their household income without having to migrate to urban areas. Since its inception in 1995, ThaiCraft, a grassroots NGO, has helped earn villagers more than \$3 million.<sup>3</sup> In the twenty-four villages where Panmai, another NGO, has established projects, the average annual household proceeds from weaving were B6,425 (B = bhat, the Thai currency) (US\$197) in 1992 in households where the average annual household income was B27,050 (US\$831).<sup>4</sup> That means that the proceeds accounted for, on average, 24 percent of the household income.

Another handicraft NGO, Crafts Manufacturing Project, provides rural women in two different villages, Waeng Noi and Det Udom, a way to earn income in the agricultural off-season by producing cottage industry textiles, rather than having the women resort to subcontracting or migration to get work. Another project, founded by a Norwegian NGO in 1992, the Northeast Thailand Rural Development Association generates annual sales of around B1 million (US\$30,713), with villagers receiving 30 percent of the overall proceeds.<sup>5</sup>

While cottage industry production does provide more young women in more villages an alternative to migration, strong cultural views about handicraft making, especially weaving, only help to reinforce

traditional perceptions of women and their roles. Weaving is traditionally women's work, particularly because before manufactured cloth and clothing were readily available, it was a woman's responsibility to make them. Weaving requires patience, manual dexterity, and the ability to perform tedious tasks. Even though it takes considerable time and practice to develop the skills necessary to be a good weaver, women are considered "natural weavers," born with the ability to weave.<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, being a good weaver in Thailand is synonymous with being a good woman, meaning that a girl "possesses womanly virtues and will make a good wife."<sup>7</sup> So, while making handicrafts for the cottage industry gives women more earning opportunities, at the same time it continues traditional norms. These activities also reinforce the traditional Thai cultural ideal of beauty.

Adhering to fair trade principles advocated by many handicraft NGOs increases the possibility of artisans receiving more reasonable wages than if they produced the goods as subcontractors. By cutting out intermediary shippers and sellers while guaranteeing a fair price to its producers, fair trade NGOs can help women earn more from their labor than they could working for one of the few businesses that subcontract out work to rural women to cut factory overhead costs. While these industries pay workers by the piece, at most amounting to a dollar a day, NGO handicraft organizations offer rural women the same opportunity to work from home, but with greater earning potential. Since NGOs are not exploiting the women to make a profit but instead are providing them with a means to sell their crafts, considerably more of the profit should be returned to the women.<sup>8</sup> Earning a more sustainable income offers an alternative to migration as well as an opportunity to better meet practical gender interests.

### *Career or Job?*

Intrastate migration—that is, moving within the country—affords the opportunity to break away from village life and be immersed in a fast-paced metropolitan way of living while at the same time providing the means to make good on filial obligations. For the majority of young women, migration is a better option than staying in the village, entering into an arranged marriage, working in the fields,

and hoping for the opportunity to sell their wares through a handicraft NGO.

Obviously one consideration young women weigh when choosing which path to take is how much they would earn (see Table 1). Though these seem like very low wages, it is important to bear in mind that the cost of goods and services is lower than what they are in the United States (see Table 2). It is possible to live quite comfortably on \$300–\$400 a month, especially for those who take factory jobs, as these jobs typically include housing in dormitories and even some meals.

Those women who enter the workforce generally have two options. Pursuing a professional career is one direction in which young women might go, taking positions in the government, education, or healthcare, for example.<sup>9</sup> Depending on the field and position, those who first earn a college degree will generally secure better paying jobs starting beyond the entry level. Another option, which tends to be the more popular choice, is to enter the export service industry. The availability of these jobs has increased as Thailand has industrialized and has served as a vacation destination for U.S. military troops stationed in Southeast Asia. These jobs include light-industry work in factories making consumer goods for export. Also considered part of the export service industry is the tourist industry, providing jobs in hotels, restaurants, and resorts. Thailand's reputation as an exotic, western-style sex tourism destination, however, means that many of

**Table 1.** Occupations and Wages in Thailand, 2003

Occupation	Daily Wages	Annual Wages
Farmer	\$3	\$1,104
Low-End Commercial Sex Work	\$3.38–\$6.75	\$1,234–\$2,464
Hotel/restaurant	\$5.81	\$2,120
Manufacturing	\$6.46	\$2,358
Health & Social Work	\$6.57	\$2,398
Personal Housekeeper	\$6.69	\$2,442
Civil Servant	\$11.65	\$4,192
Teacher	\$15.24	\$5,563
High-End Commercial Sex Work	\$21–\$40.80	\$7,665–\$14,892

**Sources:** Table data compiled from Disaster Tracking Recovery Assistance Center (DTRAC)—Thailand, "Average Thai Wages per Month, 2005," at [http://www.d-trac.org/en/average\\_thai\\_wages](http://www.d-trac.org/en/average_thai_wages); and C. Manopaiboon et al., "Leaving Sex Work: Barriers, Facilitating Factors, and Consequences for Female Sex Workers in Northern Thailand," *AIDS Care* 15(1) (2003). All figures expressed in U.S. dollars based on exchange rate of \$1US = baht \$32.56.

**Table 2.** Cost of Living in Thailand, 2007

Category	Expense	Cost
<b>Transportation</b>	Bus (within Bangkok)	11¢
	Taxi	\$1 flat rate + 31¢/mile
	Internal flights	\$10–\$15
<b>Housing</b>	Small apartment (in city)	\$90/month
	Large apartment (in city)	\$300/month
	Utilities (electricity and water in city)	\$30/month
	Cable TV	\$31/month
<b>Clothing</b>	T-shirts, shirts	\$5
	Jeans, shorts	\$7–\$10
	Sandals	\$5–\$10
	Shoes (sneakers, formal)	\$10–\$30
<b>Toiletries</b>	Soap (4 pack)	77¢
	Shampoo	60¢
	Toothbrush	\$1.55
	Toothpaste	75¢
	Toilet paper (6 pack)	60¢
<b>Food</b>	Street cart food/Thai restaurants	50¢–\$1
	Western restaurant meals	\$2
	Big Mac value meal	\$1.50
	Large pizza (Pizza Hut)	\$7.50
	Can of soda	30¢
	Bottle of beer	\$1–\$2
<b>Other</b>	14" TV	\$184
	CD player	\$107
	CD	\$12.25
	Movie theater ticket	\$2–\$3
	Internet Café (1 hour)	\$1.50

**Sources:** Table data compiled from *ESL Junction*, "Cost of Living in Thailand," 2007, at [http://www.esljunction.com/travel/cost\\_living\\_Thailand.html](http://www.esljunction.com/travel/cost_living_Thailand.html); and Learn in Asia, "Approximate Costs of Day-to-Day Living Expenses in Pattaya, Thailand," 2007, at [http://www.learn-in-asia.com/cost\\_of\\_living\\_in\\_pattaya.htm](http://www.learn-in-asia.com/cost_of_living_in_pattaya.htm). All figures expressed in U.S. dollars based on exchange rate of \$1US = baht 32.56.

the available jobs in bungalows, massage parlors, garden restaurants, and membership clubs are actually for prostitutes.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Education and Careers as Professionals*

Like men, women have the option to earn a degree, delaying their obligations to repay their parents until they have secured work. Even though more than 98 percent of Thai women are literate, and more females than males pursue higher education, women have been slow to challenge estab-

lished norms and enter fields traditionally dominated by men.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, women's rates of education actually exceed those of men in Thailand, though women are concentrated in fields that tend to be viewed as "women's work," because they "conform to their socially defined roles."<sup>12</sup> These persistent gender norms limit young women's opportunities to move into areas like business, law, and engineering and make it difficult for women to play significant roles in government. While women hold about 60 percent of government civil service positions, only around 20 percent of those women actually move into upper-rank positions.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, young women are less likely to search for positions that lead to "careers" than to find "jobs" that offer immediate financial rewards. They also spend less time looking for professional positions or learning skills necessary for a trade, instead settling for a light-industry or service job with a short-term payoff. Young women's decisions to pursue professional careers or export industry jobs are strongly influenced by their filial obligations,

their desire to be up to date, and their pursuit of freedom and autonomy. In addition to these personal factors are a number of institutional factors that affect a women's decision to seek a professional position. Besides being limited by the "old boys club" and the glass ceiling, women—particularly migrants—are viewed as "disposable labor." The social expectation is that young women will migrate to the city to fulfill their family obligations and then will return to the village once their respect is paid and, as tradition dictates, will enter into an arranged

marriage. These factors give young women an added incentive to join the export service industry.

### *The Export Service Industry*

In Thailand, women account for 80–90 percent of the overall labor force in the highest export service industry sectors, export manufacturing, and tourism.<sup>14</sup> Owing to the effect of globalization, workers are in even greater demand, drawing younger women—especially—from rural areas to urban industries. The actual proportion of women in agriculture has declined more than 50 percent over three decades, from 82 percent to 40 percent, due to the increased labor demand in urban industries.<sup>15</sup> Young women are most in demand to fill light industry-jobs particularly because they have a reputation of being more docile, patient, nimble fingered, and compliant, making them attractive to light-industry managers.<sup>16</sup>

### *The Light Industry Sector*

In terms of light industry, the five major export-oriented sectors in which women are dominant are (1) assembling electrical machinery, electronics, and computer parts; (2) manufacturing textiles and ready-made garments; (3) processing chilled, frozen, and canned food; (4) processing precious stones and jewelry; and (5) manufacturing footwear. Women constitute anywhere from 55 percent (precious stones and jewelry) to 76 percent (textiles and ready-made garments) of the workforce in these industries.<sup>17</sup> In these sectors, men dominate the upper-level managerial positions, while women fill the lower-level assembly and processing jobs. For example, in the Northern Regional Industrial Estate in Lamphun, only five women held management positions of the 109 available in 1998, while of the total 8,517 lower-level operators, 7,482 were female and 1,035 were male.<sup>18</sup> This disparity of men dominating the higher-paid, supervisory positions and women working in the lower-paid, “unskilled” jobs is typical in the light-industry, export-oriented sectors throughout the country.

Like Asian women in general, Thai female workers have a reputation of being docile, obedient workers who will not challenge the poor working conditions or long hours in factories, resulting in their employers taking advantage of them. Thai women have made few efforts to unionize as a way to protect their rights, because known participants are often excluded from overtime work or extra shifts. Of the approximately 2 percent of all Thai

people who join private-sector labor unions, these unions tend to serve more as a social club for members than as those that represent members in collective bargaining.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, if they are subject to unfavorable conditions in one factory, women are more likely to change jobs than to risk losing earning opportunities by gaining a reputation in the light-industry sector as a troublemaker. Women also are not in a position to challenge management’s practices of releasing pregnant women instead of giving them maternity leave, firing women who cannot go to work because they need to take a sick day, or allowing someone leave to care for a sick parent. Consequently, turnover rates are high as women move from job to job looking for better opportunities and conditions.<sup>20</sup>

These institutional constraints make it difficult for women to change their work conditions, increase their pay, or challenge the perception that women are only disposable labor. The ample workforce supply—with any number of women waiting to fill the next job opening—makes it unnecessary for management to step in and implement rules and regulations. In cases where women might unionize and demand better pay or conditions, they risk the possibility of driving the company to relocate to another place, as was the case with some of the factories that produced Nike footwear and clothing.<sup>21</sup>

Women also risk being subjected to any number of different factory conditions. Some factories may be better where, for example, women might get pay incentives for perfect attendance and punctuality for one month straight, with the bonus increasing for each additional month they go without absences or tardiness. Other factories are reported to have gone for months without paying their workers; holding women captive in the factories; paying workers less than the minimum wage; forcing workers to sign falsified pay slips reporting higher wages than they actually were paid; and requiring a set number of pieces per hour and, if the work is not completed during regular work hours, making women finish the work without overtime pay.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, women suffer from any number of health hazards when working in factories. In one study conducted of nine electronics factories, a typical workday is a twelve-hour shift, with two or three breaks.<sup>23</sup> Because the factories run twenty-four hours a day, workers work six days a week, rotating day and night shifts every week or two weeks. In addition to women working long hours and frequently changing shifts, tasks are repetitive, causing eyestrain and body aches; and workers are exposed

to chemicals resulting in dizziness, numbness, rashes, and sometimes fainting spells.<sup>24</sup>

Light-industry jobs tend to involve work in sweatshops with long workdays, questionable conditions, and pay at a rate lower than what men make for comparable work. Women take these jobs with the expectation that they will be a temporary and quick way to provide them with the means to fulfill their obligations to their parents, allow them to become up to date, and then to return home after a few years. Many, however, get stuck in these low-wage, export-service sector jobs for decades.<sup>25</sup> This trend is the result of the allure of material possessions that suck migrants into a cycle of earning and spending, only to remain for much longer than initially intended.

#### *The Service Industry Sector*

The service industry in Thailand is largely centered on tourism, though Thailand's image as a sex tourist destination is really what attracts visitors. Instead of working in a factory, women can choose to work as maids in private homes, maids in hotels, or servers in restaurants, but the big draw is working in any number of legitimate businesses that are really just fronts for sex services. Traditionally, prostitution in Thailand does not carry the social stigma that it does in many parts of the world. It is not uncommon for young Thai men to have their first sexual encounter with a sex worker. This attitude toward prostitution is why, during the Cold War, the U.S. military was able to contract with the Thai government to build up resorts where U.S. soldiers stationed in Southeast Asia could get some rest, relaxation, and companionship.

Thailand continues to be a well-publicized, world-renowned sex tourist destination. In *The Hedonist: World Vacation Guide For Sex Tourism*, a book specifically published to inform sex tourists about where to go, what to expect, and the "dos and don'ts" of sex tourism, Thailand is described as a place where

[Y]ou'll find [Thai girls] are sensuous, compassionate, and submissive companions. For the world's most experienced Sex Tourists, Thailand is always the place that is mentioned first as *simply the best*. . . . The typical female spends her first 17 years toiling 14 hours a day on the farm for no pay. . . . Like a lot of farm and village girls she has stars in her eyes. She finds herself with a choice of farm slave labor, or traveling with her girlfriends to the bright lights, pulsating line dances, and fascinating interaction with men

from around the world . . . men who can literally change her life, as well as her family's fortunes.<sup>26</sup>

Even though the official position of the Thai government is that prostitution does not exist because it is illegal, since prostitution is a lucrative business that brings in foreign currency, the government has little incentive to enforce its law. Corruption also ensures that enforcement of the law is quite lax. Commercial sex work is openly promoted and available through any number of legal enterprises, masquerading as massage parlors, nightclubs, and bars, serving customers on the streets of Bangkok and the beaches of Pattaya. Official statistics on the number of women in this industry would contradict the government's position on prostitution as an illegal occupation. In an effort to determine the volume of the sex trade industry in Thailand, Dr. Nitet Tinnakul conducted research from 1999 to 2002. He found that about 2.8 million people were sex workers, including 2 million women, 20,000 adult males, and 800,000 minors under the age of eighteen.<sup>27</sup>

Women enter the sex trade either by voluntarily seeking out prostitution, because it is viewed as a way to make a larger sum of money in a shorter amount of time, or, as is apparently more frequently the case, through networks that recruit women from rural areas.<sup>28</sup> Poverty in rural areas makes people in these areas susceptible to being drawn into the sex trade. One twenty-four year-old former call girl, for instance, indicated that at one point she wanted to quit but, "I couldn't. My parents had debts. If your kid makes money easily, you spend easily too—a refrigerator, a TV, which made me have to continue the job. . . . When I went home my neighbours saw me carrying a lot of stuff, and I felt they were jealous. So it was difficult to quit."<sup>29</sup> Of those in the sex industry, about 34 percent engaged in prostitution because they were unemployed, while the other 66 percent worked to supplement income from another job.<sup>30</sup> The allure of money, the prospect of a western husband, and the opportunity to express one's beauty is countered by debt bondage, disease, and abusive conditions.

Rural men also see prostitution as a money-maker. Increasingly, male relatives are acting as "brokers" to recruit their young female daughters and nieces into the sex industry. Males essentially pimp rural female relatives to urban sex shops, as many of the women who enter this type of work are directly recruited from rural villages.<sup>31</sup> The extent to which parents in rural areas may realize what the sex tourism industry involves may differ from their

traditional ideas about prostitution. That fathers and uncles sell their daughters and nieces into the industry indicates that traditional ideas about prostitution likely prevail in rural areas.

Already high and increasing rates of HIV + /AIDS in Thailand do not appear to discourage visitors. By 1989, the government recognized the need to address the health situation, not only because of the impact it was having on the health of its citizens, but also because of the effect it might have on its tourist industry and its overall economy. An AIDS awareness campaign was launched, directed at the commercial sex industry, in an effort to educate people about the risks of unprotected sex and to advocate condom use, which included providing free condoms and regular screening. The awareness campaign helped to increase the regular use of condoms to 98.7 percent, thereby aiding in reducing the spread of the disease from six in every one thousand people infected in 1989 to less than a 1 percent infection rate per one thousand people by 1999.<sup>32</sup> While these measures have proved effective, even by 1999 HIV prevalence remained higher for commercial sex workers, with about 7 percent of higher-end prostitutes and roughly 16 percent of lower-end workers infected with the disease, with rates running lower in urban areas and higher in rural areas.<sup>33</sup> Despite these rates, however, a steady stream of tourists flows to Thailand, accounting for about 6 percent of Thailand's GDP, with expected revenue of US\$10.7 billion<sup>34</sup> for 2007.<sup>35</sup>

### Conclusion

The cultural emphasis in Thailand on the duty of children to respect their parents is strong. In addition to repaying their filial obligations, migration gives children the means to become "up to date," as well as provides an environment for autonomy and independence. Peer pressure from other young girls who return to flaunt their newest purchases, as well as glamour and style that can only be acquired in urban beauty salons and shops, only encourages rural women to migrate.<sup>36</sup> Moving to urban areas also gives young women the opportunity to delay, and possibly avoid, arranged marriages,<sup>37</sup> with the added bonus of achieving a level of autonomy and independence unavailable to them in their villages.

Given its policies' ability to draw in FDI, the government has little incentive to consider the effectiveness of its laws, particularly as they affect women. Violence in the southern, Muslim-dominated provinces, sporadic seizures by the military of government control, and popular protests over government policy have made it even more difficult to cope with the negative consequences that industrialization and global interdependence have had on women in Thailand, including enduring sweatshop labor conditions, the objectification of sex trade workers, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Nevertheless, the quality of life, the purchasing power, and the standard of living have improved across the board for women in Thailand—but at what cost?

### NOTES TO PART II

1. Sinith Sittirak, *The Daughters of Development: Women in a Changing Environment* (London: Zed Books, 1998).

2. Handicraft work is done by both women and men, though there tends to be a division of labor in the types of goods made. For example, weaving and sewing are almost exclusively done by women, while men are more likely to build weaving looms and do metal craft work. The focus here is on handicrafts that give women opportunities to earn money in rural areas.

3. ThaiCraft, 2006, at <http://www.thaicraft.org/About.asp>.

4. Sakuri Yoshihide, "The Tasks of NGOs in Rural Development in Northeastern Thailand: The Debate on the Formation of Civil Society," p. 16 (paper presented at the 8th International Conference on Thai Studies, Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, 2002). All baht-to-U.S.-dollar conversions are based on the May 15, 2007, exchange rate of \$1US = baht 32.56. Bear in mind that purchasing power in Thailand differs from that in the United States.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

6. Thai Textile Museum, "The Importance of Textile Fabrics," 2007, at [http://www.thaitextilemuseum.com/English/Information\\_on\\_Thai\\_textiles/The\\_Importance\\_of\\_Textile\\_fabr.html](http://www.thaitextilemuseum.com/English/Information_on_Thai_textiles/The_Importance_of_Textile_fabr.html); Thai Textile Museum, "Information on Thai Textiles," 2007, at [http://www.thaitextilemuseum.com/English/Information\\_on\\_Thai-Textiles/A1\\_1\\_E/a1\\_1\\_e.html](http://www.thaitextilemuseum.com/English/Information_on_Thai-Textiles/A1_1_E/a1_1_e.html); and Thai Textile Museum, "Textiles in Thailand," 2007, at [http://www.thaitextilemuseum.com/English/Information\\_on-Thai-textiles/Textiles\\_in\\_Thailand/textiles\\_in\\_Thailand.html](http://www.thaitextilemuseum.com/English/Information_on-Thai-textiles/Textiles_in_Thailand/textiles_in_Thailand.html).

7. Rachel Humphreys, "Skilled Craftswomen or Cheap Labour? Craft-based Ngo projects as an alternative to female urban migration in northern Thailand," in *Gender and Technology*, ed. Caroline Sweetman (Oxford, UK: Oxfam GB [Great Britain], 1998); and Thai Textile Museum, "Information on Thai Textiles."

8. The profit available to artisans is determined by the amount of funding secured, coupled with the amount of overhead (which will always be less than a factory,

because NGOs are nonprofit) needed to run the NGO.

9. United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), *Gender and Development in Thailand*, sec. B, part 2, 2000, at <http://www.unifem-eseasia.org/resources/others/gendev/sectionb1.htm>; National Statistical Office (NSO)–Thailand, *Statistical Yearbook Thailand, 2004* (NSO: Bangkok, Thailand), at [http://web.nso.go.th/syb/syb2004/syb2004\\_eng.pdf](http://web.nso.go.th/syb/syb2004/syb2004_eng.pdf); and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Women's Right to a Political Voice in Thailand* (UNDP: Bangkok, Thailand, 2006).

10. Commercial sex workers are not limited to women, as there is without question a demand for men and children. The focus of this case study is limited to young women eighteen years and older.

11. UNDP Newsroom Press Release, “Women Lack Political Voice in Thailand,” March 29, 2006, at <http://content.undp.org/go/newsroom/march-2006/women-lack-political-voice-in-thailand.en?g11n.enc=UTF-8>.

12. National Statistical Office (NSO)–Thailand, “Gender Statistics,” 2005, sec. 4, at <http://web.nso.go.th/eng/stat/gender/gender.htm>.

13. UNDP, *Women's Right to a Political Voice*, p. 13.

14. Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Women in Thailand Country Briefing Paper* (Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 1998), p. 19.

15. UNIFEM, *Gender and Development*, sec. B, pt. 2.

16. Mary Beth Mills, “Contesting the Margins of Modernity: Women, Migration, and Consumption in Thailand,” *American Ethnologist* 24(1) (1997): p. 38; Humphreys, “Skilled Craftswomen”; Michael Clancy, “Sweating the Swoosh: Nike, The Globalization of Sneakers, and the Question of Sweatshop Labor” (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 2000), pp. 4–5.

17. Anne Clausen, “Female Labour Migration to Bangkok: Transforming Rural-Urban Interactions and Social Networks through Globalization,” *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* 17(3) (2002): p. 58.

18. Sally Theobald, “Gendered Bodies: Recruitment, Management, and Occupational Health in Northern Thailand's Electronics Factories,” *Women & Health* 35(4) (2002): p. 9.

19. Clausen, “Female Labour Migration,” pp. 65, 74.

20. ADB, *Women in Thailand*, p. 27.

21. Academics Studying Adidas, Nike, and Reebok,

“Nike in Thailand,” 2007, at <http://business.nmsu.edu>.

22. Theobald, “Gendered Bodies”; World Socialists Web Site (WSWS), “Thailand: 295 Workers Strike Nasa-wat Apparel Factory,” December 7, 2003, at <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/dec2003/thai-d17.shtml>; ThaiLabour Campaign, “Drastic change for global garment and textile industry? Seminar to address Multi-Fibre Agreement's impact on workers,” May 30, 2005, at <http://www.thailabour.org/wnews/050605gt.html>.

23. Theobald, “Gendered Bodies,” p. 16.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

25. ADB, *Women in Thailand*, pp. 26–27.

26. Brett Tate, *The Hedonist: World Vacation Guide for Sex Tourism* (Dallas, TX: TPB Publishing, 2004), p. 14.

27. “Prostitution: More Thais Selling Sex, Study Finds,” *The Nation: Bangkok's Independent Newspaper*, January 3, 2004.

28. Importing poor women from neighboring countries is also purported to be a means to meet demand. “Asia's sex trade is ‘slavery,’” BBC Online News, February 20, 2003, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2783655.stm>.

29. Quoted in C. Manopaiboon, et al, “Leaving Sex Work: Barriers, Facilitating Factors, and Consequences for Female Sex Workers in Northern Thailand,” *AIDS Care* 15(2) (2003): p. 43.

30. “Prostitution: More Thais Selling Sex,” *The Nation*.

31. Marjorie A. Muecke, “Mother Sold Food, Daughter Sells Her Body: The Cultural Continuity of Prostitution,” *Social Science and Medicine* 35(7) (1992); Mills, “Contesting the Margins,” p. 14.

32. Ministry of Public Health–Thailand, “Thailand Health Profile: 2001–2004,” 2005, p. 193, at <http://eng.moph.go.th/ContentDetails.php?intContentID=4668&strOrgID=001>.

33. Manopaiboon, “Leaving Sex Work,” p. 40.

34. Converted from \$13B Australian.

35. “Asia's \$10b. Tourist Bonanza,” *Brisbane Times*, May 11, 2007. Overall, there is an upward trend of international tourism to Thailand. In 2003, the SARS crisis and the start of the U.S.-Iraq conflict, and in 2005 the tsunami disaster, significantly affected the number of tourist arrivals for those years.

36. Mills, “Contesting the Margins,” p. 41.

37. Clausen, “Female Labour Migration.”

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## Sewing or Sex? Labor Migration in Thailand

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### THE STRUCTURE AND FOCUS OF THE CASE

This case begins with an introduction. Part I provides background information about Thailand, broken down into two sections: political and economic history, and social history. The latter section includes specific information about filial obligations, migration, the culture of beauty, and women's status in Thailand. Part II is organized around the opportunities available to rural women. One option is to remain in villages to work on farms and, in some cases, earn money through handicraft sales organized through nongovernmental organizations. With the constraints, expectations, and obligations placed on young women, however, increasing numbers migrate to urban areas within the country. Their options include continuing their education and moving on to professional careers or taking jobs in the export service industry. For the same reasons that these women migrate from rural to urban areas, they take jobs in factories or work as prostitutes.

### PART I: BACKGROUND

#### *Political & Economic History*

How did the Cold War impact Thailand?

In what ways has globalization influenced the

development of Thailand?

What choices did the government make in its efforts to promote development?

How have the government's policy decisions affected the people of Thailand?

What makes Thailand an attractive place for business investments?

#### *Social History*

What are filial obligations? How do they differ between boys and girls?

How have filial obligations contributed to an increase in internal migration?

How did the *corvée* labor system establish migration as a norm in Thailand?

How does *than samay*, or being "up to date" contrast with the traditional culture of beauty? How are young women affected by this difference?

In what ways are women at an economic disadvantage that generally makes them subordinate to men?

### PART II: WOMEN'S OPPORTUNITIES

What are the opposing views about how rapid industrialization has affected women's development?

Young women in rural areas of Thailand generally have a few options. What are these? Why do more women than not migrate?

#### *Agriculture and Handicrafts*

What benefits do nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) offer women in rural Thailand?

In what ways might NGOs actually work against women's development in rural Thailand?

### *Career or Job?*

What factors influence what field a young woman chooses? Why do more young women choose export service industry jobs over professional careers?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of the following: professional positions, factory jobs, commercial sex work?

Most countries have women working as prostitutes, regardless of whether it is a legal activity. Why is the government's official policy on prostitution what it is? Is the Thai government's position on prostitution a more realistic reflection on this activity?

### *Introduction to International Relations*

In addition to the general questions, students in introductory classes should be able to discuss the following:

How would you explain the situation in Thailand from each of the perspectives of realism, neoliberalism, and Marxism? Which theory makes the most sense in evaluating Thailand's situation?

How did the struggle for balance of power during the Cold War affect Thailand?

What transnational or global factors have influenced Thailand's policies, or vice versa?

Is globalization problematic?

What should the next generation of Thai leaders do? If this were your society, how would you address such problems? If you were choosing the next leader of Thailand, what policy issues would you consider the most significant?

Thailand has moved to the status of a newly industrialized country (NIC) but is not considered a developed country. What stands in the way of achieving this status?

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is a mixed blessing. How has FDI affected the country and its laborers?

The focus of media and activists regarding multinational corporations (MNCs) that outsource labor abroad tends to be on the conditions in factories that have come to be known as sweatshops. If overall development and the quality of life are steadily increasing in Thailand, is it fair for the media and activists to focus exclusively on human rights conditions in factories and overlook the fact that more people are better off for MNC investment?

### *Global Gender Courses*

In addition to the general questions, students in gender classes should be able to discuss the following:

What political, economic, and social factors influence the positions and roles of women?

How do government policies affect women's situations?

Why are women viewed to be "more well suited" to factory work than men?

What is globalization, and how does it affect Thai women?

Why is it more socially acceptable to work as a prostitute in Thailand?

If you were a Thai woman, why might you choose prostitution over a factory job?

What are the implications of the government's policy on prostitution?

Besides the health of its citizens, what other reasons does the Thai government have for its aggressive policy on combating the spread of AIDS/HIV?

In what ways is sex tourism a global issue?

What are the implications of the growing demand for commercial sex tourism?

Is sex work primarily exploitative of women, or can it be empowering for women?

Could greater government intervention on behalf of women's development change women's situation?

One problem women in Thailand suffer from is gaining sufficient political representation. What factors interfere with women's political development? How does this, in turn, affect the possibility of improving their economic and social situations?

The focus of media and activists regarding multinational corporations that outsource labor abroad tends to be on the conditions in factories that have come to be known as sweatshops. If overall development and the quality of life are steadily increasing in Thailand, is it fair for the media and activists to focus exclusively on human rights conditions in factories and overlook the fact that more people are better off for MNC investment?

### *International Political Economy*

Which economic theory best explains Thailand's situation?

What choices did the government make in its effort to promote rapid industrialization? What are the implications of these choices?

What difficulties does the government face in promoting economic development?

Thailand has moved to the status of a newly industrialized country, but is not considered a developed country. What stands in the way of achieving this status?

Foreign direct investment is a mixed blessing. How has FDI affected the country and its laborers?

The focus of media and activists regarding multinational corporations that outsource labor abroad tends to be on the conditions in factories that have

come to be known as sweatshops. If overall development and the quality of life are steadily increasing in Thailand, is it fair for the media and activists to focus exclusively on human rights conditions in factories and overlook the fact that more people are better off for MNC investment?

To what extent is the government in a position to pass and enforce laws regulating workers' pay and conditions?