

# Sex Tourism in Thailand

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## Introduction

A Lonely Planet global survey of 7500 travellers from 134 countries found Thailand is one of the top five tourist destinations in Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup> Thailand has been voted the most popular holiday destination for younger travellers and it ranks second behind Italy as a world wide favourite.<sup>2</sup> Tourist attractions in Thailand include the cultural sights of Bangkok, the resorts of Pattaya and Phuket, which can offer tourists tropical forest, dazzling beaches, coral reefs and well-known Thai cuisine.

However, Thailand has been involved with a kind of tourism called the international sex tourism. The relationship between tourism and sex can be described as “the seeking of romance as perhaps a precursor to sexual activities play as motivators for travel; the nature of the encounter and the role played by tourism as facilitators of romantic and sexual encounters”<sup>3</sup> Sex tourism is defined as “consisting of people from economically developed nations travelling to underdeveloped countries 'specifically to purchase the sexual services of local women [and men], it embraces a far broader range of people, activities and locations.”<sup>4</sup>

People travel for many reasons and sex is one of the main travel motivations and it is a major component of international travel to Southeast Asia especially Thailand.<sup>5</sup> The number of international tourist arrivals to Thailand is more male than female tourist. From January to September 2003 the number of international tourist arrivals was 8,832,478 visitors.<sup>6</sup> The statistics cannot be shown how much of the percentage constitutes tourists who come for sexual services. Nevertheless, “it the high male sex ratio is associated with sex tourism, then the trend is increasing

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<sup>1</sup> Chan, Y.M., “Forecasting Tourism: a sine wave time series regression approach”, *Journal of Travel Research Fall*, p. 58-60

mX newspaper, 15 January 2004, p. 2

<sup>3</sup> Baure, T. & McKercher. B. (eds), *Sex and Tourism: Journeys of Romance, Love, and Lust*, The Haworth Hospitality Press, New York, 2003, p. 5

<sup>4</sup> Enloe, C., *Bananas, Beaches & Bases: making feminist sense of international politics*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990, p. 36

<sup>5</sup> Hall, M., “Tourism Prostitution: The control and health implications of sex tourism in South-East Asia and Australia”, *Health and the international tourist*, Routledge, London, 1996, p.180

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.tat.or.th/stat/web/static\\_index.php](http://www.tat.or.th/stat/web/static_index.php)

rather than decreasing”<sup>7</sup>

This essay will consider the question, ‘why male travelers choose Thailand as a sex tour destination?’

## **Tourism and Sex Industry in Thailand**

When people travel away from home, they seek the unusual and the different. Some seek adventure, religious experience and cultural enrichment or want to get away from their everyday routines. Apart from seeking to view exciting natural scenery and visiting manifestations of exotic cultures, the tourists’ urge to experience novelty may include seeking out romantic and sexual opportunities that may not be available to them at home. This may occur by chance as in the case of the shipboard romance or more deliberately by design.

The destination may be an influential factor for travel. Tourism plays an important role to offer a liminal environment away from the constraints of home, which reduces inhibitions and provides increased opportunities for sex.<sup>8</sup> Thus, sexual activities such as honeymoons, the romantic weekends of couples, or of individuals joining a singles tour hoping to meet someone are all acceptable reasons to travel. In most cases, the relationship between tourism and sexual activity is either positive or innocuous. However, there is also a dark side if tourism and sexual activities focus on commercial sex tourism.

Tourism and the sex industry have been recognised as a component of the touristic attractiveness of several countries in Southeast Asia. The main reason was American and other troops stationed in this area in the sixties and seventies drove up the demand for prostitutes and helped to create a market after they had gone home with stories of exotic women.<sup>9</sup>

Sex tourism in Southeast Asia dates back at least as far as the Vietnam War when there was prostitution associated with the American military. Women mainly from the poorer provinces in the northeast and from the north of Thailand began to migrate to the areas outside American air bases, as well as to the urban centers, where soldiers enjoyed rest and recreation leave.<sup>10</sup> There were 20,000 prostitutes in 1957; by 1964, after the United States had established seven bases in Thailand,

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<sup>7</sup> Truong, T., *Sex, Money and Morality*, Zed Books Ltd, New Jersey, 1990, p. 173

<sup>8</sup> Baure, T. & McKercher, B. (eds), *Sex and Tourism: Journeys of Romance, Love, and Lust*, The Haworth Hospitality Press, New York, 2003, p. 10

<sup>9</sup> Kane, J., *Sold for Sex*, Arena Ashgate Publishing Limited, England, 1998, p. 6

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey, L.A., *Sex and Borders: Gender, national Identity and Prostitution Policy in Thailand*, University of Hawai'i Press, HI, 2003, p. xii

that number had skyrocketed to 400,000.<sup>11</sup> In 1967, the Thai government agreed to provide 'rest and recreation (R&R)' services to American servicemen during the Vietnam War, which the soldiers themselves called 'intercourse and intoxication (I&I)'.<sup>12</sup> Although, prostitution had existed in Thailand long before the country became a popular destination of sex tourism, it was only with the Vietnam War that the number of women involved became an issue of wide public concern. This was the real beginning of the extensive practice of prostitution in this country. Thailand began to be mentioned as a 'sexual paradise' since then.<sup>13</sup>

Economically, the Vietnam War provided for "[injecting] some \$16 million into the Thai economy annually. This was money that tourism would replace after the war was over."<sup>14</sup> When the American military forces pulled out of Vietnam in the early 1970s, many entertainment businesses saw tourism as an opportunity to expand. The growth of tourism in Asia during the 1970s and 1980s was a boom period for the sex industry. To meet the demand for prostitutes, new brothels and go-go bars sprang up rapidly. For instance, a survey in 1980 showed that the number of bars, clubs and disguised brothels in Bangkok alone had grown to 977. The number of girls in the city involved in prostitution including free-lancers was reckoned to be about 200,000.<sup>15</sup>

Prostitution in Thailand is promoted by word of mouth and through a variety of media throughout the developed countries. For instance, international tourism agencies often advertise their trips to Thailand with references to the "exotic" women of Thailand, "Thailand is a world full of extremes and the possibilities are unlimited...especially when it comes to girls"<sup>16</sup>, "you can get the feeling that taking a girl here is as easy as buying a package of cigarettes...little slaves who give real Thai warmth"<sup>17</sup>

Not only did international tourism agencies promote sex tours in Thailand through tourists, government tourism promotion also draws upon the sexualized image of Thai women to boost tourism numbers. Even in business magazines and advertisements proffered by official Thai organizations still use of sexual and

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<sup>11</sup> Gay, J., "The 'Patriotic Prostitute'", *The Progressive*, February 1985, p. 34

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 67

<sup>13</sup> Li, L. & Zhang, W., "Thailand: The dynamic growth of Thai tourism", *Tourism and Economic Development in Asia and Australasia*, Cassell Imprint, England, 1997, p. 288

<sup>14</sup> Rhodes, R., "Death in the Candy Store", *Rolling Stone*, November 28, 1991, p.66-67

<sup>15</sup> Shearer, A., *Thailand The Lotus Kingdom*, John Murry, London, 1989, p. 105

<sup>16</sup> Truong, T. cited in ISIS International Bulletin, *Sex, Money and Morality*, Zed Books Ltd, New Jersey, 1990, p. 178

<sup>17</sup> Truong, T. cited in ISIS International Bulletin, *Sex, Money and Morality*, Zed Books Ltd, New Jersey, 1990, p. 178

sexualized images to sell products is a worldwide phenomenon. Thai International Airline, for one is known to use female sexual allure in its advertising: 'Smooth as silk is a beautifully prepared meal served by a delicious hostess', "Some say it's our beautiful wide-bodied DC-10s that cause so many heads to turn at airports throughout the world. We think our beautiful slim-bodied hostesses have a lot to do with it"<sup>18</sup>

In recent years, media exposure about sex tourism with usually focusing on tourism prostitution in Thailand and the sex tourism industry has been obscured in the public by the growing awareness of number of women from Thailand working in the prostitution industry. Although, sex is not sold everywhere in Thailand, it is available in enough places and enough kinds of places at a low price to confirm that Thailand is recognized as the 'sex capital of the east'.<sup>19</sup> Not all travelers to Thailand are sex tourists, but men do travel to Thailand specifically for the purpose of sex. This kind of group is difficult to identify since 'sex tours' are officially banned by tourist organizations.<sup>20</sup>

The following questions deserve to be asked: why they do come to Thailand, what they are looking for and why they think they can find it in Thailand and not in their own country. One major reason why male tourists choose Thailand as a sex destination is because they believe it is easily available in Thailand with its reputation in this respect, or to put it another way it has been stigmatized. The reality breeds the image and the image, in turn, has helped to breed the reality. Just as other destinations have acquired certain positive associations, for instance, Paris and romantic love, it could be argued that Thailand's association is of a more sordid kind.

It would appear that there are several kinds of sex tourists. Some come for an orgiastic few days. Some come regularly to see a particular woman they have established a relationship with. Others are in search of love or something exotic. Tourists visit entertainment places which provide sexual services are not necessarily sex tourists. Nevertheless, there is also a culture amongst some

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<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey, L.A., *Sex and Borders: Gender, national Identity and Prostitution Policy in Thailand*, University of Hawai'i Press, HI, 2003, p.78 cited in Truong, T., *Sex, Mondy and Morality*, Zed Books Ltd, New Jersey, 1990, p. 179

<sup>19</sup> Li, L. & Zhang, W., "Thailand: The dynamic growth of Thai tourism", *Tourism and Economic Development in Asia and Australasia*, Cassell Imprint, England, 1997, p. 288

<sup>20</sup> Hall, M. cited in Bangkok Post, 18 August 1989, p. 24, "Tourism Prostitution: The control and health implications of sex tourism in South-East Asia and Australia", *Health and the international tourist*, Routledge, London, 1996, p.189

western countries of feeling less inhibited and being allowed more fun when they travel overseas, so they act more recklessly.

The relationship between tourists and prostitutes can be defined as “open-ended” relationship, many men search for something more than sex.<sup>21</sup> “Western men need more than sexual services from Thai sex workers. They look for loving care, sincerity and honesty, which are not part of this power game and which they certainly do not expect in their home countries. The blame is again placed on the Thai women, who dare to make them realize the reality of the prostitution business.”<sup>22</sup>

The relationship between traveler and host in a tourist country is a factor. “The social relations of the tourist focused on the different class positions of those who could be tourists and those who are only in a position to serve the tourist”<sup>23</sup> Also the relationship between the sex tourist and the sex industry is so complex. “These men find themselves not only with untold economic power, they also find themselves 'spoilt for choice'.”<sup>24</sup> This makes assumptions about the relationship between the sex tourist and prostitute in a recognition that the reality of sex tourism lies somewhere in between.<sup>25</sup>

The other reason is woman's status in Thailand has been traditionally low. This can be seen from the view of religion. Buddhism is the official state religion in Thailand. The interpretation of Buddhist morality does not carry the same moral weight for Thai men as Thai women.<sup>26</sup> For example, women cannot be ordained as monks because it is related to female sexual misbehavior but not with male sexual behavior.<sup>27</sup> Also women stand in a different relation to the nation than do men in a social relation of gender power in Thai society.<sup>28</sup> “

In Thailand, women are supposed to be chaste until marriage and monogamous afterward. Men are supposed to be promiscuous.<sup>29</sup> For instance, A Royal Proclamation in The law of Three Seals stated that “a good woman should not let more than one man gain access to her body”<sup>30</sup> In Thai society, good women

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<sup>21</sup> Thorbek, S. & Pattanaik, B. (eds), *Transnational Prostitution: Changing Patterns in a Global Context*, Zed Books, NY., 2002, p. 2

<sup>22</sup> Seabrook, J., *Travels In The Skin Trade*, Pluto Press, USA, 1996, p.viii

<sup>23</sup> Kinnaird, V. & Hall, D. (eds), *Tourism A Gender Analysis*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, England, 1994, p. 12

<sup>24</sup> O'Connell, J., & Sanchez, J., *Child Prostitution and Sex tourism Thailand*, ECPAT, UK., 1994, p. 5

<sup>25</sup> Douglas, N. & Douglas N. (eds), *Special interest tourism*, John Wiley & Sons, Qld, 2001, p.394

<sup>26</sup> Montgomery, H., *Modern Babylon?: Prostituting Children in Thailand*, Berghahn Books, 2001, USA, p. 112

<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey, L.A., *Sex and Borders: Gender, national Identity and Prostitution Policy in Thailand*. University of Hawai'i Press, HI, 2003, p. xi

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. xxi

<sup>29</sup> *Newsweek*, 20 July, 1992, p. 50

<sup>30</sup> Montgomery, H., *Modern Babylon?: Prostituting Children in Thailand*, Berghahn Books, 2001, USA, p. 113

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21. *Newsweek*, 20 July, 1992 O'Connell, J., & Sanchez, J., *Child Prostitution and Sex tourism Thailand*, ECPAT, UK., 1994
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23. Rhodes, R., "Death in the Candy Store", *Rolling Stone*, November 23, 1991
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31. *The Economist*, 8 February, 1992
32. *The Nation*, 1 November, 1993
33. Thorbek, S. & Pattanaik, B. (eds), *Transnational Prostitution: Changing Patterns in a Global Context*, Zed Books, NY., 2002
34. Totman, R., *The Third Sex: Kathoey – Thailand's Ladyboys*, Souvenir Pree, London, 2003
35. Tourism Authority of Thailand [[http://www.tat.or.th/stat/web/static\\_index.php](http://www.tat.or.th/stat/web/static_index.php)]
36. Truong, T. cited in ISIS International Bulletin, *Sex, Money and Morality*, Zed Books Ltd, New Jersey, 1990
37. Truong. T., *Sex, Mondy and Morality*, Zed Books Ltd, New Jersey, 1990
38. VanLandingham, M. J.( et al), "Sexual Activity Among Never-Married Men in Northern Thailand," *Demography*, Volume 30, Number 3, August 1993

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12. Handley, P., "Catch if catch can," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 February, 1992
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17. Kinnaird, V. & Hall, D. (eds), *Tourism A Gender Analysis*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, England, 1994

would do so 'depending on who they met' and the typed of partner likely to be chosen included bar girls (14 per cent).<sup>69</sup>

The issue of poverty has been used as a basic reason to push women into sex trade. However, many of these women see the sex industry as an alternative economic activity. With the economic development in the 1970s, Thai women migrated to Bangkok where there were only limited opportunities to join the industrial workforce and sex tourism provided them with important economic incentives.<sup>70</sup> Not only the Thai government but also other nations and organizations are concerned about sex tourism. National laws have begun to develop and a sex tourist can be prosecuted for participating in overseas sexual exploitation.

Organizations have produced travel industry information about sex tourism and travel agents in many countries support ending sex tourism. This kind of cooperative effort, plus strong laws and social programs are what is required to stop the forced prostitution of women into the sex tourism industry. In the case of Thailand, the country needs some action to take place in other well-known destinations for international sex tourist. Policies, plans and laws have been developed to discourage the sex industry and change the sexual paradise image of the country. Moreover, many projects have been established which try to rehabilitate and train women from the sex industry to a new lifestyle and focus on the potential victims.

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<sup>69</sup> Hall, M., "Tourism Prostitution: The control and health implications of sex tourism in South-East Asia and Australia", *Health and the international tourist*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 189

<sup>70</sup> Qu, H. & Zhang, H, *Tourism And economic Development in Asia and Australasia*, Cassell Imprint, England, 1997, p. 299

commercially organized tours. For instance, German and Japanese tourists travel by "the sex package tour" mainly to buy sex on short trips to Bangkok.<sup>62</sup>

Although, the tourism industry became the largest source of foreign exchange for Thailand's economy with the rapid growing number of international visitors to Thailand since the 1980s, the majority of customers patronizing prostitutes are still party of a local clientele rather than foreign tourists.<sup>63</sup> The Tourist sex industry represents only about 5 per cent of contact between customer and sex worker in Thailand, and 95 per cent, or thereabouts is confined to Thai nationals.<sup>64</sup>

A survey of military conscripts from the north of Thailand yielded that "73% of them lost their virginity with a prostitute and 97% regularly visit prostitutes."<sup>65</sup> "[a]mong the respondents who have ever patronized prostitutes, the soldiers are the most likely to have visited a prostitute recently: 81% respond that they have visited a prostitute within the past six months."<sup>66</sup> Certainly, prostitutes play a large part in forming the sexual identity of young Thai males. The title 'Prostitutes Are Better Than Lovers' is a comment on the general acceptability of single Thai men visiting prostitutes.<sup>67</sup>

One of studies show that "the majority of Thai men have their first sexual experience with a prostitute, the act is often a part of high school and university hazing rituals and that 95% of all men over 21 have slept with a prostitute"<sup>68</sup> However, it could be argued that the cause of the increase of prostitution is tourists because the country promote the tourism industry to earn foreign currencies. One of the tourist attractions is sexual service and the number of prostitutes has risen dramatically by the number of tourists each year.

In a sample of a study of planned sexual behavior of young Australian who were visiting to Thailand without a spouse or partner, only 34 per cent said they had no plans to have sex, while 57 per cent said they would 'definitely' have sex or

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<sup>62</sup> Cohen, E., *Thai Tourism: Hill Tribes, Islands and Open-Ended Prostitution*, White Lotus Press, Thailand, 1996, p. 252

<sup>63</sup> Jeffrey, L.A., *Sex and Borders: Gender, national Identity and Prostitution Policy in Thailand*. University of Hawai'i Press, HI, 2003, p 77

<sup>64</sup> Cummings, J., *Thailand*, Lonely Planet Publications, London, 1999, p. 106

<sup>65</sup> *The Economist*, 8 February, 1992, p. 33

<sup>66</sup> VanLandingham, M. J. ( et al), "Sexual Activity Among Never-Married Men in Northern Thailand," *Demography*, Volume 30, Number 3, August 1993, p. 305

<sup>67</sup> Jackson, P.A. & Cook. N.M. (eds), "Prostitutes Are Better Than Lovers", *Wives Views on the Extramarital Sexual Behaviour of Thai Men*, Silkwoon, Thailand, 1999

<sup>68</sup> Handley, P., "Catch if catch can," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 February, 1992, p. 29

countryside seeking work in the sex industry. For example, in 1980 the number of women working in prostitution was estimated at 500,000. By the early 1990s that number had reached more than two million.<sup>54</sup>

Sex tourism has been a major income generator for Thailand. For instance, during the Vietnam War, the World Bank recommended that Thailand pursue mass tourism as an economic strategy and the economic initiative consequent on the bank's report led to what is routinely described today as a \$4 billion a year business involving fraternal relationships among airlines, tours, operators and the masters of the sex industry<sup>55</sup> and between 1985 and 1990, earnings from tourism increased by 50 per cent, and it remains one of the country's major earners of foreign exchange.<sup>56</sup> It can be described that "sex tourism must be recognized as first and foremost a form of economic exploitation"<sup>57</sup>

Yet prostitution is not only illegal but it is also considered shameful to promote the country as a destination for sex tourists. Sex tourism has damaged Thailand's image. It has made Thailand infamous as "the world's biggest brothel".<sup>58</sup> However, prostitution has become an industry rather than a service. Prostitution in Thailand has developed into a lucrative business that influences employment and national income and contributes significantly to the region's economic growth.

Since the international tourism is a part of economic development, the Thai government promoted sexual services to tourists to earn foreign exchange and job creation.<sup>59</sup> The economic benefit of sex tourism has provided foreign exchange and large profits for local entrepreneurs, travel companies, tourist and leisure companies such as hotels chains and restaurants. Estimates of percentage of the gross national product from sex workers range from 2 per cent to 14 per cent.<sup>60</sup> From the perspective of political economy, sex tourism may be regarded as "a result of shifts in the international division of labour within a globalized economy and the development of consumerism in Asian countries of which tourism is a major constituent."<sup>61</sup> The sex industry has changed from traditional brothels to

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<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey, L.A., *Sex and Borders: Gender, national Identity and Prostitution Policy in Thailand*, University of Hawai'i Press, HI, 2003, p. 78

<sup>55</sup> *The Nation*, 1 November, 1993, p. 496

<sup>56</sup> Hall, M., "Tourism Prostitution: The control and health implications of sex tourism in South-East Asia and Australia", *Health and the international tourist*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 184

<sup>57</sup> Ryan, C. & Hall, M. cited in O'Connell Davidson Julia, *Sex Tourism: Marginal people and Liminalities*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 49

<sup>58</sup> Jeffrey, L.A., *Sex and Borders: Gender, national Identity and Prostitution Policy in Thailand*, University of Hawai'i Press, HI, 2003, p. x

<sup>59</sup> Kinnaird, V. & Hall, D.(eds.), *Tourism A Gender Analysis*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, England, 1994, p. 155

<sup>60</sup> Totman, R., *The Third Sex: Kathoey – Thailand's Ladyboys*, Souvenir Press, London, 2003, p. 102

<sup>61</sup> Ryan, C. & Hall, M., *Sex Tourism: Marginal people and liminalities*, Routledge, London, 2001 p. 137

countryside to Bangkok to find a job and some of them get into prostitution because it offers increased income opportunities compared to other occupations.<sup>51</sup>

Nonetheless, poverty is not the only factor that motivates girls to offer their sexual services. There are multiple factors involved. Some girls leave their families because of personal tension and conflicts. Other girls want a better lifestyle, better education, a better opportunity in life, or they seek a way to support their families. Some women become prostitutes after working in other jobs and finding that the wages are too low to live on.

The basic needs and wants seem so difficult with limited alternatives. So prostitution becomes the avenue to quick revenues and more decent lifestyle. In 1980-1995, only 10% of girls who voluntarily entered into prostitution and 90% of prostitutes were tricked into the sex trade but from 1995-present about 30% of girls had the explicit intention of working in sex services.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

The sex industry in Thailand first developed during the 1960s. It was popularized by the "R&R" [rest and recreation] vacations of American troops. After the war Thailand became an increasingly attractive destination of sex tourism. It still exists because economic opportunity operates on the law of supply and demand and men are willing to pay for sexual services. Whether foreign or local, men are willing to use women to satisfy their sexual needs in Thailand to a degree other countries might consider remarkable.

In turn this has become a part of Tourism in Thailand as well. This then feeds the spiral of activity. Even though working in the sex industry provides one of the few better paid opportunities for women, whose only other choice would be to work in factories. Nevertheless, women working in bars and brothels need to hand over approximately half of their earning to bar owners and managers.<sup>53</sup> Most of these women have had little education and no occupational train. Thus, prostitution could be one of the better-paid options for women, even if the conditions of work are often inhumane. However, some of them still find they can earn much money and enjoy better work conditions than in other workplaces. As the demand for sexual services in the tourism industry continues to grow so too does the supply of women from the

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<sup>51</sup> Ard-am, O. & Sethaput, C., *Child Prostitution in Thailand*, Mahidol University, Thailand, 1996, p. 45

<sup>52</sup> Sorajjakool, S., *Child Prostitution in Thailand: Listening to Rahab*, The Haworth Press Inc., N.Y., 2003, p. 19

<sup>53</sup> Jeffrey, L.A., *Sex and Borders: Gender, national Identity and Prostitution Policy in Thailand*, University of Hawai'i Press, HI, 2003, p. 79

Thus, the incredible rate of prostitution in Thailand is cultural. A standard definition of prostitution is as "the exchange of sexual services for material gain."<sup>42</sup> Thai men think it is their right to have cheap sex and there are enough poor Thai women to make it possible.<sup>43</sup> However, prostitutes are willing to work with tourists than locals. This can be explained on the grounds that "the women working with tourists are in many ways the 'elite' among the prostitutes: they earn significantly more than those working with Thais, enjoy greater independence, and are rarely controlled by pimps or pushed into prostitution against their will."<sup>44</sup>

It can be seen that poverty is an important factor in making prostitution an attractive alternative lifestyle. Some poor families sell their children into prostitution. "One study of 1000 Bangkok massage girls found that 70% came from farming families"<sup>45</sup> For example, there is a study of three villages in the North of Thailand where the researchers set out to discover who sold their children and why. They saw their neighbors send their children to Bangkok and the only consequences they saw were that their neighbors then acquired new houses, goods for the household, television sets, videos, motorbikes.<sup>46</sup>

The cycle of poverty for poor families in Thailand probably started in 1957 with the initiation of a strategic plan for national development. It was a change from agriculture toward industrialization.<sup>47</sup> Thailand adopted economic policies and these new policies have destroyed the diversity and integrity of the local economies.<sup>48</sup> The gap between the rich and the poor was expanded. The export industries continued to grow but the impoverishment of the countryside continued to deepen in the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, rural poverty was three times greater than urban poverty in the 1970s, it was five times greater in the 1980s and it affected directly to women in the rural agricultural areas because according to the patriarchal structures in Thai society, the dutiful daughters need to provide for the basic needs of family members and family income.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, more women than men migrated from the

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<sup>42</sup> Jeffrey, L.A., *Sex and Borders: Gender, national Identity and Prostitution Policy in Thailand*, University of Hawai'i Press, HI, 2003, p. xv

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>44</sup> Kinnaird, V. & Hall, D.(eds.), *Tourism A Gender Analysis*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, England, 1994, p. 154

<sup>45</sup> Rhodes, R., "Death in the Candy Store," *Rolling Stone*, November 28, 1991, p. 69

<sup>46</sup> Seabrook, J., *Travels In The Skin Trade*, Pluto Press, USA, 1996, p. 75

<sup>47</sup> Kaewthep, K., *Wipak Tun Niyom Thai*, Chulalongkorn Book Center, Bangkok 1999, p. 14

<sup>48</sup> Ard-am, O. & Sethaput, C., *Child Prostitution in Thailand*, Mahidol University, Thailand, 1994. p. 44

<sup>49</sup> Jeffrey, L.A., *Sex and Borders: Gender, national Identity and Prostitution Policy in Thailand*, University of Hawai'i Press, HI, 2003, p. xii

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. xii

are expected to remain virgins until marriage. Most Thai people believe "virginity before marriage is the most important value of a "decent" girl"<sup>31</sup>

According to Montgomery, a woman should be virgin before marriage and afterwards should stay with her marriage partner is the ideal, however, there are no prohibitions on a man.<sup>32</sup> For instance, a research from Ramathibodi Hospital's Mental Health Science Department states that it is common for Thai men for having second or third wives if they could afford it.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the wives are expected to feel dutiful and grateful for their husbands to make them the legal wives.<sup>34</sup>

Double standards still prevail in attitudes to men and women. Most Thai people believe that men are mischievous. Women are categorized as 'good girls' or 'bad girls'.<sup>35</sup> Sex is seen as something that men have a right to, at will and according to their own rules. Women are simply to provide the opportunity for men to take their pleasure, even married women. For example, a married Thai woman said that she gave her husband money to go out to a brothel and all her friends did the same.<sup>36</sup> A survey of both sexes in 1990 revealed that "80% of males and 74% of the females responded that it was natural for men to pursue sex at every opportunity"<sup>37</sup>

While the foreign aspect of prostitution in Thailand may garner the most attention and money, most of the customers, condescending the cheapest establishments are native "[a]ccording to reliable surveys of sexual behaviour, every day at least 450,000 Thai men visit prostitutes."<sup>38</sup> The Thai government estimates that over 90% of Thai men have at one time or another time visited prostitutes.<sup>39</sup> The population in Thailand is estimated to be 63,430,000 of which 21,819,445 are male aged between 15-64 years.<sup>40</sup> Several studies show that 50 per cent of Thai men have sex before 18 years and most of them have their first sexual experience with a sex worker.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Skrobaneck, S., *Strategies Against Prostitution: The case of Thailand*, Foundation for Women, Bangkok, 1993, p. 15

<sup>32</sup> Montgomery, H., *Modern Babylon?: Prostituting Children in Thailand*, Berghahn Books, 2001, USA, p. 113

<sup>33</sup> Sorajjakool, S., *Child Prostitution in Thailand: Listening to Rahab*, The Haworth Press Inc., N.Y., 2003, p. 47

<sup>34</sup> Montgomery, H., *Modern Babylon?: Prostituting Children in Thailand*, Berghahn Books, 2001, USA, p. 113

<sup>35</sup> Weitzer, R. (ed.), *Sex for Sale*, Routledge, London, p.7

<sup>36</sup> Montgomery, H., *Modern Babylon?: Prostituting Children in Thailand*, Berghahn Books, 2001, USA, p. 116

<sup>37</sup> VanLandingham, M. J. (et al), "Sexual Activity Among Never-Married Men in Northern Thailand," *Demography*, Volume 30, Number 3, August 1993, p. 298-9

<sup>38</sup> Erlanger, S., "A plague awaits," *The New York Times Magazine*, 14 July, 1991, p. 26

<sup>39</sup> Montgomery, H., *Modern Babylon?: Prostituting Children in Thailand*, Berghahn Books, USA 2001, p. 114

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.boi.go.th/thai/thailand/>

<sup>41</sup> Ard-am, O. & Sethaput, C., *Child Prostitution in Thailand*, Mahidol University, Thailand, 1994, p. 51