

Chapter 3

Thai Sex Industry: Its Economic, Cultural and Social Context

This chapter explores economic, social and cultural factors that led to develop Thai commercial sex service into a sex industry. It is well known that the main reason women enter into the commercial sex sector is poverty and poor educational background especially in the developing countries. Also, social and cultural values, such as gender roles and morality, should be other reasons why commercial sex services flourish openly or in secret in each society. Since the government must have an enforcement of the social policy and actions towards the commercial sex sector has played an important role to stop or encourage the business.

In Thailand, the commercial sex sector dated back to the reign of King Rama I (1782-1809) (Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994: 2-3). It cannot be denied that Thailand is known for its great variety of commercial sex services and a huge number of commercial sex workers (CSWs) both inside and outside of the country, today. From a foreigners' point of view, Thai society seems to accept the buying and selling of commercial sex services. Both Truong, Thanh-Dam, and Boonchalaksi and Guest point out in their study that there are three major factors that have encouraged the Thai sex industry especially during in the last three decades: gender roles, economic growth and tourism. This chapter examines how these three factors encourage the Thai sex industry by means of pushing rural poor girls into the sector. Moreover, it examines how the Thai government has treated the issue at every stage of its development. This chapter attempts to provide an overview of the Thai sex industry for well understanding the situations of hostesses working at the Thaniya

entertainment area, as will be described in Chapter 4 and 5.

3.1 Evolution of Tourism-oriented Sex Industry

3.1.1 The Vietnam War: the new dimension to Thai tourism

The Thai tourist-oriented sex industry's origins go back to the Vietnam War. There were seven US air force bases in the country. The number of US soldiers stationed in Thai bases was 25,000 in 1966, and later peaked at 48,000 (Suehiro 1996: 57). Under the circumstances, in 1967, the Thai government and the US military had an agreement called the R & R (Rest and Recreation leave) treaty where US soldiers that stayed in the Vietnam fronts were welcomed to come to Thailand for rest and recreation. Pattaya, which used to be a small fishing village, was selected as an R & R center for the US soldiers because Pattaya was close to U-ta-pa Air Force Base. Pattaya soon became a popular resort among US soldiers. US soldiers reportedly spent more than 5 million US dollars in 1967 and the amount skyrocketed to 20 million US dollars in 1970 (Truong 1993: 298).

The arrival of US soldiers during the war changed the tourist image of Thailand from the culturally exotic Orient to a paradise for sexual and recreational activities (Cohen 1996: 2). The reaction of the Thai entertainment business for R & R was remarkable. The Thai government settled the Entertainment Place Act in 1966 only a year before the R & R treaty. The aim of the act was to legitimize the operation of entertainment houses that were targeting US soldiers as customers. Thai tourism progressed dramatically thanks to large-scale investment flows supported by the government. It grew to become one of the main industries of

Thailand during the Vietnam War and kept progressing afterwards (Truong 1993: 299).

During R & R visits, a new dimension to Thai tourism was constructed: tourist-oriented commercial sex services. There were reportedly over 20,000 entertainment houses including bars, nightclubs, tea-houses and brothels in 1974. In a 1978 survey, there were more than 1,100 entertainment places just in Bangkok (Truong 1993: 299).

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) was established in 1972, aimed to encourage more investment flow to the tourism. As Table 3.1 shows, the number of foreign tourists considerably increased over ten-fold over a fifteen-year period: 81,340 in 1960 to 1,180,075 in 1975. Moreover, the number increased by about 90 times from 1960 to 1997. The revenue from tourism exceeded a ten-fold increase over a ten-year period: 196 million baht in 1960 to 2,175 million baht in 1970. The revenue from the tourism surprisingly grew over one thousand times between 1960 and 1997.

Table 3.1 Tourism trend: selected years between 1960-1997

Year	Number of tourist arrivals	Revenue from tourism (million Baht)
1960	81,340	196
1965	225,025	506
1970	628,671	2,175
1975	1,180,075	4,538
1980	1,858,801	17,765
1985	2,438,270	31,768
1990	5,298,860	110,572
1995	6,951,566	190,765
1997	7,293,957	240,000

Source : Tourism Authority of Thailand, *Annual Statistical Report*. Cited in *Thailand in Figures 4th Edition 1997-1998*, Alpha Research Co.,Ltd. 1997:427.

The foreign currency income earned from tourism in 1982 first surpassed that of rice, which had been the most profitable export of the country until the year. Table 3.2-1 and 3.2-2 show how Thai tourism is an important industry for the country, and has contributed to develop the Thai economy. These figures really support Bishop and Robinson's statement, "In recent years, international tourism has become an increasingly influential factor in the Thai economy" (1998: 93).

Table 3.2-1 Five largest items of foreign currency earnings-1

	1975	1980	1981	1982	1984	1985
1	Rice	Rice	Rice	Tourism	Tourism	Tourism
2	Maize	Tourism	Tourism	Rice	Rice	Textile
3	Sugar	Tapioca	Tapioca	Tapioca	Textile	Work overseas
4	Tourism	Rubber	Textile	Textile	Tapioca	Rice
5	Tapioca	Tin	Rubber	Sugar	Work overseas	Tapioca

Source: TAT, Bank of Thailand, quoted in Wun'gaeo, 1990.

Table 3.2-2 Five largest items of foreign currency earnings -2

	1990	1991	1992	1993
1	Tourism	Textile	Tourism	Tourism
2	Textile	Tourism	Textile	Textile
3	Computer/parts	Computer/parts	Computer/parts	Computer/parts
4	Rice	Rice	Precious stone	Precious stone
5	Rubber	Prawn	Rice	Plastic products

Source: JCCB, 1995: 115.

3.1.2 Sex tours

In the second half of the 1970s, tour operators based in Japan and Western European countries promoted “sex package tours” to Thailand, and the market flourished until the early 1980s (Truong 1993: 322, Cohen 1996: 269).

Truong collected some tourist advertisements stressing sex entertainment as follows;

Thai women as “slim, sun-burnt and sweet... masters of the art of making love by nature” (a Swiss tour operator).

Thailand is a country of full of chances, in special “love”... Our operators arrange a tour for you with reasonable price, of course, including erotic fun (a West Germany tour operator).

It has become a habit that one of the nice-looking daughters goes into the business in order to earn money for the poor family... you ...get the feeling that taking a girl here is easy as buying a package of cigarettes... . Little slaves will give real Thai warmth (a Dutch tour operator).

(1993: 324-5)

In addition, the government’s supportive attitude towards tourist-oriented commercial sex helped Thai tourism to flourish considerably (Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994: 16-7). In 1980, the then Deputy-Prime Minister, Royanastein Boonchoo, made a speech at a conference of provincial governors in Thailand as follows;

Within the next two years we need money. Therefore, I ask all governors to consider the natural scenery in your provinces, together with some forms of entertainment that some of you might consider disgusting and shameful because we have to consider the jobs that will be created. Business in the forms of entertainment should not be prohibited if only because you are morally fastidious. Yet explicit obscenities that may lead to damaging moral consequence should be avoided within a reasonable limit. We must do this because we have to consider the jobs that will be created (Business in Thailand, November 1981: 44 cited in Truong 1993: 327).

This kind of statement was often made by both central and local governors. The TAT has played an important role to implement the government policy concerning tourism. The TAT has carried out propaganda on a large scale: “Thailand – the Most Exotic Country in Asia” in 1972, “Visit Thailand Year” in 1987 and “Amazing Thailand Campaign” in 1998. At every stage, authorities’ supportive attitudes towards the sex industry have been reflected, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. Hotels, restaurants, and tour companies were managed by governmental financial support (Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994: 17).

These promotions were successful. Thailand has become one of the most popular destinations worldwide among male tourists who are expecting exotic and sexual experience. Table 3.3 shows how Thailand has been attracting male tourists much more than female tourists so far. Moreover, the TAT presents that 72.82 percent of all foreign arrivals were tourists in 1980 and increased to 91.05 percent in 1989. On the contrary, percentage of foreign arrivals for business purpose was only 9.3 percent in 1980 and then declined to 6.5 percent in 1989 (TAT, Annual Statistical Report 1980: 20, 1989: 26).

Table 3.3 Percentage distribution of tourists by sex

Year	Male (percent)	Female(percent)
1976	66.72	32.38
1977	66.02	33.98
1978	66.76	33.24
1979	69.21	30.39
1980	71.13	28.87
1981	69.20	30.80
1982	70.51	29.49
1983	70.65	29.35
1984	71.32	28.68
1985	71.66	28.34
1986	67.90	32.10
1987	65.77	34.23
1988	65.76	34.24
1989	65.93	34.07
1990	63.79	36.21
1991	65.47	34.53
1992	65.21	34.79
1993	64.12	35.88
1994	62.21	37.79
1995	62.31	37.69
1996	61.93	38.07
1997	62.06	37.94

Source : Tourism Authority of Thailand, Annual Statistical Report

According to Cohen's in-depth interview with women working in the sex industry, they think prostitution for foreigners is the most successful field among the other various kinds of services for Thais. They say prostitution for foreigners enables them to earn significantly more than those working with Thais. Prostitutes are less controlled by pimps or pushed into prostitution against their will compared to establishments for local men. Prostitutes working for foreigners tend to be respected as

'elite' of all kinds of prostitutes (Cohen 1996: 253). While this may sound exaggerated, it can be true in a sense with in the terms of gathering wealth. If a prostitute was picked up or rented up by a well-to-do male foreigner, it may be possible for her to go to a luxurious resort, stay at a luxurious hotel room, eat dinner at an expensive restaurant and receive a lot of gifts such as jewelry, clothing, and of course, a considerable sum of money (ibid. : 275-6).

3.2 Economic Impact on the Thai Sex Industry

3.2.1 Rural-to-urban migrants into the commercial sex sector

Two surveys regarding women working at massage parlors were conducted in 1980 and 1992. The former one was conducted by Dr. Phongpaichit of Chulalongkorn University, and the latter one was done by Dr. Boonchalaksi and Dr. Guest of Mahidol University. Both surveys were conducted through in-depth interviews with around fifty women working at massage parlors in Bangkok. The two surveys hence are based on almost the same conditions except the difference in time. Their survey results shown in Table 3.4 – 3.6 clearly indicate that many masseuses come from poor regions in order to work for their poor families and have only a primary school background.

a) *Birth place*

Table 3.4-1 Birth place (Phongpaichit)

Region of birth place	Percentage (N=50)
Central Plain	20.0
North-east	26.0
North	48.0
South	2.0

(1982: 12)

Table 3.4-2 Birth place (Boonchalaksi and Guest)

Region of birth place	Percentage (two sectors)
Central Plain, South	20.0
Northeast	20.0
Northern	60.0

(1994: 58)

Both results show that a high percentage of masseuses are from the North. Boonchalaksi and Guest estimate that the reason for the low percentage of the Northeast is partly because the Northern women are popular among customers due to the general reputation that women in the region are the most beautiful, and partly because the Northeast women are more popular in a different sector: beer bars and go-go bars (1994: 58-9).

b) Reasons for entering the sex industry

Table 3.5-1 Reasons for entering sex industry (Phongpaichit)

Reasons	Percentage (N=49)
Family's poverty	85
Need income after husband's separation	5
No work at home, bad rice harvest	5
Want to leave husband and need income	5

(1982: 14)

Table 3.5-2 Reasons for entering sex industry (Boonchalaksi and Guest)

Reasons	Percentage (N=54)
Poor parent	50.0
Help siblings	14.8
Raise child	1.9
Obtain good income	24.1
Other	9.2

(1994: 72)

All the masseuses that Phongpaichit group interviewed answered that the reason of their entry into sex services was linked with poverty. Even in 1992's survey by Boonchalaksi's group, the result shows that 64.8 percent of masseuses were working for supporting their families. 46 of 50 masseuses Phongpaichit interviewed sent some money back to their homes, and moreover, 44 of 46 women who remitted made a regular remittance (1982: 23). Boonchalaksi's interview shared that 96.3 percent of the masseuses made regular remittances, and 96.1 percent of the receivers were their parents (1994: 97).

c) Educational attainment

Table 3.6-1 Educational attainment (Phongpaichit)

Educational attainment	Percentage (N=48)
Primary(less than 4 yrs)	52
Primary(4-6yrs)	4
Secondary	4
No education	40

(1982: 13)

Table 3.6-2 Educational attainment (Boonchalaksi and Guest)

Educational attainment	Percentage (N=54)
Primary	79.6
Secondary	16.7
Tertiary	1.9
No education	1.9

(1994: 66)

In Phongpaichit's survey, 92 percent of the women are under or completely uneducated. Only 4 percent of them advanced to secondary schools. Although Boonchalaksi and Guest's survey was conducted in 1992, 79.6 percent and 16.7 percent of the whole respondents finished primary and secondary education, respectively. These figures are lower than 94.2 percent for primary and 32.9 percent for secondary reported by the Educational Information Division, Office of the National Education Commission of Thailand in 1987 (Ishii and Yoshikawa 1993: 412). From these figures, it can be implied that a poor educational background should be one of the major factors that pushed rural migrants into the sex industry.

3.2.2 Economic efficiency of the Thai commercial sex workers

Poverty in Thailand is overwhelmingly rural based. According to Phongpaichit's study, household income of the North and the Northeast were 31.7 percent and 32.0 percent compared with that of Bangkok respectively in 1962-63, 43.8 percent and 44.0 percent in 1975-76 (1882: 28). In another recent survey by Suehiro, comparing gross provincial product (GPP) per capita, Bangkok had 7.9 times as much as that of the Northeast, and 4.4 times that of the North in 1981. Worse, the gap widened by 9.5 and 6.0 respectively in 1991 as Table 3.7 shows. From these figures, the gap between the rich in urban areas and the poor in rural areas has never improved. In other words, rural regions have been left behind in the national economic developing plans.*¹

Table 3.7 GPP (Gross Provincial Product) per capita and Index (Unit: baht)

	1981		1986		1991	
	GPP per capita	Index	GPP per capita	Index	GPP per capita	Index
Whole kingdom	15,934	100	21,594	100	44,095	100
Bangkok vicinity	48,764	306	64,872	300	142,084	322
Central	14,411	90	17,526	81	36,304	82
Northeast	6,142	39	8,342	39	14,931	34
Northern	10,942	63	12,840	59	23,328	53
Southern	12,401	78	15,589	72	27,084	61

Source: NESDB, Gross regional and Provincial Product Series 1981-1991, Bangkok, 1993, cited in Niitsu and Hata (eds.). 1997: 88.

What has improved the income gap so far has largely depended on the filial obligation of women based on Buddhist-oriented social values, rather than governmental policy. One survey showed that average remittances from CSWs were 3,000 baht per month. If 200,000 CSWs sent 3,000 baht every month to their families in the rural region, 7.2 billion baht would be transferred by women migrants from urban areas to rural areas per year. This amount surpasses the budget for many rural development plans (Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994: 37-8).

In the Boonchalaksi and Guest's survey, average remittances of masseuses working in Bangkok were 6,151 baht per month in 1992 (1994: 95-6). When simply multiplied by twelve, the amount of one masseuse's remittance a year would reach up to 73,812 baht. The amount was much more than the average annual per capita income for the Northeast: 14,931 and the North: 23,328 in 1991. Furthermore the amount was more than the annual per capita income for the whole country: 44,095 baht.

In addition to improvement of the income gap between urban and rural regions, women rural-to-urban migrants have played an important role in collecting foreign currency earnings. Revenue from tourist-oriented commercial sex services could be increasing along the continuous development of Tourism. As discussed above, tourism is an important industry that brings a large amount of foreign currency to Thailand. Bell estimates that at least 2.7 percent of GDP was earned by CSWs in 1996 (Bell 1997: 68). With regard to economic efficiency, it can be said that poor rural women have been forced to bear heavy and various burden for wealth of the country.



3.3 Present Situation of the Thai Sex Industry

3.3.1 Establishments

According to tourist guidebooks or adult magazines for men, Thailand is known for its lavish and diverse commercial sex services that are available at almost any of the entertainment places today. Boonchalaksi and Guest list varieties of places where commercial sex services offer in this country, as follows;

- Traditional brothels
- Hotels and motels
- Tea-rooms
- Massage parlors
- Call-girl and escort-girls services
- Bars, night clubs, go-go bars, cocktail-lounge restaurants
- Public places (street walkers)
- Other places such as golf clubs, discos, pubs etc

(1994: 40)

Phongpaichit (et al.) adopts twenty-five types of establishments provide commercial sex services reported by the Public Health Ministry of Thailand (1998: 202). According to the list, some traditional massage parlors, barber shops, beauty parlors, coffee shops etc. where commercial sex services are rarely expected offer 'special services' practically.

On one hand, brothels, tea-rooms and massage parlors, offer commercial sex services to customers inside the establishments. On the other hand, bars, night-clubs and go-go-bars have the customers pick up their favorite women, and take them for a night or for several days if they

want to. Such open-ended prostitution appeared in the 1960s. Patpong, Nana Entertainment Plaza, Soi Cowboy are the typical examples of the variety. These places firstly were targeted for foreign (Western) tourists and businessmen and then spread to Thai customers (Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994: 47). Thaniya is a unique entertainment area where almost all establishments there offer *karaoke*, and the shop operators target Japanese clients for business entertainment (as will be described in detail in Chapter 4).

3.3.2 Number of prostitutes

The real number of CSWs is hard to ascertain accurately. There cannot be any prostitutes technically in this country because prostitution is illegal. In reality, however, Thailand is known for the huge size of its sex industry worldwide. The following is a list of articles dispatched from various authorities, NGOs and journalistic report that suggest the number of CSWs.

Bangkok Post, June 17th, 1998

According to the latest Public Health Ministry survey conducted nationwide during January 1-31, 1998, there were 63,941 prostitutes, 61,135 among which were female prostitutes. There were 8,016 establishments, such as restaurants, massage parlors, *karaoke*s and go-go bars. Regarding where the prostitutes came from, 54.01 percent came from the North, 28.9 percent from the Northeast and 9.67 percent from the central region. Moreover, the survey group estimated 14 percent of the prostitutes were younger than 18 years old.

Bangkok Post, July 28th, 1998

Contrary to the Public Health Ministry's latest survey informing that there are 63,941 prostitutes in Thailand, another official survey estimated that there were 90,000 sex workers in the country. The group claimed that the figure is based on information obtained by Mahidol University's Institute for Population and Social Research and several other governmental, non-governmental and international agencies.

TIME Magazine, June, 1993

A sensational article was published in its volume, saying that there are about 2 million prostitutes in Thailand (Ouchi 1994: 290).

Statement of Meechai Viravaidya, 1991

The then Interior Minister, Meechai Viravaidya stated at the International HIV/AIDS conference, held in Jakarta, that Thailand had 2 million prostitutes, 800 thousand of which were children under 16 (Botte and Mari 1997: 288-9).

Goldley, Jenny's survey, 1991

This article suggested Thailand had around 700,000 female prostitutes. The number indicates that 8.5 percent of all women aged 15-29 and 25 percent of urban women in those ages are prostitutes in this country (Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994: 30).

From these figures, the estimated number of prostitutes has a broad range from 61,135 to 2 million. This is because there may not be reliable method or source to conduct this kind of survey. The results with the most conservative estimates were mainly conducted by official surveys probably because they picked up only undeniable samples, and partly because authorities may be reluctant to damage the country's image in

public. Meanwhile, some NGOs and journalistic survey results are likely too exaggerated, which attitudes may indicate that they attempt to draw public attentions on the issue. Phongpaichit suggests 200 thousand as the most acceptable number of prostitutes after analyzing various survey results and interviews with authorities, even though some researchers and NGOs consider it too conservative.*²

3.3.3 Income from commercial sex services

Earnings of commercial sex workers generally depend on the type of service, and on each CSW's ability, nature and beauty. The recent survey conducted by Phongpaichit group and Boonchalaksi group present distribution of income. Both groups conclude that earnings of CSWs working at tea-rooms and brothels are lower than any other sector. Boonchalaksi and Guest's survey shows that the mean monthly income of women working in rural brothels is 5,959 baht. Furthermore, 75 percent of those in the category earn 3,000 to less than 10,000 baht. Meanwhile, the mean income of those working massage parlors in Bangkok is 35,526, and about 10 percent among them earn 65,000 baht and above.

Phongpaichit's survey group details price per session and monthly income of various types of establishments. As Table 3.8 shows in the following page, prices per session and income of CSWs have a broad range. Here, both price per session and monthly income of CSWs working in brothels and tea-houses are lower, and those of membership clubs and *karaokes* are higher. It is generally said that CSWs working in brothels and tea-houses are very young and are recruited by agents in their hometown, mostly in rural poor village. Many of their parents owe some loan from the agents in advance. Many CSWs in this section are hence

bound and their freedom is controlled by the operators (Phongpaichit, Piriyarangsan and Treerat 1998: 201-3). On the contrary, CSWs working in high class establishments, such as membership clubs where offer high prices per session are generally selected among women who have higher educational backgrounds with favorable English speaking skills, and good figures like actresses or fashion models. CSWs of this section tend to enter the trade of their own free will rather than through the obligation for better income. (ibid.: 209).

Table 3.8 Estimate of session price and monthly income, 1996

Type of Place	<u>Price-per-session</u>			Monthly Income
	Low	High	Ave.	
Brothel	100	500	300	22,500
Massage parlor	500	1800	1150	43,125
Traditional massage	500	1500	1000	37,500
Garden restaurant (operated as hotel facilities)	500	2000	1250	46,875
Hotel	200	500	350	26,250
Barber	500	1000	750	28,125
Tea-house	100	500	300	22,500
Bungalow	500	1000	750	18,750
Café	500	2000	1250	31,250
Membership club	2000	6000	4000	75,000
Cocktail lounge	1200	4000	2600	48,750
Karaoke	1200	4000	2600	65,000
Pub	800	2500	1650	41,250
Beer bar	1000	2500	1750	43,750
Go-go bar	1000	3000	2000	50,000
Night-club	1000	3000	2000	50,000
Coffee shop	800	1500	1150	28,750
Discotheque	1000	2000	1500	37,500
Beauty parlor	500	1500	1000	25,000
Telephone call	800	1500	1150	28,750
Street walker	200	1000	600	30,000

Source: the Public Health Ministry, quoted in Phongpaichit, Piriyarangsan and Treerat. 1998: 202.

*Monthly incomes are calculated according to twenty-five days a month

Table 3.9 Average monthly wage by industries, 1996 (unit: baht)

Industry	Average Monthly Wage
All Industry	8,698.4
Manufacturing	8,651.8
Electricity, gas, water	8,517.4
Construction	11,317.7
Wholesale and retail trade, Restaurants and hotels	6,268.7
Transport, communi, storage	7,571.5
Finance, insurance, real estate	12,444.5
All industry in Bangkok	10,566.0

Source: Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, quoted in JETRO Bangkok Center and JCCB. 1998: 8.

Comparing Table 3.8 and 3.9, it is obvious that earnings from the commercial sex sector are much more than those of any other industry. As far as the two tables show, it must be said that working in commercial sex sector is the easiest and shortest way to earn some big money.

3.4 Cultural and Social Impacts on the Thai Sex Industry

3.4.1 Impact of Buddhist ideas

Buddhism is the root of Thai culture and a way of life for the people (Suksamran 1993: 16). Nearly 95 percent of Thais are Buddhists, and there are about 300 thousand Buddhist monks and around 34 thousand Buddhist temples all over the country (JETRO 1998: 1). It is generally known that Thai social values are constituted by Buddhist ideas and teachings. In the process of the dissemination of Buddhist teachings, the original philosophy was simplified so as to be easily understood by non-academic people. Buddhist teachings have consequently spread as those deeply linked with social norms and customs (Suksamran 1993: 21).

Buddhism introduced the Indian based karmic theory, which indicates a cycle of one's doing or action continuing eternally, and extended the theory to cover the notion of 'volitional action': 'good action', and 'bad action'. According to Buddhist karma, every individual action should be divided into 'good karma' and 'bad karma'. Good karma or good action produces a good result, and bad karma or bad action produces a bad result (Saegusa 1997: 120-22, Rahula 1997: 31-2). Moreover, the happiness and degree of success in one's present life is to be decided by how much 'good karma' is accumulated in his/her previous life. He/she has to accumulate 'good karma', or 'making merit', in the present life if he/she wishes to improve his/her life in the next life. On the contrary, 'bad karma' is thought to lead one's life to an unhappy or unworthy one in the cycle of his/her life (Onozawa 1995:106-7).

Devaluation of women by Buddhism merged with the theory of 'good karma' and 'bad karma': being born a woman was a result of 'bad karma'

in her previous life. Women are not allowed to be ordained because they were born as a result of bad karma. Having sons and sending them to monkhood is regarded as 'good karma', which leads women to be born men in the next life. In other words, it is not until women are reborn men that they can have a right to enter monkhood to reach *nervana*, usually translated as Enlightenment, or Ultimate Truth (Truong 1993: 253, 256-7, Yamashita eds. 1991: 90, Harrison 1997: 340, Pongsapich 1997:14, Satha-Anand 1998: 3).

3.4.2 Daughters' obligation as Buddhists in Thai society

Thai family values are constituted by a strong sense of child-parent obligation based on Buddhist teachings, the male-dominated mentality, and reverence to seniority. The Thai family should take a role as an agent that brings up children to become adults possessing their own values naturally. These values are significantly visible in Thai rural farming families. Wongsith lists general characteristics of Thai rural family as follows;

- 1) Buddhist teachings, especially merit and demerit.
- 2) A strong sense of child-parent obligation. Children owe something to their parents.
- 3) Seniority is widely revered.
- 4) A sense of superordination and subordination.
- 5) Every household is centered on women who perform overall functions in the family but women are not more powerful or

influential than men (Chulalongkorn University and Kitakyushu Forum 1993: 20).

Due to many Thai family values rooted in Buddhist teachings, entry into monkhood itself is regarded by the Thais as the greatest way for children to show gratitude towards parents. For women, sending their sons to monkhood is evaluated as the third highest making of merit (Onozawa 1995: 108).^{*3} Both sons and their mothers therefore are able to accumulate 'good karma' by means of sons' Buddhist practices. However, since a female is not allowed to enter monkhood, daughters' respect for parents should be realized by other ways.

The easiest and most significant way to show daughters' gratitude towards parents is to help them with domestic matters, such as cooking, farming and taking care of babies. If their parents need more earnings to maintain their living, daughters in order of age in this case, have to work and give their parents some money, even if they are in compulsory education. These factors become the traditional social role of daughters because they cannot pay respect to their parents by means of practice in monkhood. Under the social norms, Thai women from lower socio-economic classes, especially those in rural farming areas of the North and the Northeast have always had major economic responsibility as daughters' obligation linking with the traditional social norms because of poverty caused by poor cultivation (Phongpaichit 1982: 2, Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994: 6).

3.4.3 Male-dominated society

Thai Buddhism followed the karmic theory as mentioned above, and utilized it to establish gender bias in Thai society. Based on the idea that women were born as result of an incomplete karma, Thai women were given an inferior status to men. In this way, Thai society was constructed as a male-dominated one. Thai society has restricted women from professional work equivalent to that of men, and suppressed women in economics, politics and culture. (Kabilsingh 1991: 13, Truong 1993: 265).

Such social beliefs had been enshrined by Rama I in the “Law of the Three Seals” in 1805. Under the law, Thai women were categorized in three levels: 1) the principal wife whose parents’ consented to her marriage; 2) the secondary wife whose master formally asked her to be a minor wife; and 3) the slave wife who was obtained through purchase (Hantrakul 1983: 3, Truong 1993: 272). In addition, the code that “a good woman should not let more than one man gain access to her body” had been settled in the law. Even after repeal of the law in 1908, the code has steadily remained as a social norm to be taught from mothers to daughters (Hantrakul 1983: 3).

According to the idea, women’s virginity becomes a very important virtue for ‘good women’. On the other hand, Thai society created a category of ‘bad women’ for those who lost their virginity before marriage or separated from their spouses (Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994: 7-8). By constituting a double standard of women’s position, Thai men can keep ‘good women’ for their wife and ‘bad women’ for their sexual pleasure. In this way, Thai men justified their promiscuity. Prostitutes thus must be labeled as the worst ‘bad women’ because they offer their sexuality to satisfy all men’s sexual desires. This biased social norm has also

encouraged 'good women' to regard 'bad women' as an incompatible class in terms of sympathy and discrimination as well (Harrison 1997: 335). Thai women undoubtedly have accepted the gender ideology as social philosophy, which links with Thai Buddhist system.

The idea of double standard towards Thai women that is deeply rooted in Buddhist system prevented them from questioning women's inferiority and women's discrimination in Thai society. Thai prostitution issues had also rarely drawn public attention until repeated criticism and protest by foreign organizations working for realizing gender equality or protecting human rights became significant (Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994: 20).

3.5 Laws and Policies of the Thai Government

3.5.1 The 1996 Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act

The Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act has been effective since December 21, 1996. This latest act repealed the Prostitution Suppression Act that had been effective since 1960. The former act intended that all forms of prostitution were outlaw, nevertheless, tourist-oriented sex industry based on R & R of the Vietnam War has become more thriving during the three decades. In addition to the circumstances, HIV/AIDS has rapidly spread through the commercial sex sector, and girls-trafficking issue into the sex industry has become serious since the latter half of the 1980s.*⁴

The former act 1960 had already been outdated to tackle those problems. The movement for revision of the 1960 Prostitution

Suppression Act began during the first Chuan government (1992-5) (Yoshioka 1996: 168-70). The Thai government has hence settled the new act with the intention of providing an effective tool to law enforcement officials and severer punishment for those who would offence the act.*⁵

The new act defines “Prostitution” as follows;

“Prostitution” means the acceptance of sexual intercourse, the acceptance of any other act, or the commission of any other act for sexual gratification of another person in a promiscuous manner for remuneration or any other benefit irrespective of whether the person who accepts such act and the person who commits such act are of the same or opposite sex (Section 4).

The 1996 Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act significantly improved the former act, the 1960 Prostitution Suppression Act. In the old act, prostitution was defined as a crime of promiscuity – the act of ‘promiscuity rendering sexual services for remuneration’ – based on a definition made by the 1950 United Nations Convention (Truong 1993: 288). According to the definition, those who sold commercial sex services – prostitutes and brothel owners – were to be punished, but customers were excluded from the offenders.

In the new act, punishment for prostitutes is greatly reduced with the context of that prostitutes are victims of poverty, social problems and organized crime.*⁶ On the contrary, the category of offender of this act is greatly expanded to customers, advertisers, procurers, parents and guardians involving in their children’s prostitution. It is noticeable that penalties for offenders become more severe according to the age of victims, over 18, between 15 and 18, and not over 15 years respectively. These articles clearly indicate that the new act aims to prevent and solve the problem of child prostitution. The new act has firstly settled punishment

for the parents and guardians who sent or sold their children into prostitution.

3.5.2 Reasons of poor enforcement of the 1996 act

Looking at the articles of the new act, the sex industry should be considerably reduced. No sign of damage, nevertheless, has been found since the new act has been enforced as far as staying in Bangkok. Go-go bars at Patpong are still popular and crowded with foreign tourists every night, and many hostesses at Thaniya *karaoke* houses are waiting for Japanese customers' nomination for an outside-date partner. Huge billboards of massage parlors are standing out along side the main street, such as New Petchburi Road and Ratchadapisek Road. Advertisements of escort clubs suggesting sexual relations with escort girls can be found in the Bangkok Post every day. Nowadays, it is easily to get information about what is done inside sexual entertainment places through internet homepages. Some of them openly inform customers how to enjoy sexual entertainment including prostitution.*⁷

No matter how good the act is, if enforcement is weak, the act may be ineffective. The 1996 Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act therefore seems not to enforce effectively at present. There are some reasons to think that the act enforces ineffectively. Firstly, having an unclear nature of the crime, prostitution is one of the difficult issues to be dealt with for the police, compared with robberies and murders. In addition to the ambiguous nature of the crime, corruption is also one element that makes the act prevent from enforcing effectively. It has been an open secret for a long period that the police control and protect sexual entertainment places in return of some money from operators and owners

of such establishments.

Phongpaichit and Boonchalaksi noted that all of the operators they interviewed made regular payments to local police. Otherwise, they would get in trouble with the police because their business was obviously illegal under the law (Phongpaichit, Piriyarangsan and Treerat 1998:199, Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994: 99). An operator of several Thaniya *karaoke* houses admitted that there is no establishment at Thaniya made no regular payments to the local police because payment is a must in order to run their businesses smoothly. The interview was conducted in November 1998, which fact indicates that such a custom has not changed at all even after the new act had been effective.

Secondly, as mentioned in the tourism section of this chapter, many entertainment houses are invested or managed by support of the government in the name of tourist promotion (Boonchalaksi and Guest, 1994: 17). In the process of industrializing the country, bureaucrats, especially military (army) high officials played an influential role in making policy and leading the kingdom's economy (Suehiro 1996: 33-50 and Chapter 3).

Thirdly, the Thai government has not improved the issue of rural poverty. As described earlier in this chapter and also will be discussed in Chapter 5, most of young women working in the sex industry come from rural regions, have poor educational backgrounds and suffer from parents' poverty. Furthermore, it is the fact that their remittances play an important role in relieving poverty in the rural regions. If the police and the authorities strictly controlled the sex industry, 200,000 or more women working in this sector would be out of work. If such a number of women were unemployment, the problem of poverty in the rural regions

should become more serious. The Thai government, at present, is probably not able to find a drastic countermeasure to this issue. This situation, consequently, also one of the main factors which prevents the new act from enforcing effectively. *⁸

3.6 Concluding Remarks

It cannot be denied that the Thai sex industry has greatly contributed to Thailand's economy in the three decades. Tourist-oriented commercial sex services have brought in a large sum of foreign exchange earnings. Furthermore, there are reportedly 100,000 – 200,000 or more Thai CSWs working abroad (Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994: 39). Rural-to-urban women migrants have functioned to relieve the economic gap between the rich in urban and the poor in rural.

It can be said that the development of the Thai sex industry has been supported by the social and cultural context with special emphasis on Buddhist system of the country. Its karmic theory discriminates against women as incomplete beings. In addition to establishment of the male-dominated society, Thai men made double standard of women: 'good women' for virtuous wives and 'bad women' for common women for sexual pleasure. The classification of women consequently fostered a sense of discrimination among 'good women' against 'bad women'. Prostitution issue of this country therefore rarely became the subject of the economic and social exploitation of poor women under the pretext of daughters' obligation in the past.

It must be noted that the 1996 Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act was constituted by the repeated demands and pressure

from some parliament members and NGOs involving prostitution issues. No matter how severe the act is, it is worthless as far as it does not perform appropriately. The issue of the Thai sex industry, consequently, can be marked by economic and social inequality among the people rather than lack of legal improvement.

Notes

1. The National Economic and Development Board, (in 1966 changed to NESDB; the National Economic, Social and Development Board) was established in 1959, in The Sarit Thanarat government. BOT (Board of Investment) was also established by support of the US government and the World Bank. NESDB has been playing an important role as the central planning agency to make a continuing study of the nation's economy and draw up plans for its development since 1961. NESDB has made five-year economic developing plans (Phongpaichit and Baker 1997: 128, Suehiro 1996: 37-44). NESDB is now carrying on the eighth plan.
2. The author interviewed Dr. Phongpaichit, Pasuk at Chulalongkorn University, July 23rd, 1998
3. Onozawa presented manners of Thai farming people for making-merit. The most worthy of them is to become a monk. The second is to donate for construction of a temple. The forth is to visit places noted in connection with Buddhism. Followings are donation for temple renovation, offering goods to mendicant priests, and so on.
4. The number of HIV carriers and AIDS patients has fearfully increased since the latter half of the 1980s. According to a Public Health Ministry report, there were more than 900,000 HIV carriers and 109,900 AIDS patients between 1984-1999 (Bangkok Post, May 14 1999). On the other hand, World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that a cumulative total of 2 to 4 million HIV cases in Thailand by the end of the century (Ford & Kittisuksathit 1996: 5).

The Thai Officials estimated that there are between 12,000 and 18,000 child prostitutes under the age of 18 in this country. The figures show one tenth as many as those claimed by NGOs and scholars at various international meetings (Bangkok Post, July 28 1998). The Unicef (United Nations Children's Fund) claimed that there were 200 thousand child prostitutes at a conference in 1996 (Botte and Mari 1997: 288). NGOs and other groups tackling against child and young women prostitution have organized one after another since in the 1980s, such as, ECPAT (End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism), FACE (Task Force to Fight Against Child Exploitation), and CPRC (the Center for Protection of Children's Rights). Their activities played an important role to settle the new Act (Yoshioka 1996).

5. Regarding the details of the 1996 Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act, the author asked for a lecture to Mr. Thongchai Gawbansiri, Attorney-at-law, of INTERNATIONAL LEGAL COUNSELLORS THAILAND LTD, April 27, 1999 at the ILCT office in Bangkok.
6. Lecture of Mr. Thongchai Gawbansiri, April 27, 1999.
7. For example, "Thaniya On-line", and "Information of Bangkok sexual entertainment: massage parlor" provide establishment name, pictures of girls, price list, maps and customers' personal experiences. Their expressions sometimes seem to be too exaggerated on purpose to solicit readers.
8. Lecture of Mr. Thongchai Gawbansiri, April 27, 1999.