#### **CHAPTER III**

# THE DYNAMICS OF PROSTITUTION AND SEX WORKERS IN THAILAND

This chapter explains the root and causes of that some aspects, such as economic, politics, and social culture. In addition, it also explains how women become prostitutes and how they work.

## A. Dynamics of prostitution

Prostitution is one job that most of less educated people decide to be. Prostitution is the selling or trading of sexual favors and a prostitute is the person usually female who engages in sexual activity for money or, sometimes, to barter for other goods or services. A prostitute is defined as one who offers sexual services in exchange of payments in cash or kind. The person who receives this service is known as a client or customer. While the prostitute may be a man or woman, the customer is always a male. The basic inequality of that exists in these kind of sexual encounters-structures, prostitution and categories of the prostitute. So prostitution is not just a trade, it is a form of life which pushes him/her out of the 'normal' society. She/he at once becomes an abnormal.

Prostitution in Thailand deserves special attention, as the country is known as a major site of sex tourism in Asia. The importance of this study revolves around the way the author has been able to explore the sociological factors behind prostitution in general and its particular development in Thailand Prostitution in Thailand although not unique to the country either as an occupation or as a subject

of study, it is importance has been highlighted internationally to a large extent.

The present study is an attempt to examine the all, widespread situation about

prostitution in Thailand. The study proposes to analyze the historical as well as

contemporary situation of the occupation in land of the so called "Prostitute's

Paradise"<sup>1</sup>.

1. The History of prostitution

Prostitution is not a new kind of occupation, but it has already been for

long time in the history, so it can show also about how the prostitution be and why

it still exists in nowadays. Prostitution in Thailand deserves special attention, as

the country is known as a major site of sex tourism in Asia. From the mid-1300s

to the mid-1700s prostitution was legal and taxed by the Thai government. The

late 1700s to the 1850s witnessed an influx in the number of Chinese labor

workers and sex workers coming to Thailand. Prostitution flourished especially

after the abolishment of slavery in 1905 as former slave wives under the feudal

system found themselves alone and without financial support. Then, the Japanese

occupation during World War II popularized sex massage parlors. A lot of

women, and men, in Thailand sell sexual services for money. Siamese 50 satang

brothels were popular in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the prostitution

place in Thailand called "arbobnuad". However, the image of every place is

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Prostitution in Thailand: (Myth and

difference. Some of them build the image to be a spa but inside is the prostitution place.

In 1960 prostitution in Thailand was actually made illegal as the Thai authorities came under pressure from the United Nations. However, this law was countered in 1966 by a law which allowed for the creation of entertainment establishments offering special services<sup>2</sup>. This law was urging as part of a government initiative to generate additional income from the large numbers of US armed forces stationed in Thailand and Vietnam at that time. This law, in effect, implicitly accepts prostitution in Thailand. So, that Thai bar girls, who everyone knows are prostitutes, are displayed through glass windows in bars and entertainment centers without any interference from the Thai authorities.

The modern sex trade in Thailand thus blossomed during this period of American military involvement. The number of prostitutes in Thailand mushroomed from an estimated 20,000 in 1957 to 400,000 in 1964, by which time the US had already established seven bases in the country. Tourism marketing in Thailand continues to combine the exotic and erotic, as Thai women are implicitly and on occasion explicitly represented as embodiments of both characteristics. Although the Thai government and tourism industry have in recent years tried to divert attention away from sex tourism, large groups of men continue to travel to

Thailand has a Giant sized prostitution industry that is not just for foreign men.http://www.thailovelines.com/Frontinfo/thai-prostitute.php?lang\_id=DE\_accessed 4/11/2015

Gay, J (1985, February). The 'patriotic' prostitution. *The progressive*, 34-36

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Truong, T-D. (1990). Sex, momey and morality: prostitution and tourism in Southeast Asia. London: Zed books.

Bangkok, Pattaya, Chiang Mai and Phuket for the services of male and female prostitutes, many of whom are children.<sup>5</sup>

The use of Thailand as a rest and recreation destination for U.S. military servicemen in the Vietnam War as well as rising rural poverty, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, led to urban migration and the growth of the sex industry in the cities. In the 1980s, Thailand saw a boom in sex tourism as the government poured millions of baht to promote tourism in the country. During the Vietnam War, Pattaya, still one of the most well known areas for prostitution in Thailand, was selected as an R&R location for American soldiers. It attracted women typically from the poorest Northern provinces, like Chiang Mai and Phayao. The women would move to areas outside of the military airbases and urban centers, where they would provide sexual services to U.S. soldiers. The 1960s also brought about other types of entertainment, such as sex shows and erotic dancing, and go-go bars, which first appeared in Bangkok in 1967.

Since that period, the Thai government began promoting the expansion of tourism and, since 1982; tourism has been the country's largest earner of foreign exchange. Under the 1996 Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act, prostitution is prohibited.

#### 2. The Sex workers in Thailand

As Thailand is famous for sex tourism, Thai people maybe choose to be sex workers as their occupation in the future. The efforts of the elimination of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Johnson, L. (1994, august 1). Tourist seeking sub, sea and child sex. The nation, p,A7.

<sup>6</sup> Ryan Bishop and Lilian Robinson, Night Market. 1998, p. 98.

Prostitution Act, the sex industry in Thailand grew phenomenally with the expansion of sex tourism and the use of technology. The boom in sex tourism was created during the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Thus, from the 1970s through the 1980s, the demand for sex by Japanese male clients only intensified the business for sex.

The "Thai sex-marriage tours" were even advertised in men's magazines where a typical ad would offer men three weeks in Thailand. By week three, the men could pick the bride of their choice. The official marriage documents would be signed over and the men would pay anywhere from \$1,500 to \$3,000 for a girl. From 1985-1995, because of the launch of Thailand's economic reform program, the Thai economy began to take off at one of the fastest rates in the world. The adverse effect of this growth was that it created marginalized groups of people indifferent regions of the country.

In the 1980s, poverty in the rural territories was five times higher than poverty in the urban environments like Bangkok. <sup>10</sup> The North and the Northeast area of the country's two most impoverished regions became poorer because of export-led industrial growth coming out of Bangkok. While some government officials supported the sex industry, the Thai government did try unsuccessfully to limit the sex trade by shutting down many Japanese and Asian sex tours in

H. Muroi and N. Sasaki, "Tourism and Prostitution in Japan," in *Gender, Work, and Tourism*, ed. M.T. Sinclair (London: Routledge, 1997), 185.

Kathleen Barry, Female Sexual Slavery (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice- Hall, 1979), 91.

Lim, The Sex Sector: The Economic and Social Bases of Prostitution in Southeast Asia, 134.

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ibid

Thailand. Although it did diminish foreign advertisement of sex in Thailand, it also created a more contrary effect on the industry. Rather than offering sexual services in Thailand, Thai women began to be sex worker overseas to urban areas like Tokyo, Japan. Today, even in Japan, Thai women can be found in brothels, bars, hotels, nightclubs, restaurants, and often in the homes of the traffickers.

Meanwhile, the number of international tourists to Thailand jumped, from two million in 1981 to four million in 1988, and to more than eleven million in 2003. In 2003, two-thirds of the tourists who visited Thailand were single men. The 1980s was a period of exponential growth in sex tourism for Thailand as it increased from 200million baht (over six million U.S. dollars) in 1960 to more than thirty-seven billion baht (over 1.2 billion U.S. dollars) in 1986. 12 By 1988, sex tourism made up 15 percent of the revenue from the exports of goods and services. 13 The rise in the sex trade in Southeast Asia grew from global economic development, producing an upsurge in inexpensive travel where hotels, airfare, and businesses conveniently connect sexual services into all-inclusive tour packages.

In the 1990s, the Thai government became more concerned about how it and the nation in general were being depicted in global media outlets. <sup>14</sup> This was because a1991 Rolling Stone magazine had published the article "Death in a

11 Andrea Parrot and Nina Cummings, Sexual Enslavement of Girls and Women Worldwide (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2008), 74.

Jeffrey, Sex and Borders, Gender, National Identity, and Prostitution Policy in Thailand, 78.

<sup>13</sup> ibid

Jeffrey, Sex and Borders, Gender, National Identity, and Prostitution Policy in Thailand, 99.

Candy Store," by Richard Rhodes, which asked the question "Why is Thailand the Whorehouse of the World?" In addition, a TIME Magazine article, with a bar girl on its front claimed that there were two million prostitutes in Thailand's sex trade. Thai leaders became worried about negative representations that suggested that the government did not know how to properly run the country. In 1993, there were reported instances where the government made an effort to bring to light the seriousness of Thailand's prostitution problem because of the harsh criticism from the media. 15 The publicity from these types of critical media prompted the *New* Longman Dictionary for English Language and Culture to depict Bangkok as a city "often mentioned as a place where there are a lot of prostitutes." Moreover, in 1995, a Microsoft CD-RO Men cyclopedia portrayed Bangkok as a "flesh trade center where there was danger of contracting AIDS." BBC television also recognized Thailand as being an extremely dangerous tourist attraction because of violence and the widespread AIDS outbreak. <sup>16</sup>In the 1990s while some Thai officials admitted the need to do something about the sex trafficking problem. There were still many more, which were indifferent about trying to resolve it.

Over the years, there have also been an increasing number of foreign women working in the sex industry in Thailand, with a large majority of them from Southern China and from the hill tribes of Myanmar. Thai officials have estimated that around 25 to 35 percent of women entering the sex trade are from

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>16</sup> ibid

Myanmar, of which 40 to 60 percent are already HIV positive. <sup>17</sup> In 1991, these estimates revealed more than 200,000 Thai prostitutes working outside of Thailand. <sup>18</sup>

In the 1990s it was still apparent that the Thai government continued to support the sex industry. In March 1993, for example, the Governor of Songkhla, in the southern province of Thailand, proposed the idea that prostitutes would not be allowed to return home for the Thai New Year. Instead, they would be shown during the Thai New Year (Songkran) parade in scandalous clothing because their participation would attract more foreign tourists. The Thai government also supported the sex industry through indirect financial means, such as paying for many tourism companies that promoted sexual services through hotels and restaurants.

The increase in prostitution began with the growth of the rice export economy. During, the Vietnam War in 1960s, the spread of prostitution increased when U.S. soldiers were stationed in Thailand for rest and recreation (R&R), further encouraging the brothels business. International tourism has expanded greatly, with the promise of cheap sexual services in Thailand as the main attraction for travelers.

#### 3. The Economic causes

Many causes making people to be prostitutes. At the moment the economy of the country is not going well and many people are unemployed. So, it makes

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<sup>17</sup> Lim, The Sex Sector: The Economic and Social Bases of Prostitution in Southeast Asia, 136.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 135.

some families have financial problem. They do not have money to buy food for their family and it is a reason why prostitution in Thailand continues to exist. It is estimated that as of 2010 the Thai sex industry employs 150,000 to 200,000 young girls and women, although the exact number remains unknown. <sup>19</sup> The number of prostitutes currently in Thailand could be as high as 2 million. <sup>20</sup> It is also estimated that one in ten of these sex workers were forced into sexual slavery. <sup>21</sup> Each year, thousands of women are forced into the sex trade, driven by their most important needs, to survive and to earn an income.

Actually the people, who involved in the sex worker, mostly are poor because they need income to survive. Many of them from the impoverished Northern regions of the country to cities like Chiang Rai and Mae Hong Son. These poor areas are home to the hill tribes and other ethnic minorities, and are where Thailand's poorest population lives, lacking some of the most basic necessities like clean water and electricity. Typically the victims are less educated and without occupational training. From the rural areas, the girls are sent to the urban areas of the country, where prostitution is mainly found, especially in Bangkok and in the central regions where the average prostitute makes around 3,000 baht (about 100 U.S. dollars a month), which is about three times the pay in

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<sup>19</sup> Louise I. Shelley, *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 162.

Thomas G. Bauer and Bob McKercher, Sex and Tourism: Journeys of Romance, Love, and Lust (New York: Haworth Hospitality Press, 2003), 186.

<sup>21</sup> Siddharth Kara, Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 176.

an agricultural job. <sup>22</sup> In some rural areas fathers sell their daughters for money to help the family survive economically.

Another major cause of human sex worker is the lack of education or training for women, particularly in the rural parts of Thailand. Women without training or skills are easy to deceive by others, since they have no other job alternatives and are desperate for income. Meanwhile, the economic causes of sex worker in Thailand have allowed the sex trade to become a very lucrative business. Since the sex trade in Thailand is linked to its tourism business, sex worker reap huge profits by offering sexual services to tourists. Thailand has already earned a reputation for providing cheap and exotic sex to travelers. The customers are men with high incomes who seek entertainment, escape activities, and inexpensive sex. Typically, tour coordinators will offer all-inclusive packages that feature airfare, hotel accommodations, and the main attraction sexual services from prostitutes. These tours to Thailand are easy to locate. An Internet search of the words "adult travel" pulls up numerous websites offering consumer's sex tours that package together leisure and sex with young girls.

# 4. The Socio-cultural causes

Believe is always powerful, because if people believe something then they will make it and follow it, especially about religion. The way of life is following by religion. There are many socio-cultural factors that contribute to sex worker in

Lin Lean Lim, *The Sex Sector: The Economic and Social Bases of Prostitution in Southeast Asia* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1998), 162.

VidyamaliSamarasinghe, Female Sex Trafficking in Asia: The Resilience of Patriarchy in a Changing World (New York: Routledge, 2008), 176.

Thailand. One is the lower social status of women, due to Theravada Buddhism, which considers men as more valuable. In Thailand, around 90 percent of its citizens are Theravada Buddhist, a stricter sect of Buddhism than Mahayana Buddhism. 24 This lower status of women is linked to early Theravada Buddhist views of women, which historically viewed women as subservient to males.<sup>25</sup>

There are even some Buddhist writings, which indicate that prostitution is acceptable because women are supposed to satisfy men's sexual needs. Theravada Buddhism also puts great importance on the hierarchy of rebirth as a sign of spiritual progression with females placed on a lower level of rebirth than males. On earth, there is the king, then the monks, the wealthy, the men, the women, the crippled, the destitute, and the animals. One Theravada Buddhist view of women is that the greatest achievement they can have is to obtain enough karma to be reborn as men so that they may one day become monks and achieve nibban, or Nirvana, since women cannot become monks. <sup>26</sup>Under Theravada Buddhism only males can be monks and only monks can achieve enlightenment.

Another socio-cultural factor contributing to an increase in sex trafficking is the issue of gender inequality in Thailand. One example is the insufficient job opportunities available to women. Men have better educational and career openings than women and typically receive higher wages than women, especially

Andrea Parrot and Nina Cummings, Sexual Enslavement of Girls and Women Worldwide (Westport Conn:Praeger, 2008),96-97.

Kaoru Aoyama, Thai Migrant Sex Workers: From Modernisation to Globalisation(Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 129.

Kara, Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery, 175.

in industries like information technology and engineering. Women, on the other hand, usually work in low paying jobs, in hair salons and restaurants.

Gender inequality is also a major factor in Thailand when it comes to Thai wives, who, because of their subservient nature, do not stop their husbands or sons from going to visit sex establishments. There are three traditional Thai proverbs that reflect how women are looked at as subservient to men: "To have a daughter is like having a toilet in your front yard"; "A woman is only worthy when she has a husband"; and "Women are buffaloes, men are humans."

A third socio-cultural factor behind human trafficking in Thailand is the deep obligation to the family. In Thai culture, obligation to the family is also known as filial piety, or "*bhunkun*," in which the youngest daughter is expected to provide financial support to her parents. <sup>30</sup> In this custom, women are sold or sell themselves into brothels to provide for their families, with the idea that they can

<sup>27</sup> Kathryn Cullen-DuPont, *Human Trafficking* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 2009), 25.

<sup>28</sup> Kara, Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery, 176.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 15.

buy their freedom once they pay back their debt. Young girls feel it is their responsibility to support their parents and they thus resort to selling their bodies for money. In Thai families, men will show gratitude to their parents by working hard and becoming ordained monks for a temporary period of time before marriage. This ensures that their parents receive karmic merit. Since women cannot become monks, they show appreciation by caring for their parents financially or by acting as their caregivers.

#### 5. The Political causes

Besides the economic and socio-cultural causes of sex worker, there are also the political causes that involved in prostitution. Many Thai police do not have sufficient understanding or training about anti-sex worker laws, making them unable to properly identify victims of the sex trade. Moreover, some law enforcement officials are apathetic to the plight of the sex worker's suffering in the sex trade.

Corruption is another political cause of the sex trade. There has been evidence of both low and high-level police involvement in aiding the seller, by accepting bribes for favors and by letting brothel owners operate openly even though prostitution is illegal in Thailand. 31

There are several reasons why Thai police turn to bribery and corruption. Many of these Thai police officers are paid low salaries, making it easier for them to be tempted by payoffs. There also seems to be a blatant disregard for the law, with numerous reports that local police protect brothels and other sex businesses

Anna M. Troubnikoff, *Trafficking in Women and Children: Current Issues and Developments* (Hauppauge, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, 2003), 135.

against periodic raids. They will often accept money from sex trade operators in exchange for tipping them off about government raids. The Thai police take an apathetic approach to prosecuting cases of sex worker that involve Thai officials and law enforcement.

Another political cause of sex worker is the various crime syndicates working with drug and prostitution rings in Thailand. There are at least seven "families" in Bangkok that are involved in the recruiting, and soliciting of women from all over the world to work in the sex industry. 32

There are many different economic, socio-cultural, and political factors associated with why sex worker occurs in Thailand. Of these three, the most important is the economic problem. Within the economic causes of sex worker, poverty is most important because women need monetary resources in order to survive. Extreme poverty makes women desperate enough to seek out work in the sex industry. The sex trade in Thailand has been driven by the wide economic gap in Thailand between the rich and the poor and by limited training and job opportunities for women. The poor people always are the main victim in the sex worker.

## **B.** Lodging and work

Every single occupation always has its own characteristic. Prostitution is also one of job that is different from other jobs. The housing situation and place of work for women in the sex trade vary depending on the pimp. Some women live

<sup>32</sup> Gilbert King, *Woman, Child for Sale: The New Slave Trade in the 21<sup>st</sup>Century* (New York: Chamberlain Bros, 2004), 206.

in brothels, hotels, and massage parlors, while others live in private residences and are usually sent to various areas to work. These girls are often put into tiny living quarters or cubicles where they live and where their bed is no more than a small room. Most girls will sleep in the same place where they take their clients to have sex. Some areas where girls are found selling their bodies are at go-go clubs, karaoke bars, and various other business establishments. 33 The housing conditions in one brothel in Ranong, a southern province of Thailand, featured small cubicles, which extend two by two-and-a-half meters, and contained tiny cement bunks where the girls were forced to have sex with their clients. <sup>34</sup> There were also secret doors and passageways used to hide the girls in case of a police raid. Often, the smell of the place is nauseating since there is little room for good hygiene and the toilets do not work properly. 35

The first sex establishment that the women arrive at is rarely their final destination. Instead, most women will stay in a brothel for up to a year or more, after which the owners will typically move these girls around to other venues. Although, many females are forced into the sex business, some will agree sign a contract in which they acknowledge they will have to sell their bodies. This agreement may tell a woman that she must sleep with hundreds of customers in order to cover her debt. Many of these women, however, are not told other

35 Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Siddharth Kara, Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery (NewYork: Columbia University Press, 2009), 153.

Dorothy Q. Thomas, A Modern Form of Slavery: Trafficking of BurmeseWomen and Girls into Brothels in Thailand, ed. Sidney Jones (New York: HumanRights Watch, 1993), 67.

information that they can be kept in these brothels against their will; that their passports can be withheld by the traffickers and that they can lose their identifying and freedom as sex workers.

Although the market itself is a shopping destination aimed at tourists, as it features bootleg DVDs, knock off purses, watches, and other counterfeit items, it is also surrounded by the busy sex industry. This district is lined with entertainment go-go bars with bright neon lights and women sitting outside the bars waiting for customers. The women, dressed in skintight bikini tops and short skirts, and with faces heavily made up, will smile when men walk by. Inside the clubs one can see women dancing on poles, and in more private and secluded areas, other women will put on sex shows. The red light district caters to tourists wanting to view these sex shows. Around every corner, the men associated with these shows will hang out paper programs listing what the sex shows offer, such as tricks and deviant sex acts that the women are willing to perform for money. These men approach both male and female tourists in hopes that they may be interested in watching these sex shows. Some of the bars will even offer special treatment for an additional charge. If a client is willing to pay more, there are even programs offering full sexual services.

# C. Financial aspect

While prostitution is a job for who has less education, but it is not means that who doing prostitute will be richer than before, because there are also some problem about money. Many of the sex workers receive little or no money for their sexual services. Some of them are in the sex industry because they are

paying back a personal debt as part of a debt bondage deal to support their family. Some of those who are paid money have reported getting around only 30 baht a day, which is why, tips are so important in this particular business. When a female sex worker earns money, she only gets to keep a small portion of it because most of it goes to the pimp. Sometimes a trafficker will send a small part back to the sex worker's family to pay off their debt.

A sex worker will also have to pay back additional money that is added to her debt to cover clothes, cosmetics, and even necessities like food. In the northern city of Chiang Mai, the prices in 2000 for sexual services were as follows: for a 30 minute sex massage, around 100-150 baht (2.50-3.75 U.S. dollars); for having a girl for one hour of sex, it is typically 200-400 baht (5.00-10.00 U.S. dollars), for having a girl for the full night, it is usually around 1,000 baht (25.00 U.S. dollars) and for having a girl as a sex worker for a whole week would cost around 5,000 baht (125.00 U.S. dollars). 36

Usually, these girls will be put on display in a lineup for clients to choose them, sometimes with a number assigned to each individual girl. This way, rather than knowing her name, a client can point to the girl's number to indicate that he wants her. These girls are forced to work long hours, often seven days a week. On average, they are forced to work ten to eighteen hours a day and twenty-five days a month, with normally a few days off during their menstrual cycle. <sup>37</sup> Some girls are even forced to have sex when they are menstruating. Records have shown that

 $<sup>{\</sup>it Xara, Sex\ Trafficking: Inside\ the\ Business\ of\ Modern\ Slavery,}$ 

Kathryn Cullen-DuPont, Human Trafficking, Foreword by Jessica Neuwirth and Taina Bien-Aimé (New York, NY: Facts On File, 2009),

some brothel owners resort to making sex workers stop their menstrual cycle so that they could keep working every day. <sup>38</sup> On average they will see five to fifteen clients a day. In one case, a group of Burmese girls in Thailand reported that they worked ten to fourteen hours a day. <sup>39</sup> Some Burmese migrants working in Thailand stated they had an average of ten customers a day and sometimes even twenty clients a day on weekends, and that they never had any choice in choosing their customers and the type of sexual services they would perform. <sup>40</sup> In 1996, another study of sex workers in brothels in Bangkok found that 426 of them worked an average of twelve to sixteen hours a day. <sup>41</sup> These women had to do whatever their clients and the brothel owners demanded of them.

One Thai sex worker, Mai (lusi) from PhangNga, a southern province of Thailand, recounted the number of hours she was forced to work while in the sex trade. "I worked from morning to late in the night - it depended, but usually from eight or nine to noon for lunch and to 4p.m., when we had a break, and had dinner and a shower, then till midnight." Mai added that the brothel owners also kept a record of the hours of work. According to her "if there was a customer, we

<sup>38</sup> ibid

<sup>39</sup> Thomas, A Modern Form of Slavery: Trafficking of Burmese Women and Girls into Brothels in Thailand,

<sup>40</sup> ibid

<sup>41</sup> Kaoru Aoyama, *Thai Migrant Sex Workers: From Modernisation to Globalisation*(England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009),

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

worked till he finished."<sup>43</sup>Girls could also be hired for an entire day as long as clients left a deposit or identification.