

Population Changes and Economic Development in Thailand: Their Implications on Women's Status

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INTRODUCTION

The status of women in a society is deeply rooted upon culture, religious beliefs, traditions and economic environments. Over time, factors mentioned above can change, although at different speeds. In the modern world of globalization, economic environments tend to change more rapidly, and in order to survive or to function more effectively, the roles of members in the society adjust along the acceptable limits allowed by cultural and religious constraints. If the constraints impose serious obstacles for members to function effectively in new environments, the constraints themselves can be modified, yet usually with a longer time lag. Thus, over time, the status of women changes according to their new roles and functions in society.

Through an analysis and integration of existing data and studies, this paper documents Thailand's demographic and economic changes over three decades during 1960-1990 and makes an assessment of their implications on the status of women in Thailand. There is no single consensus index to measure the status of women, but it is generally agreed that the status of women directly corresponds to the degree of women's autonomy, which can be defined as women's ability to manipulate their own personal environment. In assessing women's status under this conceptual definition, the study divides the life cycle into three phases, namely as children and youth, as adults, and as elders. It examines how women are treated or how they can manage their living style through the analysis of changes in key variables which correspond to each of the three phases. The key variables are *education* during childhood and youth; *marriage and divorce*, *fertility*, and *women's economic activities* during adulthood; and *living arrangements* and *old age security* during the elderly stage.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section lays out some conflicting evidence concerning the status of women in Thailand. The second section gives a brief description of salient features of Thailand's population and economic changes. The third section examines some aspects of changes in the status of women in Thailand by providing a conceptual framework on how the key variables are affected by economic and demographic changes, and presenting empirical evidence on changes in the key variables, causes of change and their implications on women's status. Conclusions and issues of present concern are provided in the last section.

I. CONFLICTING EVIDENCE ABOUT THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THAILAND

Experts who study the issues on women in Thailand have not yet reached a consensual conclusion regarding their status. If one assesses the status of women by the degree of gender preference for children, freedom of movement and association for adolescent and adult females, control in timing and choice of marital partner and the number of children, economic participation rate, control over household income and expenditures, and, finally, ability of females to inherit property, Thai women rank quite high. Evidence seems to indicate that there is no gender preference at birth, or at most, a mild preference for sons in Thailand (Akin 1984, Knodel et al. 1987). Thai cultural traits dictates different expectations and values between sons and daughters. While sons carry the family name, and only sons can serve in Buddhist monkhood which is believed to confer merits to both the parents and the sons themselves, daughters are expected to look after parents during their old age. After marriage, the groom moves in to live with the bride's family and helps in her family farm or enterprise. Accordingly, daughters are more likely to provide the source of economic and old-age security when compared to sons.

In terms of freedom of movement and association for adolescent and adult females, there are no serious restrictions that confine Thai women from having access to information and association with non-family members. Female migration rate from rural to urban areas is almost as high as that of male migration. Both the choice of spouse and the timing of marriage are mainly decisions of individual couples, with parents having marginal influence. The decision on the number of children is jointly made by the couple (Knodel 1982 and Aphichat 1984). The norm that women are entitled

to manage household income and expenditures is widely accepted. The female labor force participation rate is very high. Many women participate in the modern economic sectors, and some women hold high administrative posts in both the private and public sectors. For these reasons, the general belief is that the status of women in Thailand ranks relatively well in comparison with many Asian countries.

However, the conclusion that Thai women enjoy a relatively high status may only tell a partial story since there is evidence that points to the contrary. Regarding women's economic participation, gender discrimination still exists both in law and in practice. Thai women tend to concentrate in female-dominated occupation with lower pay, a characteristic shared by most working women around the world. Legally, there remain positions in the public sector that can be filled only by men, although such prohibition is mainly to protect women. Wage discrimination is not allowed by law, yet studies show that such practice is quite common. A male-female wage gap still exists even after the potentially influential factors have been controlled for (Paradon 1983, and Mathana 1995). Job advertisements which specify gender preference is legal and commonly practiced. Although some women hold high-rank positions in public and private establishments, women are still far from obtaining a proportionally just representation in such positions.

Culturally, although women have a choice of residence after marriage and normally inherit their parents' house, men usually hold authority in making major household decisions. This cultural trait was evidently reflected in the legal obligation that married women and children were obliged to use the man's family name. Only recently has a woman been allowed to choose to maintain her maiden name after marriage. Again, only recently have children of a Thai woman and a foreign father been allowed to acquire Thai nationality, while children of a Thai man and a foreign mother have long been granted the right. Different standards are also adopted regarding sexual freedom both before and after marriage. Society normally accepts, for example, that a husband could leave his wife if she commits adultery. Conversely, it is not widely practiced for a wife to leave her husband on the grounds of adultery as long as he supports her financially and takes good care of her (Napaporn et al. 1995).

The most conflicting evidence is the widespread commercial sex industry. Some cultural values and economic development complicate the problem of prostitution. The 1960 Anti Prostitution Bill, for example, imposed punishment to all parties involved except the clients. The Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act, which imposes harsher punishment to all parties involved, including clients, was enacted as late as 1997.

On the political front, women's actual participation in politics has been very limited despite their right to vote and to run in national elections. The actual number of female members of the parliament and the number of female members of the parliament who hold administrative positions in the Government are far below the proportion of female population. This applies to high-rank non-political positions in the Government as well. Hence, decision making at all levels is mainly in the hands of men (NCWA 1995).

The seemingly conflicting evidence can be explained by Thailand's unique historical background. In ancient times, male commoners were frequently recruited to work for the monarch or in the army, during which time women took full responsibility for their family farm. This explains why Thai women have always been active in economic activities. Studies suggest segregated responsibilities between men and women, in that women were responsible for financial and domestic matters while men controlled political and external matters (Akin 1984, Napaporn et al. 1995). Among the upper class Thai society, however, women were separated from economic activities, and their values were centered around management of domestic matters (Yos 1992). Nowadays, the division between commoners and the upper class is not clear, and the division of social class tends to be based on income class. Social mobility as a result of economic development leads to a society where people of the same income class may come from different social backgrounds. As the traces of past values coexist, conflicting evidence is generated.

II. SALIENT FEATURES OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHANGES IN THAILAND

The process of demographic transition in Thailand started in the early 1970s. In 1960, the number of population was reported at 26.2 million. The population size was reported at 34.4 million in 1970, 44.8 million in 1980 and 54.5 million in 1990. The inter-censal growth rates per annum were recorded at 2.74 percent, 2.65 percent and 1.98 percent respectively. The total fertility rates (TFR), as surveyed by the Survey of Population Change (SPC) during the mid inter-censal periods of 1965-1966, 1975-1976 and 1985-1986, were reported at 6.3, 4.9 and 2.7. The latest SPC conducted in 1991 indicated a decline of the TFR to 2.17. During the period of fertility decline, the mortality rate dropped substantially. Life expectancy of males and females increased from 55.2 and 61.8 years as reported by the SPC conducted during 1965-1966, to 67.7 and 72.5 years in 1991. The demographic trend of the past three decades is expected to continue in the near future, with a slower pace of fertility and mortality decline. The fertility rate may fall until it reaches the replacement level, while the mortality rate is expected to fall and approach the level of developed countries. These indicators show that Thailand takes approximately three decades to complete its demographic

transition.

Significant changes in the modern Thai economy began in the 1960s. Since the establishment of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) in 1960, economic development has been guided by the National Social and Economic Development Plans prepared by the NESDB. During the first two plans (1961-1966 and 1967-1971), the industrialization policy to promote import substitution industries was adopted, and infrastructure expansion, such as the construction of roads and dams, was emphasized. The expansion of industries was characterized by large imports of capital goods and high dependence on imported technology in production. As a result, although the expansion was quite impressive in terms of value added in the industrial sector, its impact on employment was marginal. The expansion of infrastructure during this period, however, facilitated family planning programs and accelerated change in the rural living style toward modernization and consumerism.

The import substitution industrialization policy was disrupted by two oil shocks in 1973 and 1979 and an overall world recession in the 1970s. During 1972-1985, the country suffered from a variety of problems, such as high inflation rates, current account deficit and high external debt. The situation forced the country to alter its economic development strategy from import substitution to export promotion.

During 1986-1990, the country experienced another round of prosperity. The economic growth was driven by labor-intensive products, such as textile, food processing and electronic parts assembly. A large number of women shifted from being home-based workers to employees in the modern sectors, a change which has significantly affected their roles and status.

It should be noted, however, that during the past three decades of alleged economic success, income distribution has shown no sign of improvement. Per capita income has rapidly increased as a result of rapid economic growth and the low population growth rate, leading to a decline in the proportion of population in absolute poverty from 30 percent in 1975 to 22.8 percent in 1988. Income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient, nevertheless, changed from 0.426 in 1975 to 0.479 in 1988 (Suganya and Somchai 1988, Medhi et al. 1994). This indicates that while economic development offers better opportunity for some people, it pushes under-privileged groups, which fail to catch up with the rapid development process, into a relatively more disadvantaged position and creates even more complicated problems. Although all disadvantaged groups are affected regardless of gender, women tend to be more vulnerable.

Thailand has come to another economic turning point in the 1990s. The disrupting factors this time are both external and internal. With the high degree of openness in the Thai economy, the country has been extremely vulnerable to external changes. One major external factor is the end of the Cold War which resulted in the entrance of many ex-socialist countries into the competitive world. The major internal factor was the success of population control in Thailand which resulted in a low rate of increase in the labor supply for more than two decades, thus contributing to Thailand's loss of competitiveness in labor intensive production. Many labor intensive industries are forced to close down and relocated to neighboring countries with higher availability of cheap unskilled labor. Women bear the strongest effects of such change as the relocated industries mostly employed female labor.

III. SOME ASPECTS OF CHANGES IN THE STATUS OF WOMENT IN THAILAND

1. Education

Education is a form of human capital investment. Like other investment decisions, it is governed by the rate of return. The optimal level is reached when the marginal costs equal the marginal benefits. The cost of education includes monetary expenses and the cost of students' time. As educational investment tends to occur when one is young, the decision to invest is usually made by parents rather than by the investors themselves. The parent's decision to invest in a child's education normally depends on the social and economic environments.

Demographic changes can affect female educational investment levels in many ways. Fertility decline, for instance, should reduce the overall costs of education as more resources are available per child. Also, fertility decline should decrease the shadow price of education of older siblings as the need for child labor in household activities, especially in taking care of younger siblings, is reduced. Women will benefit more than men in this regard as taking care of younger siblings is normally a daughter's responsibility. Studies on school enrollment in Thailand have indicated that family size, age and gender have significant effects on school enrollment. (See Chalongphob 1991, Mathana and Mason 1987 and Supriya 1994). Controlling for income, age and sex, children from smaller families have a higher probability of attending school. This effect is strongest among poor households and at educational levels beyond the primary level. The presence of younger children, especially preschool children, depresses school enrollment among older siblings. A girl is more susceptible to foregone her education at the presence of a preschool aged child, particularly girls of upper

secondary school age (Supriya 1994).

The economic environment will heavily influence a parent's decision to invest in a child's education because it affects the benefits of education. Economic changes affect the demand for female labor, thus alter their actual and perceived productivity which, in turn, affects the rate of return to female education. Studies also show that occupation of household head and location of household, whether in urban or rural areas, affect children's school enrollment. Given household income, children of rural households and households headed by farmers or laborers have lower school enrollment. School enrollment is higher for children in urban households and in households where household heads participate in the formal labor market, as the rate of return to education is higher if children's future occupation is in the formal labor market.

Educational indicators, such as the literacy rate, school enrollment of the population aged 6-29 and educational attainment by gender over 1960-1990 (Table 1) show that school enrollment in Thailand has increased for both males and females, and that the rate of increase has been more rapid for females. The achievement of the educational process as measured by educational attainment also confirms that male-female differentials in education have been declining. Literacy rates have increased continuously since 1960 for both males and females. Although discrepancy between male and female literacy rates remains during all periods, the gap has narrowed. School enrollment of the population aged 6-29 years gives a similar picture. The gap between male and female school enrollment rates become narrower at all levels of education, especially at the primary and secondary levels.

As previously discussed, fertility decline in Thailand frees children, especially daughters, from the responsibility of caring for younger siblings and reduces the cost of education. Economic development, which raises per capita income and increases women's opportunities for employment in the formal sector, has also encouraged higher educational investment in women. However, for the majority of rural residents, the level of education on their horizon meant only primary education and seldom went beyond lower secondary education. An increase in the average education of women, therefore, was also due to the government's policy to raise the level of compulsory education which was feasible through successful population control and economic development. While population control reduces the number of school aged children, economic development raises the government budget for education. It should be noted, however, that, despite higher female employment in the industrial and service sectors, labor demand was focused on unskilled labor. The development process, hence, did not encourage investment in education rapidly enough. In the future, the effect of fertility decline on school enrollment is expected to diminish since the number of children in each household is already quite low. Whether the gendered educational gap will continue to recede should depend on the type of labor demanded.

It should also be noted that enrollment and educational attainment classified by broad categories may not provide the overall picture of equal opportunity in education. Although the proportion of women enrolling at the tertiary level is quite high, they tend to enroll in fields which, on average, earn less in the labor market, such as the humanities, languages and social studies. Men, on the other hand, tend to enroll in fields which earn more, such as natural sciences, engineering and computers (NCWA 1995). Equal opportunity in the labor market will thus be a crucial factor in the further reduction of the gendered educational gap.

2. Marriage and Divorce

There are different determinants of the incidence and timing of marriage as well as marriage dissolution, for instance, the utility maximization of marriage, the demand for children, and the probability of finding a compatible marital partner.

Becker (1981) initiated a theoretical framework of utility maximization subject to constraints to analyze marriage decisions and dissolution. Under such a framework, marriage means two persons pooling their resources and time in producing and consuming commodities produced in the household. Thus, the gain from marriage could be measured by utility gained from the surplus in the level of commodities produced together that exceeds the sum of the levels that could be produced if they lived separately. The surplus of marriage arises from the division of labor within the household or from economies of scale in consumption as a result of living together. The larger the difference in human capital endowment and investment between partners, the higher will be the gain from the division of labor. Also, if the technologies of making and caring for children outside a family improve and the segregated roles by gender erode, the gains from marriage will decrease. Hence, the incidence of marriage will be reduced.

With regard to the demand for children, marriage tends to be universal and occurs earlier in societies where children are of high value. As the demand for children declines, delayed marriage and the proportion of permanent celibates tend to increase. The probability of finding a compatible marital partner also play an important role in the incidence and timing

of marriage. Freidan estimated that as the ratio of females to males in the marriage age group rose, the fraction of females being married fell (Freidan 1974). Incompatibility in the level of education also decreases the incidence of marriage or postpones the timing of marriage. In Singapore, an increase in women's education increases the difficulty of finding a compatible marital partner, hence reducing the marriage rate (Chan 1988).

On the incidence of divorce, changes in the demand for children and social values, as well as economic development, all affect the divorce rate (see more discussion in Bryant 1990). Divorce occurs once the benefits associated with staying married are less than the costs. Desired children increase the benefits of staying married, while unanticipated children increase the costs. The opportunity to remarry will reduce the costs of divorce, while the costs of divorce will increase for women who abandon investment opportunities in market activities and become specialized in home activities.

Studies show that Thai women have a relatively high degree of freedom regarding the timing and choice of marital partner, that marriage is close to universal in Thailand, and that the Thai culture accepts celibacy, divorce and remarriage (see for example, Cherlin and Aphichat 1987, Knodel et al. 1984, Guest and Tan 1994). [Table 2](#) presents the proportion of never-married among the population aged 13 years and over during four censuses starting in 1960. Both the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) and the proportion never married by age 50 increased over time for both males and females, but the changes were more significant for females than for males. The figures also show that the age at first marriage and the proportion of women permanently single have increased slightly. Differences in the proportion of ever-married women were most visible among women aged 20-35. An increase in SMAM is thus mainly due to postponed marriage rather than permanent singlehood which remains quite low even in 1990.

Three major factors are stated in several studies (see for example Bhassorn 1983, Guest and Tan 1994, and Mathana 1995) as sources of changing marriage patterns, i.e., changes in women's education, urbanization and increasing employment opportunities in modern economic sectors. These changes directly result from economic development. When a woman has a higher education and her opportunity to participate in the labor market increases, the gain from marriage decreases. This is because men and women are less specialized in either home or market activities. Higher education and per capita income in a modern economic environment tend to postpone marriage for both men and women, but postponement of marriage is more likely to turn into permanent singlehood in the case of women than that of men.

There are fewer studies on divorce than on marriage pattern. The proportion of divorce and separated combined remains very low and unchanged at approximately five percent (NSO 1960-1990). However, based on registration data, the proportion between registered divorce and marriage between 1981-1990 has increased from 7.9 to 9.7 percent (NSO, various issues). This implies that as the rate of divorce increased over time, it seemed to be matched by an increase in the rate of remarriage. Although divorce and remarriage are acceptable in Thai culture, divorced women and widows, to some extent, have a lower probability of getting remarried when compared to divorced men and widowers. Similar to the case of changing marriage patterns, economic and financial independence of women may contribute to such an increase in divorce and remarriage rates. However, until more is known about the reasons for divorce, and how divorce is settled, the implications of these incidences on the welfare of women remain unclear, except that more women will be the head of single-headed household or live alone.

3. Fertility

In a modern society, fertility is a deliberate choice, hence could be viewed as parents' demand for children. Under the framework initiated by Becker and Lewis (1974), the demand for children is determined by parents' preference for children, income and the shadow price of children. Parents' preference for children depends on the pure utility of children and the utility derived from children as a source of labor and old-age security. At higher income levels, the demand for children should be higher, if children are normal goods. In contrast, the higher the shadow price of children, the lower will be the demand for children.

Changes in the economic environment can affect the demand for children in many ways. Economic development shifts production from home-based to non-home-based institutions, and is usually accompanied by the establishment of modern financial institutions and organized social security systems. This should reduce the benefits of children as sources of household labor and old-age security. Under the process of economic development, income rises. Demand for children should thus rise. However, economic development also leads to higher demand for child services and better child quality, leading to an increase in the cost of children. The most significant effect of economic development on the demand for children probably works through an increase in the shadow price of children. Since children are very time-consuming, especially so of women's time, any factor which raises the value of women's time will result in an increase in the shadow price of children and a decline in demand.

As presented in Section II, fertility in Thailand has sharply declined. The TFR in Thailand fell by almost two-thirds and approached the replacement level between 1965-1991. During this period, fertility rates declined across all age groups, but most noticeably among women aged 30 years and over ([Table 3](#)). Analysis of two surveys on Attitudes About Children in 1988 and 1993 shows that although the mean preferred number of children expressed by married women aged between 15-49 years in 1993 was smaller than in 1988, the difference was only by a small margin (2.42 versus 2.65). The average expressed preferred number of children of married women aged below 30 years old was 2.29 in 1988 and 2.19 in 1993 (Vipan et al. 1996). Based on the two surveys, future fertility will likely remain at a level close to replacement.

Thailand's fertility decline is mainly due to deliberate marital-fertility control. In 1987, Knodel and colleagues used Bongaarts' accounting scheme to decompose changes in total fertility between 1968 and 1978 into changes in four principal proximate variables: the proportion of married among women, contraceptive use and effectiveness, prevalence of induced abortion, and duration of postpartum infecundability. The study concludes that contraception made the greatest contribution to the decline in total fertility.

The effectiveness of deliberate marital-fertility control was due to strong support of family planning programs from both governmental and non-government agencies. Women's participation in wage employment, induced by economic development, and women's education also attribute to fertility decline. From the results of focus group discussion presented in Knodel et al. (1987), parents anticipated higher standard of living for themselves and for their children, and believed that the sufficient provision of education to children was necessary for their survival in the new economic environment. As children stay in school longer and more production units move away from home, the benefits of children in assisting in household duties and in contributing to household income decreases, leading to a reduction in the demand for children. With regards to women's education, evidently, the percentage of currently married women practicing contraception was higher among the more educated than the less educated ones (see for example Knodel et al. 1982, and Peerasit and Aphichat 1985).

Although studies in general agree that, in Thailand, the number of children is usually a joint decision of husband and wife (see for example Knodel et al. 1987), women are found to bear higher responsibility in fertility regulation. Data from various surveys show that the proportion of currently married women aged 15-49 who practice contraception increased from 14.4 percent in 1969/1970 to 75.2 percent in 1995. Female contraceptive methods are also far more dominant than male methods. Male sterilization, condoms and other methods, including abstinence, postpartum rituals and withdrawal, constituted only 5.1 percent of all methods practice in 1995. Also, studies by Napaporn et al. (1996) indicates that 54.5 and 67.9 percent of women either never or seldom discussed the number of children and family planning with their husbands. Yet, women seem to have increasing control over the number of children they desire. Napaporn et al. (1996) found that the number of women stating that they made the final decision over the number of children accounted for 81.5 percent in 1996. In 1975, Deemar Company, as quoted in Knodel et al. 1987, found that 56 percent of men and 58 percent of women felt that the decision over the number of children was the responsibility of both husband and wife, and most of the rest felt that it was the responsibility of their own gender.

Fertility decline has shortened the time women spend in child bearing and child rearing; however, the magnitude of the time women save from managing a smaller family is not known and should not be over-emphasized. As the number of children per family falls, help from older children or hired labor falls. Provided that all household work is mainly the responsibility borne by women, their actual burden in both household and market activities may increase, and the changes may not render women better off.

4. Economic Participation

Labor force participation is usually viewed as an allocation problem in which each member of the household allocates his or her time between household and economic activities in order to maximize household utility (Becker 1965). Decision to participate in the labor force is affected by physical as well as human endowments. The physical endowment includes wealth and unearned income, while the most important human capital endowments is education.

While education, marriage and fertility all affect the supply of labor by type, economic development determines the demand side and together determines wage rate and employment status.

Population Census in 1960 and Population and Housing Censuses between 1970 and 1990 ([Table 4](#)) shows a declining trend in labor participation rates of both men and women during 1960-1980. In 1990, labor force participation was higher than that in 1980 for both men and women. The decline is observed in all age groups, but is most noticeable in the population aged 11-19 years where the change is more significant for females than males. From 1970 onwards, the participation rate of the population aged 60 years and above also declined, but the change was more significant for

males than for females. The table also shows that women started to participate in economic activities earlier than men, and that the male-female differentials in labor force participation rate have been declining over time. Since the participation rates of prime aged men between 25-59 years hardly changed, the reversing trend in the labor force participation rate for men between 1980-1990 probably resulted from change in the age structure of the population with more working age men in 1990. For women, however, an increase in the labor participation rate occurred in all age groups, thus the reversing trend should be due to the increase in working age women, as well as actual increased participation.

Multivariate analysis shows that the labor force participation rate of women is more sensitive to social and demographic changes than that of men. A shift of female labor from home-based to non-home-based establishments tends to force women to make a deliberate choice whether to participate in economic activities. This could influence the decline in female labor force participation during 1960-1980. However, fertility decline has the opposite effect. Fertility decline decreases the time women need in caring for children, which leads to higher female participation in the labor force. The effect of fertility decline, however, will be strong only when a large proportion of women work in non-home-based enterprises where work and childcare are in conflict. This effect should, therefore, become stronger over time as more women are expected to work in non-home-based establishments in the future. Education is also a key determinant of female labor force participation. A comparison of female labor force participation rate by educational attainment shows that women with higher education have higher participation rates, and this effect is stronger in urban areas and in more industrialized economy. Higher education depresses female labor force participation rates among younger age groups, raises the rate for prime age women, and suppresses the rate again for women aged 60 years old and above as educated women are more likely to work in the formal sector where a fixed retirement age applies.

Women's participation in the labor force is also more sensitive to economic changes than that of men. Women join the labor force when the economic environment is favorable to employment, and move out of the labor market when the economic environment turns unfavorable. A higher labor force participation rate of women in 1990 than in 1980 may partially be due to their adjustment to the economic boom in 1990 and economic recession in 1980. Such an increase may be temporary as 1990 was the peak of the Thai economy prior to economic downturn shortly thereafter. A note of caution should be made regarding the flexibility of women's participation in the labor force. The flexibility for women to move in and out of the labor market indicates that the types of work in which women engage require low-skills and offer relatively no security, hence the cost of discontinuity on the job is low.

On the demand side, changes in the percentage of the economically active population aged 11 years and above show that women are always over-represented in occupations relating to agricultural and sales. The proportion of women working as clerical and related workers and as professional, technical and related workers increased over time, and became higher than that of men in 1990 (Table 5). However, although the proportion of women working as administrative, executive, managerial workers and government officials increased over time, it remained very low when compared to that of men. The most significant changes in women's work status are the decline in the proportion of women who are unpaid family workers (from 82 percent in 1960 to 61.7 percent in 1990) and the increase in the proportion of women working as an employee (from 6.5 percent in 1960 to 22.9 percent in 1990). A greater concentration of women in a certain type of occupation implies that the choice of occupation for women has been more restricted amidst the increased acceptance of women in male-dominated occupations.

It is not possible to comprehensively compare male-female wage differentials. However, it is evident that among employees, women on average have always earned less than men. In 1977, female employees earned 33.4 percent less than male employees, and the gap among those with a tertiary level of education was 19.5 percent. This gap was smaller than the gap among those with primary education. In 1994, female employees earned 23.2 percent less than male employees, but the gap among those with tertiary education was 38.4 percent, which was higher than that of employees with primary education. This implies that the male-female wage gap has been declining over time. A decomposition of wage differentials in 1980 and 1989 shows that approximately 40 percent of the wage differential in 1980 could be explained by differences in the average age, education and marital status of men and women. But these characteristic differences by gender became less pronounced and could explain only 30 percent of wage differentials in 1989 (Mathana 1995). If the unexplained differentials are interpreted as due to discrimination, discrimination against women in the labor market has been very strong in Thailand. Discrimination in one area tends to transmit its effect in another. For instance, gender discrimination in the labor market will result in an unequal investment in human capital in men and women.

5. Living Arrangements and Old Age Security

Living arrangements is another area of choice whereby an individual adjusts in accordance with his or her social and economic roles. In discussing how family structure might change in response to economic changes, Pollak (1985)

considered three major roles of the family, i.e., the role of security provider, training school and production unit. In traditional society, family played the role of insurance institution that provided members protection against adverse economic consequences and uncertainty during sickness, unemployment and old age. Family also played the role of a school whereby knowledge is passed from one generation to another. Finally, family was a production unit where members worked together. In order to perform these functions effectively, a large extended family was desirable. However, as the social and economic structure changes, the relative advantages of family structure versus non-family structure in performing many of these activities has declined. Children who used to be the only source of old-age security has lost their significance in this respect, a change made possible because of modern financial institutions, and due to organized social security system. Likewise, educational institutions and non-family based production units can perform the last two functions more effectively. Hence, along with economic development and population changes, family structure has also changed, with extended and large families becoming less prevalent.

As a result of fertility and mortality decline, the Thai population aged. In 1960, the proportion of population aged 0-14 constituted 43.2 percent of the total population; adults aged 15-59 years constituted of 52.2; and population aged 60 years and above constituted of 4.6 percent. The old dependency ratio¹ was 8.8 percent. In 1990, the percentage of population classified by the three broad age groups were 28.8, 63.9 and 7.3 respectively, and the old dependency ratio was 11.4 percent. It is estimated that old dependency ratio will increase to 14.1 percent in the year 2000, and the number of elders will be around 5.7 million (NESDB 1991).

In terms of family size, according to the census data, average private household size declined from 5.73 in 1970 to 4.37 in 1990. Average private household size in rural areas was slightly larger than that in urban areas in 1980 and 1990, with no significant difference between urban and rural household size in 1970. The percentage of households in 1990 that were of nuclear family, extended family and non-family types was 67.58, 26.25 and 6.16 respectively. The percentage of families classified by type was not recorded in earlier censuses, hence a dynamic comparison is not possible. However, based on the experiences of other countries and other studies on household structure in Thailand (for example, Mason et al. 1987 and Mathana 1991, 1995), extended family should be declining proportionally, while the proportion of one-person and female single-headed households should be increasing. A smaller family size and changing family structure are the results of the changing age structure and living arrangement.

Change in family types has many implications on the welfare of women. It is expected that as family size becomes smaller, women spend less time in raising children and doing household chores. However, the time formerly spent in home activities is usually spent in market activities. It is, therefore, not clear whether women can afford more leisure than in the past, as household chores remain mainly the women's responsibility. This can have adverse effects on the welfare of women. As a result of the changing age structure and living structure, the number of female single-headed households will increase. This family type, as a group, is more susceptible to poverty, as women are in a disadvantaged position in the labor market and likely to take more responsibilities over childrearing in case of divorce. The problem is likely to become more critical since the incidence of female single-headed households has increased during economic development.

Most importantly, changes in the age structure of the population and altering family types have crucial impacts on women's old-age security. As the population grows older, the time and resources that must be allocated in caring for the elderly must increase rapidly both in magnitude and in proportion. Moreover, in order to design any sustainable scheme for old age security, the tax burden on the working aged population must be very high. At present, there are only two formal old-age security schemes which cover government officials, employees of government enterprises and large private establishments. The coverage is approximately 2.51 million persons which constitutes roughly eight percent of the total work force (Mathana et al. 1996). Hence, a majority of elders must rely on their own savings, children or prolonged participation in the labor market. Children remain the most important source of security, especially for rural parents. With fertility decline, the number of children still living of elders also declines.

Women are likely to bear adverse effects of change in this regard in both taking care of elders and as elders themselves. Within the next two or three decades, when the generation of women whose fertility rate has declined most significantly become elders, the burden of children in taking care of parents will increase more significantly. Women will be more affected by the incidence than men as taking care of elders is mainly the women's responsibility. Since organized social security usually starts in the formal sector, with a long time lag before the scheme covers the informal sector, and as women are more likely to work in the informal sector, women tend to be the last group to be covered. This, coupled with the fact that traditional sources of security within the family is weakening, will result in many female elders being left without protection and facing a higher risk of poverty, particularly those who live in one-person households.

IV. CONCLUSION AND ISSUES OF PRESENT CONCERN

Economic and demographic changes in Thailand during the past three decades have significantly affected the role and status of women. In general, women enjoy higher social and economic independence. At a closer look, however, it is women who bear most of the adverse effects of economic development and demographic change. Average household size and the proportion of extended households have declined over time, but the proportion of female-headed households and the proportion of females forming one-person households have increased. Women who should be able to save time from household activities as a result of fertility decline thus need to spend long working hours for income earning. The changing family structure, coupled with postponed marriage and lower fertility, has weakened the traditional security system where children were the source of old age security for parents. More women will then have to rely on their own savings or prolong their participation in the labor market, an option which is not always available or favorable for them. Female labor remains largely unskilled, and discrimination in the labor market is still widely practiced. As discrimination in the labor market leads to unequal human capital investment in men and women, all forms of discrimination against women, both in law and in practice, must be eliminated. Equally important is the prompt introduction of effective old age security system.

Another issue of concern deals with women in the commercial sex industry. This could be considered a symptom of past strategic development which emphasized growth and undermined the problem of unequal income distribution. Increase in income inequality is one of the flourishing factors of the commercial sex industry in Thailand. Economic success and better access to the mass media have fostered growing consumerism. Some women have chosen a short cut to quick money through prostitution, while some are forced into the industry against their will. Some Thai cultural values have even encouraged the growth of the industry. Emphasis on women's obligation to the family and debt payment for parents results in some women's voluntary entrance to the industry or in even women being sold by their parents. Finally, general acceptance of Thai men's unrestricted sexual freedom supports the existence of the industry (NCWA 1995). At the extreme, the existence of the commercial sex industry is viewed by some as a safeguard against the sexual assault of women.

Economic and demographic factors have changed rapidly, yet cultural factors change at a much slower pace. At present, many organizations, both at the international and national levels, are working toward promotion of women's status. Unfortunately, decision makers at all levels who are men are likely to consider the problem at low priority. The development of women's status, therefore, has not been on par with overall economic development.

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