

Cross-Border Migration, Trafficking and the Sex Industry: Thailand and Its Neighbours

Carl Grundy-Warr, Rita King and Gary Risser

The post-Cold War formalisation of cross-border political and economic relations has turned previously alienated borderlands into coexistent, even interdependent ones, such that each state tries to maximise economic advantage through more open borders (Grundy-Warr, 1993).¹ One dimension of these new geopolitical realities is the promotion of transboundary transportation networks, the so called 'corridors of growth' linking various parts of the greater Mekong Basin together as a means to encourage closer intra-regional trade and investments (Walker, 1993). The Asian Development Bank has effectively become a supranational investment broker supporting ambitious transboundary infrastructural projects which is in line with the Bank's vision of sub-regional economic cooperation (Chapman, 1995). Ahead of the transborder highways, regional business people and politicians are talking about a new "border bonanza" in mainland Southeast Asia (Mellor, 1993), particularly within certain areas such as the so-called "golden quadrangle" (Handley, 1993; Robertson, 1995) or Asia's "growth circles" (Chai-anan, 1995; Hinton, 1995).²

Undoubtedly, more permeable borders and an end to the ideological inter-state rivalries of the Cold War era have produced a period of growing cross-border economic contact. Even so, there are negative dimensions to the new geopolitical order in mainland Southeast Asia and ones that will probably have serious long-term developmental impacts. These include the rapid increase in unsustainable transboundary natural resource exploitation (see Hirsch, 1995) and a whole set of problems relating to widespread cross-border movements of people, particularly concerning undocumented migration, human trafficking and cross-border prostitution (Mya Than, 1992; Asia Watch, 1993; Risser, 1995).

In recent years there has been an unprecedented rise in short-term or temporary cross-border movements of people in mainland Southeast Asia (Pongsapich, 1994). One can attribute this to several factors :

- the so-called transitional economies of Indochina and Myanmar (Burma) have been opened up to international capital;
- there is a need for more migrant labour to feed the economic growth of the emerging Newly Industrialising Economies (NIEs) of Asia;
- there are problems of deteriorating economies in the countryside, particularly in Myanmar and Cambodia. Poverty is a critical issue underlying the migration of young people from villages to towns or to other countries;
- the end of the Cold War politics and growth in formal trade has also produced a big expansion in cross-border natural resource exploitation, particularly in the timber, energy, mining and fishing industries;
- the promotion of cross-border tourism, both local and international;
- the continued boom in undocumented trade as a result of lax border restrictions and corrupt officials is matched by a massive rise in undocumented migration.

It is evident from the limited academic literature available that there is an urgent need for more research on the many socio-economic impacts of short-term undocumented migration in the region. For instance, Thailand has become a major recipient and sender of migrant workers. Conservative estimates show that there are around 100,000 Indochinese, 100,000 Chinese and as many as 334,000 Burmese people working illegally in Thailand (Royal Thai Ministry of Interior, 1994).³

Cross-border migration is likely to continue increasing in mainland Southeast Asia as the aforementioned networks of roads and railways facilitate trade and mobility (Chapman, 1995). Whilst this will provide people with access to better paid jobs and economic opportunities outside their home environments, there are associated costs. One of the biggest problems is likely to be the spread of HIV/AIDS.⁴ As Singhanetra-Renard (1995) has

observed, population movements affect all aspects of HIV/AIDS, including the underlying socio-economic issues, the transmission of HIV and prevention and health care campaigns. In mainland Southeast Asia the links between migration and HIV/AIDS are exacerbated by an existing sex industry, sexual attitudes condoning male promiscuity and casual sexual encounters.⁵

Furthermore, single migrant workers, like many single tourists, are away from their home environments and, *"the anonymity gained through population movement can be linked to indiscriminate sexual behaviour by movers"* (Singhanetra-Renard, 1995: 59).⁶

Thailand is becoming a critical subregional centre for trade, industry and tourism. It is also noted for its flourishing sex industry that caters to locals and international tourists. Indeed, during the 1970s and 1980s sex was openly marketed as a key attraction by Thai and international travel companies (Truong, 1990).⁷

As a result, Thailand has been particularly hard hit by HIV/AIDS. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated that 3.5 million people in Asia have been infected with HIV and probably as many as 750,000 of those people are from Thailand (Fairclough, 1995a). Unfortunately, the opening of borders and increasing numbers of migrant workers is likely to help the spread of HIV/AIDS into neighbouring countries (Jantraka, 1995). These workers usually include traders, loggers, fishermen, truck drivers, short stay tourists, and commercial sex workers. For example, it is a common practice for truck drivers who deliver goods across the borders of mainland Southeast Asia to sleep with prostitutes at various stops along their routes. Once infected, they may spread the virus along the same path and eventually back to wives and children. Similarly, migrant labourers in Thailand, away from the social controls of their home community, may partake in activities from which they would normally refrain. A worker may engage in casual or commercial sex in Thailand and become HIV infected then return to his own country and pass the disease on to his wife (Risser, 1995).⁸

In addition to the movement of truckers and traders, there are thousands of migrants who regularly cross over borders. Many of these are women who voluntarily enter low paid (but higher paid work than they can get in their own countries) service sector jobs, including entry into the booming cross-border commercial sex trade (Fairclough, 1995b). Thailand has become a regional centre (but not the only centre) for the international sex industry with

women commercial sex workers from all the neighbouring countries and from as far afield as Eastern Europe and Latin America. Whilst many women enter the industry for personal economic reasons, there is a disturbing increase in the trafficking of women and girls into forced prostitution.

Trafficking in Women and Girls

The current increasing international awareness of the spread of HIV/AIDS and the desire to maintain a flourishing and highly profitable sex industry, has led those in the sex trade to seek means of allaying fears of clients about the pandemic problem. One such means is the frequent procurement of young girls and women who are considered to be less likely to carry sexually transmitted diseases and more importantly HIV/AIDS.⁹ These *"fresh"* recruits are offered as virgins to clients for high prices.¹⁰ Some brothel owners recruit a new batch of women and girls every six months (Porter, 1992). Consequently, traffickers are travelling to poorer and remoter villagers across Thailand's international boundaries in search of young novices, including children (Boydon, 1992).

Skrobanek (1994) has noted that the investigation into the trafficking in women and children *"should be made in connection with the international division of labour, and the labour export/import policy of sending and receiving countries."* Certainly the problem of trafficking in migrants is truly global and revenue from human smuggling may be funding crime networks of unprecedented sophistication.¹¹ Of particular concern is the trafficking in women and girls which represents serious violations of basic human rights and touches on sensitive areas of national and international law.¹² As the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (September 1994) stated:

"For many trafficked migrants who are women, sexual violence is often part and parcel of the trafficking process. Rape and other forms of sexual abuse during the voyage have been reported by trafficked women. Many women are forced into prostitution during transit and upon arrival in the country of destination."

In mainland Southeast Asia, the problem of trafficking women and children across political borders has reached new heights. As one magazine report on organised crime and the sex trade stated:

"The opening of China, Vietnam and Cambodia couldn't have come at a better time for an industry that thrives on economic disparity."

(Vatikiotis, Sakamaki and Silverman, 1995: 26).

A mix of political and economic processes have aided the networks, organisations and individuals who profit from human trafficking and forced prostitution. This is illustrated by the well researched case of Burmese women and girls working in the Thai sex industry (Asia Watch, 1993).

Cross-border Networks and Trafficking Routes: Myanmar-Thailand

Official trade between Myanmar and Thailand has increased since late 1988 when Thai authorities began a form of constructive engagement with the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) governing Myanmar following SLORC's military crackdown on student-led pro-democracy demonstrations (Lintner, 1990). As Mya Than (1994) noted:

"Although the US-led embargo was imposed on Burma due to human rights issues Myanmar's external trade has flourished again due to political support from China and ASEAN nations."

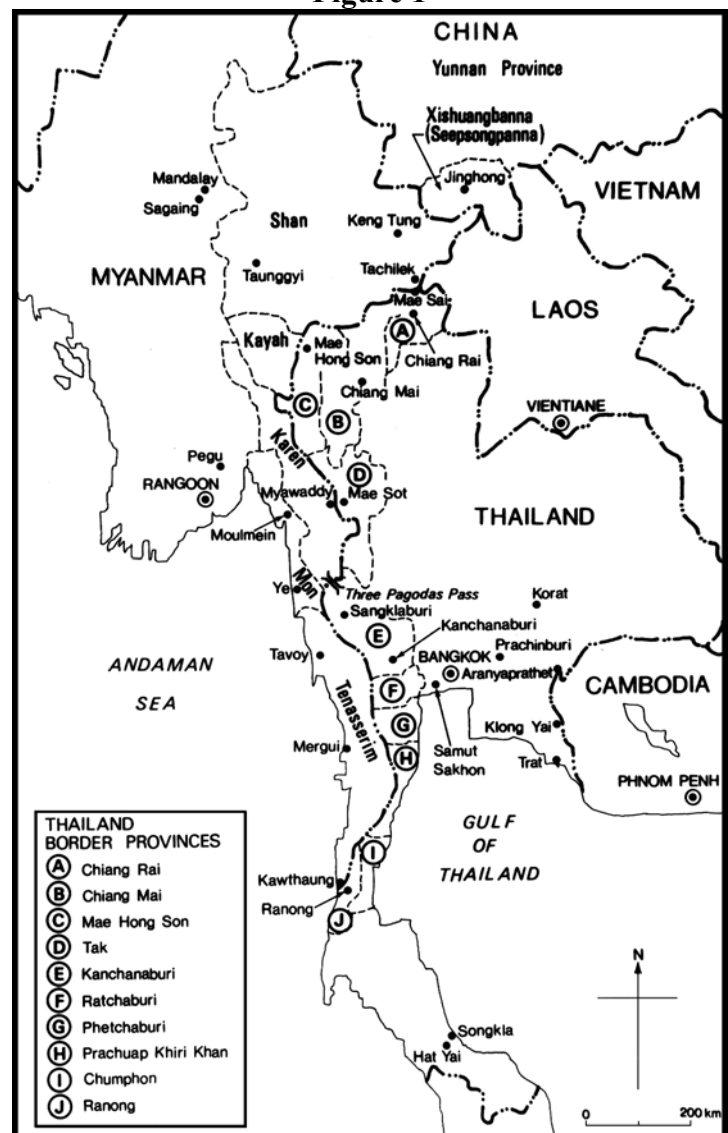
Two main overland routes are currently used most often; they are Keng Tung-Tachilek-Mae Sai-Chiang Mai route and a route connecting Myawaddy and the Thai border town of Mae Sot, six miles across the Moei border river. Further south there is some trade across a narrow strait between Kawthaung and Ranong (Figure 1). The main border outposts along the Thai side of the border are Mae Sai, Mae Hong Son and Mae Sariang in Chiang Rai Province, Mae Sot in Tak Province, and Kra Buri and Ranong in the southern tip of Thailand (Mya Than, 1994). A wide variety of goods are traded both legally and illegally,¹³ and it is likely that formal trade statistics are a "gross underestimation" of the total cross-border movement of goods (Mya Than, 1992: 93). These are also key crossing-points for the trafficking of women and children.

Geopolitical changes in the region as a whole and in the Myanmar-Thai borderlands in particular have resulted in efforts to strengthen formal inter-state linkages (Grundy-Warr, 1993). Now that the

Burmese military has pushed deep into territory formerly held by ethnic minority armies, Yangon (Rangoon) has effective control over long stretches of the border for the first time since Burma's independence (Lintner, 1995). New border crossings have been opened to facilitate cross-border activities.¹⁴ Anywhere between 200,000 and 500,000 Burmese people may be living illegally in Thailand. These cross-border migrants have a variety of motives for moving. Some are Burmese students and political activists who have fled persecution and imprisonment by SLORC, some are members of ethnic minorities who have escaped the Burmese military's counterinsurgency operations, many are migrants workers seeking higher-paid jobs than are available in Myanmar¹⁵, and a growing number are women and girls who are the victims of trafficking operations.

For trafficking networks to operate, there has to be cooperation from local village levels where women and girls are recruited up to the national and

Figure 1



international levels. Women, usually poor, are lured by false promises of well-paid jobs abroad as dancers, waitresses, hostesses or domestic workers and have to pay a fee to an “agent” for the opportunity. Alternatively, peripatetic recruitment agents enter villages and some women are sold to these agents or simply abducted (IOM Newsletter, September 1994). Sometimes provincial intermediaries will introduce members of families to agents who promise to make arrangements for relevant documentation and transportation across borders. Families may even mortgage their plot of land as a form of payment to recruitment agents (Skrobanek, 1994).

There is evidence of official collusion in trafficking on one or both sides of the border. Whilst on the Burmese side of the border there have been areas where official state functionaries have not dared set foot, any movements across the border on the Thai side would quickly be picked up by the Thai police. Both immigration officials and border police are implicated in trafficking operations (Asia Watch, 1993, Ch. 5).

Once out of their home country, the women and girls have their documents confiscated by their agents and they are sold or taken by prior arrangement to brothel owners who force them to work as prostitutes. In order to recover their documents and leave, they are obliged to pay the “debt” incurred for their procurement, transportation, food, housing and medical costs. Most women are hard pressed to pay for their freedom, whilst others find themselves resold, and their “debts” recalculated, just as they are about to pay them off (IOM Newsletter, September 1994).

Women and girls caught in trafficking and forced prostitution are caught in debt-bondage.¹⁶ Their position is made more vulnerable because like other illegal migrants, they are at the mercy of their employers. If they protest, refuse demands or disobey, they can easily be turned over to the local police and arrested under the Thai Immigration Act and summarily deported.

“The Immigration Act is often used not to keep Burmese from entering Thailand, but to ensure compliance and obedience once they are there. This is particularly true in the case of women and girls trafficked into prostitution, who in virtually every case enter Thailand with the knowledge and complicity of border guards and police. Most are forced to remain in brothels because of their debt to

the owner and their fear of arrest as illegal immigrants.”
(Asia Watch, 1993: 17-18).

The trafficking of young girls and women into Thailand for the sex industry has remained virtually unchecked despite high profile crackdowns.¹⁷ Reforms undertaken are minimal and half-hearted and hardly any Thai officials or brothel-owner has been investigated. As Asia Watch (1993) has noted there are different legal regimes addressing the overlapping components of trafficking and prostitution in Thailand, and contradictions exist. For instance, the Anti-Trafficking law exempts victims from imprisonment or fines, but the Anti-Prostitution Law (1960) does not; the Suppression of Prostitution Act penalises prostitution whilst the Entertainment Place Act (1966) regulates and taxes it. Thai police have profited from non-enforcement of the law by collecting protection fees from the brothel owners so as to ensure that the long arm of the law do not catch up with the latter and to ensure the ‘return’ of prostitutes who are arrested. Furthermore, half of the Burmese women interviewed by Asia Watch Women’s Rights Project claimed to have policemen as clients.

The deportation of Burmese immigrants from Thailand has been a frequent event in recent years. Immigration and border police authorities have often escorted illegal migrants to the Myanmar border where SLORC officials are waiting on the other side. All Burmese people who leave the country illegally are subject to arrest, a fine of 1,500 kyat¹⁸ or a prison term if six months under the Immigration and Manpower Act of the Union of Myanmar. Given the fact that prostitution is officially illegal, women are liable to additional prison terms if caught upon their return. In fact, the most vulnerable of all immigrants are those who are caught in trafficking operations, members of ethnic minorities, and students deemed to be political opponents of SLORC.¹⁹ To avoid forcible deportation, bribes are sometimes paid by the deportees to secure release from immigration detention centres, to border police to allow re-entry into Thailand, or before reaching the Myanmar coast.

Borderland geopolitics have tended to work in favour of SLORC and against migrants facing deportation.²⁰ Furthermore, deportation was often at points along the border far from any village or main roads. Women are then faced with further possible abductions and solicitations from agents who follow the police trucks, to offer the women jobs (in brothels), transportation and other arrangements for

a loan, which heralds in another period of debt-servitude for the women who accept (Amnesty International, 1991).

The Borderlands' Sex Industry

Whilst many foreign visitors to Thailand are well aware of the lurid sex shows of Patpong and Soi Cowboy in Bangkok or other commercial sex establishments in seaside resorts like Pataya and Phuket, it is a fact that such places represent only the most visible and popular portion of the total sex industry. Virtually every urban centre and main highway have outlets for commercial sex, and the now thriving formal and informal trade across political borders has produced a growth in commercial sex establishments in border towns. The three case studies below illustrate this.

Shan State and the Hilltribes of Northern Thailand

According to one important report by Sompop Jantraka (1995) NGO data for Mae Sai, the self-styled "*capital of the Golden Triangle*" on the northern Thai border with Myanmar, which was collected between 1989-94 showed that 80% of the commercial sex workers were from hilltribes across the Thailand-Myanmar border; 17% were from Thai hilltribes; and only 3% were native Thais from farming families in the Payao, Chiangmai and Lampang districts. The study found that the overall crude HIV prevalence rates in the villages of the highlands were 2.13% compared with an HIV prevalence of around 6.9% among persons aged 15-49 years (in 1992) in the northern Thai lowlander population (Nelson, *et al*, 1994).²¹

It also revealed that the Shan, Akha and Yao communities were showing a higher percentage of people with HIV than other groups.²² For instance, the Shan community had the highest rate of 8.75% of people showing HIV positive serostatus. Most of these people were from Mai Ai district near to the international border. This is an area that is well known as an active one for the recruitment of young women into Thailand's sex industry. Many Shan women can be found in the lower class brothels of northern Thailand, particularly along the busy trucker routes (Beyrer *et al*, 1995). According to a Thai Working Group on AIDS estimates in 1992 there were around 100,000 Shan prostitutes working in Chiang Mai alone. As much as 20% of the local Shan prostitutes returning home from northern Thailand were reported to be HIV infected. As Doug Porter (1992) noted:

"At the regional level, there is great potential for rapid escalation of the HIV/AIDS problem from Thailand into Yunnan and Myanmar, both currently considered low HIV risk areas...A rapid escalation in the HIV/AIDS pandemic, combined with the inordinately difficult task of mounting effective treatment, prevention and education programme in such remote localities, could dramatically effect all aspects of the society, economy and environment."

Thailand-Malaysian Borderlands

Just as northern Thailand is being promoted as part of a dynamic area of transborder trade, tourism and economic growth, Thailand's southernmost borderlands with Malaysia are part of a zone that is designated as ASEAN's "*northern growth triangle*" (Liwgasemsan, 1993; Salleh, 1993).²³ Since the mid-1980s, there has been an increase in border trade and tourism. Pshyachinda *et al* (1995) provide some details about the links between transborder sex tourism and the likely spread of HIV transmission from Southern Thailand to neighbouring countries. For instance, the majority of cross-border visitors to Southern Thailand are male Malaysians and Singaporeans.

Whilst major destinations for international tourists exists in Southern Thailand, such as the popular resort of Phuket, many of the overland visitors call in at towns such as Hat Yai, Songkhla Province; Betong, Yala Province; and Sugai Kolok, Narathiwat Province. The number of short stay visitors across the land border has increased from 555,000 in 1985 to 907,000 visitors in 1994. The study found that as much as 90% of the clients of prostitutes in Sugai Kolok are men from either Malaysia or Singapore. Given the high estimated HIV seropositive prevalence rates amongst women engaged in direct prostitution²⁴ in Southern Thailand of 18-24%²⁵, Pshyachinda *et al* (1995: 145) point out:

"It is probably legitimate to assume that the risks for HIV transmission is quite high if a significant number of foreign visitors use prostitute service without appropriate protection."

Thai-Cambodia Borderlands

The end of the ideological and military rivalry that existed during the Cold War between the "*front line state*" of Thailand and the Indochinese countries, has led to many border crossings being reopened

with a resurgence of transborder economic activity. This is evident along the Thai-Cambodia border, which between 1979-1989 had become something of an *“ideological frontier”* between the West, ASEAN and Khmer resistance on one side and the Vietnamese on the other. The withdrawal of the Vietnamese military, Cambodian peace accords and subsequent UN-supervised elections in Cambodia led to an easing of ASEAN-Indochina relations. Along the borderlands, there remains the problem of territory still under *de facto* control of the Khmer Rouge (Grundy-Warr, 1994), but commercial links between Thailand and Cambodia have been growing. Nowhere is this more visible than in the southern section of the international borderlands, particularly in Trad Province of Southeastern Thailand.

Trad has five districts, one municipality and pre-district. Klong Yai is the district bordering on Cambodia, and it is a crossroads for traders, tourists and business people of both countries. Movement across the border is easy, as Pramualratana (1995: 108) states:

“Indeed, this zone along the border can be viewed as a Thai-Cambodian neutral zone where no travel documents are required and movement is unrestricted.”

The population in this *“neutral zone”* include traders involved in import-export businesses (male and female); loggers (male); fishermen from Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia; local tourists, particularly Thais visiting Cambodia and commercial sex workers (females from Vietnam, Cambodia and to a lesser extent, Thailand). Between 1992 - May 1993 there were also numerous nationalities who were working for the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). According to Pramualratana (1995) there are frequent, short-term movements across the political border without any serious examinations of travel documents or citizenship, particularly for the commuter parts of Haad Lek and Koh Kong (Sao Tong to the Cambodians).

The ports are effectively centres of commerce for cross-border business and recreation for the thousands of labourers and fishermen who work there or call into port. The ports of Koh Kong, Koh Jao island, Pat Klong and Komangoom (Sihanoukville) in Cambodia, and Klong Yai, Koh Kud and Kalapangha part of Haad Lek (Thailand) all have numerous hotels, restaurants, night-clubs, karaoke bars and a full range of commercial sex establishments. The fishing industry attracts

thousands of boats of various sizes and crews have routine contact with ports throughout the Gulf of Thailand (Figure 2).

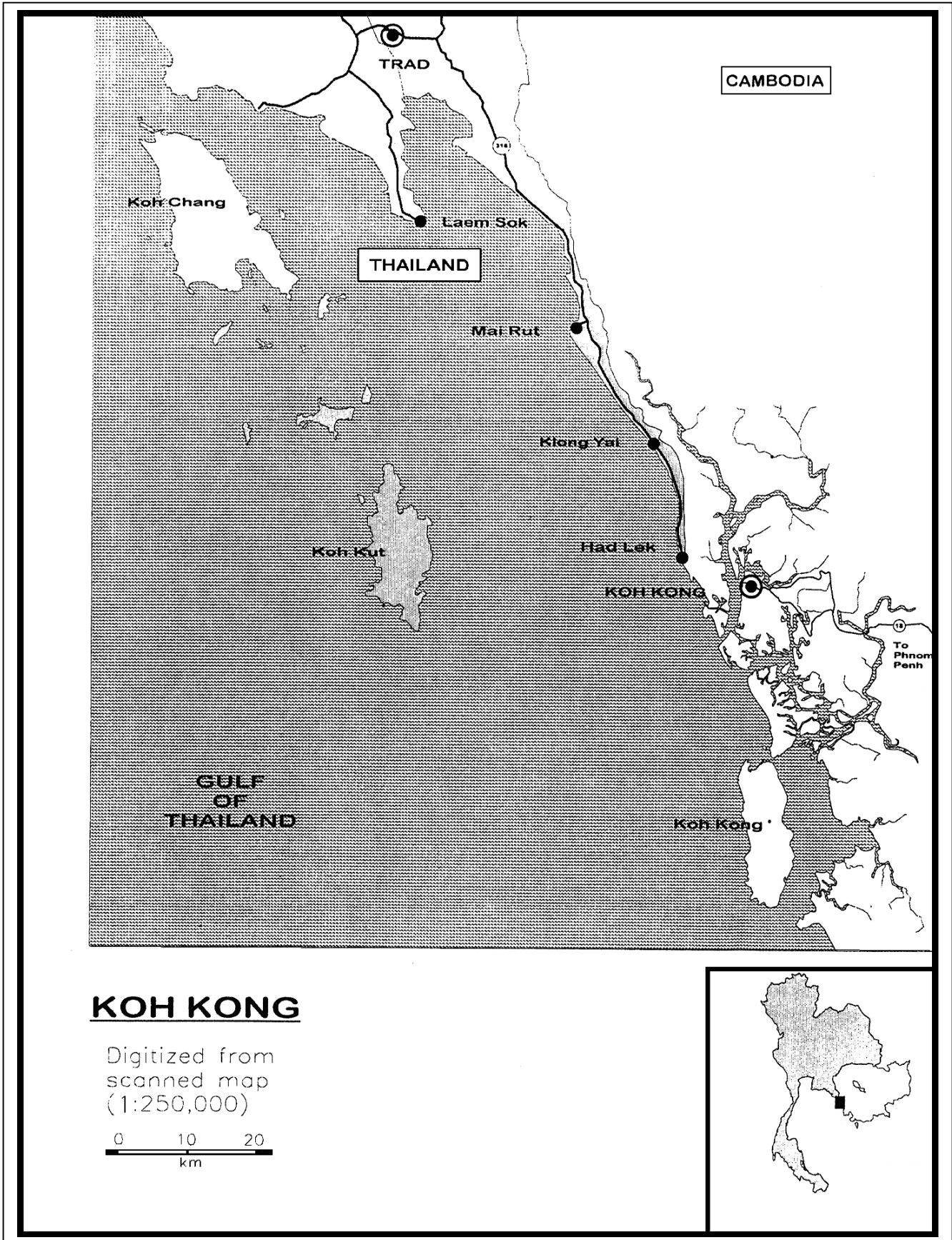
Overfishing in the Thai Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) means that many fishing vessels frequently enter the EEZs and territorial waters of neighbours whether this is legally or otherwise. Pramualratana's (1995) investigation of the cross-border movements in relation to the spread of HIV/AIDS reveals that fishermen are a particularly high risk group.²⁶

Studies of the commercial sex industry in Thailand's busy fishing port of Ranong near to Myanmar on the Andaman Sea reveal a similar story.²⁷ For the Thai-Cambodian ports and Ranong there is ample evidence of very active cross-border recruitment of women and girls for commercial sex establishments.²⁸

Tackling Human Trafficking and the Cross-Border Health Crisis

Asia Watch Women's Rights Project (1993: 159) suggested that the trafficking issue across the Myanmar-Thai border offers an opportunity *“to develop a model for prevention of trafficking and protection of victims that may be applicable to other countries.”* In addition to urging the countries concerned to ratify and abide by relevant international conventions,²⁹ Asia Watch called upon Thailand to enforce its existing laws that would help to protect victims of trafficking from further abuse, extortion, arbitrary arrest, detention in immigration centres, and summary deportation. Much could be done to investigate, arrest and persecute the roving recruitment agents, colluding officials, and the brothel-owners.

To help curtail the clandestine operations of the traffickers there is a need for specially trained law enforcement officials at the border points, and for official investigations into the operations of employment agencies and recruitment networks operating in known trafficking centres such as Mae Sot, Mae Sai and Ranong. International agreement between Thailand and Myanmar is necessary to ensure the safe return of people caught in trafficking operations. Asia Watch expressed considerable doubts about the safety and well-being of people deported back to Myanmar³⁰, and the report called for SLORC to permit frequent and systematic monitoring of returned trafficking victims by Thai officials and international organisations to ensure the protection of the women and girls from further arrest, harassment, abuse or discrimination.



One of the most disturbing problems associated with human trafficking is the fact that the women and girls involved are placed in enormous personal danger of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS with virtually no possibility of self-protection. NGOs are trying to target brothels in their HIV/AIDS prevention programmes, although there is a need for multilingual intervention strategies when many of the women and girls concerned are from other countries or ethnic minority groups (Pramualratana, 1995; Beyer *et al*, 1995). Nevertheless, at the heart of the problem is the fact that the women and girls working in the sex industry as a result of trafficking operations are doubly “disempowered as employees” (Singhanetra-Renard, 1995) as illegal migrants working in an already exploitative and highly discriminatory industry. As such, these women and girls are unable to negotiate the terms of their employment, such as number of clients per day and safer sex practices.

Conclusion

Transborder trafficking represents a growing problem in a part of the world where formerly ideological and alienated borders have suddenly become critical crossing-points for businesses and communities. The fact that the sex industry is one of the beneficiaries of permeable borders should be of no surprise. The widespread existence of all kinds of prostitution in Thailand touches on a whole range of cultural, social, economic, religious, and political issues that are well beyond analysis here (see Phongpaichit, 1982; Hantrakul, 1988, 1992; Truong, 1990; Pyne, 1992) It should be obvious, however, that the current existence of massive cross-border migration is likely to facilitate both the transmission and geographical spread of HIV/AIDS throughout the Mekong Basin and beyond. Already there are worrying signs from Cambodia, which is having to face an escalating public health problem on top of massive socio-economic developmental needs (Kahane, 1995).³¹

The technical consultation on information regarding population movements and HIV/AIDS held at Chulalongkorn University in May 1995 produced a useful set of recommendations to help manage the growing transboundary health crisis related to the spread of the HIV virus. Clearly many migrant groups are at risk and borderlands are becoming critical zones for government-run public health campaigns and for NGOs involved in HIV/AIDS education, prevention and health care activities. Many of the conference contributors stressed the

need for collaboration at all levels: local/cross-border (sister city) level, provincial, national, sub-regional (e.g. Mekong Basin), regional (e.g. ASEAN and partner countries), and international levels. Such cooperation should be between relevant government ministries, departments and agencies; academic research institutions;³² and between concerned NGOs across borders.

Open borders are a welcome change in a part of the world that has witnessed bloody warfare and massive refugee movements due to ideological and political differences, superpower meddling, and brutal regimes. Nevertheless, sub-regional economic development and the increasing mobility of people have further internationalised problems associated with the sex industry and public health. Such problems can only be adequately tackled if there is systematic research, sufficient resources and a willingness to tackle difficult socio-economic and political issues within and across political boundaries.

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Notes

- ¹ The categories 'alienated', 'coexistent' and 'interdependent' borderlands relate to differing degrees of formal cross-boundary contact between neighbouring states. Refer to Oscar J. Martinez (1994) 'The dynamics of border interaction. New approaches to border analysis' in C. H. Schofield (ed) 'Global Boundaries': 1, 1-15, *World Boundaries Series*, Routledge: London. Grundy-Warr (1993) has argued that the new geopolitics of mainland Southeast Asia has produced greater coexistence between states, although we have to apply such terms cautiously because there are still sections of borderlands that are under the *de facto* control of groups opposed to the extension of central government authority.
- ² The 'growth quadrangle' is a term applied to the large transborder zone covering southern Yunnan Province (China), Laos, northern Myanmar and northern Thailand. 'Growth circles' imply "both tertiary and businessman-to-businessman *guanxi*, that evocative Chinese term for 'connections'" (*Asia, Inc.*, 1993, 2, 11: 37).
- ³ Thailand is also a major sender of migrant workers. An estimated 118,600 Thais were working in other Asian countries in 1993, particularly in Japan, Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore, with another 17,000 Thais working in the Middle East (*Year Book of Labour Statistics*, Department of Labour, Royal Thai Government).
- ⁴ For a detailed analysis of the links between "wheeling" (i.e. the regional transport and road networks), "dealing" (i.e. cross-border trade and settlement), migration and the spread of HIV/AIDS, readers should refer to Porter (1995), full reference in bibliography.
- ⁵ Anchalee Singhanera-Renard (1995) has argued that migrant workers in labouring jobs are often subjected to exploitation from employers, poor and often unhygienic working conditions, with very limited access to welfare and health services. Many migrants live in temporary work site shelters or in low-cost rented rooms. For many migrant workers their main outlets from stress are alcohol, sex and drugs.
- ⁶ Prostitution touches on many important socio-economic, cultural and religious issues. Sukanya Hantrakul has questioned Thai patriarchal values as an aspect of prostitution in the country that would exist without foreign customers. In Thai family life the major point of conflict in marriage stems from fear of minor wives. This fear and subsequent marital conflict, together with financial predicaments, has led to many women preferring their husbands to visit prostitutes rather than to take a second or minor wife, "For virtuous young Thai virgins, the prostitute is a necessity, providing an opportunity for their male lovers to gain experience before they marry. For loving mothers, the prostitute is an adventure, a social service, a cultural universal for males" (Hantrakul, 1988: 134).
- ⁷ As Thanh-Dam Truong (190: 178) notes that advertising campaigns of tour operators deliberately mix sexual fantasy and meaning based around East-West differences.
- ⁸ According to Sawaengdee and Isarapakdee (1991), approximately 3.5% of Thai truckers are HIV infected, and this figure is expected to climb to 10-29% by the year 2000.
- ⁹ Many of the young women and girls who are trafficked are brought in as virgins, but a high proportion of them leave infected with HIV (Jantraka, 1995; Asia Watch, Women's Rights Project, 1993).
- ¹⁰ Some brothel owners employ the services of local doctors to make it "appear" that new recruits are still virgin to clients, so that these women and girls can reap high returns over their initial employment period (Asia Watch, Women's Rights Project, 1993).
- ¹¹ The problem of trafficking in women and girls is an international one. (See the IOM Bulletins for details). For instance, an estimated 5,000-7,000 Nepalese women and girls are thought to be trafficked to India alone each year (IOM Newsletter, September 1994). The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, an advocacy group, has estimated that there are as many as 150,000 foreign sex workers in Japan, mostly from the Philippines and Thailand. Cambodia and Vietnam recently have become new centres for sex tourism and sources of "recruits" for the trafficking networks (see Vatikiotis *et al*, 1995). Organised crime syndicates, such as the notorious Japanese underworld organisation, the Yakuza, as well as corrupt law enforcement and government officials, are involved in "an efficient web of human trafficking throughout the region and beyond" (Risser, 1995: 47). Furthermore, China is now a major source for all forms of migrant worker trafficking. See also David deVoss 'Labour so cheap' and Joe Studwell 'Passports so dear' about the massive Asian migrant trafficking and smuggling operations to the Americas in *Asia, Inc.*, May 1993, 2, 5.
- ¹² The Slavery Convention of 1926 condemns slavery and slavery-related practices. Females sexual slavery has specifically been condemned by the 1949 Convention on the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. The Convention calls on state parties to punish traffickers and to protect all persons only

- after an agreement with the state of destination. In addition, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) obligates states to eliminate discrimination and, under Article 6, to take all appropriate measures to suppress all forms of trafficking in women.
- 13 Myanmar's legal exports to Thailand are mostly beans and pulses, marine products, raw rubber, vegetables and fruits, and industrial art objects. Illegal exports have included timber, gems, minerals, livestock and drugs from the infamous "Golden Triangle". On the other hand, Thailand's exports to Myanmar across the border are mostly manufactured goods, including textile products, plastic goods, pharmaceuticals, machinery and spare parts, electrical goods, foodstuffs, watches and miscellaneous goods. The Thai authorities are getting anxious about the growing flow of such items from China into Myanmar and across the Thai border undercutting Thai prices.
 - 14 In April 1993, the Thai Cabinet approved a proposal from the Ministry of Interior to open 14 temporary border crossings to facilitate the importation of logs from Thai timber concession areas on the Burmese side of the border (*The Nation*, 28 April 1993).
 - 15 The daily wages in Thailand for most labouring types of jobs is roughly twenty times that in Myanmar (Risser, 1995: 46).
 - 16 As the Asia Watch (1993) report observes, debt bondage is one of a number of slavery-related practices defined in the Supplementary Convention Section I (1957) on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave and Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery of 1949. The Supplementary Convention defines bondage as the status or condition arising from a promise made by an indebted person to provide personal services or the services of a third party where the length and nature of the services are not limited or defined or the reasonable value of the services are not applied to the debt.
 - 17 For instance, on 2 November 1992 Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai announced to provincial governors that there would be a crackdown on child and involuntary prostitution and child labour abuse. It was publicly acknowledged that government officials were involved in perpetrating and profiting from such abuse (*Bangkok Post*, 3 November 1992, 'Chuan demands end to child exploitation')
 - 18 75 kyat was the equivalent of approximately one US dollar.
 - 19 Amnesty International (1991) reported how the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) had been unable to prevent Thai authorities from forcibly deporting "persons of concerns" back to Myanmar. Under the UNHCR mandate these people are described as refugees with a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion". On the part of UNHCR, it has issued "letters of concern" to those asylum-seekers from Myanmar whom it recognised as refugees after an application and interview. However, in late 1989, the Thai authorities requested that UNHCR no longer issue the letters, and UNHCR ceased issuing them.
 - 20 Now that the Burmese military (tatmadaur) have gained control of key border crossing-points there are fewer disputed territories or areas under the *de facto* control of the rebel ethnic armies, such as the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), where illegal immigrants can return without fear or arrest. Until recently, Kanchanaburi Province was a preferred deportation area due to the stretches of territory under control of the Mons and Karens (Asia Watch, 1993: 104-10). Even so, for both female and male deportees, the Kanchanaburi Immigration Detention Centre was a place where further abuses and extortion took place (*Ibid*).
 - 21 There are numerous studies of HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in northern Thailand. One report in *The Nation* (30 January 1995) had it that an average of 12 people die each day in five northern provinces: five in Chiang Rai, three in Lampang, two in Chiang Mai, and one each in Lamphun and Phayao. See 'Thais' woes on AIDS: Ignorance, old habits and sex taboo', *Thai Development Newsletter*, No. 27-28, 1995: 17. Also refer to Carr, J. K. *et al* (1994) 'HIV-1 Infection in young men in Thailand', *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency (JAID)*, Vol. 7, 12.
 - 22 Northern Thailand has numerous ethnic minority groups including the Shan, Akha, Yao, Hmong, Karen, Lahu and Lisu people. These groups account for 8% of northern Thailand's 4.5 million population (Thai National Statistics Office, 1993).
 - 23 The proposed Northern Growth Triangle links subregions of three ASEAN countries: consisting four states in Northern Peninsular Malaysia, 14 provinces in Southern Thailand and two provinces in Northern Sumatra, Indonesia. The 'triangle' encompasses approximately 25 million people.
 - 24 Prostitution can be divided into two broad categories by the type of service establishment. Direct prostitution refers to brothels offering explicit sex services without any facade. Indirect prostitution refers to establishments such as massage parlours, hotels, cocktail lounges, cafes, bars, karaoke bars, etc. Which may offer sex services more discretely.
 - 25 Statistics from the Division of Epidemiology, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand.
 - 26 Pramualratana (1995) quotes a local expression: "fishermen sleep like dogs, eat like pigs but entertain themselves like kings." The latter refers to the fact that fishermen frequent brothels and other commercial sex establishments wherever they call into port. The study reveals an alarming degree of ignorance about the transmission of HIV and about AIDS. The use of condoms was very low. The study called for an active programme of tri-lingual (Thai-Cambodian-Vietnamese) HIV/AIDS information dissemination and intervention strategies in the transborder region.
 - 27 The number of brothels tripled in Ranong between 1988 and 1992. Following the official improvement in ties between Thailand and Myanmar, something of the order of 99% of all business in Ranong involved cross-border trade and Burmese migrant labour (*Bangkok Post*, 'Ranong's constructive engagement poses big dilemma', 13 September 1992). Seroprevalence data among local fishermen in Ranong revealed an alarming increase of HIV; from 7% of fishermen found to be HIV positive in 1991 to 14% in 1992 to 22% in 1993. Most of the female prostitutes in Ranong are Burmese (Asia Watch, 1993 : 14).

- ²⁸ Some networks bring Vietnamese women from Ho Chi Minh City across to Phnom Penh, then to Kampongoun and eventually into one of the commercial sex establishments of the Thai-Cambodia border (Pramualratana, 1995). Asia Watch (1993) also gives details of Burmese women in forced prostitution who were taken to brothels in border towns near to Cambodia.
- ²⁹ These include the UN Convention on the Suppression of Traffic in Persons; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Slavery Convention and the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, and, in the case of girls below the age of 18, the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- ³⁰ Refer to Amnesty International (AI: ASA 39/15/91). It is unlikely that the situation regarding returnees to Myanmar will change much without significant improvements to the human rights situation in Myanmar as a whole. For instance, many females are forced to act as porters on constructive projects, there are reports of regular sexual abuses by Burmese soldiers on village women, and some Myanmar officials and military personnel are likely to be involved in cross-border trafficking operations (see Mitchel, *Burma Issues*, August 1995).
- ³¹ In 1991, 0.08% of blood donors in Phnom Penh tested HIV seropositive. By September 1994, 3.5% of blood donors in the capital were found to be infected. In the same period, 8.9% of people voluntarily undergoing tests in Phnom Penh (including patients in STD clinics) were positive, the rate having doubled from 1993. A survey in 1992 found that almost 10% of female commercial sex workers in the capital were infected, while in 1994, 38% of a sample of sex workers in the southern coastal town of Sihanoukville were found to be HIV seropositive. The southern island of Koh Kong regularly visited by both Thai and Vietnamese fishermen (Pramualratana, 1995), is also known to have a high rate of infection. The presence of the 22,000 strong United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1992/3 also led to a serious increase in the sex industry. According to Dr Tia Phalla of the National AIDS Committee, there are 20,000 to 30,000 female sex workers in Cambodia, and at least 20% of the sexually active men – about 400,000 people out of the national population of nine million – are at high risk because of their regular practice of visiting prostitutes and not using condoms (see Kahane, 1995).
- ³² One useful development is the new information network and database on cross-border migration and HIV/AIDS by the Asian Research Center for Migration (ARCM) at Chulalongkorn University. The ultimate aim is to initiate and support relevant inter-agency and transborder cooperation by NGOs, government agencies and international organisations. For more information on this contact ARCM, Institute of Asian Studies at fax: (662) 255 1124; tel: (662) 218 7462 or 2558854; internet: Fiassct@Chulkn.Chula.ac.th.

Rita King is a postgraduate researcher in the Department of International Relations, University of New South Wales, Australia.

Gary Risser is a researcher at the Asian Research Center for Migration, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.

Dr. Carl Grundy-Warr lectures political and economic geography at the National University of Singapore.