LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN IN NORTHERN THAILAND

LEE YILING FIONA
(B.Soc.Sci. (Hons.), NUS)

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Summary

With one of the highest female labour force participation rates in the region, Thai women have historically been active participants in the country's economic activities. However, their modes of labour participation have undergone significant changes over the past half-century, as economic development has dramatically transformed Thai women's livelihood options and their traditional gender roles. Based on research conducted in Chiang Mai province, this study utilises the framework of livelihood strategies to explore the ways in which women are choosing to participate in the contemporary Thai economy, by examining their employment choices, motives and the implications of their livelihood decisions for themselves and their families. Theories of modernity and identity construction are also incorporated into the discussion to accentuate women's agency in the decision-making process. Through these approaches, it will be shown that Thai women's range of employment choices and opportunities to attain greater social and economic mobility vary according to the extent of their possession of the various forms of capital. In addition, their livelihood strategies are also influenced by the economic and social contexts in which they are created and manifested.

By utilising resources at both the household and individual level, Thai women have attempted to create a more desired future for themselves — whether it is to acquire more education, pursue a wider range of job opportunities, gain greater personal autonomy, or to juggle both work and childcare duties. However, it can be observed in the conflicts and negotiations which arise from their livelihood decisions that these women are in a subordinated gender position at the family level and also in the national and global economy. This is reflected in their obligations to the natal household and their

acquiescence to the organizational practices of industrial workplaces, which fail to accommodate women’s responsibilities in the domestic sphere.

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Women’s Livelihood Strategies in the Household

In contemporary Thailand, working women can be found everywhere—as sales assistants in the glittering shopping malls of cities like Bangkok and Chiang Mai, or as labourers on construction sites. Thai women are also a ubiquitous sight as workers in the tourist beach resorts, employed as stall vendors in street markets, as waitresses and sex workers in the restaurants and bars, and as teachers and nurses in schools and hospitals. Even in the countryside, Thai women are also highly visible, working as farmers or shopkeepers in rural villages. Furthermore, Thai women are not only active participants in the country’s workforce, but have also played an essential role in the rise of the export-orientated manufacturing and tourism sectors, two areas which have been integral to the country’s overall economic development. It is therefore not surprising that feminist scholars examining Thailand’s recent economic development have claimed Thailand’s “‘economic miracle’ has been built largely on the backs of women” (Bell 1997: 56).

Whether or not this is the case, it is undeniable that economic development has dramatically transformed the options open to women and the roles they play in the society and the economy. Thai women’s modes of labour participation have diverged significantly over the past half-century, from a situation where virtually all Thai women, except for members of the nobility, were working, but predominately in agricultural activities, to one where increasing numbers of young females consciously choose livelihoods based on non-rural activities, even if they have to migrate half-way across the nation. The agriculture sector has historically been the main source of Thai female labour, as it employed almost 80% of the female labour force up to the 1970s and still accounts for approximately 44% of present-day female employment (Laborsta 2004). However, by

the mid-1990s, other sectors were fast overtaking agriculture as sources of female employment, with Thai women constituting 80-90% of the labour force in the highest foreign exchange-earning sectors, which are export manufacturing and tourism (Asian Development Bank 1998: 19). Furthermore, increasing numbers of women are also being employed in white-collar and semi-professional positions such as teaching, nursing and medicine.

This thesis therefore sets out to explore the ways in which women, especially women originating from a fairly traditional place in Thai society and the Thai economy, are choosing to position themselves in the modern economy. It looks at their options, their motives and the implications of their decisions for themselves and their families. Given the crucial role that Thai women have played in the country's economic growth and their continuing high participation rate in the workforce, it is also important to examine how their involvement in the economy has been shaped by a combination of structural factors and differing access to the assets which are needed to enter specific forms of work. Hence, the following research questions are raised: 1) How and why do women choose to participate in the contemporary Thai economy 2) What employment choices are available to them and 3) What are the consequences of different livelihood strategies for the women who pursue them and their families?

These issues are explored within the framework of livelihood strategies, a model which suggests that such decision making is embedded in a larger familial or household context. I also incorporate theories of modernity and identity construction to accentuate women's agency in the decision-making process. Through these approaches, it will be shown that Thai women's range of employment choices and opportunities to attain

greater social and economic mobility vary according to the extent of their possession of the various forms of capital. In addition, their livelihood strategies are also influenced by the economic and social contexts in which they are created and manifested.

Models of Household Economic Behaviour and Household Strategies

Utilising the Household as the Level of Analysis

Women's lives are inextricably tied to both the household and the family (Deshmukh-Ranadive 2002: 23), and as such any analysis of their livelihood strategies needs to be contextualised relative to their families and households. One of the most visible differences between male and female employment lies in the 'sexual' or more accurately, 'gender' division of labour, where "women are seen to be associated primarily with the private ('domestic') realm, and men with the public ('social') realm" (Evans 1993: 266), with the focus of the 'domestic' sphere on the household and family, while the 'public' sphere usually refers to society at large. Thus, men's employment is often discussed at the level of the individual, especially in the competitive labour market, which is characterised by rational decision-makers interested in maximising their individual utility (Folbre 1994: 18). Women's work, on the other hand, is viewed at a more collective level, as it mainly takes place or is heavily influenced by the 'domestic sphere'. This can be attributed to the connection between women's reproductive systems and their domestic roles, where women's household and child-care work are seen as an extension of their physiology (Rosaldo 1974: 7; Mies 1997: 265).

Therefore, with women's economic decisions being strongly tied to the realm of the domestic sphere, mothers find that their waged labour activities are often constrained by the responsibilities of childcare and housework, while unmarried working daughters,

who traditionally laboured as unpaid workers on family farms, are now expected to make significant monetary contributions through waged labour to the household. While it must be stated that focusing exclusively on livelihood strategies at the household level is also problematic because it de-emphasises the role of agency in an individual's decision-making processes, "any theory that takes individual agents as the starting point cannot explain how they arrive at their preferences or whether they can attain their goals" (Folbre 1994: 28).

Hence, the influence of the household cannot be ignored, as it is where the allocation of different forms of capital are located, affecting the success and ability of individuals to pursue their own interests and livelihoods. However, as "actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happen to occupy" (Granovetter 1985: 487), livelihood strategies should also take into consideration the conflicts and eventual negotiations that arise over the contestation of resources between individuals. This would ensure that the neither the role of structure nor agency is ignored when examining how individual choices and abilities shape livelihood strategies.

Definition of the Household

As I will show below, household strategies are directly linked to individual livelihood strategies because access to resources affects the way women participate in the larger economy at different points (Momsen 1993; Hapke and Ayyankeril 2004: 232), in the context of the household. As such, it is necessary to begin by establishing a working definition of the household (Schmink 1984: 87). Researchers have grappled with the

challenge of defining and setting the boundaries of any given household unit for decades[1] "as the complexity of household formation and dissolution, together with the networks of resource flows that stretch across residential units, render any arbitrary definition problematic" (Hart 1995: 53). For the purposes of this study, however, I adopt a definition based upon function, where the household is "the basic unit of society in which the activities of production, reproduction, consumption and the socialisation of children take place" (Roberts 1991: 62). Hence, the household is identified as "the basic social unit of the society, a unit that is bounded by common agreement on the management of its resources, both in the management of resource inflows into the household and their use and distribution" (Wheelock and Oughton 2003: 139). This is a more inclusive definition of the household as it does not require members to be staying within the same residence, where it will be seen that women's livelihood strategies are often dependent on the various forms of capital rendered by extended kin networks.

Theories of Household Economic Behaviour

Having defined the household as a unit which is not spatially bounded, but rather based on the management of resources between individual members, I now utilise the neoclassical economic model of the family in explaining the division of reproductive and productive functions within a given family. Other economic models of the family include the bargaining model of the household (Manser and Brown 1980; McElroy and Horney

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[1] See, for example, Donald R. Bender, "A Refinement of the Concept of the Household: Families, Co-Residence, and Domestic Functions" *American Anthropologist*, 69 (5) (October 1967): 493-504; Sylvia Junko Yanagisako, "Family and Household: The Analysis of Domestic Groups" *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 8 (1979): 161-205; Gary S. Becker, "Human Capital, Effort, and the Sexual Division of Labor" *Journal of Labor Economics*, 3(1) (1985): 33-58 and Gillian Hart, "Imagined Unities: Constructions of 'The Household' in Economic Theory" in *Understanding Economic Processes*, ed. Sutti Ortiz and Susan Lees (Lanham: University Press of America, 1992), 111-129.

1981) and the Marxist theory of the household (Seccombe 1974; Deere and De Janvry 1979). In the bargaining model of household behaviour, the household is envisaged as composing of self-interested individuals whose preferences are separate from one another (Hart 1995: 46), and unlike the neoclassical model of pooled family income, what matters is who has control over the various income sources (McElroy 1990: 506). In the Marxist theory of the household, nonmarket institutions such as the family and the State are explained primarily in terms of their implications for class relations, with individuals being aggregated within economic classes (Hartmann 1981; Roemer 1982; Folbre 1986: 248). A greater role is also given to production than reproduction, with the household being virtually ignored as a unit mediating between the individual and the forces of the capitalist market (Stichter 1990: 32).

However, as will be shown in the proceeding chapters, my respondents often shape their livelihood strategies based on the collective influence of the household, as it is through the household that these women gain access to the various forms of capital. In addition, it is through the pooling of household income and resources that these women and their households are able to pursue their various livelihood strategies. Furthermore, it will also be seen that reproductive activities in the form of housework determines the various forms of women's wage labour in the formation of livelihood strategies. Thus, the household plays a vital role in the success and ability of individuals to engage in the capitalist market.

The applicability of the neoclassical household economic model to livelihood strategies can be found in Gary Becker's *A Treatise on the Family* (1981). Becker is widely considered 'the father' of what is also popularly referred to as the 'New

Household Economics' approach, and *A Treatise* is a centrepiece of the neoclassical economic theory of the family and a culmination of much of the author's previous work. (Ferber 2003: 9). Part of the new household economics approach is the attempt to analyse the sexual division of labour, where Becker (1981) claims that the specialization of women in household production and men in market production is due to women having a biological comparative advantage in reproductive labour. He also cites efficiency as another reason in arguing for the sexual division of labour between employment and home, where "in order to maximize income at least one partner must specialize completely in either housework or market work" (Ferber 2003: 14). Becker's (1981) argument is that since incomes are pooled in the unified household model, family welfare is maximised when individual members practice their specific skills.

Another feature in the new household economics approach assumes that the theoretical household is headed by a 'benevolent dictator', who is the sole decision-maker in the equitable division of resources, responsibilities and benefits within the family and where these decisions are also accepted by all other family members as in their own best interest (Ferber 2003: 11, 16). As a result, the new household economics model takes an uncritical approach in portraying the household as a single unified model where individuals specialize in particular roles in order to maximise income and family welfare, and are guided by the decisions made solely by an altruistic head of household, who "embodies the interests and well-being of other household members" (Wolf 1992: 15), and where bargaining power and conflict between individual members of the household is not an issue.

While the neoclassicist economic model of the family assumes that the income of household members is pooled in order to maximize the welfare of the household as a whole, it can be argued "that such procedures are far from being the norm, as some income is kept for personal discretionary spending, and men and women actively strive over the use of pooled income and have differing expenditure priorities [...] and where family interaction over the use of income is fraught with friction" (Elson 1991: 183). Furthermore, the theoretical household should not be treated as if it were an individual maximising a joint utility function and striving to achieve a single set of objectives (Evans 1989). In reality, as individuals have differing access to the various forms of capital based upon their position within the household, conflicts during the process of resource allocation are inevitable, and it will be seen that this can be structured along gender lines.

The argument in the new household economic approach that productive labour is fundamentally incompatible with reproductive work becomes less convincing, if we recognise that particularly in many low-income or developing country settings women often shape their livelihood strategies (i.e. choose forms of employment or economic participation) to accommodate household responsibilities. Hence, patterns of women's labour often incorporate both housework and more flexible work arrangements such as petty commodity production or other home-based forms of work. Therefore, women's economic strategies which take place at the level of the household can be divided into three categories. They are:

1) Reproductive, non-remunerated tasks
2) Informal or undocumented remunerated tasks
3) Formal, remunerative employment

Reproductive, non-remunerated tasks consist mainly of household activities such as food preparation, cleaning and maintenance of living facilities and childcare duties, with a large share of these reproductive activities taking place outside of the market economy and carried out mostly by women. Informal, remunerated tasks, on the other hand, “produce goods and services *relatively* independent of the formal sector, and those that are associated with the circulation of these goods and services outside a formal market system” (Smith 1984: 75). In addition, informal sector activities are not defined by particular occupations or types of economic activities. Rather, it is characterised by the manner in which activities are conducted, such as “ease of entry, family ownership of enterprises, the small scale of operation, its labour-intensive nature, skills acquired outside the formal school system, unregulated and competitive markets, and a relatively low level of capital requirement” (UNESCAP 2002: 75). For the purposes of this study, informal sector activities can be divided into the following categories: 1) the preparation of food products for sale in the market and provision of personal services and trade 2) Industrial home work, in which women produce industrial goods at home or in small workshops (Nisonoff 1997: 183).

The third category in which women’s livelihood strategies take place is in formal waged work. This is the only form of employment typically captured in national statistics and regulated by law. Within my study, work of this sort includes employment in the manufacturing and service sectors, such as in tourism and nursing for respondents in Chiang Mai.

Livelihood Strategies

As explained and elaborated in the proceeding sections, a frequently criticized aspect of Becker's New Household Economics approach is the assumption that households exist as one unit with a single utility function. It is also seen in the Household Strategies Approach, where households are treated as pursuing one overarching collective goal that reflects a common set of interests (Wolf 1992: 13-14). However, it can be argued that "there is a strong case for looking at the household rather than the individual as a unit of analysis, as people in most societies live in households of one kind or other, and the organization and management of household activity is an important requirement for the reproduction of society on a daily basis and between generations" (Wallace 2002: 281).

Furthermore, as will be addressed in the following chapter, an over-emphasis on individual agency ignores the importance of social structure and fails to take into account the macro-level factors that situate an individual's livelihood strategies. It can also be pointed out that the argument by critics that household strategies always assume a collective unity and consensus during the decision-making process may not be necessarily true, as "households could build strategies around strong internal antipathies but nevertheless still organize the division of tasks and resources among the household members" (*Ibid*: 283), especially after much conflict and negotiation over control of resources.

A conceptualization of strategies that take place at the level of the household is therefore more useful in understanding how "the continuous interplay between family households and labour markets" (Papanek 1985: 322) determines patterns of female

labour force participation and activities. Furthermore, unlike the neoclassical economic model of the family, household strategies allow for the examination of "*family* tradeoffs in the choice of which members enter employment and which do not, thus going beyond husband-wife tradeoffs" (Stichter 1990: 44), in explaining the division of labour within a household. Household strategies can be conceptualized into three main areas: survival strategies, consolidation strategies and accumulative strategies, where for the rural rich it seems to be a strategy of further accumulation; for the rural poor, a strategy of survival; and for middle-income households it is a strategy of consolidation (Rigg 1989, 1998: 503; Effendi and Manning 1994: 216; Hart 1994; Tambunan 1995). It has also been suggested that "for the poor it is the inadequacy of agricultural sector incomes which propels [them] into nonfarm activities as a survival strategy, [while] for the rich there is a dynamic strategy of accumulation, in which surpluses derived from one activity are used to gain access to the other" (White and Wiradi, 1989: 296). These strategies are thought to be reflected in any number of economic-demographic behaviours, including wage labour, home production for use or sale, migration, petty entrepreneurship, coresidence, marriage, childbearing, food allocation and education (Stichter 1990: 32; Wolf 1992: 12).

Hence, it is through such strategies that households actually pool members' labour and other resources. These resources include various assets, which Ellis (2000) refers to in terms of different forms of capital, (natural, physical, human, financial and social), upon which people can draw to generate income and meet household needs. These forms of capital influence the types of activities [strategies of use] undertaken and determine the living gained by the individual or household (2000: 10). They are:

1) Natural capital, which refers to the natural resource base (land, water, trees) that yields products utilised by human populations for their survival.

2) Physical capital, which refers to assets brought into existence by economic production processes, for example, tools, machines and land improvements like terraces or irrigation canals.

3) Human capital, which refers to the education level and health status of individuals and populations.

4) Financial capital, which refers to stocks of cash that can be accessed in order to purchase either production or consumption goods, and access to credit might be included in this category.

5) Social capital refers to the social networks and associations in which people participate, and from which they can derive support that contributes to their livelihoods (*Ibid*: 8).

According to the livelihood strategies framework, access to assets are also mediated by local and distant institutions, social relations, and economic opportunities (*Ibid*: 6), and takes place in the context of social and economic trends such as changes in population and migration flows, technological change and both national and world economic policies (*Ibid*: 30). Hence, assets and access (opportunities) interact to define the possible livelihood strategies (activities) available to individuals or households in an iterative and ongoing process (*Ibid*: 51; Hapke and Ayyankeril 2004: 232), in response to socio-economic conditions that (re)shape the setting(s) within which they occur (Ellis, 2000; Francis 2000; Rakodi and Lloyd-Jones 2002; Mandel 2004: 258).

The flexibility of the livelihood strategies framework is demonstrated by the fact that while the main emphasis of studies using the livelihood approach to date has been households in rural areas, it is also equally applicable to individuals and to urban contexts (Mandel 2004: 260). Thus, the livelihood strategies framework allows for an examination of linkages between three levels: the macro-social and economic environment which either expands or constrains a person's employment opportunities and the network flows

of resources between household members that mediate each household member's access to assets, thereby influencing the overall formation of an individual's livelihood strategies. In addition, an individual's access to the different forms of capital will vary according to the degree of control of resources by other family members, leading to the possibility of conflict and ultimately negotiation between individual household members over the availability of these assets.

Hence, livelihood options for any given individual are often restricted by the various structural factors they encounter, such as the structure of the labour market which is often gendered, the resulting employment opportunities and the educational options available within the country. Gender ideology, the composition of the household and an individual's life-cycle circumstances further explain the different manifestations of livelihood strategies amongst women. An analysis of livelihood strategies must therefore be situated at the level of the household, as it "effectively describes a concentration of actors and activities that we can use both to lead us into the wider economy and to a better understanding of the behaviour of the individuals" (Wheelock and Oughton 2003: 144).

Furthermore, as will be examined below, livelihood strategies are created and utilised most effectively in the context of the household, as it is through household processes that individuals gain access to assets, and also where the impact of their economic activities is mediated. Hence, the livelihood strategies framework is useful in mediating between the over-emphasis on an individual's agency in making livelihood decisions, and the assumption that all households operate on a basis of economic rationality and consensus, as it "enables us to consider the agency of social actors and the

way in which they may use all forms of work in organizing their lives, but also enables research to take into account the actor's or household's point of view, and the structural and cultural circumstances in which they operate" (Wallace 2002: 288).

In the following chapter, I shall examine models which have been developed to describe women's modes of labour along with the roles of modernization and female agency in shaping livelihood strategies. In Chapter Three, the focus is on the social and economic trends that have occurred in Thailand over the last half-century and have influenced women's livelihood strategies. In particular, I will discuss the rural transformation of Thailand as a whole, followed by a focus on the changing nature of Thai women's employment. This is followed by a brief discussion in Chapter Four on the economic development of Chiang Mai province and the ethnographic methods that were utilised in my fieldwork research. Chapters Five to Seven examines respondents' livelihood strategies in the manufacturing, white-collar and informal sectors respectively, such as how and why they entered their chosen professions over other employment opportunities, and the consequences of their livelihood strategies. Chapter Eight then discusses the different forms of capital needed to enter the various industries that respondents are employed in, and how various factors influence respondents' work conditions and domestic responsibilities, which in turn are dependent on their roles as daughters, mothers and wives. Finally, Chapter Nine summarises the conclusion of the thesis, highlighting the connection between respondents' modes of employment and their position and access to resources within their household, and suggestions for future research, as Thailand not only becomes increasingly integrated into the global economy, but also experiences fundamental changes in family structure.

Chapter 2
Modes of Labour and Identity Creation in Women's Livelihood Strategies

This chapter begins with a discussion of the three main sectors of economic activities in which women are employed and the importance of structural factors such as modernization and deagrarianization in influencing livelihood strategies. While women's decision-making processes are shaped to a large extent by household resources and relations, it will be seen that the role of agency is apparent in women's livelihood strategies, particularly in the creation of gendered identities under the influence of modernity.

It will be shown in the following chapters that women's livelihood strategies are often constructed not only to earn cash income, but also to accommodate the incorporation of household-based labour. The fact that women's employment choices—to a much larger extent than men's—reflect this need for balance, can be attributed to the gender-based division of labour. However, the fulfilment of domestic labour can also be shifted to other household members, depending on the woman's marital and child-bearing status. Thus, some women may be able to avoid the conflict that often arises between domestic responsibilities and wage labour, allowing them to pursue employment in the formal sector. As will be examined in the proceeding chapters, this does not only benefit women waged workers, since household members provide support in the domestic sphere in exchange for the economic labour of those employed in formal waged work, in order to provide financial security. Hence, linkages in the sphere of domestic work can be observed between the level of the individual and the household, as the allocation of domestic responsibilities within the household determines the formation of livelihood

strategies for individual women, where "whose household work is affected may determine who is sent out for wage work" (Stichter 1990: 47).

Women in the Three Sectors

Since the allocation of women's time and household resources across the three sectors of 'work' most clearly follows from or perhaps is reflected in their forms of participation (or not) in formal labour markets, I have for sampling purposes broken my respondents down in terms of the types of non-reproductive work they do. The sectors used are 1) informal/reproductive work only 2) Work in manufacturing 3) Work in the white-collar, service sector. As will be shown in the proceeding chapters, these sectors are important sources of non-agricultural employment for women in Chiang Mai province. The main difference between informal remunerative employment and formal remunerative employment is that informal sector activity can be classified as taking place outside "the formal norms of economic transactions established by the state and formal business practices" (Cross 1998: 512). The division between employment in manufacturing and the white-collar service sector is derived from existing statistical definitions on the structure of a given country's economy[1] into three sectors: agriculture, industry and services. This division was also elaborated upon in Kuznet's *Modern Economic Growth*, where

> the three major sectors do differ significantly from each other-in the use of natural resources, in the scale of operation of the productive units common to each, in the production process in which they engage, in the final products that they contribute, and in the trends in their shares in total output and resources used (1973: 87).

[1] See, for example, The World Bank Group, "World Development Indicators Data Query" , http://devdata.worldbank.org/data-query/; International Monetary Fund, "World Economic Outlook: Financial Systems and Economic Cycles", http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2006/02/index.htm; and Asian Development Bank, " Key Indicators of Developing Asian and Pacific Countries", http://www.adb.org/Statistics/ki.asp.

As will be seen in the next chapter, the focus on the industry and service sectors over agriculture reflects the increasing importance of non-agricultural activities in Thailand, while the division between waged work in the manufacturing (i.e. industry) and service sectors is clearly seen in the differing modes of women's entry into the different sectors and the impact of their employment upon themselves and their families. In the next section, I will show how women's employment in the informal sector explicitly accommodates reproductive duties within the household, and the differences in women's work within the two sub-sectors in the informal sector.

Women in the Informal Sector

Women employed in the informal sector can be classified as 'home-based workers', which in turn refers to two types of workers: 1) those who carry out remunerative work within their homes, otherwise known as independent own-account producers and 2) dependent subcontract worker (Chen, Sebstad and O'Connell 1999: 605). As explained in the gender-based division of labour, women's obligations in the domestic sphere typically have implications for their livelihood strategies, as they often seek employment in the informal sector, where there is less conflict between carrying out reproductive duties and remunerative work simultaneously, and this is especially so for married women. In addition to its flexibility in terms of work-family arrangements, employment in the informal sector is also attractive because no formal educational qualifications or vocational skills are required for entry into this sector. Hence, informal sector work not only allows women the possibility of combining paid work and family obligations, but is "often the leading source of employment opportunities for people with

limited access to formal sector wage employment, in particular for women" (United Nations 1995: 44).

For dependent subcontract workers, their employment can be situated in crafts production,

> such as in the embroidery of and weaving of traditional clothing, where products are constantly adapted to demands from tourists and marketing groups. They may be organized under the putting-out system, where they provide their own means of production, e.g. thread and a loom, and weave according to designs commissioned by merchants and are paid by the piece. These craft producers may also be found in industrial homework, where they may be employed in small workshops or sweatshops (Prügl and Tinker 1997: 1473, 1475).

For independent own-account workers or microentrepreneurs, "many often use their homes as a base and work out of their garage, porch, or front room in residential areas. […] Largely the domain of women, home is often the work place for those preparing foods or agricultural products for sale" (*Ibid*: 1473). While this definition is utilized for food producers and vendors, I argue that it can also encompass women who conduct service-based enterprises such as hairdressing or tailoring, and running of retail shops, as it is operated within the premises of the home, and is undertaken as a small-scale independent enterprise, thus fulfilling the definition of informal sector activities as given above.

For both categories of informal sector workers, however, their work is characterized by low wages, long hours and little job security, due to their inadequate legal protection, isolation and weak bargaining position (International Labour Organisation 2002: 9). This can be seen for those employed in the 'putting-out system', as they have no access to a profitable market or independent buyers, and are heavily

dependent on merchants or workshop owners to sell their products to local markets or to tourists (Prügl and Tinker 1997: 1475). While this may not apply to microentrepreneurs, women in both categories find that "home-based work is often perceived as an extension of the traditional division of labour, replacing the activities of farming households among landless families" (*Ibid*: 1476). Hence, as will be shown, this results in their subordinate position within the household, as their only access to independent means of income is often given over to household needs. In the next section, an examination of women's employment in formal waged labour will reveal how entry into the manufacturing and service sectors is based not only upon their level of education, but on stereotyped notions of age and women's supposed 'natural' labour skills.

Women in the Large-Scale Manufacturing Industries

In examining women's employment in the manufacturing industry, the preference for female over male labour has been extensively documented for the case of labour-intensive, cheap labour, export-processing industries associated with transnational capital (Frobel *et al*. 1980; Hein 1986) and also national capital (Berik 1987), with the female workforce of export-processing zones (EPZs) being as high as 90% in some areas (Benería 1989: 248). The presence of a female labour force can also be found in the smaller workshops to which certain production processes are subcontracted.

One of the reasons that it is more profitable to employ female rather than male labour is a widespread belief that there is a 'natural' differentiation, produced by innate capacities and personality traits, between women and men, and also by an objective differentiation of their income needs; men need an income to support a family, while women do not (Elson and Pearson 1997: 193). In addition, women workers are assumed

to facilitate labour control and labour malleability for a variety of reasons, such as their willingness to follow orders, their greater discipline, and other characteristics falling under the stereotype of docility (Benería 1989: 250). Hence, women are considered to be more suited to tedious, repetitious, monotonous work that is often found in the manufacturing industries, as they are not only considered more docile and willing to accept tough work discipline, but also to have naturally nimble fingers (Elson and Pearson 1997: 192). The above traits that are ascribed to women apply particularly to young unmarried females, as "their youth and gender […] suggest a work force already schooled in obedience to parental authority, hard work and the patience and dexterity required for many domestic chores (such as weaving and sewing)" (Mills 1999: 7).

Employers' preference for young women without domestic responsibilities can be linked to the allocation of reproductive duties within the household, as it is only young women who can afford to delegate household tasks to their mothers and take up factory work. Hence, employment in the manufacturing industries is not only dependent on labour demand for young females, but also on supply-side factors at the level of the household. In addition, women's entry into the large-scale manufacturing sector depends on their level of education, as "most employers prefer their workers to be educated, usually to high school level, the main reason being that a certain degree of intelligence is required to understand machine operations and/or to undergo training programs" (Chant and McIlwaine 1995a: 156), with access to education mediated by a woman's position in the family life-cycle and the prevailing gender ideologies. Therefore, examining the reasons underlying the subordination of women in large-scale manufacturing industries is important, as it can be equally applied to other sectors of the female wage labour force,

such as in the tourism industry and other white-collar service sectors, as seen in the next section.

Women in the White-Collar Service Sector

Definitions of the service industry vary, with the WTO classifying an extremely diverse range of labour activities in the service sector,

> ranging from highly sophisticated, knowledge and information intensive activities performed in both private and public sector organisations to the very basic services of cleaning and simple maintenance. It includes retail and wholesale distribution and entertainment as well as health care and education services [and] encompasses construction activities, transport activities, financial activities, communication activities and professional services (Dicken 1992: 350).

Growth in the service sector can be seen in nearly all developing and developed countries across the globe, where for most Asian countries the percentage of GDP accounted for by the service sector has been increasing since 1975 (Wirtz 1999: 3-4). Along with the shift in the structure of Asian economies from predominantly agricultural activities to a more diversified services sector, one of the main drivers for consumer services within Asia is also the increasing levels in income and education. As the population becomes more educated and prosperous, there has been an increasing demand for leisure activities such as travel services (Schoell and Ivy 1982: 277), and with improving health conditions, a demand for greater health services.

In my study, I examine at two distinct positions in the white-collar service sector: the formal tourism sector (hoteliers, tour guides, travel agents) and nursing. While women's work in the informal sector can be subsumed under the service sector as well, women's employment within the informal sector and the white-collar service sector are clearly differentiated on the basis of measurement in labour statistics and stability of

wages, where women's employment in the white-collar service sectors is on the basis of regular remuneration and taking place within the regulated market economy. Entry into the white-collar service sector is also differentiated from the other sectors as it more strongly dependent on access to human capital in the form of education, than in the other employment sectors. In addition, women's employment in the tourism industry, like that of manufacturing, is also predicated upon on age, while women's employment within nursing can be attributed to the adoption of modernization processes which stress the utilization of medical services within hospitals rather than in homes. While women's employment within the three sectors vary according to life-cycle circumstances and their access to the different forms of capital, resulting in different individual and household economic strategies, they all take place in the context of modernization and deagrarianization processes, thereby leading to a diversification in women's modes of employment and their lifestyles, as examined below.

Processes of Modernization and Deagrarianization

It can be argued that an examination of livelihood strategies at both the level of the individual and the household will become meaningless "when abstracted from the complex of relations that extends beyond it" (Evans 1991: 56). Hence, the national and global contexts within which the household is embedded contribute to determining the circumstances under which choice is made and a strategy devised (Wheelock and Oughton 2003: 141), and it is in the next section that I examine the national and global forces of modernization and deagrarianization.

Women's livelihood strategies are shaped by the larger system of which they are a part, as seen in the next chapter, where modernization has been the dominant

development discourse in Thailand following World War II. The process of modernization explicitly distinguishes the 'modern' from the 'traditional', where "the evolution of societies occurs as traditional patterns give way under the pressures of modernisation" (Webster 1990: 54). Hence, modernization describes the fundamental transitions that occur as society changes, such as "replacement of patterns of authorities based on traditional loyalties to a rational system of law coupled with representative national government, an increased emphasis on entrepreneurship and capital accumulation, educational growth for literacy and training and the commercialization of agriculture and trade" (*Ibid*: 53-55). The impact of modernization is reflected in the utilisation of advanced technological practices, new consumption patterns, the building of large-scale physical infrastructure and a shift in the relative important of agriculture (which declines) relative to manufacturing and the service sector.

Hence, the Thai state under General Sarit Thanarat, who became prime minister in 1957, attempted to hasten and direct the process of modernization by implementing a deliberate development campaign through the creation of the National Economic Development Board (NEDB), which formulated Thailand's first five-year development plan (1961-6) (Rigg 2002: 52), thereby "utilising an organized strategy for pursuing nationally managed economic growth" (McMichael 2000: 75). It adopted factors typically found in the modernization process, which could be seen in "a national framework for economic growth, an international framework of aid (military and economic) binding the developing world to the developed world and a growth strategy favouring industrialization" (*Ibid*).

As a result, Thailand, like many other less developed countries, "often adopted policies that forced the agricultural sector to bear the costs of protecting domestic industry" (Hayami and Ruttan 1985: 368), causing developing economies to experience decreases in agriculture's share and increases in industry's share (*Ibid*: 33). This has implications not only at the structural level, but at the local level as well, as individuals previously involved in agricultural activities are now undergoing what Bryceson defines as a process of 'deagrarianization'. This consists of four parallel processes: livelihood reorientation, occupational adjustment, social re-identification, and spatial relocation (1996: 99). In Thailand, livelihood reorientation has meant the shift from predominantly agricultural labour activities to employment in a greater variety of sectors, such as in the industrial, commercial and services sectors. This has implications at the individual and societal level for occupational adjustment, as both women and men find themselves presented with very different occupational choices from those of a previous generation. This in turn leads to the process of social re-identification, where respondents, particularly those in waged labour, attempt to create a 'modern' gender identity for themselves through consumption and leisure practices. While women do not physically relocate their residence from that of their natal households, their employment has now expanded beyond the confines of the family workforce, leading to the spatial relocation of their workplaces and affecting both their household and individual livelihood strategies.

Female Agency in Crafting a Livelihood Strategy

As explained previously, both the neoclassical economic theory of the family and the household strategies approach implicitly assume that the household functions as a

single unit, where all members of the household either passively accept the allocation and utilisation of resources by the head of the household, also known as the 'benevolent dictator', or work in harmony to pursue a common set of interests. This ignores the fact that "the household is composed of diverse people whose interests may conflict" (Hart 1992: 114), and where there is the possibility for negotiation. Hence, it is important to acknowledge the role which women themselves have played in shaping their roles and identities.

In addition, the modernization of Southeast Asia countries has been largely explained in macro-economic transformations, through abstractions—capital, world systems, labour, the state and so on, where in the presence of these titans, the endeavours of mere humans seem the dithering of ants (McVey 1992: 8; Rigg 2002: 281). As a result, while capitalism is personified and differentiated in terms of its varied effects on the women who are undergoing industrialisation, the women themselves are depicted as identical and interchangeable (Ong 1988: 84). In particular, these women are portrayed as victims of capital, as part of a puppetlike reserve labour force whose behavioural strings are pulled in the interests of capital; they are not shown as social agents who think about, struggle against, and react to their own conditions and who can also interpret their own situations (Benería and Roldan 1987: 8; Wolf 1992: 9).

Therefore, while the creation of women's livelihood strategies may be influenced by economic development policies implemented by the state, as well as their dependence upon the household unit, an examination of livelihood strategies must also include the role of female agency within women's lives. Agency is defined as action taken in specific contexts, but not entirely autonomously or without constraint (Wolf 1992: 23), where the

agency of women is influenced externally and organized “within the context of their collectivities” (Etzioni 1988: 181). Avoiding the extreme images of women either as autonomous individuals or completely symbiotic with their families, the concept of female agency recognizes multiple and possibly contradictory sources of identity and interest (Wolf 1992: 23-24) amongst members in a household. However, it must be pointed out that the influence of female agency on individuals’ livelihood strategies should not be over-stated, as seen in several studies examining women’s employment in Asian countries (Salaff 1995; Wolf 1992; Mills 1999). It has been found that women maintaining close ties to their natal household often find that their earnings are received and controlled at the level of the household, and they do not significantly challenge prevailing family structures. In addition, their wages do not enable them to transcend their economic dependence on the family (Stichter 1990: 59). Nonetheless, one way in which female agency can be exercised is through “ideas and practices that individuals associate with modernization and modernity” (Mills 1999: 17), which are exemplified in women’s consumption patterns and freedom in social life, allowing them to create a desired ‘modern’ identity.

Modernity, Self-Identity and Consumption

In examining livelihood strategies, structural changes such as modernization or household processes are not the only factors that influence social change and social re-identification in individuals’ lives. The creation of self-identity is also central to the formation of different livelihood strategies as the ways in which women attempt to create and shape their life courses take place through the creation of self-identity under conditions of modernity.

Giddens has suggested that modernity may be seen as a way in which social life is constructed self-consciously by individuals rather than received through tradition (1991). While an individual's roles and actions have traditionally been prescribed in pre-modern societies, "in modern culture, precedents set by previous generations may be disregarded, and more options are available. Individuals can now make significant choices throughout their lives, from everyday questions about clothing, appearance and leisure to high-impact decisions about relationships, beliefs and occupations" (Gauntlett 2002: 96). For women in particular, acquiring an education and moving into waged labour were traditionally viewed as an anathema to female identity, but are now accepted as compatible with the role of daughter, wife and/or mother in modern societies. As Giddens writes: "What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity- and ones which on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour" (1991: 70).

Therefore, in Giddens' analysis, individuals create, maintain and revise a set of biographical narratives that explains who they are and how they arrived at their present identit (ies) (Gauntlett 2002: 99). The impetus for the creation of new identities has resulted from the structural and ideological transformations of modern societies, leading to a parallel transformation in the social imagination of individuals (Appadurai 1990: 5). Hence, experiences of modernity are informed by the availability of newly imagined (and imaginable) identities and social relations (Mills 1999: 15), with women's livelihood strategies closely tied to the production of such 'imagined' possibilities.

The creation of a 'modern' identity is aided by a variety of institutions, such as "commodity markets, mass media, government bureaucracy, and schools; as they

disseminate ideological constructions of modernity" (*Ibid*: 16). For example, through the medium of mass media, individuals are bombarded with a series of images on how a modern lifestyle should look like. In particular, "feminine beauty has become one of the most powerful symbols for representing Thai progress and modernity, contributing to the proliferation of urban styles and images in rural settings" (*Ibid*: 105). This is linked to consumption practices, as "consumption is pivotal to the constant search for and the construction of the 'new', including new identities, that is the hallmark of modernity and postmodernity" (Stivens 1998: 5). Hence, it can be argued the fulfilment of consumption needs is a factor in the creation of livelihood strategies, as women attempt to find jobs that allow them to re-create, as far as they can, the urban, and by extension, modern, lifestyles and images that are disseminated through these institutions.

Thus, it is in a modern society that individuals have the ability, however limited, to create a desired identity and lifestyle for themselves, not only through the processes of consumption, but also through the re-working of gender roles and institutions, which is seen clearly in the creation of gendered identities under various discourses of modernity. This is explored in Butler's concept of identity, in particular gendered identity, when she argued that there is no such thing as a legitimate gender identity, as what we understand to be masculinity and femininity are, in fact, performances conditioned by society (1989: 120). Instead, she develops what she calls a performative theory of identity, where "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender, identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (*Ibid*: 25). Therefore, individuals inhabit many different social identities that may be stressed or muted, depending on the situation, where any social situation can be adapted to the doing of

gender—*and that adaptation* makes gender relevant to social interaction and the workings of social institutions (West and Fenstermaker 1993: 157). This can be seen in Mills's work (1999), where young women in Thailand enter urban-based forms of waged work ostensibly to fulfil household economic needs but also due to the unspoken desire to be '*thansamay*' or modern. Thus, engagement in modern, non-rural employment allows these women to exercise divergent social identities simultaneously, that of the 'dutiful daughter' and 'modern woman', by supporting her family through economic means, but also earning income to engage in commodity consumption patterns in the form of city-based leisure activities and through purchases of clothing and cosmetics. This then leads to tension between an individual's notion of identity, which is influenced by modernity, and adherence to a traditional, kinship-based notion of identity, as conflicts arise over allocation of their income for household expenses and personal aspirations. While Mills's work deals with young, unmarried Thai women, I will show that the creation of personal identities and lifestyles under the influence of modernity can apply to married mothers who are employed in the informal sector as well, as they enter into non-agricultural forms of labour to meet the demands generated by various household economic strategies in order to fulfil traditional cultural expectations not only of their roles as daughters, but also as mothers and wives.

Hence, it will be seen that various expressions of personal identity under conditions of 'modernity' are clearly articulated in the formation of livelihood strategies amongst women of different ages and in different forms of employment. In addition, while the creation of both self and gendered identity is an important feature of modernity, it will be seen in the examination of livelihood strategies that "the ability of different

individuals within modern societies to achieve desired identities and social relations varies considerably" (Mills 1999: 19). In reality, most women, especially the poor, have only a limited range of choices when it comes to employment opportunities, and it will be seen that these constraints can be explained not only at the structural level, but at the household level as well.

Chapter 3
Overview of the Modern Thai Economy [Post-World War II] and Women's Place in It

This chapter examines the social and economic trends which have influenced Thai women's livelihood strategies. The Thai word for development is "*kanpattana*, which means 'progressing' or 'advancing forward' and is probably better translated as 'modernization' rather than 'development', illustrating that like most of the other countries in Southeast Asia, the dominant development discourse in Thailand has been a modernist one" (Rigg 2002: 43, 52). As Thailand embarked on the path to economic and social modernization, the economy slowly evolved from one which was predominantly agricultural-based to its present-day dependence on export-orientated industries as well as the tourism sector. In the process, the rural population found themselves displaced from the agricultural sector, transforming drastically not only the labour force in general, but also women's participation in waged work and corresponding changes in the livelihood strategies of Thai labour. Drawing extensively on secondary sources, different levels of discussion will be offered in this chapter to provide a holistic view: for Thailand as a whole, followed by a focus on the changing nature of Thai women's employment.

The modernization of the Thai economy began shortly after the end of World War II, when the U.S. became a new foreign patron, seizing on Thailand as an ally and base for opposing the spread of communism in Asia and promoting 'development' in the country, meaning primarily economic growth through private capitalism (Pasuk and Baker 2005: 140, 150). As mentioned previously, the National Economic Development Board (NEDB) was created during General Sarit Thanarat's regime, and Thailand's First National Development Plan (1961-6) was formulated, emphasizing import substitution

and giving priority to a number of infrastructure projects, including road building (Falkus 1995: 22). As will be seen in the proceeding sections, the building of physical infrastructure, particularly highways, with U.S aid, facilitated rural-urban interpenetration and permanently changed the structure and composition of the country's labour force.

Emphasis on Import-Substitution Industrialisation

In the 1950s and 1960s Thailand commenced a pattern of growth which relied on Import Substituting Industrialisation (ISI) and the expansion of agricultural production. An increase in agricultural production resulted mainly from the extension of the cultivated area, with little intensification of production (Feeny 1982). Agriculture became the Kingdom's main engine of growth and a major source of government revenue as the state extracted considerable surplus from the agricultural sector in the form of taxation on rice exports (Dixon 1996: 29). Hence, a substantial industrial base was established by the early 1970s as the tax on rice exports depressed the domestic price of rice and also the level of urban-industrial labour costs (Krongkaew 1995: 44).

The small size of the domestic market and questions over the country's long- term political stability may have been expected to discourage foreign investment and transnational activity (Dixon 1991: 172). However, due to the prevailing geo-political situation in the 1960s and 1970s, Thailand received U.S. $1.13 billion in American economic and military 'aid' between 1950 and 1970 (Caldwell 1974: 63; Elliot 1978: 131). In addition, the deployment of American military personnel generated a high level of expenditure, leading to the expansion of the service sector and the growth of urban centres adjacent to major military bases (Elliott 1978: 129-133). Overall, the involvement of the U.S., as well as South Korea and Taiwan, both supplemented foreign investment

and boosted the confidence of investors. Subsequently, despite concerns over security, a number of Transnational corporations (TNCs) started operating in Thailand during the 1950s and 1960s (Hewison 1985: 273). However, even as key areas of the economy became dominated by foreign capital, notably in textiles, motor vehicle production, petroleum and tin, Thailand remained a producer of a comparatively limited range of primary products, with 85 per cent of export earnings in 1970 principally from rice, rubber, tin, maize and kenaf (Dixon 1996: 30). Hence, Thailand up till the early 1980s could be characterised as a country with very limited structural change in either the domestic economy or the composition of exports, as the majority of the population was rural and engaged in agriculture, with economic growth and government policy centred on primary production and ISI (Dixon 1999: 109).

The Move to Export-Orientated Industrialisation

The shift to export-orientated industrialisation came in the early 1980s when Thailand's agricultural export growth faltered at the same time as American subsidies tailed away. Thailand's economic problems were exacerbated by the second oil crisis of 1980-81, the subsequent collapse of non-oil commodity prices and sharp rises in interest rates (Pasuk and Baker 2005: 203). The World Bank and IMF, after being approached by Thailand for funding, advocated structural adjustment in order "to shift the pattern of growth from one based on the extension of land under cultivation and on import substitution to one based on increasingly intensive use of land and industries producing for domestic and export markets under competitive conditions" (World Bank 1980: 19). Although the Thai government incorporated the World Bank's analysis and proposals as an integral part of the Fifth National Plan (1982-86), by 1986 very limited progress had

been made towards implementing the main World Bank and IMF recommendations (Dixon 1999: 119). After 1986 however, the rapid economic growth that Thailand experienced was closely related to the expansion of markets for manufactured products, initially textiles and later electronic products in the global economy when the Asian Newly Industrialising Economies (NIEs) were beginning to lose their comparative advantage in such activities (Dixon 1996: 40)

Once the rapid growth of manufactured exports had started, a major factor in its continuation and acceleration was that from 1987, Thailand became a major destination for Japanese and Asian NIE investment in labour-intensive manufacturing operations (Pasuk and Baker 2005: 204). These firms used Thailand as part of complex multi-country systems for manufacturing technology-based goods such as electrical circuits, computer parts, electrical goods, and automobiles. When the manufacturing-based export boom was under way it was also reinforced by the promotion of tourism (Dixon 1996: 42). The introduction of labour-intensive manufacturing industries and the growth of the service sector, principally in tourism, has had gendered implications, as the feminisation of the labour force has led to a diversification from women's traditional modes of economic participation and transformed existing gender ideology. However, before discussing Thai women's participation in these sectors, the next section will first examine the gradual marginalization of agriculture in the country's economy, and its repercussions for the rural labour force.

Growth and Structural Changes in the Thai economy

Changes in the Structure of the Thai Economy

Thailand's economy in the last few decades has been dominated by strong growth—the average annual growth rate in GDP from 1965-80 was 7.3%, followed by an average annual growth rate in GDP of 7.6% from 1980-1990 (World Bank 1992: 220). The GDP average annual growth rate from 1990-2003 has since plummeted to 3.7%, a result of the 1997 Asian economic crisis, although the GDP annual growth rate has increased in recent years to 4.8% in 2002 and 6.1% in 2004 (World Bank 2005). Thailand's growth experience has been closely connected to its two tradable sectors, agriculture and manufacturing, while the remainder of the economy or about half of the total GDP produces largely nontradable goods, although income from tourism does contribute a significant amount to the value-added in this sector (Siamwalla 1995: 151). As the following statistics will show, the importance of agriculture in the economy has declined, while that of manufacturing has steadily increased.

From 1980-1990, the average annual rate of growth was highest in the industry sector (9.0%), followed by the services sector (7.8%). However, the average annual rate of growth for the agricultural sector, the traditional backbone of Thailand's economy, lagged behind at only 4.1% (World Bank 1992: 220). Due to the economic crisis starting from 1997, the average annual rate of growth in agriculture from 1990-2003 had fallen further to 1.7%, while that of industry also dropped to 4.9%. In 1990, the agriculture sector comprised the smallest share of GDP (12%), compared with services (48%) and industry (39%). By 2004, agriculture's share of GDP had fallen to 10%, while industry's share increased slightly to 44.1% (Asian Development Bank 2005: 160). In fact, over the

past two decades, the distribution of the agricultural and manufacturing sectors had been rapidly reversed—agriculture comprised 32% of GDP in 1965, but had fallen to 9% by 2000, while manufacturing had risen sharply from 14% to 34% over the same period (World Bank 1992: 222; Asian Development Bank 2005: 160).

Table 1: GDP Growth and Distribution by Sector

Sector	Distribution (%GDP)			Average Annual Growth (%)		
	1965	1990	2000	1965-80	1980-1990	1990-2003
Agriculture	32	12	9	4.9	4.1	1.7
Industry	23	39	42	9.5	9.0	4.9
Services	45	48	49	8.0	7.8	3.0
Total	100	100	100			

Source: World Bank: Selected World Development Indicators 1992; Asian Development Bank: Key Indicators 2005.

The shift from agriculture to manufacturing is also reflected in the export sector. Agriculture declined as a share of total exports from 82.7% in 1984 to 11.4% in 1994. In the same period, manufacturing increased its share of total exports from 2.4% to 81.1% (Thailand Development Research Institute 1995: 6). By 2003, agriculture's share of total exports had declined further to 8.3%, while exports of manufactured products comprised 85.8% of total exports (TDRI 2004: 8). Rice, once Thailand's single largest export, was also no longer in the list of top ten exported goods by 2005 (Export–Import Bank of Thailand). Hence, it can be seen that while agriculture in Thailand is declining in importance, manufacturing has increased its share in both the GDP and export sectors. Another important non-agricultural source of foreign exchange earnings was income from tourism, exceeding for the first time exports of computers and parts which had been

Thailand's leading goods export, in 2002, reaching 7.7 billion US dollars or around 6 per cent of total GDP (Bank of Thailand 2003: 52).

However, it can be argued that the country has not wholly completed its transformation from being a predominantly agricultural nation to an industrialized economy, "as the agricultural sector remains the principal source of livelihood for some 60% of the population" (Dixon 1999: 140). While it is difficult to determine the country's non-urban population due to both short and long-term internal labour migration, it was estimated that 67.5% out of a total population of 64 million in 2005 lived in rural areas (United Nations 2005). Nonetheless, these figures do not reflect the radical changes in the shift in composition of the Thai workforce that have occurred, as shown below.

Changes in the Sectoral Composition of the Thai Workforce

Sectoral employment statistics in Table 2 illustrate how Thai governmental policies not only led to the deagrarianization of the economy, but also played an important role in displacing people from their existing agricultural livelihoods and into the urban work sector. In 1970, 79.3% of the country's workforce was classified as being in the agricultural sector, with only 5.9% in the manufacturing sector, and 14.9% in the non-agricultural and manufacturing sectors. By 1990, however, the population workforce that was involved in agriculture had fallen to 64% (Laborsta 2004). The shift in the population's concentration in agricultural labour was even more pronounced by 2005, with less than half, or only 42.1%, classified as engaged in agriculture (National Statistical Office of Thailand 2005).

Table 2: Employed Persons by Industry for the Whole Kingdom

Sector	Distribution (%)		
	1970	1990	2005
Agriculture	**79.3**	**64**	**42.1**
Manufacturing	**5.9**	**10.2**	**15.1**
Others	**14.9**	**25.8**	**48.1**
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Sources: Laborsta on the Web (http://laborsta.ilo.org/); Population and Housing Census 1970 National Statistical Office; Report of the Labor Force Survey: 2005, National Statistical Office (http://web.nso.go.th/eng/stat/lfs_e/lfse-tab2.xls).

As explained previously, government intervention in the agricultural sector depressed the level of rice prices. This discouraged farmers from investing in land improvements and intensifying production (Rigg 1985: 490-491). Moreover, with better nutrition, improved health conditions and general stability, population growth had spurted up to 3 per cent a year by the 1950s (Pasuk and Baker 2005: 155). Increased landlessness amongst the rural population thus resulted from a growing population and decreasing land area. By the 1970s, about a fifth of households in the central plain and in the northern valleys were landless, and around another tenth were land-poor (*Ibid*: 160). Hence, the rural population could no longer rely on the agricultural sector as their lone source of livelihood and had to rely increasingly on other sectors of the economy as well.

With agriculture as the main source of livelihood being threatened, the entry of rural labourers into the urban wage sector was also aided by important changes in the country's physical infrastructure, when the U.S., "beginning with the 'Mitraphap (Friendship)' highway which cut from Bangkok into the northeast in 1955, sponsored the construction of highways as part of its war campaign in Indochina" (*Ibid*: 156). By

around 1990, every province and most district centres were connected to the capital by an overnight bus (*Ibid*: 221). However, improvements in the country's road network were not confined to the highways linking other regions with the capital. Unlike Bangkok, Chiang Mai has not experienced large-scale migration of the rural population into the city area. This is in large part due to

> a well-developed road network linking Chiang Mai with the adjacent districts, cheap public transport ("minibus revolution"), and a booming construction sector. Since most construction companies use labour-intensive technologies, the building industry is able to absorb a large proportion of low-skilled rural workers. The well-developed transport network on the one hand, and flexible recruitment practices on the other, allow these workers to participate in the urban labour market without being forced to migrate to Chiang Mai on a permanent basis (Ruland 1992: 94).

It will be shown in the proceeding chapters that improvements in the physical infrastructure of Chiang Mai province also has gendered implications as well, as commuters are able to work in the urban economy and yet maintain a foothold in their village, resulting in women's livelihood strategies that are embedded within the context of their rural households.

Changes in Thai Women's Modes of Economic Participation

In the discussion above, it can be seen that the Thai economy has shifted in emphasis from agriculture to the manufacturing and service sectors, with the resultant displacement of rural livelihoods. This change in the sectoral composition of the Thai labour workforce can be attributed to the government's emphasis on export-orientated production, which has led to the establishment of industries like textiles and electronics, while other development policies have contributed to the growth of service sectors such as tourism. The move away from agriculture and hence agricultural employment can also

be traced to government policies, which, as mentioned earlier, have "discouraged the intensification and innovation of the agricultural sector, and facilitated the almost unlimited supply of cheap labour into urban areas since village communities suffered from chronic indebtedness and stagnation" (Puntasen 1996: 79). Such changes have thus influenced the nature of women's participation in the economy, as the rapid rise of female wage labour represents a change in Thai women's economic participation from agricultural labourer to urban waged worker.

Thai women have historically played a major role in the economic life of the country (Asian Development Bank 1998: 19), as they were expected to take full responsibility for family farms whenever men were conscripted into the army or made to perform corvée labour for the king. Therefore, there were never any cultural barriers which prevented women from taking part in economic activities (Phananiramai 1995: 275). However, Thai women's high labour participation rate is not only due to the traditional assumption "that women are responsible for housework as well as economic activities" (*Ibid*: 275), but "is partly rooted in Buddhist philosophy of the accumulation of merit as well as a sexual division of labour" (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1991: 21). While men can enter the monkhood to fulfil the merit obligation to their parents, women cannot pay their 'debt' in a religious or spiritual way. Hence, while men participate more in merit-making, religious and political activities (Klausner 1997: 70), the religious emphasis on the duty of a daughter to serve her parents (Asian Development Bank 1998: 27) means that women predominate in the economic aspects of life.

This trend of high female participation in the economy has continued into the present and is reflected in Thailand's contemporary female labour participation statistics,

shown in Table 3, which demonstrates that the overall average female labour force participation rate from 15-64 yrs of age for Thailand in 2000 was significantly higher than for the other ASEAN countries, (in the mid-60s percentage range, as compared to others being in the low 50s % range)[1]. As shown in Chart 1, Thai female labour force participation is relatively high across all age groups, peaking at an average of slightly over 80% in the 25-49 age range.

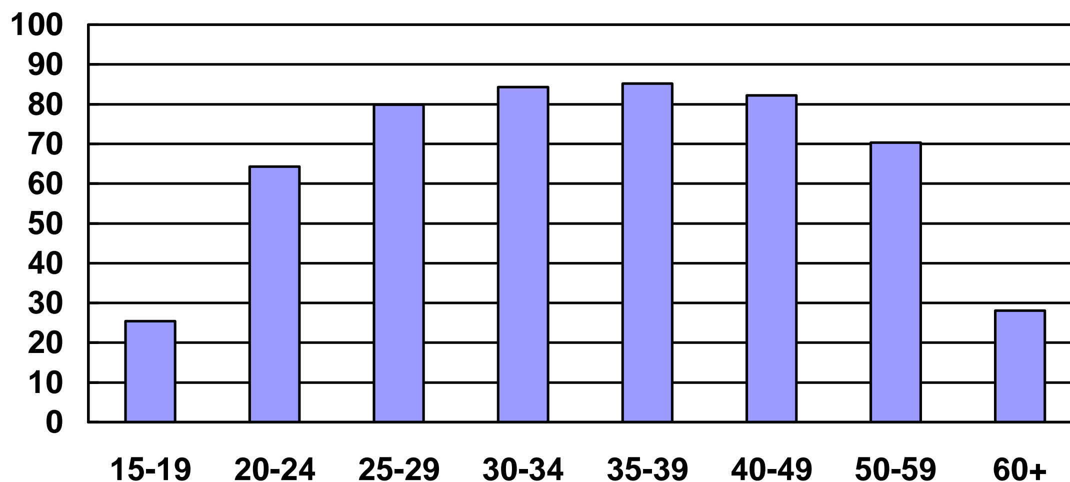
Table 3: Overall Average Female Labour Force Participation Rates (%) for Five ASEAN Countries, Ages 15-64, 1999-2000

Countries	1999	2000
Indonesia	52.7	53
Malaysia	42.2	44.2
Philippines	50.0	48.4
Singapore	52.7	55.5
Thailand	**64.2**	**64.9**

Source: Laborsta on the web (http://laborsta.ilo.org/).

[1] As women who work as unpaid labour on family farms are often undocumented in labour force surveys, this could be one reason for the lower female labour force participation rate of other countries

Chart 1: Female Labour Force Participation Rates (%) by Age for Thailand, 2004



Sources: Laborsta on the Web (http://laborsta.ilo.org/); Report of the Labor Force Survey: 2000 National Statistical Office. (http://www.nso.go.th/eng/stat/lfs/lfstab9.htm).

Hence, although the participation of women in Thailand's economy is not new, the nature of their participation in the economy has changed significantly, reflecting the overall shift in the workforce out of agriculture. In 1971, 79.7% of the female workforce was concentrated in the agriculture sector, with only 5.5% and 14.8% in the manufacturing sector and the non-agriculture and manufacturing sectors respectively. By 2004, only 43.9% of the Thai female workforce was classified as being engaged in agricultural labour, with 12.9% in the manufacturing sector and 43.2% in the non-agriculture and non-manufacturing sectors (Laborsta 2004). Importantly, too, while 44% of all Thai working women were officially classified as agricultural labourers, there is evidence to suggest many of these female workers are also engaged in outside farm activities such as small-time trading and handicraft production (Luangaramsri 2005: 4), and thus they are engaged (informally) in non-agricultural employment as well. Hence, the percentage of women that is employed at least part-time in non-agricultural work is even higher than official statistics suggest.

Therefore, it will be shown in the proceeding chapters that the change in women's labour participation from unpaid family worker to urban waged work has resulted in Thai women facing conflicts between wage labour and housework, which still remains the primary responsibility of women. In addition, the wages earned by Thai women also comprise an essential component of rural families' incomes, leading to conflict and contestation over access to resources amongst household members.

Effects of Modernization on Women

As can be seen, the modernization of Thailand has fundamentally altered both the structure of the country's economy and the rural population's traditional modes of labour. However, the modernization process has not only led to a diversification in employment options, but also an increasing emphasis on educational qualifications and fundamental changes in consumption patterns.

The effects of modernization can be seen clearly in the institution of education, where traditionally boys in Thailand received their education through the temples, while girls served as novitiates, which was a role proscribed for females. As such, female education was almost non-existent (UNESCO 1998: 3). Since 1951 however, education has been explicitly linked to the national economic development policy (Watson 1982: 37), leading to a massive expansion of public education in the 1960s and 1970s, including the establishment of primary schools in most villages and secondary schools in many districts. This allowed most Thais—male and female—to have access to either formal or nonformal education up to the secondary level (UNESCO 1998: 7). As a result, Thai women have experienced rising levels of educational participation, as seen in the declining illiteracy rate among Thai women. While in 1970 the illiteracy rate of Thai

women was 25.2%, by 1990 it had fallen to 8.7% (NSO Thailand 1970, 1990). Furthermore, while women comprised 48.4% of total enrolment in elementary education in 1999, their participation in upper secondary education was greater than that of males, comprising 56.5% of total enrolment (NSO Thailand 1999). With higher levels of education, Thai women have therefore been able to enter sectors where formal educational qualifications are essential, such as in the large-scale manufacturing and the formal tourism sector.

The importance of educational qualifications in providing for a better economic future for Thai women can be seen in the nursing profession, which "was the first education-based occupational field for women in Thailand" (Muecke and Srisuphan 1989: 643). It is presently heavily dominated by females, as women comprised 90.6% of registered and technical nurses in 2005 (International Council of Nurses 2005). The effects of modernization on the nursing profession could be seen in the need for nursing practitioners to have post-secondary qualifications, and was reinforced by a post-World War Two population growth spurt and advances in communication and educational infrastructures, which led to a growing demand for medical care and nurses (Muecke and Srisuphan 1989: 647). Employment in the nursing profession is therefore not only desired because of the availability of jobs in the sector, but also because it is an "appropriate route for young women to gain university education" (*Ibid*: 648). However, given that as of 2004, only 44% of Thai women of tertiary age had completed secondary school (UNESCO UIS 2004), it is still the minority of Thai women who have been able to avail themselves of these opportunities.

In addition to widening Thai women's range of employment options, modernization has also had a highly variable and gendered effect on female lifestyles in Thailand. In the mid-1990s, over 90 per cent of rural households had at least one television set. However, while the television dramas and commercials showcased the latest fashions in clothing, home design and models of social behaviour, it was hardly ever situated in a rural setting (Pasuk and Baker 2005: 223). This emphasis on attaining the features of an urban lifestyle has thus affected the livelihood strategies of Thai women, "as the portrayal of women and women's bodies in the dominant urban-centred culture which links beauty with modernity and active sexuality, flirts dangerously with equally powerful ideas about beauty predicated on women's sexual propriety and modesty" (Mills 1999: 106). Such changes have led to a clash between female aspirations for a modern, sophisticated identity and existing gender ideologies, which reinforce a woman's obligations towards her family and is a constraining factor on women's livelihood strategies. In the next chapter, the changing economic structure of Northern Thailand, in particular, Chiang Mai, will be discussed, showing how opportunities to enter non-rural forms of employment have affected women's livelihood strategies.

Chapter 4
Exploring Changing Livelihood Strategies in Northern Thailand

The region of Northern Thailand, particularly Chiang Mai province, has long been regarded as a popular destination for both Thai and overseas tourists. In addition to this highly visible role in the nation's tourism sector, Chiang Mai is also a major contributor to the country's manufacturing growth, especially since the promulgation of the 5th (1982-1986) National Development Plan, which sought to decentralise economic growth and a shift in industrial production away from Bangkok. This chapter will explore the economic changes that have occurred from the perspective of Northern Thailand and explain why the region provides an ideal venue in which to study the effects of modernization on female employment in Thailand.

Chiang Mai Valley, located in the largest inland valley between Vietnam and South Asia, was historically a large population centre and an area of much agricultural production (Singhanetra-Renard 1999: 76). Chiang Mai province, which had been founded in 1296 by King Mengrai, became part of the extensive Lanna kingdom in Northern Thailand, until the late 18th century where it was increasingly governed directly by Bangkok as the process of consolidation continued (Wyatt 1984). As the result of the imposition of Bangkok hegemony, the people of Chiang Mai began to call themselves *khon muang* ('people of the country'), to distinguish the local residents from *khon thai*, or newcomers from Central Thailand (Singhantera-Renard 1982: 44). Thus, by the 1980s Chiang Mai had not only created a distinctive cultural identity but had also evolved to become the regional centre for the North in many sectors, among them the educational, medical, tourist and trade industries (*Ibid*: 43). As of 2002, 37.5% of employed persons aged 15 years and over in the province were engaged in the primary sector, with 12.6%

employed in the manufacturing sector and 49.9% in the services-related sectors (Chiang Mai National Statistical Office 2002).

Women's Employment in the Manufacturing, Services and Informal sector in Northern Thailand

The Manufacturing Sector

As mentioned previously, agriculture was traditionally the main focus of economic activity for Thais, with women being an integral part of the agricultural labour force (Limanonda 2000: 256). However, in the period of rapid industrialisation during the years 1970-90, there was a distinct feminisation of the non-agricultural work force in Thailand, especially in the labour-intensive industries associated with the female labour force (Falkus 2000: 177, 180). While only 750,000 women were recorded in the 'manufacturing' workforce in 1980, this had risen to 2.6 million by 2000 (*Ibid*: 181; NSO Thailand). For my respondents, the Northern Region Industrial Estate or NRIE has generated numerous job opportunities for young women, playing an important role in their livelihood strategies.

History of the Northern Region Industrial Estate (NRIE)

In spite of Chiang Mai's long history as an urban centre and a regional trade hub, manufacturing in the Chiang Mai area before the 1980s remained rudimentary, overwhelmingly small scale, and centred largely in agriculture (Glassman and Sneddon 2003: 99). This industrial profile began to change, in part because of the development of the Northern Region Industrial Estate (NRIE), located on 286 ha of land in Lamphun Province, 23 kilometres south of Chiang Mai City and part of the broader Chiang Mai

metropolitan area. Construction of the NRIE started in 1983 and was completed in 1985 (Thongnoi 1983; NRIE 1997; Glassman and Sneddon 2003: 99).

The estate's location, along the Chiang Mai–Lampang superhighway, is strategic in multiple ways (Manat, Kerdphibul, and Leesuwan 1992: 12; Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand 1995/1996; NRIE 1997; Glassman and Sneddon 2003: 99). The combination of being located near Chiang Mai city but outside of it allows companies to take advantage of both the lower official minimum wages for nonurban areas and the skilled workers that have been trained by the nearby universities and technical schools (Glassman and Sneddon 2003: 100). The NRIE is located only thirty minutes away from Chiang Mai international airport (IEAT 2002), while the specific location within Lamphun Province is close to required water supplies (Manat, Kerdphibul, and Leesuwan 1992: 10; Glassman and Sneddon 2003: 100). Finally, as the NRIE is not located in Bangkok or its surrounding provinces, it is eligible for further BOI tax and duty privileges (BOI 2004).

As land prices, wages, and other costs of production rose in Bangkok during the economic boom that began in 1987-1988, investors began to look for alternative production sites, and as of February 1997, ninety-two units, representing more than 90 percent of all units available, had been sold (Manat, Kerdphibul, and Leesuwan 1992: 12; NRIE 1997; Glassman and Sneddon 2003: 100) Overall, as of 2000, the NRIE was estimated to have received 26,687 million baht worth of investment and to be employing 36,940 persons (Lamphun Province 2000). Electronics and machinery firms, most of them Japanese owned, provided more than 90 percent of capital and 60 percent of

employment. Thus, the NRIE has become a significant outpost of foreign investment in higher technology export industries (Glassman and Sneddon 2003: 100).

In Northern Thailand, the NRIE is an important source of employment for local women. As workers receive the legal minimum wage along with other welfare benefits, employment in the NRIE is more desirable than in the smaller factories and sweatshops for women within the manufacturing industry. Hence, women in the manufacturing sector are financially independent as they are able to earn a steady source of income. As I will show in my data, this access to financial resources allows them to pursue a desired 'modern' identity, as manifested in their consumption practices. In addition to women's employment in the manufacturing sector, there is also a considerable diversification of the female workforce in Chiang Mai, with increasing numbers of women seeking employment in both the formal and informal tourism sectors. Although women's livelihood strategies in the formal tourism sector and the informal home industry are based upon widely differing access to the various forms of capital, employment in these two sectors have both been influenced by Chiang Mai's emphasis on tourism, which I shall now examine below.

Tourism in Thailand

In examining women's employment in the service sector, participation in the tourism sector is an important component of Thai female wage labour, "as tourism has been one of the three of the principal factors which have underpinned Thailand's overall economic success story, the other two being the increasing importance of the manufacturing sector and international investment in export-oriented industries" (Parnwell and Rigg 1996: 215). As mentioned previously, Thailand's service sector has

accounted for about half of total GDP, constituting 49% of total GDP in 2000. Promotion of services by the mid-1980s had become a major policy platform and was seen most effectively in the tourism sector, which required relatively small investment on the part of the government as Thailand had plenty of scenic sites and 'exotic' local culture to attract tourists (Pasuk and Chiasakul 1993: 159).

This had repercussions for the country's labour force as well, as tourism became a leading employment sector, with direct employment for Thai female workers in tourism-related industries, such as in hotels and restaurants, accounting for about 276,300 jobs or 16% of total female employment in 2004 (Laborsta 2004). In Chiang Mai alone, approximately 12% of total female employment within the province was located within the hotel and restaurant industry (Chiang Mai NSO 2002). These figures do not reflect other sub-sectors of tourism-related employment, such as travel agencies, shops selling tourist items, domestic transport for tourists, as well as entertainment and recreation places. Hence, it can be argued that the tourism sector employs a substantial proportion of the workforce, where it was estimated that direct plus indirect employment in the tourism economy of Thailand accounted for 2.89 million, or 8.6% of all jobs in the country (ILO 2003: 9-10).

Chiang Mai and its Emphasis on Tourism

Since the 1920s with the completion of the rail line to the city, tourism has been continuously promoted in Chiang Mai. From the 1970s onwards, many guest houses, mid-range and luxury hotels, along with shops and restaurants catering for tourists were built while the airport was expanded and major roads widened and otherwise upgraded (Singhanetra-Renard 1999: 77). Tourism thus became the engine of Chiang Mai's rapid

economic growth, with 30-40 percent of the city's income directly or indirectly related to tourism by the mid-1980s (Chiang Mai Chamber of Commerce 1985: 17). This is reflected in the number of hotel registrants in Chiang Mai, which was 105,000 in 1972, but had risen to 3.9 million by 2004 (Singhanetra-Renard 1999: 76; Tourism Authority of Thailand 2005).

It can be argued that female employment in the tourist-related entertainment and recreation industries, particularly in entertainment, has become a euphemism for prostitution, which is a famous tourist attraction for Thailand. Prostitution in Thailand has attracted a disproportionate amount of attention from both local and foreign media and academic analysis[1] (Cook 1998: 250), permeating discussions of the role of gender within contemporary Thailand. However, in framing the discussion of women's livelihood strategies in Thailand, examining Thai women's participation in other employment sectors beyond prostitution would present a more comprehensive picture about the issues surrounding women and their households in the modern context of the country. For the next section, employment of female home industry workers and female entrepreneurs within the informal sector will be examined below.

The Informal Sector

While much attention has been paid to the importance of tourism and export-orientated industries in manufacturing to Thailand's overall economic growth, it is important to note that Thai women's employment is still predominantly in the informal

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[1] See for example, Wathinee Boonchalaksi and Philip Guest, "Prostitution in Thailand" in *The Sex Sector: the economic and social bases of prostitution in Southeast Asia*, ed. Lin Lean Lim (ILO, 1998), 130-169; *Genders and sexualities in modern Thailand*, ed. Peter Jackson and Nerida Cook (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999); Ryan Bishop and Lillian S. Robinson, *Night Markets: Sexual Cultures and the Thai Economic Miracle* (Routledge 1998), and Siriphon Skrobanek et al., *The traffic in women: Human realities of the international sex trade* (London: Zed Books, 1997).

employment sector, in both informal agricultural and informal non-agricultural activities. In 2000, 44% of all Thai working women (NSO Thailand) were classified as agricultural labourers. However, as many of them also engaged in outside farm activities such as small-time trading and handicraft production, these can be considered as activities in the non-agricultural informal sector. Thus, for the purposes of my study, respondents in both the home industries and those who run their own enterprises can be considered as informal sector workers. As the informal sector is "conceptually, methodologically and theoretically difficult to define in terms of its precise nature, size and significance" (Cross 1998: 512), statistics on employment in the informal sector should only be viewed as a rough estimate of actual figures. The average percentage of Thai women in informal employment within non-agricultural employment from 1994-2000 was estimated at 54%, and 68% of women in this category were self-employed workers (ILO 2002: 19-20). In my study, respondents running their own enterprises, such as restaurants or retail shops, or providing services such as hairdressing or tailoring, may be included in this category.

Within the informal sector, homeworking in Thailand, such as in the case of silk weaving, has always been a part of farm women's economic activities. However, homeworking under subcontracting arrangements emerged in the early seventies (Lazo 1992: 2), as Thai development policies that emphasised the growth of regional centres outside of Bangkok led to the promotion of traditional craft products in Chiang Mai for the tourist and export markets (Dixon 1999: 224, 235). As of 2005, there were 119,321 homeworkers in the North of Thailand, with 31.5% or 37,586 classified as within the textile and garment home industry (Luangaramsri 2005: 20). In Chiang Mai, the silk-weaving industry is organized under the putting-out system, where small groups of

women are employed in a number of factories, but also weave using their own thread and looms in their homes with raw materials provided from the factories, in order to gain extra income.

As shown previously, employment in the informal sector is attractive because no formal educational qualifications or vocational skills are required for entry into this sector. It is also ideal for women with children as it allows them to take on responsibilities in both the domestic and public spheres. While Thai women have always taken an active role in economic activities, female entrepreneurship also illustrates the diversification of the economy in the service sector, as opportunities have opened up for women to embark on independent business ventures beyond working traditionally as unpaid workers in family enterprises. However, as will be seen in the proceeding chapters, both home industry work and female entrepreneurship as livelihood strategies also reinforces existing gender ideologies, particularly in the allocation of domestic obligations and household chores. In the next section, I will conclude the chapter with a description of my ethnographic fieldwork in Chiang Mai.

Ethnography and Methodology of Fieldwork

Selection of Province and Villages

The first step of my fieldwork study was to select a site in which to conduct the research. Chiang Mai province was selected because of its long history as the capital of Northern Thailand, and is regarded as the second most important city after the country's capital and primate city of Bangkok. The process of Thai women's entry into the non-agricultural economy is also clearly illustrated in Chiang Mai province, due to the proximity of its rural villages to Chiang Mai city, a major Thai tourist destination, and

also the Northern Region Industrial Estate or NRIE, an important industrial area in the adjoining province of Lamphun. Hence, by examining women in the province who reside in rural villages but participate in urban industrial areas, I could analyse how respondents could fulfil household obligations and maintain financial and social ties in the village but still exercise female agency through the pursuit of city-based leisure activities and consumption purchases.

In order to study how women managed both household subsistence and economic activities, along with the transition from rural to urban-based forms of employment, I began my preliminary fieldwork in a village located twelve kilometres north of Chiang Mai city. It was located in a district traditionally renowned for its silk and handicraft products, where government policies promoting rural industrialization and tourism in Chiang Mai have further contributed to the continued existence of numerous small-scale garment and textile factories in the area. My interviews with homeworkers in the silk-weaving industry therefore enabled me to examine how rural women were integrated into the modern economy, as these homeworkers utilized their traditional weaving skills to supply handicraft products to the tourist market in Chiang Mai city. It also revealed how rural women's engagement in the informal sector allowed them to straddle both the private and public spheres.

As my study examines urban forms of employment for Thai women residing in rural areas, I also focused on respondents who have made their living in Chiang Mai's tourist industry, which comprises almost 40% of the city's income and is integral not only to the economic success of the province, but also the country's tourism sector. Hence, the second village in my fieldwork research was chosen due to its proximity to the

province's major tourist centre, as it is located thirteen kilometres northeast of Chiang Mai city. My interviews with respondents employed in the tourist industry from this village therefore enabled me to examine how virtually all the villagers have made their livelihoods outside of the village, especially in the city.

The third village in my fieldwork research was selected due to its strategic location between Chiang Mai city and the NRIE, allowing me to conduct interviews with inhabitants who have made their living in either the manufacturing or tourism sector by commuting to these two places for work. I also interviewed respondents in the nursing profession from this village, as their employment in the district hospital revealed the interpenetration of urban activities into rural areas, in contrast to respondents who had to commute into urban areas for their employment. Finally, in order to provide a comparison with homeworkers in the first village, I also interviewed respondents who were engaged in the informal sector through the operation of their own enterprises in the third village. My interviews revealed that based on their differing access to the various forms of capital, Thai women are channelled into different divisions within the informal sector, either as independent own-account producers, such as respondents from the third village, or as homeworkers in the dependent sub-contractor category.

Hence, the social and economic changes which have affected the rural transformation of Thailand over the past half-century, and its implications for the rural population, are exemplified in the livelihood strategies of respondents in Chiang Mai. This can be seen in the three villages which form the bulk of my research data, where although all three villages are located in a rural setting, my interviews with respondents

in these villages have indicated that livelihoods, especially amongst the younger generation, are now situated in non-agricultural industries.

Timeline of Fieldwork Research

Data for this study were collected in the course of several trips to Chiang Mai Province, from December 2003 to December 2004, with an additional trip to Bangkok in May 2005 to conduct library research at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), Chulalongkorn University and the National Council of Women's Affairs (NCWA). I began my preliminary fieldwork research in Chiang Mai in December 2003, where I interviewed women employed in the informal sector in the first village. During the second phase of fieldwork I examined women's livelihood strategies in the formal employment sector, first by interviewing women in the second village who were employed in the tourism industry in June 2004, followed by several months of research in 'Market Town', a village located twenty-five kilometres southwest of Chiang Mai city and thirty kilometres west of the Northern Regional Industrial Estate in Lamphun Province, where I lived more or less continuously from August 2004 to December 2004. During this period I also conducted follow-up research in the first two villages where I had interviewed the homeworkers and women employed in tourism, and made several trips to Chiang Mai city, including an extended stay for the month of November 2004, when I conducted comparative interviews with other women, as well as further interviews with my main respondents.

Profile of Respondents

The data on which this study is based was derived through in-depth interviews with thirty female respondents aged between 20-40 years of age, from a variety of occupations. Informants were selected using a combination of snowball and purposive sampling methods, which like most qualitative sampling approaches, did not result in a random or even necessarily representative sample, but did allow for an information-rich sample. Nine of the respondents were employed in the manufacturing sector, while six were employed in the formal tourist industry, and four in the nursing profession. In addition, I interviewed eleven respondents in the informal sector, comprising five homeworkers and six respondents who operated their own businesses. In order to protect their confidentiality, only the age and occupation of each respondent is given.

Due to the small sample size, I also conducted shorter comparative interviews with women from other villages who were employed in Chiang Mai city, such as those employed in retail shops or operating their own stalls in shopping centres and the bazaars, or in white-collar professions such as teaching and accountancy. Thus, information for my study was not confined to interviews with my main respondents, as I had gathered additional data on the family backgrounds and occupational patterns of women in Chiang Mai through these shorter interviews. Such information on other villagers, who, like my respondents, commuted into Chiang Mai city for work, also enhanced my understanding of Thai women's involvement in non-agricultural employment.

Interviews with Respondents

Much of the data for this study was gathered through the ethnographic methods of participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The data included a short

life history of each of my respondents, which focused mainly on their educational background and the employment histories of both the informants themselves and their household members. I also gathered information on how those women who worked outside the home had obtained employment, the educational level that was required to enter their professions, and the role of siblings and other kin members in helping them gain advanced schooling and in finding a job. Such data was useful in examining respondents' access to the different forms of employment, which is integral to the creation of livelihood strategies. I also examined the consequences of respondents' livelihood strategies, by interviewing them about their employment experiences, in terms of their satisfaction with their present job, the prospects for both social and economic mobility, and any problems that they faced in their current position. In addition to collecting information on respondents' education and household employment backgrounds, I also collected qualitative data on the women's daily time usage, such as how and whether respondents had to manage housework and childrearing duties in addition to their waged work. These data allowed me to understand not only respondents' employment experiences, but also their household obligations and responsibilities.

Most interviews were conducted in Thai with the help of a translator, though English was used in cases where the respondent could speak English and preferred to use this language in our conversations. While I had initially recorded interviews using a tape recorder, I found that this method inhibited respondents' conversations, as they became self-conscious in the presence of the recorder. Thus, I preferred to take brief notes during the conversations, and then construct more detailed notes from memory after the interviews.

In the course of my fieldwork research, my in-depth interviews with women who were formally employed were confined almost exclusively to Sundays or on days off from work. These scheduling constraints, imposed by their work commitments, presented a barrier to timely completion of the research. As a result, I resorted to multiple shorter interviews with informants drawn from the manufacturing and tourism sector, as such exchange could be conducted informally either during leisure outings we made together to Chiang Mai city, or in their own homes after dinner. Hence, I chose to stay for one month in the city, as this made it not only easier for me to meet up with respondents during their weekly outings there, but also to conduct comparative interviews with other women who were employed in the city. In addition, it was during such outings that I could observe respondents' leisure activities and patterns of consumption, enabling me to understand how the influence of modernity had affected their identities and livelihood strategies.

Ironically, given my predominantly 'rural' samples, moving to Chiang Mai city allowed me to conduct more in-depth interviews with my main respondents, as they were able to relax away from the pressures of work, and talk in greater detail about their personal lives. Such conversations were especially frank during my stay in the city, as without the presence of other family members, respondents could speak honestly and for a longer duration of time, about the familial pressures and work burdens they faced as a result of the livelihood strategies they had created.

Due to the small size of my sample, the views of the respondents may not be representative of the experiences of all women employed in these sectors. However, it does provide insights into the motivations and experiences of women who in their

background, employment characteristics and demographics seem broadly typical of the pool of workers from whom they were drawn. As such, it is hoped that in spite of its limitations, this study would provide insights into the creation and consequences of women's livelihood strategies in Northern Thailand.

Chapter 5
Livelihood Strategies of Women in the Manufacturing Sector

As the growth of manufacturing activities was in many ways the catalyst for the transformation of women's employment in Thailand, I will begin my discussion by examining how and why the women whom I spoke to came to work in this sector and what the implications of their choices have been for them and their family members. Entry into the manufacturing sector is dependent on factors such as the level of education attained and the existence of social networks which facilitates the employment of women into factory work. This is also aided by the principles of obligation and reciprocity of children towards their parents, specifically for daughters who are expected to contribute financially to the household. As my respondents in the manufacturing sector come from an agricultural background, it will be shown that their employment choice can also be viewed as a rejection of agricultural work.

For women who enter into the manufacturing sector, the wages they earn have enabled them to contribute to the family's financial stability and to set aside money for their personal consumption as well. Employment in the factories, as will be shown, has also allowed female factory workers to widen their social network beyond the confines of the village and kin-based community. However, factory employment is also considered by many women to be hazardous to their health, and the precariousness of their job has also delayed their marriage and childbirth prospects.

Desirability of Employment in the Manufacturing Sector

While my respondents in the manufacturing sector come from families who are employed in agriculture, they had never worked in the agricultural sector before.

According to them, one of the most important reasons for pursuing livelihoods away from agriculture is the wage differential. One respondent says "I don't want to be a farmer because I can earn a higher pay working in the factories" (Factory worker, 23 years old). In Chiang Mai, while the minimum daily wage was set at 153 baht per day (Ministry of Labour 2005), respondents stated that the daily wage rate for tenant and wage farmers growing rice was approximately 120 baht per day. This is in comparison to working in the Northern Region Industrial Estate (NRIE), where factory workers could earn between 167-250 baht a day for a six-day workweek; and even up to 417 baht a day if they worked overtime.

Respondents engaged in factory work also saw no future in agriculture, as one respondent stated "You cannot earn a stable income in agriculture…even if you work hard, you may not earn enough to feed your family. Whether your harvest is good depends on the weather…if it rains too much or there is no rain, all your effort in planting the crop is wasted" (Factory Worker, 27 years old). For another respondent whose parents were involved in onion farming, she recalled that the family often faced difficulties in paying for farming and household expenses incurred if they could not sell the onions at a high enough price. This frequently occurred as there was usually an oversupply of onions in the market. After my respondent joined the NRIE, her employment helped the family to gain a stable monthly source of income. Her wages not only helped to pay off any farming expenses that were incurred regularly, but to renovate the house as well. As she explained, "My parents were always worried about the debts that had to paid off, but now there is enough money left over to build a better house" (Factory Worker, 25 years old).

In Chiang Mai Province, young women's employment opportunities beyond agriculture and the manufacturing sector are limited. Employment in other sectors, such as in tourism, is harder to obtain, as it requires knowledge of foreign language skills, often English, and usually an intermediate level of command in the language. While home-based work has traditionally been a source of employment for women other than in agriculture, my respondents did not think that such employment was desirable, citing the low wages as the main reason. In my preliminary research, which included women home workers, the average income in the silk-weaving industry (a cottage-based enterprise) was 3,000 baht a month, compared to the workers in the NRIE, where young women could earn 5,000 baht a month after one year's work experience.

One respondent mentioned that a weaving co-op had been set up in her village by the Queen's foundation, to help women develop skills for employment in craft-based industries. However, she stated that "It is only the poorer women in the village who work in the centre. The older women with little education and girls who stop studying after primary school work there. You can earn up to 4,000 baht a month, but because there are not enough (weaving) looms, the women have to give 10% of their salary to buy more looms for the centre" (Factory Worker, 30 years old). Another respondent also said that "How much you earn in the weaving industry depends on the time of year…there is more demand during the peak tourist seasons, but the rest of the time you may earn very little" (Factory Worker, 28 years old).

The seasonality of home-based work can be contrasted to my respondents' work in the NRIE, as some of them had been employed in the industrial estate constantly for more than five years. Hence, it can be seen that employment in manufacturing is desired

due to the higher monetary returns and the stability it provides for the household by allowing the respondent to earn a monthly income. Employment in the NRIE is also desirable due to its proximity to the respondents' villages, as it is approximately thirty kilometres away and is therefore easily accessible by motorcycle or car. The ease of transportation is an important factor in the creation of my respondents' livelihood strategies, as one respondent explains "It is easy to travel to the factory as my village is near the main highway into Lamphun…I don't have to live in a dormitory or apartment as I save money by staying at home and cutting down on food and lodging costs" (Factory Worker, 24 years old).

The attainment of a regular wage is not only important for economic reasons, but for social and cultural reasons as well. According to my respondents, helping their families financially was one of the main reasons for entering waged work. One respondent said that "My salary in the factory means I can give money to my parents and younger sister can go to secondary school as well" (Factory Worker, 22 years old). Respondents also claimed that as parents relied more on daughters financially than on sons, they were expected to contribute towards household expenses, and entry into the manufacturing sector helps to facilitate their obligations. As one respondent said, "My brother is not married, but he hardly gives my mother money, while she is always asking me for more money" (Factory worker, 25 years old). Therefore, it is apparent that the *bun khun* system is a motivating factor in channelling these women into the manufacturing sector and in shaping the livelihood strategies they can adopt.

For my respondents, employment in the manufacturing sector is desired not only for the reasons given above, but also because of its perceived status as a 'modern' job,

with its use of advanced machinery and taking place indoors. In addition to the wage differential and instability of monetary returns, agricultural labour is also viewed as an undesirable occupation for cultural reasons. As one respondent stated "It is not easy to be a farmer. You have to work in the fields, sweating under the hot sun. Your skin will become burnt also" (Factory Worker, 25 years old). Another respondent illustrated why farming is viewed as an occupation that is low in social status as she said, "Farmwomen look very old because their faces have wrinkles from being in the sun all day. They are also not good looking because the sun makes their skin dark. For Thai women, if your skin is *khaao maak* (very white or fair), then you are *suay maak* (very beautiful)" (Factory Worker, 22 years old).

Women employed in the manufacturing sector would also never fail to mention how their skin became fairer after working in the factories. One respondent said "Getting a job in the factory means I can work indoors and I won't become tanned" (Factory Worker, 20 years old). As mentioned in the preceding chapters, feminine beauty has become one of the most powerful symbols for representing Thai progress and modernity, (Mills 1999: 105) and for my respondents, it can be clearly seen that having fairer skin is an explicit rejection of a traditional agricultural lifestyle in favour of a modern urban one. This is reinforced by the wearing of uniforms in the factories. Rather than viewing the uniforms as relegating them to the low-level status of a nameless employee, respondents in the manufacturing sector regarded the uniforms as representations of their successful livelihoods. As one respondent said, "When I wear my uniform to work, people in the village know that I am employed in one of the factories in the NRIE" (Factory Worker,

22 years old). Thus, the disadvantages of working in the agricultural sector are not only based on economic considerations, but for social and cultural reasons also.

Entry into the Manufacturing Sector

For my respondents in the manufacturing sector, female sibling networks have enabled them to gain employment in the NRIE, thus allowing these workers to make contributions towards rural household expenditure, and also giving them opportunities to expand their social networks and acquire a certain degree of financial autonomy. For all but two of my respondents, it was through their older sisters that they gained employment in the industrial estate. One respondent stated that, “After finishing secondary school, I didn’t have to look for a job, because the company where my elder sister worked was hiring workers” (Factory Worker, age 23 years old). Another respondent said, “After I finished 9th grade, I helped my aunt out at her vegetable stall in the village market, but soon I became bored, and I followed my sister to work in Lamphun when I was eighteen” (Factory Worker, age 27 years old).

My respondents not only relied on their sisters for employment assistance, but also for meeting the requirements needed to gain employment in the factories. According to my respondents, factories seldom employed workers who had less than nine years of schooling, although they were also less likely to employ workers who were educated beyond vocational school. As of 2004, only 44% of women of tertiary age had completed secondary school in Thailand (UNESCO UIS 2004), hence female employment in the export-orientated factories is only available to a minority of women in the country. Employment in these factories is also dependent on the worker’s age, as my respondents started working in the industrial estate when they were between 18-20 years old. In fact,

some of my respondents stated that the factories they worked in did not hire anyone beyond their mid-twenties.

Before my respondents were involved in factory work, their older sisters were the main source of income for the household, including the education of younger siblings such as my respondents. As it was not until 1999 that the duration of compulsory education was raised from six to nine years of school (Ministry of Education of Thailand 2005: 1), it can be argued that it was only due to the efforts of their older siblings that my respondents were able to continue their education past primary school. As one respondent said “My parents couldn’t afford to pay for my education because they were poor rice farmers. It was my sister, who was working in the factory by then, who paid for my school books and uniforms, and when I went to secondary school, she paid for my bus fare to school and back for six years” (Factory Worker, 22 years old). Thus, livelihood strategies are shaped by the existence of social networks, which facilitates an individual’s entry into specific forms of work. In the next section, an examination of the allocation of respondents’ wages reveals why employment in the manufacturing sector is considered lucrative by respondents and their families as their income is integral to the functioning of the household and individual needs, for both consumption and investment practices.

Allocation of Wages for Both Household and Personal Use

Allocation of Wages for Household Expenses

For respondents in the manufacturing sector, contributing to household expenses was one of the main reasons for entering factory work. As the wages they earned were stable, and increased if they put in extra hours, this helped to stabilise the family income and in paying off any household debts that were incurred. For one respondent and her

sister, their combined wages earned at the NRIE allowed her parents to retire from farming, and they no longer had to work as agricultural labourers on other people's farms. My respondent stated that, "My mother can now stay at home to take care of my grandmother, who is eighty years old…My sister and I have rebuilt the house, which was made of wood, into cement. My parents don't have to work anymore, and now they have time to watch the shows on the new television set we just bought" (Factory Worker, 23 years old).

The wages earned in the manufacturing sector not only benefited the respondents' parents financially, but also allowed the respondents' mothers to carry out the main bulk of household and childcare responsibilities, tasks which may have traditionally been assigned to my respondents if they had worked as unpaid family workers instead. This can be seen in the description given by one respondent of her daily work routine "I work up to eight hours a day, six days a week, either on the night or day shift. My mother prepares breakfast for me if I work the day shift, or an early lunch if I work at night…I don't need to do any housework because my mother does all the cooking and cleaning" (Factory Worker, 25 years old). Another respondent also mentioned that working in the factory meant she no longer had to do housework. As she stated, "After I left secondary school, I did all the housework while my parents worked as farmers. When I went to work in the factory one year later, I didn't have to do the housework anymore, as my sister and I are earning enough for my mother to stay home, but my father still works as a farmer" (Factory worker, 20 years old).

For my respondents, the wages that they earned were not only distributed to their parents, but were also allocated for their younger siblings' education. One respondent

said that, if it were not for her, “my younger brother would not be able to go to technical school, as my parents cannot afford to pay for his school fees” (Factory Worker, 27 years old). For another respondent, she stated that “My younger sister wants to go to the vocational college to study Business, so my older sister and I are helping with the school fees, as our parents cannot pay for all of it” (Factory Worker, 24 years old). Just as the respondents were given financial assistance by their elder siblings, they hoped that their younger siblings would take over their financial duties, or at least help out, especially if they can earn more money with a better education.

The allocation of wages extends not only to household expenses for the respondents’ parents and siblings’ education, but also to financial assistance for siblings who have established households of their own as well. This is especially for respondents’ elder sisters who earned lower wages after leaving the NRIE. For example, one respondent’s mother stayed at home to take care of my respondent’s niece, while the child’s parents worked as street food vendors. My respondent explained that “My sister works as a cooked food vendor in the city, so she cannot bring her baby to work, and she cannot afford to pay for babysitting service also” (Factory worker, 28 years old). She also added that “My sister and her husband don’t earn a steady income from selling cooked food on the streets, so I help them whenever they need extra money for their daughter”. It can be seen, therefore, that the principles of obligation and reciprocity are shown not only to the parents of these female factory workers, but extended to their siblings as well.

Allocation of Wages for Personal Consumption

While respondents had stated their main intention in entering the manufacturing sector was to assist their families financially, they also allocated a proportion of their

wages for their own personal expenses. Popular activities with factory colleagues included trips to Chiang Mai city, where there has been a proliferation of mega-sized shopping centres in the last decade. One respondent said that “The things there [the shopping centres] are too expensive for me to buy. But I can always go to the small shops inside the city to buy clothes and cosmetics” (Factory Worker, 25 years old).

An important priority for my respondents in terms of personal consumption was also to acquire their own means of transport. While a car was desirable, my respondents were satisfied that they now had a motorcycle of their own. Although some of them already had motorcycles given by family members, they preferred to put aside money to purchase their own motorcycle. One respondent said, “My older sister gave me her motorcycle after she saved enough money to buy a pickup truck, but I want to buy a new motorcycle because my sister’s motorcycle is small and of an older model” (Factory Worker, 20 years old). While they had to incur extra expenses for petrol, which came up to 120 baht a month, having their own motorcycle meant that my respondents could easily travel to the factories, and not rely on public transportation or their families to fetch them to and from work.

It is also interesting to note that all my respondents cited similar benefits of having their own means of transport. They all said that having a motorcycle was convenient, not only because they could travel to their workplace, but it also gave them “the freedom to go wherever I want outside of work” (Factory Worker, 22 years old). In the next section, I will show how having easy access to transportation has widened the social circle of factory workers beyond their traditional kin and community-based networks.

Factory Work as a Means of Expanding Social Networks

For three of my respondents in the manufacturing sector, factory work was not the first paid job they had entered into. After leaving school and before joining the NRIE, my respondents had undertaken a variety of jobs. One had helped her aunt out at a vegetable stall in another town, while another respondent was a kitchen helper in a distant relative's restaurant in another district and a third respondent worked in a retail shop in the city. For the two respondents who lived away from home, they were expected not only to assist in the running of the businesses, but to do laundry and take care of the children as well when their services at the businesses were not required. Thus, they were effectively domestic servants. Furthermore, while they were given room and board, their wages were sent directly to their parents, rather than given to them personally. Without their own means of expenditure, and being kept busy with tasks both within and outside the household, meant that they had no time for themselves, and their isolation also led them to feel bored and lonely.

As one respondent explained, "Although hours at the factory are long, any free time left is mine. I can do whatever I want. When I was helping my aunt, she always gave me things to do if I was free. Since I had no money, I also could not go anywhere. Now, I decide how to spend the money I earn" (Factory Worker, 27 years old). The other respondent explained "Even though I worked in a restaurant, I didn't deal with customers at all. I did most of the washing up and preparing the food. I hardly saw anyone besides my relatives" (Factory Worker, 30 years old). She also added, "Now that I am working in the factory, I can visit my friends on my day off and go out with them, by driving my motorcycle".

My respondents explained that although they could live at home due to the proximity of their villages to the industrial estate, many factory workers stayed in dormitories near the factories. However, some factory workers preferred to rent apartments near the industrial estate even as this incurred extra expenses, as there were no rules governing their mobility, unlike in the dormitories. It was at these apartments that the factory workers could hold gatherings on their days off from work. As my respondents had only one day of rest a week, they preferred to spend their free time engaging in leisure activities such as shopping, going for karaoke or to the movies, or as seen above, going to their friends' apartments, where they could relax and chat over potluck dinners.

Hence, it can be seen that for the respondents, entering factory work not only allows them to ensure the financial stability of the family or to have money for their own personal consumption. It also enables them to broaden their social networks, which would not have been possible if they had remained in traditional modes of labour. The demarcation between working hours and free time facilitates their autonomy in deciding their leisure activities, aided by the acquisition of their own means of transportation. Factory work has also allowed them to a certain degree, the freedom in deciding the allocation of wages between household expenses and personal use. However, as I will show in the next section, factory work is not without its disadvantages as well.

Problems associated with Factory Work

For my respondents, the most common complaint about working in the NRIE was the long hours required to bring home a good wage. My respondents would work long, gruelling hours, in order to maximize the financial benefits they could receive from

working overtime. As one respondent said "I work almost non-stop for up to twelve hours…By the end of my shift, my back aches badly and my eyes really hurt from staring at the machine" (Factory Worker, 27 years old). Also, factory workers in the NRIE work six days a week on a shift-basis and change their shifts about once a week, switching between the day shift and night shift. The frequent changes in their sleeping routine due to the change in shifts results in fatigue and sleeplessness. As one respondent said, "Just when I get used to sleeping from late at night until the early morning, my shift changes and I have to adjust to sleeping in the afternoons if I get the night shift" (Factory Worker, 22 years old). Respondents also found their jobs repetitive and boring, and the monotonous routine only exacerbated their dislike of the job. One respondent said, "I do the same tasks, twelve hours a day, six days a week… it feels like I am reliving the same day for the past two years" (Factory Worker, 20 years old).

It was not only the long hours and frequent disruptions in work routines that caused my respondents to be worried about the long-term consequences of working in the factories. Some respondents mentioned that before working at the NRIE, they were worried about rumours that people had died of industrial poisoning caused by working in the NRIE. [1] One respondent even contemplated quitting after experiencing similar symptoms as the victims, but as she said "If I leave the factory, I can't get a job that pays as well outside…I have very little education…also my family depends on me to support them for my sister's education, and my mother needs medicine as well" (Factory Worker, 24 years old).

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[1] In 1994, 14 workers in their 20s and 30s died after working in the NRIE. The victims had suffered very similar symptoms before they died. Although government officials insisted they had all died of AIDS, academics, environmentalists and activists believed the cause of death was due to the accumulation of unidentified metals in their bodies ("Mysterious Deaths in Lamphun," *Bangkok Post*, 27 February 1994).

Even though none of the respondents wanted to work in agriculture, it was ironic that the independence they had sought by venturing into factory work was not fully realised, and they had ended up exchanging one form of repression for another. As one respondent said, "In the factory, everything you do is timed, from how many minutes you have for eating, to how long your toilet break can be" (Factory Worker, 20 years old). Although as unpaid family workers in agriculture, they could not earn their own wages or have strictly defined leisure time, they claimed that, in some ways, agriculture work was preferable, as "As a farmer, I can do my work whenever I like…no one is watching to see if I am taking a break from work" (Factory Worker, 28 years old).

In addition to the occupational health hazards they faced, my respondents faced additional work pressures and social conflicts as well. As previously mentioned, my respondents said that they did not know of anyone who was hired beyond their mid-twenties, hence, as they continued on in their work, my respondents were worried that they might lose their jobs, as younger applicants could take their positions for lower pay. This was especially worrying for the older respondents, who were earning more due to their longer work experience in the factories. As one respondent explained, "I am afraid that my bosses might find an excuse to let me go as I have been working here for a long time" (Factory Worker, 28 years old).

For two of my respondents who were married, the fear of losing their posts meant that they had postponed childbearing responsibilities indefinitely. One respondent stated that "I am worried that if I get pregnant, I will have to take leave when my child is born or if I fall ill during the pregnancy…then they might find it easy to fire me" (Factory Worker, 30 years old). Although there were factory workers who continued their

employment after having children, my respondents said that it was not easy to work such long hours and raise children at the same time, even if childcare help was available. For two of my respondents, their sisters had left the NRIE after giving birth, to work in the informal sector, but were finding it hard to make ends meet, as they no longer earned a steady income. Hence, as one respondent said, “I don’t want to end up like my sister, always worrying about whether she has enough money to feed the family” (Factory Worker, 25 years old). Even respondents who were single were delaying marriage, as it meant the potential loss of their jobs. One respondent voiced the fears of other respondents when she said, “If I get married, my family would expect me to give birth very soon, so I cannot postpone having children once I am no longer single” (Factory Worker, 24 years old).

In addition to the prospect of job insecurity, my respondents had to confront family conflicts as well. While my respondents had entered wage work in order to contribute to household expenses, the regular demands on their wages left them feeling trapped by their familial obligations and having to forego their own aspirations. One respondent, who was married, wanted to move out of the house she shared with her family, but was unable to do so, as she said “My mother is always asking me for money…for buying new furniture, to renovate the house again, for my younger brother’s education, and even to buy new clothes for herself…my husband and I cannot save enough money to buy a new house” (Factory Worker, 28 years old). Another respondent said, “I cannot work in the NRIE forever, so I was thinking of going back to vocational school…maybe to take a course in Home Economics…but my parents always need

money to pay for farming expenses…I don't know if I can save up enough money to pay for my own education" (Factory Worker, 24 years old).

While it was often the respondents' parents who were continually asking for monetary assistance, the respondents also felt resentful towards their siblings for not shouldering their financial burden. One respondent echoed a common sentiment articulated by other respondents when she said, "My brother is unmarried but he doesn't give my parents any money. I am already married and my mother still asks me for money" (Factory Worker, 30 years old). As mentioned in the previous section, respondents had often relied on their older sisters for paying their school expenses. After they joined the NRIE, those who had younger siblings would render financial assistance when it came to their education. In return, my respondents hoped that their younger siblings would look for a job after secondary school, so that they could assume some responsibilities for household expenses as well. However, my respondents said that their younger siblings were not interested in working and wanted to continue studying (on the respondents' expenses). Although they realised the importance of further education, they could not help but feel disappointed that there was no one to help them financially, and that made them feel guilty for being 'selfish' as well. As one respondent said "My younger sister, who is eighteen, wants to go to the Teachers' College for four years…I was hoping that she would join me in the NRIE so that I can put aside more money for myself as well…I feel bad for thinking this way…I should be happy that my sister is clever enough to go to university" (Factory Worker, 25 years old).

For my respondents, therefore, waged labour in factories has both benefited and disadvantaged them in ways they never imagined. Their wages have enabled them to

fulfil their original intention, which was to assist the family, and this is a source of pride and happiness for them. In addition, they have gained a degree of autonomy by working in the factories, as they can pursue leisure activities and expand their social networks during their time off, which would not have been possible had they remained unpaid family workers. However, the occupational hazards of factory work; both in terms of health fears and job insecurity has left them facing an uncertain future, compounded by the stresses of financial demands inflicted upon them by family members.

Thus, it is not surprising that my respondents do not contemplate a long-term future in the manufacturing sector and some of them have had plans to set up their own businesses, either in the service sector or to have a retail shop. However, as one respondent said, “I never received any training to be a businesswoman…I only know how to operate a machine…I don’t know if this is such a good idea after all” (Factory Worker, 27 years old). Other respondents whose older sisters left the NRIE to work in the informal sector realise that if they were to do the same, they will be exchanging the monetary stability of factory work for poorer prospects in the informal sector, hence one respondent fretted, “I will have to leave the industrial estate one day, but working outside is not good, you don’t know how much you can earn each month” (Factory Worker, 30 years old). In the next section, I will examine the livelihood strategies of women in the professional sector. While they differ significantly from respondents in the manufacturing sector in terms of job security and obligations to family members, they are also facing similar demands in societal expectations and job pressures as well.

Chapter 6
Livelihood Strategies of Women in the White-Collar Sector

While most recent research on women's participation in the 'modern' sector has focused exclusively on the manufacturing sector, an increasing share of Thailand's current 'working women' and an even larger share of the young women who are still in school and aspiring to enter the workforce are looking beyond manufacturing to white-collar employment. My research on livelihood strategies of women in the white-collar sector focuses on two areas of employment: women employed in the nursing profession and women employed in the tourism sector, either as tour guides or hotel employees. Entry into the white-collar sector requires a higher level of education than what is needed for manufacturing work, usually post-secondary or vocational education. Just as in the manufacturing sector, social networks are integral in shaping the livelihood strategies of my white-collar respondents, although it differs somewhat from employment in factory work, in that kin are instrumental in helping respondents gain the required level of education and not entry into the sector itself. Obtaining a position in the civil sector has long been an ideal for educated young Thais, as there are considerable benefits that accompany a source of stable income. However, jobs in tourism are becoming an acceptable alternative to jobs in the civil sector such as teaching, due to the existence of Chiang Mai as a popular tourist destination, and they are also regarded as high-status jobs.

However, while those who are employed in the tourism sector cited the benefits of working in an industry where they could interact with people from other countries, they also spoke about the long hours of shift work required, and for tour guides, the dependence on tips to supplement their wages. As for my respondents who are employed in nursing, their work in the district hospital means that they can juggle work

commitments and household responsibilities easily. However, employment in the civil sector means that they could be easily transferred to another district, causing a potential loss of support from natal kin.

Employment in the White-Collar Sector: Its Perceived Benefits

Advantages of the Nursing Profession

For my respondents in the nursing sector, their wages ranged from 10,000-20,000 baht per month, depending on their level of experience, while the salary for a technical nurse is 8,000 baht a month. Just like the respondents in the manufacturing sector, those employed as nurses also had to work in shifts. However, as my respondents were employed in the district hospital, their workload was comparatively lighter than those in the manufacturing sector. As one respondent explained, “Most of the patients come to the hospital for minor medical treatment, such as respiratory infections. If they suffer from more serious illnesses, they will have to go to the general hospital” (Nurse, 34 years old). This is in contrast to respondents in the manufacturing sector, who can only earn up to 10,000 baht if they put in up to twelve hours and after working in the factory for several years.

Unlike respondents in the manufacturing sector, respondents in the professional sector who were nurses were not worried about job insecurity. Although two of my four respondents in the profession were single, this was not due to the fear that they might lose their job if they were to get married and have children, unlike respondents in the manufacturing sector. Nursing in Thailand is a relatively secure profession, as the country has a shortage of trained nurses. As one respondent states “Not many women want to become a nurse, even though tuition fees are quite low and you have a job after

graduation…it's a demanding job and you have to take care of many patients" (Nurse, 37 years old).

For women in the nursing profession, the creation of district hospitals throughout the province, as well as the rapid growth of private hospitals in Chiang Mai city, has given them a variety of workplace options, which is one of the reasons why they entered nursing. As one respondent said "Although I am working in the district hospital now, with my qualifications, there are also several private hospitals in Chiang Mai city where I may be able to get a job" (Nurse, 28 years old).

My respondents in the nursing profession also cited the benefits given to public servants as another positive aspect of their jobs. As one respondent said, "Even though my pay is not high as I am only a *phayaabaan thaehknik* (technical nurse), the benefits I get pays for my mother's medical expenses…it is something I feel grateful for as my father died because the family was too poor to afford medical treatment" (Technical Nurse, 35 years old). Another respondent said, "My parents are getting older, so they require more medical aid…I don't have to pay so much for their healthcare as I am working in the government" (Nurse, 37 years old).

Entry into the Nursing Profession

As shown above, attaining employment in the civil sector, specifically in the nursing sector, is desired because of the stability of the profession and other associated job benefits. However, according to my respondents, those who wish to enter the nursing sector in Thailand must have a minimum two years of tertiary education in nursing to become a technical nurse, and four years of tertiary education to acquire a bachelor of nursing degree, before they can work in government hospitals. Hence, it can be seen that

as compared to the manufacturing sector, the barriers to entering the nursing profession are also considerably higher; hence those who have entered the sector will not be facing the prospect of losing their jobs easily, as only a minority of women in Thailand have attained post-secondary qualifications. Another obstacle for women wishing to enter the nursing profession is the level of competence in English. A respondent explained that "In nursing, you must have some knowledge of English because the textbooks used in nursing schools are usually in English, at least for some of the courses…most of the medical books are also written only in English" (Nurse, 32 years old).

While respondents did not rely on their relatives for direct employment assistance, financial assistance rendered by kin members was crucial for respondents to continue their education beyond secondary school. One respondent, whose father died when she was fifteen, relied on relatives to subsidise her school fees until she went to nursing college, while her mother barely managed to eke out a living raising chickens in the backyard of the house. During the two-year program at nursing college, she explained that "I obtained a job as a waitress in a restaurant through one of my relatives…as the nursing school fees were very low, I could work during the school holidays to pay for my tuition" (Technical Nurse, 35 years old). Two other respondents also relied on relatives, albeit indirectly, for tuition assistance. While their parents had to rent land in order to cultivate crops, they rented it from the respondent's grandparents, and hence rents were much lower than if they had rented from non-kin landlords. One respondent recalled that "My grandfather charged my father a very low rent, and he also did not have to pay for all the expenses of production such as fertiliser, planting and harvesting…unlike other

farmers who had to pay for all the costs plus the landlords would take more than half the crop as rent" (Nurse, 37 years old).

Similar to respondents in the manufacturing sector, respondents employed in nursing could attain a higher level of education based on their position in the family. Just as respondents in the manufacturing sector relied on their elder sisters to pay for their education expenses, one respondent said that "As I am the youngest of three children, my elder siblings started working when I was still in secondary school…they helped my parents to put me through four years of nursing school" (Nurse, 28 years old). It can be argued that the attainment of higher education is also dependent on family size. Another respondent mentioned that "I only had one brother who was a few years younger, after he graduated from vocational college, I went back to nursing school so that I could obtain two more years of education and upgrade my credentials from a technical nurse to a registered nurse" (Nurse, 32 years old). Thus, while a nursing career may be much sought-after, it relies very much on the attainment of tertiary qualifications, and as shown, assistance from relatives is vital for respondents to gain entry into the nursing sector. In the next section, I will examine the motivations for women in pursuing livelihoods in the tourism sector and how they gained access into a sector that is viewed as an acceptable avenue of female employment.

Employment in Tourism: Stability and Long-term Possibilities

As explained previously, Chiang Mai has long been promoted as a tourist destination by successive Thai governments since the 1920s (Singhantera-Renard 1999: 76) and in the last decade, the tourism sector of Chiang Mai has appeared impervious to crises such as the economic recession, SARS and the tsunami disaster. At the height of

the Asian economic crisis in 1998, the devaluation of the baht meant that Thailand become a popular destination for foreign tourists and visitor arrivals to Chiang Mai rose 4.68% from 1997, while the SARS crisis in 2003 resulted in tourist arrivals declining slightly by 1.76% from 2002. Visitors to Chiang Mai in 2005 rose by 2.55% from 2004 (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2005), boosted, ironically, by the tsunami disaster. As one respondent explained rather abashedly, "The tsunami was good business for Chiang Mai tourism, because foreigners who had already bought air tickets to Thailand switched from Southern Thailand to the North" (Tour Guide, 36 years old). Returns from working in the tourism sector were also high, as a tour guide could earn up to 16,000 baht a month, including tips from tourists, while the starting salary of a hotel employee was around 5,000 baht a month, excluding tips and meals provided in the hotel. Thus, the tourism sector in Chiang Mai has become a viable source of employment, due to the stability of the industry and as will be shown below, its associated high status and potential to move into other associated areas.

In addition to its long-term potential as a source of employment in Chiang Mai, tourism has become a new avenue of white-collar employment for students with post-secondary education, while previously obtaining a position in the civil service has long been an ideal for educated young Thais and their parents (Mills 1999: 85; Ames and Ames 2002: 220). In fact, some graduates may choose not to take up jobs in the civil sector, even if presented with the opportunity. One of my respondents found a position as a teacher in a district located far away from Chiang Mai city after graduating from the teacher's college in Chiang Mai and taking the civil service examinations. However, she quit after one year as she did not enjoy teaching, and went to work as a hotel sales

coordinator in Chiang Mai city instead. As she explained “I actually earned more as a teacher, but I found teaching children boring, and there were no leisure activities in that town. I prefer working in Chiang Mai city as it is more exciting” (Hotel employee, 30 years old).

As seen above, working in the tourist sector has become a desirable alternative to a job in the civil sector. Furthermore, for my respondents working in the tourism sector, their reasons for entering the tourism sector can be attributed to the city’s proximity to other districts in the province. As explained previously, the well-developed transport system from the city to its adjacent districts has meant that young people in Chiang Mai province have found it easy to seek employment in the city. Thus, for my respondents, working in the tourism sector is sought-after because it is an acceptable alternative to employment in agriculture or in the home industries, where the perceived disadvantages have already been discussed. In fact, a few of the older respondents also had the opportunity to enter the manufacturing sector, but chose not to do so. One respondent said that “I didn’t want to work in the factory; even though my friend could help me get a job…the factory is very polluted” (Tour Guide, 36 years old). Another respondent said “I prefer working in a hotel because it is cleaner and not so noisy” (Hotel employee, 30 years old).

It can be argued that just as in the manufacturing sector, employment in the tourism industry is seen as desirable as it is based upon the same notions of higher status and represents upward mobility. This can be seen in the response of one respondent when she started working in a hotel “I never stayed in a hotel before, so I had never even been inside one before I worked here…the hotel rooms were so beautiful and I was very happy

to get a job in this place" (Hotel employee, 32 years old). One respondent, who worked in a hotel said, "I was so happy to get the job at first, because I could work in a clean, air-conditioned place and not outdoors" (Hotel employee, 25 years old). She added that "The first time I wore my hotel uniform; my mother was very happy and took a photograph. It's now on display in the living room cabinet". As seen in the previous chapter, respondents in the manufacturing sector also took pride in wearing their factory uniforms and working indoors, hence it can be argued that 'modern' workplace practices represents a rise in socioeconomic status for the respondents, as they move away from the 'traditional' agricultural labour practices such as working in the sun and wearing farming clothes.

Entry into the Tourism Sector

While employment for women in the formal tourism sector may be highly sought-after, they are limited to those who can speak foreign languages, usually English. While this is a formal requirement for employment in hotels, my respondents who work as tour guides must also be able to speak a higher level of English as they are employed in the foreign tourist market. Before they entered into hotel employment, four out of the six respondents in the tourism sector had also worked in the small-scale tourism sector, working as shop or stall assistants for tourist souvenir outlets, in order to improve their English language skills. As one respondent explained, "Even if you have graduated from college, you will only understand the foreigners' English when you start working in the tourist area… the hotels won't hire you if you don't speak English" (Hotel Employee, 30 years old).

With the exception of cleaning jobs, even positions that did not require a tertiary level of education, would have requirements such as "Waiter/Waitress: *Mathayom 3* (9th Grade) or higher education, Fair command of spoken English" or "Reservation Officer: *Mathayom 6* (12th Grade) or higher education, Good command of both spoken and written English"[1], for four-star hotels in Thailand. For most positions open to women however, a bachelor's degree was required, such as "Guest Relations Officer: Female with Bachelor's Degree" or "Telephone Operator: Female with Bachelor's Degree in any field". Therefore, like entry into the nursing sector, entry into tourism sector requires a level of education few women in Thailand have attained.

As for my respondents in the sector, all of them, including those who were now working as tour guides, had worked in a hotel at some point in their careers, and had started hotel employment between the ages of 20-25 years old. Some of them stated that certain jobs in the hotel were not available for older workers. As one respondent explained "If you work in the hotel restaurant as a waitress, it is very busy in the mornings when all the guests eat breakfast…you have to work very fast and carry heavy trays, so it is not suitable for older people" (Hotel employee, 25 years old). Another respondent added that "Only young people work at the front desk, because the male guests prefer to have young women serving them" (Hotel employee, 32 years old). While my respondents agreed that certain jobs were done only by young people, they insisted that this was due to the requirement for English language skills. One respondent said "Not many people in Chiang Mai can work in big hotels, because even some young people don't speak English well" (Hotel employee, 28 years old).

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[1] All job advertisements reproduced in this chapter are taken from the Amari Hotels and Resorts Group Thailand, The Imperial Hotels Group Thailand and Central Hotels and Resorts Thailand, all of whom have hotels located in Chiang Mai.

Like the manufacturing sector, gaining employment in tourism is also facilitated by social networks as well. Some of the respondents obtained their jobs through the assistance of a friend who were already working in the hotel. Others had established a network of contacts after working in the hotel industry for several years and helped those who were now working as tour guides, to make the transition from hotel employment. One respondent went to work for a tour agency that she had frequently dealt with when employed in the hotel. She decided to work as a tour guide after her daughter was born, as "The hours as a tour guide are more flexible…I couldn't do shift work anymore as I had to take care of my daughter" (Tour Guide, 36 years old).

It can therefore be seen that the livelihood strategies of women working in the white-collar sector are based upon similar factors of those working in the manufacturing sector. Like respondents in the manufacturing sector, those employed in the white-collar sector pursue livelihood strategies based on the perceived stability of their chosen profession and the high wages they can earn in engaging in such employment. Obtaining the necessary educational qualifications also depends on the assistance of relatives, and employment in the tourism sector is also seen as a viable alternative for educated Thai women, as obtaining a job in the civil sector is increasingly difficult. Employment in the export-oriented factories and in tourism is predicated upon age and gender, while employment in the white-collar sector requires an additional level of competency, which is knowledge of English. In the next section, I will examine the consumption patterns and household expenses of respondents in the white-collar sector, which are similar to that of respondents in the manufacturing sector, although with some significant differences.

Allocation of Wages: The Balance between Consumption and Investment

Similar to respondents in the manufacturing sector, respondents in the white-collar sector also mentioned the obligation to provide financial assistance to their families as a reason to pursue employment in the service sector. As one respondent says "I am happy to look after my parents. They took care of me when I was a child, so I should show my gratitude by helping them with household expenses" (Hotel employee, 30 years old). As mentioned above, respondents who were nurses also mentioned that their jobs allowed them to pay for their parents' medical bills. In addition, the wages earned in white-collar employment, like that of the manufacturing sector, were stable, and this enabled respondents to put aside money for personal consumption, in addition to contributing towards household expenses. For respondents employed in the tourism sector, the location of their workplaces in the city meant that they could easily engage in leisure activities after work with their colleagues. Even respondents working in the district hospital could easily travel to the city on their days off, as one respondent explained "I go to the shopping centre in the city to watch movies or go bowling with my friends from the village, we work in different jobs, but we can get together whenever we have days off" (Nurse, 28 years old).

For respondents who were single, saving up money for the future was especially difficult, as one respondent lamented, "When I walk into a shopping centre, there are so many things I want to buy…like cosmetics as I am working in a hotel and I have to look good" (Hotel Employee, 25 years old). Another respondent felt worried about her future when she found that her colleague had managed accumulated enough savings to purchase a two-storey house, "I would like to move out of my parents' house but it is very difficult

as a single woman to save up enough money, I always spend money on clothes and entertainment activities…since I am divorced, I don't plan to have any children. It's difficult to save when you only need to think of yourself" (Tour Guide, 34 years old).

In contrast to respondents who are childless, respondents with children cited long-term investments as a reason in taking up more lucrative sources of employment. One respondent in the nursing profession said that "As my job subsidises my medical expenses, this means that there is more money for my daughter's school fees in the city" (Nurse, 37 years old). Another respondent explained why she left the hotel industry to become a tour guide, so that she could earn more from the tips they got from their customers who went on the tours, allowing her to "send my daughter to a private school in the city, where the level of English taught is higher than that of the village primary school" (Tour Guide, 36 years old). Hence, it can be seen that respondents, in explaining the reasons and motivations underlying their livelihood strategies, not only cited consumption practices, but also long-term investments, both productive and non-productive, in taking up higher-paying types of work.

Impact of Livelihood Strategies in the White-Collar Sector

Unlike my respondents in the manufacturing sector, the respondents who were nurses did not see themselves leaving the nursing profession. This was not only due to the perceived comfortable situation they found themselves in, but as one respondent said, "I am not trained for any jobs other than being a nurse…I would probably work until I have to retire" (Nurse, 34 years old). In fact, working in the district hospital makes it easier for my respondents to juggle work commitments and household responsibilities. One respondent, who is married with a son, says that "As most of the patients don't come to

the hospital in the afternoon and at night, I can usually take the morning shift and be home when my son comes back from school" (Nurse, 34 years old). For another respondent, the proximity of the hospital to her village means that "I can go home easily and attend to my mother regularly, as she is alone at home when I go to work and her health is not good" (Technical Nurse, 35 years old).

As compared to my respondents in the manufacturing sector, it was more difficult for my respondents in the nursing profession to talk about the negative aspects of their job, or any potential problems that they may encounter in their profession. One of the complaints was that they had to travel to remote villages in the district to educate villagers on preventative health measures, such as how to maintain basic levels of hygiene. My respondents found it inconvenient to stay overnight in the villages occasionally, but felt that this was part of their duties as a nurse.

A more worrying aspect of their jobs, however, was the fact that they could be transferred from the community hospital to another district, if there were more patients that required treatment, making it harder for them to maintain their ties to their families. Although my respondents said it would probably be in a nearby district, as one respondent said "It would be more troublesome for me as I would not be able to spend more time with my son" (Nurse, 34 years old). Another respondent said, "If I was transferred to another hospital, I wouldn't mind moving to another village, but I can't leave my mother behind as she wouldn't want to move out of the village where she has lived her whole life" (Technical Nurse, 35 years old).

Expansion of Social Networks

Just like respondents in the manufacturing sector, both hotel employees and tour guides saw an expansion of social networks beyond their village and kin-based communities. While respondents often engaged in social activities with their colleagues, they also spoke about how working in the tourism industry allowed them to interact with tourists from many different countries. One respondent said, "Before I started my job, first in the hotel, then as a tour guide, I had only known people from Thailand…since then I have met people from all over the world…now I can even tell where they are from by their accent" (Tour Guide, 31 years old). Another respondent said, "I meet all sorts of tourists in the hotel…I know more about foreigners now, especially if they are very friendly and talk about their own countries" (Hotel Employee, 32 years old).

In contrast to respondents in the manufacturing sector, respondents in the tourism industry were confident that they could look for jobs elsewhere should they choose to leave their employment in the hotels or the tourism industry. As mentioned previously, working in the tourism sector helped my respondents to establish contacts within the industry, and to make the transition from hotel employment into other related careers, which was how three of my respondents became tour guides. One respondent was planning to leave her job in the hotel and set up a small guesthouse in Chiang Rai with her husband. She explained that "I have been working in the hotel for eight years…I think I learnt enough to run a guesthouse, and the bank has already agreed to finance my business loan, I can employ my sister and her husband to work for me in maintaining the guesthouse as they need a job" (Hotel Employee, 32 years old). Another respondent said, "I earned enough money to buy a piece of land near my house…I want to start a

plantation…although it's not the same as working in the tourist industry, I already have business skills and I can manage my own company" (Tour Guide, 36 years old).

Disadvantages of Working in the Tourism Sector

Although respondents working in the tourism industry do not have to deal with the potential health and safety hazards that characterize the manufacturing sector, they did have some common complaints about employment in the tourism sector. Dealing with guests or tourists from different countries means confronting considerable culture and language barriers. As one respondent said, "When I started out as a waitress, all the guests would be eating breakfast in the hotel, you have to serve many people…you get confused sometimes when the guest asks for something and talks very fast…if you don't understand what they are saying straightaway, some of them get impatient and you feel stressed out" (Hotel Employee, 25 years old). Another respondent also spoke about the occasional difficulties in dealing with impatient guests, "If you work at the front desk, you will meet many different types of people….some guests are really nice, but others will get irritated if you don't serve them fast enough or you don't understand what they want…they will look at you as if you are very stupid" (Hotel Employee, 30 years old).

Respondents who were tour guides also encountered similar problems. One respondent said, "Some tourists are really demanding…they will ask to try local Thai food and then complain that it's too spicy. Some will ask a lot of questions, and as it takes time for me to respond as I have to translate the more difficult terms in my brain, they get impatient if I don't answer them quickly" (Tour Guide, 34 years old). Another respondent said, "Some tourists will ask you to bargain with the stall vendors for a very low price, it's difficult for me to do so as the vendors have to make a living and they get

angry that I am asking for such a low price" (Tour Guide, 31 years old). Tour guides also encountered an additional difficulty, as they were dependent on tips from customers to raise their minimum wages. Thus, their monetary takings often fluctuated depending on the nationality of the customers. One tour guide said, "Whenever I see the tourists, I will know how much they are going to tip. People from some countries are very generous…but in other countries, they are not used to tipping, so I earn very little on certain tours" (Tour Guide, 36 years old). Respondents who were tour guides also had to budget their earnings carefully, as one tour guide explained, "We get almost no tourists for two or three months every year, if I spend too much money, I may not have enough during this period" (Tour Guide, 34 years old).

Respondents in the tourism industry also experienced burnout from their jobs like those in the manufacturing sector. One respondent said, "I have been bringing tourists to the same attractions and giving the same explanations for the past ten years, I am getting quite bored of it" (Tour Guide, 36 years old). Another respondent claimed that "I can probably walk blindfolded to all the attractions in the city, I go to the same temples almost every week!" (Tour Guide, 34 years old). Respondents employed in the hotels spoke about similar symptoms as the tour guides. One respondent said, "The guests always have the same complaints or requests…you get tired of listening to them after a while" (Hotel Employee, 32 years old).

For respondents in the tourism industry, the long hours they had to put in was also a disincentive. Respondents employed in the hotels would have to work in shifts, especially those in the food and beverage departments or at the reception desks. Similar to respondents in the manufacturing sector, hotel employees spoke of fatigue as a result

of the irregular hours and changes in shifts. One respondent said, "It gets worse during the peak tourist season, as you will have to put in more hours…sometimes I work more than the hours I am supposed to do" (Hotel Employee, 30 years old). Another respondent said, "I want to leave my job because I hardly get to see my husband if I have to work the night shift…I can't have children now, because I am too busy working" (Hotel Employee, 32 years old). Respondents who were in the tour guiding industry had the option of working more flexible hours, but they had often to work overnight as well, particularly if the tour agency was short-handed during the peak tourist season. One respondent had also delayed childbearing responsibilities, as she said "My husband and I would like to have children, but if I have to bring tourists to other provinces…I can be away from home for up to three days a week…if I continue in my job, I won't be able to take care of my baby" (Tour Guide, 31 years old). Another tour guide said, "I am working very hard now, so that I can work less hours when my daughter gets older…my mother is taking care of her now and I see her only once a week sometimes…I want to help her with her schoolwork as my mother is not educated, and spend more time with her as well" (Tour Guide, 36 years old).

Just like respondents in the manufacturing sector, some respondents in the tourism industry also had difficulties in acceding to their parents' demand for regular financial aid. One respondent said, "I work very hard to make a living for my family, but I still give money to my mother as she is no longer working…but then each month she gives most of the money to my brother, who is not working and then she asks me for more" (Tour Guide, 36 years old). Another respondent said, "I hope to set up my own guesthouse so that I can help out my family members, but my parents always seem to need more money

than I what give them…I need to put more savings in the bank for my business" (Hotel Employee, 32 years old). One respondent said, "Of course we have to take care of our parents, but we must think of our own future as well" (Tour Guide, 31 years old).

Hence, it can be seen that while livelihood strategies of women in the manufacturing and white-collar sector are created under different circumstances and conditions, the impact of their strategies may be similar in certain respects. Women in the two sectors confront the 'double burden' of work and domestic tasks, and also in reconciling both kin-based obligations and personal aspirations. As seen in the next section, women in the retail and service sector have avoided some of these difficulties by opting out of formal waged labour employment, in exchange for a more balanced role in both the domestic and public spheres.

Chapter 7
Livelihood Strategies of Women in the Informal Sector

No discussion of contemporary female employment in Northern Thailand would be complete without acknowledging the vast number of women who remain active in the economy only on an informal basis, whether as agricultural employees, casual labourers, private entrepreneurs or in artisan production. In examining livelihood strategies of women in Chiang Mai, my research shows that employment in the informal sector is an important aspect of my respondents' work. Thai women have had a long history of employment in the informal sector, and Keyes views women's dominance in economic activities as related to their gender roles within the family unit. As Thai women have "traditionally assumed the responsibility for providing for her family through her productive activities in the fields and in craftwork at home, it is but a small step to market the products of the family enterprise" (1984: 229). Thus, when respondents in the three sectors that I interviewed discussed their remunerative activities, they not only described their main source of wage labour, but also included other economic endeavours such as small-scale business enterprises.

As many of such enterprises are not operated on a daily basis, they may be undertaken even by those engaged in waged labour. One respondent in the nursing profession would make dumplings to sell in front of her house, on her days off from work. Although she could only earn 100-200 baht per day from selling the dumplings, she did not think that it was a waste of her leisure time, as she claimed that she had nothing else to do, since her mother was retired and took care of all the household chores. Another respondent had a sister who was employed as a teacher in the secondary school in the district, but also ran a stall selling snacks in the weekend market in Chiang Mai city.

Other women would also sell home-made snacks in the village, at small stands set up at the place where the *song-thaw* (a converted pick-up truck) would drop off passengers daily from work or school, who might stop for food before proceeding home. However, this was done only if they had spare time after doing household chores and their own main source of wage labour. Hence, it can be seen that involvement in the informal sector is a widespread option for women in rural villages, and my research examines those who rely on employment in this sector as their main source of income.

Women's Entry into the Informal Sector

For respondents in the informal sector, the diverse range of occupations they are engaged in reflects the difficulties in defining the sector overall. My respondents can be broadly divided into two groups and then a further sub-group. The first group consists of five respondents who are employed in the home industry, while the other group consists of people who are involved in retail, as the owners of their own enterprises, and those who are self-employed in the service sector, such as hairdressing, sewing or running a food stall.

Of the six respondents who were owners of their own enterprises, one operated a grocery store with her husband; one operated a food stall alone while another operated a food stall with her husband. The other respondents were a seamstress who ran her business from home, a hairdresser who also operated from her house and another respondent who operated a drinks and desserts stall in the market. As will be shown below, respondents in the informal sector often handle reproductive and productive duties concurrently, contributing substantially to the household income, but receiving less assistance for domestic responsibilities than women in the other two sectors.

Women in the Home Industry

In my preliminary field research, I interviewed respondents who were working in a factory that produced silk garments and other cloth-based items for sale, particularly for the tourist market. While the front of the factory consisted of a showroom that allowed visitors to see traditional methods of silk-weaving and a shop that sold the finished products, the back of the factory was where the main bulk of the work was done. Women operated similar looms to those seen in the showroom, but according to my respondents those working in the front were supposedly more skilful, which was why they were selected to display their skills for the visitors. Women who worked in the showroom could be paid up to 4,000 baht a month, while those who worked in the back of the factory were usually paid approximately 3,000 baht a month. However, respondents stated that both groups of workers often brought home extra work to do on their own looms, where they are paid 50 baht for every metre of cloth weaved, in order to attain the income quoted above.

For my respondents, entry into the home industry can be attributed to the availability of such employment in their village, and the fact that no formal skills are required before entry into this sector. All five respondents had entered the industry in their late teens, after three of them had completed six years of education, while another two had nine years of schooling. While they had no formal training, they had acquired knowledge of traditional methods of weaving from their mothers or other female members of the family. They had also assisted their mothers who would bring back piecework to do in order to secure extra income, before they started working in the small-scale garment factories. Employment in the home industry was not difficult to find, as the

district has been traditionally renowned for its silk and handicraft products, and government policies promoting rural industrialization and tourism in Chiang Mai have further contributed to the continued existence of numerous small-scale garment and textile factories in the area.

According to my respondents, employment prospects in the home industry were much brighter than working as an agricultural labourer. Three of the respondents came from families who did not own land, while another two had families who rented farmland. Thus, as one respondent explained "After I left school, my first job was in a garment factory near my home, I did not work in the farm because the land my parents had rented was small and they didn't need my help…it was easy to find work because there were many jobs available if you knew how to sew or weave" (Home Industry Worker, 35 years old). Another respondent said "My parents worked as wage labourers on other people's farms and earned very little money, which was why my mother often did piecework at home…I earned more working in the garment factory than if I had worked as an agricultural wage labourer" (Home Industry Worker, 39 years old). Thus, it can be seen that employment in the home industry was one of the few options open to uneducated women in this district, and a vital source of income for the household. In the next section, I examine how training and assistance from family members is vital to women's business enterprises.

Female Entrepreneurs

For my respondents who ran their own enterprises, none of them had more than nine years of schooling, excluding vocational training. However, capital was often needed before they could set up their enterprises, while others had undergone additional

training and skills before venturing into their chosen enterprises. One respondent started working in a variety of retail shops after leaving school at the age of fifteen, until she begun working in different restaurants when she was twenty. After several years of training in the food business, she then went on to set up her own restaurant. As she was married to a clerk in the government service by then, her husband's job security and other benefits meant that they had enough capital to rent space in a shophouse located in a convenient location in the village, which was crucial for the business. Another respondent added an extension to her house so that she could run a hairdressing salon. However, she had previously taken vocational courses in hairdressing after secondary school, before starting her business. Her training had been sponsored by her elder siblings, who were already working and could contribute money for her vocational education. Her husband, who was employed as a policeman in the village, provided her with the money to purchase the hairdressing apparatuses and products that were needed to start up the shop.

Others also received help from extended family members as well. One respondent, for example, embarked on a successful dairy enterprise after her cousin-in-law married into a family which had experience in producing dairy products for several decades. The mother of her cousin-in-law taught her how to make ice-cream and other milk-based ice drinks, which became very popular in the village, especially on hot days. Hence, it can seen be that for businesses which require advanced skills, family members were crucial means of support, either through financial assistance or providing training.

Survival of the Business

For my respondents, utilisation of extended family networks was crucial not only for obtaining the skills needed to set up their businesses, but to the continued survival of

their enterprises as well. This was apparent when I became acquainted with one of the respondents after her cousin brought me to patronise her restaurant in the village. For this respondent, who operated a restaurant by herself, the convenient location of her business has meant a steady stream of customers, but various members from her large extended network of relatives frequently patronise the restaurant in the evenings. Another respondent who ran a restaurant with her husband did not have the advantage of a good business location, as her restaurant was off the main road. However, the business has managed to survive, as she depended initially on her relatives to patronise the restaurant and also for word-of-mouth advertising. Location is also important for retail shops, even as several mega-sized supermarkets have been set up in the province over the last decade. My respondent who ran a grocery store, credited the survival of her business to its location in the village, as it is more convenient to purchase small items such as toiletries, water or cigarettes in the village shops, than venturing to supermarkets in the city.

For respondents who operated their businesses from their homes, location is not as important to their businesses' success, but establishing a regular network of customers is integral to the businesses' long-term survival. One respondent who worked as a seamstress from her home relied on relatives to advertise her business, as relatives who were engaged in paid labour outside the village would bring their friends to her home for altering and mending of clothes. Although she charges very low rates in order to stay competitive, operating costs are extremely low as she operates from home. Another respondent who is a hairdresser was also fortunate in that she has cultivated a network of regular customers who prefer the location of her business, as the other hairdressing salons are located in adjacent villages. She also has low operating costs as the salon is located at

the front of her house, and her husband's salary and benefits from being employed as a policeman reduces the reliance on her intermittent earnings for household expenses. Introducing new type of products can also help the business to thrive, as the respondent who ran a drink and desserts stall in the market found that her ice-cream and milk-based ice drinks were copied by other vendors after she successfully introduced it to the village. However, she had already established a network of customers, many of whom continued to patronise her stall.

Integration of Public and Private Spheres of Work

In my interviews with women employed in the home industry, respondents stated that they continued to work in the small-scale garment and textile factories, even after they were married and started raising children, and this can be attributed to the flexible work arrangements of the informal sector. During my visit to the factory, it was not unusual to see women weaving at the looms, while children were playing around the room [this was at the back of the factory]. Respondents revealed that this was a common situation in many of the small garment factories they had worked in. As one respondent said, "Before my son went to primary school, I could bring him to work, but very young children were not allowed, because they needed more attention, and children were also not allowed to go into the showroom or shop area" (Home Industry Worker, 33 years old). While all the respondents are currently working full-time in the factory from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., they had stayed at home doing piecework after their children were born, and had only gone back to full-time work either when their children had gone to primary school or if they were old enough to be brought to the workplace.

In addition to taking responsibility for childcare duties, respondents employed in the home industry also did most of the housework as well. Respondents often rose early in the morning to do the cleaning, laundry, prepare breakfast for their husbands and children before going to the morning market, and then leave home to work in the factory. After work, they would come home to prepare dinner, finish up the household chores and then do piecework in order to earn additional income.

Respondents who ran their own enterprises stated that they did most of the tasks in the daily operation of their businesses. One respondent who ran her own food stall did all the cooking and cleaning in the restaurant, the ordering and planning of supplies for the business, along with bookkeeping as well. In addition, she also did the laundry, household chores and marketing for both the business and her family's needs. Although her food stall was only open from eight a.m. onwards, she would get up at five a.m. every day in order buy fresh produce for her restaurant, return home to do the laundry, and then return to the restaurant to engage in food preparation or wait for the wholesale vendors to deliver supplies before the restaurant opened. The only free time she had was in between the lunch and dinner hour, when she could clean up her restaurant or go home to do more household chores. As the restaurant was situated on the village's main road leading to the provincial highway, there were a lot of customers, particularly at night when male customers would gather to drink alcohol and watch television. My respondent explained "Business is better in the evenings, so the restaurant is open until midnight. After cleaning up the restaurant, I do a bit of bookkeeping before going home" (Restaurant Owner, 32 years old). The integration of both the public and private spheres can be seen as she added "My husband can come to the restaurant in the evenings to eat, I don't have

to cook for him separately. After that, he takes my daughter home while I continue running the restaurant. During the day, my daughter can stay in the restaurant while I cook for the customers".

For respondents who operated their businesses from home, the merging of both public and private spheres of work meant that they could carry out their housework and childcare obligations in conjunction with their business enterprises. Hence one respondent who ran a hairdressing salon from her house would do housework when there were no customers to attend to, and take care of her son at the same time. She would also get up early in the morning to do the marketing before opening her salon at eight a.m. Another respondent who was a seamstress would work on her sewing and do household chores when required. Other respondents who were running the businesses with their husbands also did most of the work involved in the daily operation of the businesses along with the housework. One respondent who ran a grocery store said that she was in charge of the ordering and planning of supplies and bookkeeping, as well as looking after the store, while her husband did the unloading and delivering of merchandise to the store. A respondent who also operated a restaurant would share cooking responsibilities with her husband, when the restaurant had more customers. However, as she explained "I do the laundry and cleaning of the house in the afternoon, while my husband looks after the restaurant…I have to wake up early in the morning to buy produce from the market, order supplies from the vendors and do the bookkeeping" (Restaurant Owner, 35 years old).

Assuming Responsibility in the Domestic Sphere of Work

In my interviews with respondents in the informal sector, women in the home industry did not rely on family members to take care of their children when they were

very young, preferring to work at home until the children were old enough to be brought to work. Respondents said that as both their parents had to go to the fields to work, there was no one to take care of young children, although their mothers would come home during lunch to do some cooking and household chores. As their younger siblings were either in secondary school, which was located far from the village, or working outside the village, they could not stay at home to take care of the respondents' children. One respondent said that "It is easier for me to bring my son to work, than to let him get in the way of my parents while they are busy working on the farm" (Home Industry Worker, 33 years old). Another respondent remarked "There is no one who can stay at home to look after my daughter, unlike in the past, when I was in charge of my younger brother and sister" (Home Industry Worker, 36 years old). In fact, respondents employed in the home industry stated that it was common for girls during their generation to finish schooling during their early teenage years and if they did not start full-time employment immediately, "the older girls would do the housework for the family and take care of the younger children" (Home Industry Worker, 39 years old).

It is not only women employed in the home industry who must assume responsibility for childcare and housework duties, but also those who run their own businesses as well. A respondent who operated her own restaurant stated that her husband could not help her in her household chores, as he was employed away from home and only returned home in the evening. She also had no support from her immediate family, as her parents had passed away before she started her business, and she had only one brother who was married and lived in another district. She did, however, have a network of extended relatives, who were engaged in agricultural work or involved in waged

labour. Yet, she could not rely on them for assistance either, as she said, “My aunts and uncles are busy with their farming, and my cousins all have jobs outside the village, so I have to take care of my six-year-old daughter by myself” (Restaurant Owner, 32 years old). Another respondent said that “My children cannot help me to do most of the housework as they are still in primary school” (Restaurant Owner, 35 years old).

Respondents who operated their businesses from home also assumed most of the responsibilities for household tasks. One respondent had her mother residing with the family, but was too frail to do the more arduous housework. Another respondent who was employed as a hairdresser had only moved to the village after her husband was assigned there as a policeman, hence she had no support from her relatives. Both respondents did not expect their husbands to help them out as they were employed in wage labour. As one respondent said, “My husband comes home very late at night from work sometimes, so he doesn’t have time to help me with the housework” (Seamstress, 38 years old). She also added that “my son studies in secondary school in another village, so he only comes home in the evening…I don’t expect him to do housework for me as he has to do his schoolwork”. One respondent said “My children study in secondary school so they can only help with the cooking of dinner in the evening and some of the housework…I do the laundry and most of the housework during the day” (Grocery Store Owner, 40 years old).

Even for respondents who can rely on kin-based assistance, it appears from my interviews that women do not expect any help from the male members of the family. Women employed in the home industry would share housework with their mothers, with respondents doing the more strenuous chores. Like respondents who operated their own enterprises, women homeworkers would state that their husbands could not help them, as

they worked outside the village. One respondent said “My husband comes home later than I, so my mother and I have more time to do the housework” (Home Industry Worker, 36 years old). Other respondents said that their fathers had seldom helped their mothers with household chores, even when both parents were engaged in agricultural work.

For the respondent who operated a drink and desserts stall in the market, her dairy products came from the farm which her parents operated along with her husband. Before opening the stall in the early afternoon, she and her mother would wake up early in the morning to make food preparations for the stall, and tend to the cows, while her husband and father-in-law would deliver milk to a primary school in another district. My respondent said that while her husband and father would operate the farm in the afternoon, she was in charge of the stall, while her mother would do the cleaning and cooking at home, and also help run the farm. She said that “My husband and father don’t do housework, as they are busy running the farm the whole day” (Stall Vendor, 30 years old).

It was interesting to note that respondents in both the home industry and entrepreneurial sector did not appear to think that their earnings were crucial for the maintenance of household finances, stating that it merely provided ‘extra’ cash to their husband’s wages. One respondent said, “My husband is a policeman, so his salary is quite good and there other benefits also. I am doing this because I have free time…I am only taking care of my son and doing housework” (Hairdresser, 31 years old). Another respondent said that “I do sewing to earn extra cash; otherwise I have nothing else to do the whole day, besides taking of the house” (Seamstress, 38 years old). Even respondents working in the home industry did not think that their work was important, even though they were working full-time in the factory. As one respondent said “What I earn is extra

income only, so that we have more money to spend on new clothes and furniture" (Home Industry Worker, 32 years old). Another respondent said, "I don't make a lot of money by working in the factory, so I can only make a small contribution to my husband's income", even though she added "The income I earn pays for my children's schooling expenses, and my mother can work less hours on the farm now" (Home Industry Worker, 35 years old). Thus, it can be seen that they regarded their work as non-vital sources of income to the household, which could be partly due to the fact that their earnings were not fixed and were difficult to estimate. Consequently, it can be argued that they fail to recognize the importance of their income and labour as vital in sustaining household finances and in preserving women's domestic responsibilities.

Thus, it can be seen that the impact of livelihood strategies on women in the informal sector vary according to their position in the life-cycle and avenues of employment. Women who were either employed in the home industry or running their own enterprises often took on most of the tasks involved in the daily operation of the businesses, and assumed most of the responsibilities for childcare and household chores. For these women, the integration of both the public and private spheres of work enables them to avoid the conflict arising between paid wage labour and household tasks that characterise women's livelihood strategies in the other two sectors. However, their accommodation of prevailing gender structures ensures that they do not challenge the 'double work burden' that characterises women's labour.

Chapter 8
Discussion of Women's Livelihood Strategies in Northern Thailand

Having discussed separately the livelihood strategies of Thai women in three different occupational groups, I will now look in a composite fashion at the conditions and behaviours that unite their strategies. The Livelihood Strategies Approach framework is utilised in order to interpret the data, where to reiterate, 'livelihoods' are defined as the assets, which are the various forms of natural, physical, human, financial and social capital, upon which people can draw to generate income and meet household needs. For the purposes of this chapter, only physical, human, financial and social capital will be examined. It will be shown that physical capital in the form of improved transport links, human capital in the form of education and training, financial capital in the form of access to stocks of cash and social capital in the form of social networks in which people participate and derive support for their livelihoods, all play an integral role in fulfilling an individual or household's livelihood strategies, which typically include three components: strategies of accumulation, survival and consolidation.

It is important to note that as Thai women have always played an important role in the economic sphere, this has made it easier for them to take advantage of expanded employment opportunities as the country undergoes modernization. Thus, women have not encountered many obstacles in moving into formal wage-work. The issue, therefore, "is not the ability of women to enter the labour force, but rather how they enter it, the conditions of their work, and the use of the income that they generate" (Blanc-Szanton 1990: 79). Therefore, apart from the economic goals or determinants that decide how household strategies are created and carried out, household strategies also reflect

prevailing gender ideology in prescribing what roles are appropriate for various household members to play.

Finally, the goals in service of which livelihood strategies are defined have shifted and continue to shift under the influence of modernity, as manifested through gender identity and consumption patterns. These continue to exert an important influence on the creation of livelihood strategies, affecting the way in which female workers exert their agency in the shaping of livelihood strategies, even under the constraints of gender subordination. In the next section, I will examine how access to the various forms of capital and gender-based role assumptions shape women's livelihood strategies, with differing consequences for respondents in the various occupational groups, and where the options which women and their families are able to choose among reflect, more than anything, their individual and collective assets.

Access to Capital

Access to Financial Capital

As seen throughout the data presentation, access to financial capital is a crucial determinant in the creation of livelihood strategies, as individuals residing in households with a higher level of financial capital are more likely to pursue strategies of accumulation and consolidation, rather than being restricted to strategies of economic subsistence. While financial capital is defined as the access to stocks of cash and/or credit in the Livelihood Strategies Approach, it is not always a directly productive form of capital. Instead, the vital role that it plays in the formation of women's livelihoods lies in the fact that it can be directly converted into "other forms of capital, or indeed directly into consumption" (Ellis 2000: 34). Hence, financial capital can be enjoyed directly

through the purchase and upgrading of lifestyle products, such as furniture and home appliances, vehicles, or clothes and cosmetics. Some of these consumptive uses of financial capital can also be seen as investments, particularly for women working in the service sector who are expected to present a 'modern' and 'fashionable' image through their appearance and manner of dressing.

Financial capital can also be applied as an investment through its conversion to human capital. The most obvious and frequent example of this is the extensive investments made in education, which, in a historical sense, were what enabled the present generation of factory and service-sector workers to attain their current position. They, in turn, are often using their acquired financial capital to fund a sibling's education or saving it to use for their financial betterment. Hence, the linkage between financial capital and human capital in the form of education is strong, and facilitate the channelling of women into different employment sectors. For women in the manufacturing sector, gaining education would not have been possible without the help of their older siblings, particularly elder sisters, who provided financial support for respondents to continue schooling. Women in the white-collar service sectors also benefited from the financial support that was given by their relatives and immediate family members to pursue higher education. For example, one respondent relied on financial assistance rendered by relatives to gain more human capital, as she could continue her education beyond secondary school, and also for subsistence needs, since she and her mother were left without a breadwinner after her father died. As seen in the life histories of other respondents in nursing and in tourism, their families received financial support also, as

they rented land from kin at lower rates, allowing them to put aside more money required for their children's higher education, as they could lower their agricultural expenses.

For respondents in the informal sector running their own businesses, access to financial capital was required for vocational training, which can be viewed again as an investment in human capital, before they embarked on their respective enterprises. It can also be argued from my data that without a sufficient level of financial capital, married women who have to assume responsibility for both productive and reproductive tasks would often seek employment as dependent subcontract workers, whilst women who have access to greater financial assets can create livelihoods as independent own-account producers.

Financial capital therefore, can be viewed as a convertible asset allowing respondents to pursue a more comprehensive consolidation and accumulation strategy, as women who require higher education in order to enjoy a wider range of employment choices, such as entry into the better-paid wage sectors, could not have done so without financial support to continue their education beyond primary school. In contrast, respondents in the home industry can also pursue the two strategies through their remunerative labour, but would not be as successful as women in the other professions, since their wages are used mainly for subsistence needs, with only a small portion set aside for accumulative purposes. It is interesting to note that respondents working in the home industries, who received the least amount of financial support from kin in acquiring the skills to gain employment, were also the ones with the lowest levels of human capital, thus, they also earned the lowest wages on average.

However, another implication, as seen in the data, is that having access to financial capital often becomes more important than education in determining livelihood strategies in the informal sector. In fact, for respondents contemplating moving away from employment in the formal tourism and manufacturing sectors, financial capital, rather than education, is arguably the key asset in determining their future career directions, where financial capital in this context is utilised directly rather than being converted into human capital. Hence, the amount of financial capital that is available for starting up a business would decide whether entrepreneurs enter a secondary labour market of insecure, low paying jobs such as small-scale cottage industries and vending (Thorbek 1987: 61, 72-75; Mills 1999: 156), or into the earning of a lucrative remuneration through the running of bigger-scale enterprises.

In addition to the conversion of financial capital into other types of capital, mainly in the form of education, financial capital may be used directly for consumption purposes as well. The income earned by both married and unmarried women may also be used to pursue strategies of subsistence such as paying off agricultural debts, allowing a larger share of proceeds from farming to be set aside for consumption and investment needs. Strategies of consolidation can also be observed at both the individual and household level, such as the purchasing of motorcycles and cars to maintain easier transport links to workplaces and also for healthcare needs. Hence, the utilisation of women's income generated from urban wage labour can result in an improvement in the family's socio-economic status, as the household can acquire not only 'modern' commodities, but also a create a source of savings for potential emergencies. Families can also engage in strategies of accumulation, where "surpluses derived from one activity are used to gain

access to the other" (White and Wiradi 1989: 296), through investment in children's education or for vocational training.

As seen in my interviews with respondents, both poor and rich households place great emphasis on the importance of higher education for children, which can be viewed as an investment or accumulation strategy, since households are forgoing children's labour in exchange for a future pay-off in the form of higher wage differentials as compared to returns in agriculture. Thus, respondents preferred to assume responsibility for both productive and domestic duties, so that their children could concentrate on doing their schoolwork, while respondents from the lowest-earning wage group, which was the home industry workers, cited paying for school expenses as one of the reasons for engaging in informal sector work. For respondents who were single, moving into more lucrative forms of waged work enabled them to provide financial assistance for their younger siblings' education.

Access to Human Capital

The relationship between financial and human capital can be clearly seen above, as financial capital is needed to acquire further education, which is integral to the ability of individuals to seek more long-term and profitable sources of employment. The human capital created, in turn, leads to the formation of greater financial capital, as education is a crucial asset in determining the occupations that are available to the different groups of women, and is a means by which greater social and economic mobility can be achieved. Education, rather than land, has become the inheritance passed down from parents to their children (Richter and Podhisita 1992: 10) and this is especially so in land-scarce Northern Thailand.

Enabling children to stay in school longer in exchange for a future pay-off confers obvious economic advantages, as respondents with at least nine years of education can seek employment in large export-orientated factories, where the average wage without overtime is 208 baht a day or 5,000 baht a month. Meanwhile, respondents with tertiary or vocational education can pursue employment in the tourism and nursing sectors, where the pay of a hotel employee is similar to that of factory workers, while a tour guide can earn up to 16,000 baht a month. Respondents who are nurses have reported wages ranging from 8,000-20,000 baht a month. In contrast, the daily wage rate of an agricultural labourer was approximately 120 baht or 2800 baht a month. Hence, families can pursue household strategies of consolidation and accumulation, rather than simply constructing strategies at the subsistence level, since daughters with more education could earn a higher wage differential than if they were to become agricultural labourers and unpaid household workers. As mentioned earlier, respondents' wages can also be used for younger siblings' education, thereby perpetuating and reinforcing the formation of financial assets, as younger members of the household can also move into higher-paying jobs.

The benefits of having higher education can be seen in the fact that having tertiary or vocational education appears to increase the prospects of having both high salaries and long-term employment. Differences can also be observed by level of education attained. Thus, those in the nursing profession, who have at least tertiary education, have the benefit of both steady and long-term employment, as a high level of education is required, resulting in considerable barriers to entering the sector. Women in the manufacturing sector, who have completed secondary school, do earn (by local standards), a high and

steady income, especially if they work overtime. However, their long-term employment future is not as stable, as they learn "specialized assembly skills" (Chant and McIlwaine 1995b: 297) which cannot "be used to sustain income-earning capabilities in the future" (Ellis 2000: 153). This is in contrast to women in the tourism sector [who typically have even higher levels of education], and may have "greater possibilities [to enter] lucrative self-employment or entrepreneurship" (Chant and McIlwaine 1995b: 292). This can be seen in interviews with respondents from the tourism sector who also confront job vulnerability, as the tourism sector may easily crumble when facing health and safety crises. However, the business knowledge and skills they have acquired in the tourist industry can also be viewed as another form of human capital, as it has enabled them to begin investing in enterprises, such as setting up a guesthouse or running a plantation.

Moving beyond the wage differential and advantages for the household unit, education for the individual becomes "'the golden plough', the means of escaping from the drudgery of work in the rice field and the monotony of village life" (Bruner 1961: 511). This has been shown in my research data, which has depicted the autonomy gained from working in the manufacturing and white-collar sectors, away from the traditional role of unpaid household worker in an agricultural setting. This demarcation between the workplace and the household could not have been achieved without access to higher education, and as such, education can also be seen as a symbol of status and prestige, enabling Thai women to take up jobs that allow them to move away from the inferior status accorded to agriculture. In addition, as stated earlier, modernity is manifested in the fact that precedents set by previous generations may be disregarded, and more options are available in modern cultures. Individuals undergoing conditions of modernity can also

make choices in their lives, about their appearance and occupations (Giddens 1991; Gauntlett 2002: 96). Hence, it can be argued that having a higher level of education and the lighter skin acquired only in working non-agricultural jobs are obvious symbols of status, indicating that the individual has more choices in the creation of livelihood strategies.

Access to Social Capital

For the purposes of this study, social capital can be defined as the reciprocity that exists between members of a household based on trust deriving from social ties (Moser 1998: 4). Hence, much time and resources are devoted to extending and nurturing family networks of reciprocity, which also comprise near kin members, as this is seen as an investment in future livelihood security by rural households (Berry 1993; Ellis 2000: 36). In the case of Thailand, networks of reciprocity at the household level are situated culturally within the tradition of *bun khun*, whereby daughters are supposed to repay their upbringing by taking responsibility for their parents' economic welfare; either in participating as unpaid household workers or in the various forms of waged work. The *bun khun* system benefits both the obliged woman and the household, as Thai women gain access to human capital in the form of further education, as families are willing to provide them with education beyond the elementary level, in the hope of reaping financial success. Therefore, the *bun khun* system can be seen as an important link between access to assets and the widening of choices in women's employment.

In addition, the fact that Thai women are obligated to ensure the social security of the household through the *bun khun* system can be viewed as an important household strategy, as negotiation within households about female labour is usually resolved either

on basis of tradition (patriarchy) or on the basis of rationality (maximization of economic interests) (Yeandle 1984: 168). However, in the case of Thailand both patriarchal and economic rationality purposes can be reconciled through the *bun khun* system, as women are allowed to fulfil traditional obligations through economic labour.

Although the *bun khun* system allows women to gain human capital, it also sharply constrains the use of the capital they generate by ensuring "a significant proportion of income earned is diverted back to the family" (Rigg 2001a: 46). Thus, even women with high access to financial capital, such as those employed in the white-collar sector, must utilize the capital for the maintenance of the household. As I will examine later in the chapter, control over financial capital is one of the key issues in the conflicts and tensions present in household strategies.

While the *bun khun* system emphasises the obligations of a daughter towards her parents, examples of reciprocity can be observed between other family members as well. In the manufacturing sector, respondents also relied on their elder siblings to attain jobs within the factories, which can be viewed as a use of social capital. In return, some respondents also provided financial assistance to their siblings who were not earning a steady source of income in the informal sector. For respondents employed in the white-collar and manufacturing sector, reliance on other members of the family to fulfil household obligations, such as cleaning and cooking duties, enables them to avoid the conflict that exists between domestic and public spheres of work. Thus, household members provide support in the domestic sphere in exchange for financial subsistence, consolidation and accumulation, as seen in the livelihood strategies of respondents. By contrast, respondents with lower levels of social assistance for subsistence activities are

more likely to be found in the informal sector, which allows for greater versatility in work-home arrangements. However, for respondents running their own enterprises, utilisation of family networks to patronise their businesses, at least in the initial stages, was also crucial to the survival of the enterprises.

Access to Physical Capital

Accumulation of capital in Northern Thailand has also occurred at a societal level and some of this collective accumulation has benefited my informants across the board. Apart from the widespread accumulation of financial capital which enabled the construction of factories, hotels and for that matter, schools, there has been tremendous growth in physical infrastructure, including roads and telecommunications.

For women in the manufacturing and white-collar service sectors, the well-developed transport network from their urban workplaces to rural villages has not only allowed them to create 'modern' identities for themselves, but enabled them to maintain close social ties to their natal kin. As seen in the section above, women in these two sectors have greater access to social capital, as they can take advantage of family services and support to fulfil domestic duties. Even for women employed in the informal sector, who have had less support from natal kin, the proximity of their work to reproductive duties allows them to manage both public and domestic spheres with relative ease. Maintaining strong social and emotional ties to the village household also ensures future economic protection for respondents, as exemplified in the livelihood strategies of respondents in the manufacturing sector, who recognise that familial support is vital once they leave the factories and most likely venture into the informal sector. Having

elaborated upon the different types of capital required for livelihood strategies, I will now examine how other factors also play a role in the creation of women's livelihoods.

Life-cycle Differences and its Impact on Women's Livelihood Strategies

Life-cycle differences are another distinguishing characteristic across the groups of respondents whom I interviewed, and these tended to both explain and amplify differences in the types of capital they had access to and hence their employment choices. For example, respondents in the manufacturing and tourism sectors were more likely than those in the informal or nursing sectors to be unmarried daughters living within their parents' households, with nine respondents who were single, five respondents married, and one divorced. This is in contrast to respondents in the entrepreneurial, homeworker or nursing groups, where thirteen were married, and two were unmarried. More importantly, of the fifteen respondents in the first two sectors, only one had a child, while in the informal sector and the nursing profession, all the respondents had children. Also, all the respondents in the informal sector were married with children, with the two never-married respondents from the nursing profession.

When respondents are single, they are able to work long hours and travel away from home without significantly drawing down their pool of social capital but as they become older and are married with children, they tend to move towards self-employment or flexible forms of work arrangements. This can be applied to respondents working in the district hospital, who can commute quickly between the workplace and their homes in the village. It is clear that such a trend can be attributed to the need for Thai women with children to assume responsibility for both productive and reproductive duties, especially if kinship assistance cannot be sought for reproductive tasks.

The implications for examining life-cycle differences is that chances for women to enter industries which are predicated upon age and education, with regimented long working hours, appear to decrease as respondents move down the path towards family formation. Women, who are already mothers and need to carry out reproductive duties at home, find that their chances of entering the formal sector employment are lowered, as the strict delineation between workplace and residence does not allow them to mediate between work and household duties. Therefore, it appears that most married women with children utilise work arrangements which combine work with childcare, such as setting up their own businesses or engage in employment which offers flexible work-family arrangements. This can also be attributed to the 'double burden' assumed by women due to the gender-based division of labour, where "women are chiefly responsible for child rearing, familial and domestic tasks regardless of their other work" (Chafetz 1991: 74).

Thus, it can be seen that chances of women moving into the formal employment sector is determined not only by the variation in the amount of financial, social and human capital they possess, but also by their life-cycle position. Women who have more access to the various forms of capital and are in a more favourable life-cycle position enjoy a greater variety of employment choices as compared to women with less capital or more domestic responsibilities, who face greater constraint in moving into the formal sector. In summary, it can be seen that that life-cycle variables are important factors in the formation of different livelihood strategies amongst my respondents, affecting the amount of financial and human capital they possess, as well as increasing their chances of acquiring more choices in employment.

Gender Implications of Thai Household Livelihood Strategies

An analysis of women's livelihood strategies reveals that gender subordination is an issue that respondents have to confront within both their waged work and in the domestic sphere, at the household and individual level. It can be argued that women's movement into the various forms of waged work does not challenge existing gender ideology, but instead, strengthens and reinforces the prevailing gender roles prescribed to women. Three tendencies can be distinguished in the relationship between the process of modernization, such as the rise of industrial development, and the subordination of women as a gender: a tendency to *intensify* the existing forms of gender subordination; a tendency to *decompose* existing forms of gender subordination and a tendency to *recompose* new forms of gender subordination (Pearson 1996: 173).

As previously discussed, employment in urban-based work is due to a higher investment in daughters' education, thus increasing the obligations of women to the household, which can be a viewed as an intensification of existing forms of gender subordination. An example of the recomposition of gender subordination in a new form is the allocation of income to the parents or the household. Where previously a Thai woman's labour was conducted as an unpaid worker in the household or in agricultural, she is now paid for her labour, but her wages (or at least a large part of it) is given to her parents for subsistence, consumption and investment needs. Therefore, the process of gender subordination can be seen in new modes of financial contribution by daughters to their households and is facilitated by the traditional gender ideology.

However, my data suggests that gender subordination is not passively accepted by the women involved, which leads to conflict and tensions over the use of financial

resources, as seen in household strategies. Throughout much of this chapter, it has been shown that women in the manufacturing and white-collar sectors provide much financial support to their households, while those in the informal sector also take on reproductive tasks. While this may suggest that the respondents whole-heartedly devote themselves to fulfilling household needs and obligations, it is apparent from interviews with the respondents that much tension surrounds the financial sacrifices that individuals are expected to make for the collective good of the household. Strain and conflict often revolves around issues of how to allocate responsibilities for household support among different siblings. This can be attributed to the principles espoused in the *bun khun* system, where men can enter the monkhood to fulfil the merit obligation to their parents, but women have to pay their 'debt' through economic means (Klausner 1997: 70). Since daughters, rather than sons, are mainly relied on to subsidise parents' consumption or younger siblings' education needs, respondents often had to forego their individual aspirations, such as moving out of their natal households, or putting aside money for further education. This was in contrast to their brothers, who need not contribute to family expenses once they were married; or younger brothers (and sisters) who relied on elder female siblings for their education and even personal expenses. It can also be argued that physical proximity to their workplaces is also a drawback for the respondents, as keeping familial ties intact means they are expected to support their natal household's endless requests for financial assistance, even after marriage and motherhood.

Hence, it can be seen that the *bun khun* system as a gender ideology enables Thai women much access to human and social capital, but curtailing their control over financial capital. The effects of the *bun khun* system is manifested in the gender

subordination of respondents, where those who have received further education or training feel greater pressure to repay their households, giving up a large part of their wages to their families. This leads to conflicts between the individual and her family members over control of financial resources, in deciding what proportion of income earned should be given to household consumption and investment needs versus the respondent's personal expenses or savings for future needs.

Implications of Women's Livelihood Strategies in Their Personal Lives

Although the *bun khun* system contributes to the intensification and recomposition of women's gender subordination, it can be argued nonetheless that the system has allowed Thai women to take advantage of the expansion of employment opportunities beyond agricultural and household production work without discarding their traditional roles as sources of economic labour in the household, and is therefore instrumental in shaping women's livelihood strategies. From the interviews with my respondents, it is apparent that women do not only gain access to various forms of capital or obtain economic benefits from urban-based work through the *bun khun* system. Giddens has proposed that modernity may be seen as a way in which social life is constructed self-consciously by individuals, with self-identity as a reflexive project in which individuals create an on-going set of biographical narratives that explains who they are and how they arrive at their present identit (ies) (1991: 53; Gauntlett 2002: 99). As seen in my data, the demarcation between working hours and free time facilitates the autonomy of respondents who work in the 'modern' sectors of waged employment, allowing them to broaden their social networks and construct a 'modern' self-identity away from the confines of village and household, and moving away from being defined

merely as being the daughter or wife in the family. The allocation of respondents' wages for their leisure activities and acquisition of fashionable clothes, cosmetics and motorcycles can also be seen as the construction of a modern self-identity, as it has been argued that consumption is pivotal to the construction of identities, which is the hallmark of modernity (Stivens 1998: 5). In addition, consumption practices at both the individual and household level can also be viewed as the creation of a gendered identity for respondents, where as seen in my data, they frequently contribute to the acquisition of household appliances, but also setting aside money for their own consumption needs. By investing in forms of 'modern consumption' which were shared across household members, my respondents were able to simultaneously fulfil their roles as 'dutiful' daughters and 'modern' women.

By contrast, respondents in the informal sector did not appear to think that the income they earned was an essential part of household finances. They also did not think that their work was important as a contributor to their identity. Perhaps because these respondents participate in a more 'traditional' form of employment, which better conformed to existing Northern Thai gender norms, they were not aware of "identity construction as an active 'project'" (Butler 1989).

The onus on women to assume responsibility for most household duties, which can be seen as a component of their traditional role within the family can be seen in my interviews with respondents, where the majority of women believed that informal sector work, such as running home-based enterprises or engagement in various forms of homeworking, was "an ideal way of combining paid employment with family responsibilities" (Yeandle 1984: 157). The adoption of such arrangements however, can

be seen as an example of women accommodating, rather than challenging prevailing gender norms, thereby reinforcing the subordination of their status in the household. This is reinforced by the formal organization of industrial workplaces, where respondents in urban-based forms of work have to work long shifts without any provision for childcare, should they choose to have children.

As mentioned previously, an example of the effects of the modernization process on women can be seen in the decomposition or change in existing forms of gender subordination. This is due to the expansion of employment opportunities beyond the household for Thai women, although it is dependent on factors such as age and level of education. This widening in terms of choices in employment also has effects on existing social relations, as Thai women can delay marriage and childbirth to pursue more autonomous livelihoods. However, such strategies, including unmarried women relying on practical support from other members of their household (principally mothers), can be viewed as a submission to regimented workplace arrangements. In addition, women's employment within the three different sectors shows how changes in life-cycle circumstances often propels women working in the formal sector, who experience a marked delineation between work and home, into the informal sector, which is characterised by a greater conformity to traditional gender norms, as women are expected to assume responsibility for household and childrearing obligations in addition to their remunerative work. Therefore, it can be argued that adaptation to the processes of modernization and industrialization, as seen in the domestic and work schedules of my respondents, has not led to radical changes in the roles of Thai women within the public

sphere and their households, but has led instead to a greater reliance on their families for long-term financial and social assistance.

On the other hand, respondents, including those who opted for more modern roles, were not necessarily opting out of traditional roles, as many felt that their long-term financial and social support would be best realized through marriage and formation of a nuclear family. Thus, respondents in the manufacturing sector planned eventually to move into the informal sector, in order to allow the possibility of starting a family. Remaining childless is not a desirable option, as they would have to forego potential sources of social support and financial maintenance in their old age. Respondents in the tourism sector also confront a similar situation, as they are aware that their continued employment is predicated upon not only notions of age but also appearance, which is why some women in the formal tourism industry are looking to the informal sector for long-term employment. Even respondents in nursing, who are employed in a relatively secure profession, choose to stay near their families for the emotional and financial support they can provide.

As seen in their livelihood strategies, women in Chiang Mai, under conditions of constrains and opportunities, have attempted to create a more desired future for themselves. This is done by exploiting the various forms of capital—whether it is to acquire more education or pursue a wider range of job opportunities, to gain greater personal autonomy, or to juggle both work and childcare duties. However, it can be observed in the range of their livelihoods strategies that women are in a subordinated gender position at the family level and also in the national and global economy, as seen in their obligations to the natal household and their acquiescence to the organizational

practices of industrial workplaces, which fail to accommodate women's responsibilities in the domestic sphere.

Despite the gender subordination that prevails in Thai women's lives, respondents do have agency, even if such agency is conditioned by outside forces and is structured "within the context of their collectivities" (Etzioni 1988: 181). As seen in my interviews, some respondents defied their parents to take up jobs in factories instead of continuing employment as stall and kitchen assistants in the informal sector, while others regularly a small portion of their income to pursue leisure activities or to purchase more expensive consumer items, like motorcycles. Delaying marriage and childbearing obligations, for whatever limited period of time, can arguably be viewed as a form of agency, allowing respondents the freedom of creating an autonomous identity beyond traditional notions of gender roles.

In examining the data on respondents in the informal sector, it can also be seen that married women with children also exercise agency, as those who contribute to the household income can also make personal decisions about how to allocate their wages between subsistence and investment needs. Agency is also employed in the work-life arrangements of women in the informal sector, as respondents in the home industry continue to work outside the household in factories with flexible childcare arrangements. This is also true for respondents running their own enterprises, as they have utilised Thai women's traditional dominance in economic issues to enter a profession which allows them the most freedom in making business and household decisions, and to be independent workers away from the regimented conditions of industrial or bureaucratic employment. As independent wage earners in the different occupational sectors, these

women have gained both economic and social capital along with a degree of autonomy in decision-making that they could never enjoy as unpaid household workers or rural agricultural labourers. Thus, in the choices that women make, as shown in their consumption practices, allocation of income, and marital choice, agency is manifest and "however small the changes […] that women have accomplished may appear to the observer, these changes do not look insignificant to the women themselves" (Benería and Roldán 1987: 162).

Chapter 9
Conclusion

This study has shown that as prospects for sustainable employment in agriculture become increasingly remote, Thai women find that the urban environment now provides more opportunities for wage labour. Within Chiang Mai province, women have found an expansion of employment opportunities in the export-orientated manufacturing and tourism-related sectors, allowing respondents to pursue strategies based on accumulation, consolidation and survival for themselves and their households, but varying in intensity based on access to the various assets listed below. Given the vital role of the household in influencing shaping women's livelihood strategies, this study has also examined how respondents have utilised household resources to create successful livelihoods for both themselves and their families.

In the framework of livelihood strategies, it has been found that possession of financial capital is the starting point for establishing a successful livelihood strategy. While financial capital may not be a directly productive form of capital, it is essential for the development of human capital, in the form of higher education or further training. The development of human capital would also lead to a higher level of financial capital formation, as individuals who have acquired more education find it easier to enter better-paying jobs, thereby generating more income for consumption and investment purposes. In addition, the development of financial and human capital at the level of the household is also achieved through utilising social networks of reciprocity, where family members assist respondents in obtaining jobs, provide unpaid labour for household subsistence activities or even to patronise their businesses.

Women's livelihood strategies also vary according to their access to the various forms of capital. Thus, occupations such as those in the entrepreneurial category require the acquisition and use of capital and also additional training, while entry into factory work and white-collar sector employment relies more on attaining upper or post-secondary qualifications. It has also been found that home industry workers, who have the least access to financial capital, and subsequently less education or training than women in the other professions, also earn the lowest wages on average.

In addition to the different types of capital that are required to create a livelihood strategy, women also shape very different livelihoods based on their life-cycle position, such as their marital and motherhood status. Thus, it remains to be seen whether women's move into non-agricultural employment "reflect life cycle changes or a more fundamental shift in priorities and therefore in the trajectory of change" (Rigg 2001b: 954), as it appears that women who embark upon marriage and motherhood often adopt strategies that are largely similar to those embraced by their mothers. However, even unmarried, childless Thai women who are employed in the modern economy are also not opting out of traditional roles, as seen in the *bun khun* system, "where the modern and the traditional are not in conflict, but tightly linked" (Rigg 2002: 257), as moving into urban forms of work allows women in Thailand to be 'dutiful' daughters and create a desired self-identity simultaneously. The *bun khun* system also allows for maximization of economic interests through patriarchal arrangements, as the wages of daughters, wives and mothers are used to pursue the three household strategies of accumulation, consolidation and survival.

Gender subordination, however, is manifested in respondents' workplace pressures, in the adoption of domestic arrangements for childcare and housework, and the importance of household obligations over personal preferences when it comes to allocating women's income. While women in the industrial workforce can gain some measure of autonomy over their wages and domestic lives should they choose to postpone marriage and childbirth, maintaining links with the natal family is required to minimise the risks of not entering a conjugal relationship. This leads to conflicts and tensions over the creation of household strategies, especially in terms of control over financial capital and also lack of financial support from other family members. Agency is nonetheless present for respondents in all occupational sectors, although to varying degrees and constrained by the factors given above.

Suggestions for Future Research

The thesis has shown that agency is important in shaping Thai women's identities; as these women enter into enter into various forms of waged labour not only to pursue successful livelihoods for their households, but also to create a 'modern' identity for themselves. However, further research is required on the extent of agency that Thai women possess in their lives, as they attempt to create agency for themselves through their consumption practices, allocation of income, and marital choice, yet find that their "earnings are controlled and received at the level of the household" (Stichter 1990: 59). The manifestations of various forms of agency in women's resistance to problems associated with waged work, such as through campaigning for better workplace practices or negotiating for a higher wage on either an individual or collective level, also deserves further consideration.

While Thai women have found that non-agricultural employment allows them to pursue better strategies of investment and consumption, it remains to be seen if such sources of employment can be sustained, particularly in the manufacturing sector. With China and also Vietnam emerging as serious competitors for low-wage large-scale factory jobs that have characterised the Thai manufacturing economy, it is not difficult to foresee Thailand's competitive advantage in this sector rapidly slipping away. As Thai women form a large proportion of the export-oriented manufacturing workforce, the prospects for their continued employment in this sector may become increasingly remote. Hence, the repercussions from mass structural unemployment for women in the manufacturing industries could be the basis for future research.

However, as Thailand finds itself moving away from low-skilled labour intensive activities and into the highly-skilled knowledge-intensive activities, there will be a greater demand for scientific, engineering and technical manpower. Hence, while increasing numbers of Thai women have attained post-secondary academic credentials, they are under-represented at the university level in subjects such as engineering and the natural sciences, which provide the main bulk of trained technical and scientific workers which are needed for the more advanced technological industries. Thus, the mismatch between Thai women's higher educational qualifications and labour market requirements warrants further attention, as it is crucial that the female workforce adapts "to rapidly changing skill requirements as technologically sophisticated sectors become more prominent" (Khoman 2004: 259).

Another issue to consider for future research would be the implications of a changing family structure for the Thai population. Evidence from the censuses has shown

a continuously increasing proportion of women who remain never-married and this trend, together with the decline in fertility, has led to increased childlessness (Prachuabmoh and Mithranon 2003: 41). Such life-cycle changes may result in an erosion of traditional family support systems, as there would be fewer children to care for aged parents. Thus, future research could examine if such trends would lead to a renegotiation of gender roles within the household, since Thai women are primarily responsible for both elderly care and household chores within the family. Given the future trends described above, research is also needed on the transformation of the nature of patriarchy and the ways in which gendered obligation is structured, and how these will lead to changes in women's opportunities, strategies and employment outcomes.

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