

Rural Industrialization and Return Migration : A Case Study of Female Factory Workers in Northeast Thailand

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Introduction

Two assumptions underlie much discussion on the role of rural industrialization that aims at establishing small industries and light manufacturing factories in rural areas of developing countries. First, rural industrialization will reduce the rural-urban income gap by creating non-farm job opportunities and more diverse sources of cash income for the rural households (e.g., Todaro, 2000). Second, rural industrialization will reduce the massive flow of migrants into large cities and to relieve various problems emerging from over-urbanization (Parnwell and Khamanarong, 1990). Furthermore, rural industrialization may reverse the rural-urban migration flow by inducing return migration, since villagers can work in factories near their villages that provide them similar jobs in the cities, thus, they will no longer need to migrate to find jobs elsewhere (Prasartkul and Isarabhakdi, 1998).

In reality, however, one can easily contend that such efforts to slow the pace of population movements through rural industrialization have yielded much less impact than expected upon reducing migration flows. In Thailand, for example, the government's attempt to promote regional growth centers as a way to reduce migration into Bangkok has not been successful, since the rural-urban disparities in income and economic opportunity are too large to be reduced by such rural development efforts (Goldstein and Goldstein, 1985). Even when rural factories are established, since

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factory wages are usually lower in rural areas than in urban areas (Wolf, 1984), cities continue to attract vast numbers of migrants. Thus, from the economic viewpoint, the effectiveness of small rural factories has been skeptical.

Yet there have been relatively few studies that examined how rural industrialization is affecting the household economy and migration intentions of villagers from a viewpoint of the actors (in the present study, “actresses”) themselves, that is, rural factory workers, return migrants and potential out-migrants. Do they well recognize the contributions of such rural factories toward their household economy? Or, do they consider it as just another form of odd jobs or wage labor available near their villages, therefore, not significantly contributing to the household economy? Furthermore, do they consider the new type of job opportunities as an alternative to out-migration? This paper sets out to examine these questions through a case study of female factory workers in Northeast Thailand, the region which is often mentioned as a source of massive migrants to Bangkok.

The aims of this study are twofold. First, it attempts to explore how rural Thai women perceive factory employment in terms of contributions to the household economy. This study focuses particularly on female workers, because as described in the next section the majority of the rural factory workers are females. The second goal of this study is to consider the potentiality that rural factory employment may contribute to diverting and mitigating the rural-urban migration flow.

The data used in this study were obtained from a survey and focus group discussions conducted by the authors from April to June 2001. The next section of this paper attempts to conceptualize factory employment and migration for rural Thai women by reviewing the existing literature. In the third and fourth sections, we will briefly describe the research setting and the sample. The main findings from the survey and focus group discussions are then presented in the fifth and sixth sections, followed by the concluding remarks.

Migration and Factory Employment for Rural Thai Women

Factory employment is by no means a new phenomenon to rural Thai women. Since the 1970s, Thailand has emphasized the strategy of economic development based on export-oriented manufacturing industries (garments, food-processing, and electronics) established in Bangkok and its peripheral areas. Rural women's labor participation in factories and rural-urban migration have been closely related to each other in the process of Thailand's industrialization and economic development. Thus, while this paper focuses on factory employment in rural areas, it is necessary to review the background for Thai women's participation in rural-urban migration and factory employment in urban areas.

The government-initiated economic development took off in 1961, when the first five-year economic development plan was launched. During the first decade or so, Thailand's economic growth was based on exports of agricultural products and import substitution. It was after the 1970s that the government switched its development strategy to export-oriented industrialization and took an initiative to promote exports of manufactured items such as garments, shoes and processed food products (Krongkaew, 1988).

The government's initiative consisted of two backbones. First, the government contributed to the development of infrastructures such as roads and communication facilities as well as the generation of electricity. Second, the government provided foreign investors with incentives including various types of tax and duty exemption and a cheap and docile labor force. Especially for the latter, the government adopted several measures to keep urban wages low (Porpora and Lim, 1987).

In order to make Thai industrial production more competitive on world markets with low wages, the government attempted to keep the cost of living in urban areas low, which was made possible through a combined taxation and subsidy policy,

the so-called rice premium (Silcock, 1967). As part of this policy, the government purchased rice and sold it at artificially low prices, with the intention to lower the price of rice in urban areas, thereby preventing demands for higher wages. However, this had negative impact upon the agricultural sector.

The rice premium brought about at least three negative results to rural Thailand. First, the rice policy encouraged crop diversification as rice farmers turned to other cash crops in attempt to increase economic gains from other agricultural sources. For example, the production of new crops such as cassava, kenaf, sugarcane, and maize in Northeast Thailand grew by 12 percent between 1958 and 1980 (Fugile, 1991: 331). Second, since this crop diversification was achieved mainly by mobilizing previously uncultivated land, it resulted in the deforestation which led to the military-supported environmental conservation policy in the early 1990s (Matsumura, 1994). Thirdly, rural households also responded to the low agricultural earnings by increasing the number of household laborers and wage earners. As a result, the population in the Northeast almost doubled between 1960 and 1980 (Porpora and Lim, 1987: 84).

By the 1980s, the low agricultural price, land scarcity, and growing population all created the backdrop for the massive rural-urban migration. In addition to these “push” factors, the expansion of industry and service activities in Bangkok and its peripheral areas played an important role in “pulling” those migrants from the rural areas (Phongpaichit, 1993: 180). Thus, since the mid-1970s, migrant labor from the rural sector has contributed significantly to Thai economy and the component of this migrant labor was mostly young rural women.

As a number of scholars described, the 1980s witnessed “feminization of the global labor force” (Standing, 1989, 1999; Guest, 1993; Skeldon, 1997a). During that decade, the opportunities for female wage employment increased rapidly as a result of the locational shift of labor-intensive industries from developed to developing countries, where labor costs are lower. Firms in search for low labor costs have increasingly turned to female workers, since they are ready to take up low wage jobs and assumed to be “naturally more docile and willing to accept tough work discipline, and naturally

more suited to tedious, repetitious, monotonous work” (Elson and Pearson, 1981: 23). Furthermore, as Guy Standing (1999) explains, women have a higher labor turnover than men and, this high turnover has a positive value for employers of such monotonous manufacturing industries, “since maximum efficiency may be reached after only a few months, thereafter plateauing or declining” (Standing, 1999: 585). Thus, in Thailand, the growth of manufacturing has played a critical role in bringing female migrants to Bangkok and central Thailand (Singhanetra-Renard and Prabhudhanitisarn, 1992). In this way, the rise of female migration in the late 1970s has been associated closely with the export-led industrialization and female-intensive employment patterns in urban factories.

From a perspective of the demand side, as we mentioned above, the increase of female factory employment and migration in Thailand and elsewhere can be interpreted as a result of the emerging new type of “gendered division of labor” which was created by the changing structure of export-led industrial production (Radcliffe, 1991). Yet the fact that the new type of industrial production requires particular attributes specific to women (such as nimble fingers and docility) alone cannot explain why those women decide to migrate into cities and take up factory jobs there. Thus, various theoretical explanations attempted to explain why women decide to migrate and engage in factory employment from a perspective of the supply side.

There are two types of explanation in the supply side. The first explanation focuses on the role of the household in selecting and sending female migrants. In this model, it is argued that in the agrarian society, female labor often has no direct input into production and becomes “too costly” to support for the household unit. Therefore, the household tries to reduce its costs by sending surplus female labor into migration (Radcliffe, 1991: 134). Phongpaichit (1993) also describes this scenario in the Thai context: “Women constitute a sizeable proportion of the flow because they are more likely to be unemployed and underemployed in rural areas and because young women can be released from the rural household without greatly affecting the household’s agricultural productive capacity” (Phongpaichit 1993: 182). In addition, the family-level decision in female migration also considers opportunity costs within the

household, associated with preparing food, washing cloths, cleaning rooms, looking after children and elderly members. If a family member contributes heavily to producing these “Z-goods” in the household, then, the family will be reluctant to release this member. On the contrary, if a member does not contribute much to the Z-good production, the family will allow this member to migrate, since the opportunity costs that the family has to bear will be minimum (Kusago, 2000).

The second explanation is an individual-oriented approach to female migration. In this approach, women make their own migration decisions by taking into consideration such factors as employment opportunities and wage differentials, as well as marital opportunities (Thadani and Todaro, 1979, cited in Kusago, 2000). In Thai culture, the sense of filial obligations also has important influence upon migration decisions. Especially, daughters are raised to express their gratitude and respect and acknowledge their debts to parents by, for example, earning money to send home (Mills, 1997). It should be noted, however, that the sense of filial obligations in this context is different from parental pressure. Rather, it is one of the important reasons that most young female migrants mention in order to justify their own “autonomous decision” to migrate. As Porpora and his colleagues (1989) observed in their study of textile workers in Bangkok, while majority of the respondents indicate supporting their families as the primary motivation for urban factory employment, they also say that most parents actually discouraged their migration decisions.

The above explanations integrate economically driven motives into female migration, determined at either individual or household level, at least in the sense that they focus on such factors as income generation, cost reduction, or provision of financial support to parents. On the other hand, as Skeldon (1997b) suggests, a more recent “post-modern” approach to migration tends to emphasize a non-economic aspect of migration behavior. According to the conceptualization of this approach, “it is the experience of migration that is important: the experience of moving from one area, from one culture, to another is fundamental for the creation of new cultures” (Skeldon, 1997b: 38). Mary Beth Mills (1997; 1999) was among the first to use this conceptual framework to interpret and explain rural Thai women’s decisions to migrate to

Bangkok. Her conceptualization stems from the notion of the “gender-specific experience of modernity.” Mills questions that “if young women in Thailand or elsewhere appeal to urban and industrial employers as a presumable quiescent and inexpensive labor force, this tells us neither why women themselves take up wage work nor how they construct their experience of it” (1999: 9). Her explanation is that the prime motivations are the personal desires of young women to acquire the personal status associated with being urban, modern, and up-to-date (*thansamay*). Thus, according to Mills, while it is true that these women migrate to work in Bangkok to help their parents, their decisions are not derived from only economically driven motives. Equally important is their desire to “redefine” themselves by participating in Bangkok’s commodity culture. If this view is correct, therefore, providing opportunities for factory employment in rural areas by itself would not stop the out-migration.

This section has sought to provide the conceptual basis for understanding female factory employment in the context of Thai economic development and rural-urban migration. Based on the issues discussed above, the key research questions for the present study revolve around the following:

1. Who work in the rural factories, and why do they take factory jobs?
2. From the workers’ point of view, to what extent does factory employment contribute to their household economy?
3. Does the employment opportunity in rural factories change migration intentions of rural Thai women?

In what follows, we will attempt to answer each of these questions by presenting the results of our research in one district of Buriram province, Northeast Thailand. Before doing so, we turn to a brief description of the research site necessary to familiarize the reader with the context of rural industrialization and return migration under investigation.

The Research Setting

The site for this research is in Nang Rong district, Buriram province, located in the south of Northeast Thailand, approximately 400 kilometers from Bangkok. Buriram and Bangkok are linked through a good road system. The northeastern region is the poorest region in Thailand, with limited availability of land and poor soil quality. The region is the largest in terms of population size, accounting for one-third of the sixty million population of Thailand. The region also has the highest level of rural out-migration in the country (Goldstein and Goldstein, 1985; National Statistics Office, 1991; Chamratrithirong et al., 1995).

In 1988, the Population and Community Development Association (PDA) initiated the Thai Business Initiative for Rural Development (T-BIRD) in Buriram. T-BIRD is a general term referring to variety of rural development projects implemented throughout Thailand, involving large Thai and international corporations and industrial investors. The main objective of T-BIRD has been to reduce out-migration from rural areas by setting up medium size factories in villages, thereby creating employment opportunities that are similar to those offered in Bangkok. The T-BIRD project also aims at reducing the income gap between rural areas and Bangkok, as well as developing the basic skills of rural people in order to improve their living standards.

At the end of 1997, there were fifteen factories in Buriram province, each with 100 to 200 workers located in villages in Nang Rong district and the bordering districts of None Suwan, Lam Plaimas, and Chamni. The industries are run either by the companies themselves, villagers in the form of cooperatives, or joint investment by companies and cooperatives. Villagers also could get some loans from the T-BIRD project to establish their own factories.

The population of Buriram as of 2000 is about 1.5 million. The number of factories has increased during the past five years. By setting up factories in rural villages, the T-BIRD project had provided well over 1,000 jobs to the population of

Nang Rong district. The workers in the T-BIRD factories are surplus to the needs of the agricultural sector in the area. In terms of number, however, T-BIRD cannot yet draw large number of migrants back from Bangkok and other places. In fact, T-BIRD factories at the moment can absorb a very limited number of surplus workers relative to the local demand for jobs and the population size.

Research Methods and Sample Composition

Data used in this study have two components, one derived from a survey and the other derived from focus group transcripts. We conducted the field work from April to June 2001. The field work involved a random survey carried out in two garment and two shoe factories in the district, followed by focus group interviews of female factory workers who had experience working in Bangkok as well as their parents. The procedure of the data collection is described below.

Four factories were selected for this study; three are located in Nang Rong district, and the other in Lam Plaimas district. From each factory, a list of currently employed workers was obtained. In each of these lists, approximately 50 to 60 persons were randomly selected using a systematic-sampling method. The sample size varies among the factories due to the different total numbers of employees. Finally, we conducted a survey with a total of 202 female factory workers during the lunch break, using a structured survey format. The survey questions covered demographic information, reasons for and contributions of factory employment, and about their families. We also included questions regarding migration experience and experience working in other places than their home villages. These questions were used to select participants of the follow-up focus group interviews. Due to the small sample size, the survey data analysis is exclusively descriptive; it aims mainly at understanding general characteristics of female workers in the rural factories. Thus, the results of the analysis are augmented by qualitative data collected through focus group interviews.

Table 1: Selected Characteristics of Sampled Female Factory Workers

	Factories				
	Garment A	Garment B	Shoe A	Shoe B	
No. of Employees					
Total	160	105	522	127	Sample Total
Females	158	101	504	94	
Males	2	4	18	33	
No. of sampled female workers					
	62	59	41	40	202
Selected Sample Characteristics					
<i>Age</i>					
Mean	25.7	25.0	25.0	25.5	25.3
Standard deviation	5.3	4.4	4.7	8.1	5.6
<i>Marital status (%)</i>					
Unmarried	37	30	25	40	33
Married with no children	24	14	7	10	15
Married with children	39	56	68	50	52
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>Education (%)</i>					
Never completed primary school	4	3	3	20	6
Completed primary school	48	53	46	40	48
Completed secondary school or above	48	44	51	40	46
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>Number of siblings</i>					
Mean	4.1	4.0	3.2	3.2	3.7
Standard deviation	2.1	2.5	1.8	2.4	2.2
<i>Relationship to the head of household (%)</i>					
Granddaughter	3	2	0	0	1
Daughter	61	54	66	63	60
Daughter-in-law	5	9	2	2	5
Wife	28	32	25	30	29
Head of the household	3	3	5	5	4
Younger sibling	0	0	2	0	1
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

We conducted three focus group sessions: two with workers and one with their parents. Each session with workers included four or five participants purposively chosen; all had experience working in Bangkok and its peripheral areas before starting

to work in the factories in Nang Rong. The session with the parents included five participants. One of the authors guided the discussions as a moderator, on the basis of a set of guidelines specifying the topics to be covered. The moderator guided the discussions flexibly, for example, by allowing leeway to follow unanticipated topics as long as they were related to the purposes of the session. Discussions in the focus group sessions revolved around such topics as reasons why they went to work in Bangkok, why they came back, and the life styles in Nang Rong and Bangkok. Particular attention was paid to the contributions of rural factory employment compared to the employment in Bangkok. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. In our presentation of quotes from the transcripts, "MO" represents the moderator and the respondents are identified by their initials.

Table 1 provides a profile of the sampled female factory workers. Of the total of 202 we interviewed, 135 have ever married and 67 have never married. The mean age is 22.3 for never-married women and 26.8 for ever-married women. Since the minimum level of education required for the employment in all factories is the completion of six-year compulsory education in a primary school, almost all of the respondents completed at least this level of education. Among the ever-married women, more than 65 percent had higher levels of education completed, such as a junior or senior high school.

Rural Factory Employment and the Household Economy

In this section, we analyze the decision and reason for factory employment, as well as the contributions of factory employment that the respondents perceive. We asked our respondents whether taking the factory job is their own decision, or someone else encouraged them to do so. As presented in Table 2, for both ever-married and never-married women, 73 percent of the respondents made the decision by themselves. The typical reason for factory employment for ever-married women is to supplement their husbands' income (46 percent) and, for never-married women, it is to supplement their parents' income (64 percent).

Table 2: Decision and Reason for Factory Employment by Marital Status

	Ever Married	Never Married	Total
Who decided to work in factory? (%)			
Myself	73	73	73
Spouse	19	0	12
Parent	8	22	13
Other	0	5	2
Total	100%	100%	100%
Main reason for factory employment (%)			
Main income earner	9	12	10
Supplement parent's income	10	64	28
Supplement spouse's income	46	0	31
Send siblings or children to schools	22	2	15
Personal spending or saving	11	16	13
Other	1	6	3
Total	100%	100%	100%
Sample N	135	67	202

How do these rural women evaluate their factory employment in relation to their household economy? To examine this question, we analyze the contributions of factory employment to the household economy using the responses to two questions in the survey. First, we asked our respondents what they think is the major income source for their households. Ninety of the total 202 respondents (45 percent) listed factory employment and the rest chose other sources such as agriculture and wage work. Second, the respondents were asked to self-assess percentage of the share of income from the factory employment toward the household economy, ranging from zero to one hundred percent. We then counted the number of respondents who answered that the

income from factory employment shares more than half of the household income. Seventy (35 percent) said that the income from the factory employment shares more than half of the household economy. These results were further tabulated according to land holding and presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Main Household Income Source and Contributions of Factory Employment by Land Holding Status

	Land owner	Landless	Total
Main source of household income (%)			
Agriculture	27	7	22
Wage labor	16	20	17
Factory employment	42	53	45
Other (e.g., shop owner, government employee)	15	20	16
Total	100%	100%	100%
Does factory employment contribute more than half of the household economy? (%)			
Yes	34	36	35
No	66	64	65
Total	100%	100%	100%
Sample N	157	45	202

The respondents' land holding status does not clearly differentiate women who consider factory employment as the main family income source. While 36 percent of the women from the landless households recognize the share of factory employment as more than half of the total family income, 34 percent of the women from the households with some land reported factory employment accounts for more than half of the total family income (Table 3). At least, however, more women from the landless households than women from the households owning land consider factory employment

as the main family income source (53 percent and 42 percent, respectively), though this may not be surprising.

On the contrary, the household composition more clearly than land holding differentiates a certain categories of women who think that factory employment contributes to the family income. As demonstrated in Table 4, the presence of other working people in the household determines the share of contribution that respondents perceive from factory employment. When there are no other working people within the household, more than half of the respondents (55 percent) indicate that their factory employment shares 100 percent of the total household income; the rest consider it as contributing at least half of the household income. In a case that there is another working person, for example, one of the parents or a husband, most of the women in this household composition (73 percent) consider their factory employment contributes to 50 or 70 percent of the household economy.

Table 4: Self-Assessed Contributions of Factory Employment to the Household Economy and the Number of Other Working Family Members*

Contribution of factory employment	No. of other working people in the household					Total
	0	1	2	3	4 or more	
Less than 1/3 or 30 percent (%)	0	3	12	11	6	7
About 1/3 or 30 percent (%)	0	16	17	11	20	15
About 1/2 or 50 percent (%)	18	43	47	37	57	43
About 2/3 or 70 percent (%)	27	30	24	30	14	26
100 percent (%)	55	8	0	11	3	9
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Sample n	11	70	42	44	35	202

* The relationship between the two variables is inverse ($\gamma = -0.233$) and significant at the .05 level.

To summarize, although employment in the rural factories does not appear to be the single main income source, this study reveals that all respondents utilize this job opportunity to supplement their parents' and husbands' income from the agricultural sector. Nevertheless, when the number of other working members in the household is few, the women working in the factories play an important role of breadwinners. Thus, in our study, the economic contribution of rural industrialization was highly significant from the viewpoint of the factory workers.

Rural Factory Employment and Return Migration

This section examines the question whether rural industrialization will discourage out-migration and mitigate the massive flow of rural women into Bangkok. First of all, in the survey, we asked the return migrants to choose the main reason for coming back. Of the 41 return migrants, 27 (66 percent) chose "to stay with the family," while five (12 percent) pointed "to work in the factories in Nang Rong." The other people had more specific reasons such as death of a family member. In some cases, their parents asked them to come back, especially after the establishment of the rural factories. These cases are illustrated in the following responses in the focus group discussion.

MO: Why did you come back?

K: My father passed away. I returned to be with my mother; she had no one. So I came back to work here.

P: I came back to be with my mother. She isn't well. She has no company, only a brother staying with her. She was lonely so she wanted me to come home.

N: My father asked me to come home.

Transcripts from the focus group interviews also allow us to understand that the villagers appreciate the newly created job opportunities near their home villages. For example, the focus group discussion with the parents confirms this point.

- MO: Regarding the feeling, when they are back, are you very happy?
- P: I was happy till the day she left again. When she left, I was crying.
- S: I'm very happy my child is back. When she said she would go back, I didn't want her to go.
- MO: So do you love your children more after this experience of them leaving and coming back?
- P: Yes, more. Because I love her more, I don't want her to go.
- MO: Is it good to have factories here?
- P: Yes. People don't have to go to Bangkok. They can earn enough to live, although it's not much.
- MO: Do you think the factories stop a lot of people from migrating out?
- P: Yes, a number of people don't migrate. Look at those who came back from Bangkok, many came back to live here, to work in the factories here.

We also asked the focus group participants the difference between working in the factories in Bangkok and in Nang Rong. Following are several examples of discussions that included information pertinent to the return migrants' views concerning factory employment in Bangkok and Nang Rong.

- MO: Did you like anything there? I mean, the work, life style.
- W: I liked the work since I got a lot of payment.
- C: A lot of OT (over-time wages), 9.00pm, 11.00 pm, something like that.
- MO: Didn't you have no other good impression besides getting a lot of money? Things like convenience?
- C: Yes, it was convenient to move around. Here if you want to go places, you have to wait for transportation. If you have no transportation, it's difficult.
- S: Here, at the time when there was no asphalt road, public transportation was rare and to come to Nang Rong, one had to wait for half a day.

- MO: In Bangkok, you liked the convenience to move around, compared to your home village.
- P: There are many things. It's not that I wanted to stay on, but it was necessary. Staying at home, I had no money at all if I didn't plant rice or was employed. Over there, I always had money to spend.
- W: After selling rice I wanted to buy some clothes but I had to be considerate to my parents. It would be difficult for them.
- P: Each week, payment was divided to send home.
- W: Women wanted to dress up, buying clothes.

Contrary to this image of affluent consumer culture that they expected to encounter in Bangkok, their real life in Bangkok was not convenient, but very severe. We asked all respondents to list major expenses in Nang Rong managed by their monthly wages. In addition, we asked the return migrants to list their monthly expenses in Bangkok for a typical month. Based on this information, we have obtained figures on average monthly expenses in Nang Rong and Bangkok. The results are presented in Table 5.

Factory workers in Nang Rong as well as in Bangkok are similar to what Diane Wolf (1984: 219) called "permanent daily laborers" in the sense that their salaries are calculated based on daily wages, though they are usually paid biweekly. In Nang Rong, almost all factories set the daily wage at 133 Baht, which is the minimum wage in the province according to the law effective January, 2001. This rate applies to everyone regardless of their work experience. In other words, people who have been working for three years and people who have been working for one year are paid almost the same amount of salary; the difference comes only from how many hours of over-time work they take. In Bangkok and its peripheral areas, the minimum wage is higher than other provinces (165 Baht per day, effective January, 2001). As can be seen in Table 5, the average biweekly salary in Nang Rong calculated from 200 respondents is 1,595 Baht, whereas the average biweekly salary in Bangkok calculated from 40 return migrants is 2,103 Baht. The difference is not only because of the lower minimum wage but also because of the availability of more over-time work in Bangkok factories.

Table 5: Income-Expenditure Comparison between Nang Rong and Bangkok

	All surveyed workers in Nang Rong	Return migrants	
		in Nang Rong	in Bangkok
<i>Biweekly salary (Baht)</i>			
Mean	1,595	1,613	2,103
Standard deviation	201	222	630
Sample N	200	41	40
Frequency distribution			
500-1,000 Baht	2	5	0
1,001-1,500 Baht	29	19	20
1,501-2,000 Baht	69	76	30
2,001-2,500 Baht	0	0	37
2,501-3,000 Baht	0	0	5
>3,000 Baht	0	0	8
Total	100%	100%	100%
<i>Average monthly expenditures in Nang Rong (Baht)</i>			
Lunch (N=202)	287		
Food for family (N=202)	765		
Clothing (N=200)	189		
Support for parents (N=202)	542		
Leisure (N=200)	78		
Personal savings (N=198)	342		
Savings for children (N=15)	508		
Expenses for children (N=14)	562		
Transportation (N=119)	769		
<i>Average monthly expenditures in Bangkok (Baht)</i>			
House rent (N=40)			670
Food (N=39)			965
Clothing (N=40)			215
Remittance (N=40)			1,149
Leisure (N=40)			123
Savings (N=40)			460

Two major expenses for factory workers in Nang Rong are daily food and transportation (mainly gasoline for a motor-bike). Following these indispensable daily needs is monetary support for parents. Whether or not they are living with their parents,

all our respondents indicated some amount of money for this item. The average monetary support derived from the monthly salary in Nang Rong is 542 Baht which is about 17 percent of the average monthly wage. For factory women who have children, savings and/or expenses for children share the almost equivalent importance.

The average monthly expenditures in Bangkok were calculated based on the responses from the return migrants. Table 5 clearly indicates that remittance appears to be the major part of their monthly budget. On average, they would send 1,149 Baht per month, which counts 27 percent of the average monthly income, followed by housing and food. Thus, making a living in Bangkok is never easy for most migrants from rural areas. The parents participating in the focus group discussion complained about the high cost of living in Bangkok as follows:

MO: Truly, do you want your children to go to Bangkok or other places?

All: No, we don't want them to go.

S: There is a factory near home.

P: Well, the income is rather small but there are no other expenses. Over there, one must pay for everything.

MO: But in Bangkok, working in a factory gets a lot of money. Well, working in Bangkok doing a lot of OT and getting a lot of money. Do you want them to go back?

P: Earn a lot but the expenses are a lot, too. Staying at home is more comfortable no matter how hard it is. There is no rent. There is no need to buy water or rice. We pay a little but for food and drink. But in Bangkok, everything has to be paid. Although she made money to send to me in Bangkok, she had to pay for everything. Here she doesn't have to pay for a bed; over there, she had to pay for the rent. It's difficult.

As these responses indicate, the parents are rather reluctant about their daughters looking for jobs in Bangkok, especially after the establishment of factories

near their villages. However, the daughters were attracted by the modern life style in Bangkok as indicated in the following dialogue.

MO: Why did you want to go to work in Bangkok?

W: I wanted a taste of it.

MO: What do you mean by “wanted a taste of it?”

W: It’s like . . . a friend of mine came to ask me. The person got good income. At that time, I was at home with nothing to do . . . so I just wanted to try it out, and I went.

In another factory, the return migrants also responded in the similar way.

MO: Besides money, what else did you want from working in Bangkok?

K: I wanted to see the city and the surroundings.

MO: Oh, you wanted to see the city and the surroundings.

K: I wanted to see what kind of place it was.

MO: I see.

K: I saw it on the TV, it was beautiful. I wanted to go.

MO: Was having relatives and elder siblings going before you part of the factors that made you want to follow them?

P: Part of it. After finishing school, I also wanted to go to earn experiences embedded in different environs.

A: They came back to tell us how the city was like and how good the income earned over there was.

As these responses indicate, our focus group findings are consistent with Mary Beth Mills’ (1997; 1999) conceptualization of the gendered experience of modernity. In addressing the issue of migration decisions, she contends that:

Such images of urban modernity combine with the real obligations young women and men feel to assist rural family to heighten the desires of adolescent sons and daughters to leave Baan Naa Sakae and find a job in Bangkok. Many discussed their

wish to spend time in the city as though urban employment were almost essential rite of passage through which they would gain an enhanced sense of personal autonomy and *thansamay* cultural authority (Mills, 1999: 84).

Thus, incorporating migrants' point of view into explanations of migration decisions will enrich the conventional theories of migration. In particular, when female migration decisions are studied, Mills' notion of "gendered experience of modernity" is highly useful, as demonstrated in our focus group research.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to examine the role of rural industrialization in the form of small- and medium-scale manufacturing factories with special attention to the issues of income generation for rural households and mitigation of massive rural-urban migration flows. While most previous discussion has centered around an economic point of view, this paper has emphasized the importance of incorporating perceptions of workers of the rural factories and return migrants. It also attempted to adopt the "post-modern" approach to migration, which emphasized the notion of the experience of modernity.

The data presented in this paper show that rural industrialization of this kind has been recognized favorably by the villagers, especially young women and their parents. Many return migrants raised the establishment of the rural factories as the primary reason for returning from Bangkok. On the other hand, it is clear from the information derived from focus group discussions that rural industrialization does not guarantee to stop out-migration flows from rural areas, at least in the short-run. This is not because the financial contribution of rural factory employment to the rural household economy is insignificant, but because rural young women are attracted by the "modern" culture that they are supposed to experience in Bangkok, as Mary Beth Mills (1999) has argued in her work.

This is not to say that rural industrialization does not play a significant role in the rural community. Rather, the principal issues regarding the role of rural industrialization in the future seem to revolve around the family relations. For example, Thailand is gradually experiencing population aging and, as a result, providing basic support for the elderly is becoming an important issue in the country. In Thailand, at present, most elderly people are taken care of by their children (Knodel, Chayovan and Siriboon, 1992). Given that the number of children each elderly person can rely on will become fewer, the co-residency of available adult children will become increasingly important, especially in rural areas where formal elderly support services have not developed yet. Thus, the existence of nearby factories allows family members, particularly female care-givers, to have more time to look after the elderly while being employed outside the household; this is impossible if they migrate to work in Bangkok, however.

Another emerging issue regarding the family relations is care of children in the young ages. Research conducted in the US (e.g., Kalmijn, 1994; Yabiku, Axinn and Thornton, 1999) show that the presence of parents at home has great influence upon children's self-esteem and school performance. Mills (1999) points out that rural women working in Bangkok factories, if they are already married and have children, leave their children back in the village to be raised by grandparents, in order to secure their urban employment. Thus, they have to "endure long and distressing separations from children" (Mills, 1999: 156). In this regard, the existence of rural factories near the home village can contribute to generating better mother-child relationships, which will have great influence upon children's future.

In sum, from an economic viewpoint, rural factories of this kind may not be viable in terms of efficiency and competitiveness. From the perspective of rural residents, however, rural industrialization is something to make them feel, "There's no place like home."

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