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A POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ASIAN SEX TOURISM

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Abstract: Sex represents an important tourism attraction for many developing countries. Like all markets, however, sex tourism is both an economic and political phenomenon. It cannot exist without sources of demand, where these types of transactions are considered to be socially and politically legitimate. In the case of Japanese sex tourism to Thailand, the market has been rocked by the development of greater women's rights in Japan. This has shifted the economic constraints on Thai policymakers, who are now confronted with a lucrative demand source that is increasingly avoiding sex destinations. As social movements change Japanese consumer choices and investment strategies, they affect genderized notions of the masculine "high politics" of international finance and economic development. **Keywords:** sex tourism, soft power, investment, identity, Japan, Thailand.

Résumé: Une économie politique du tourisme sexuel en Asie. Le sexe est une attraction touristique importante pour beaucoup de pays en voie de développement. Pourtant, le tourisme sexuel est un phénomène politique aussi bien qu'économique. Il ne peut pas exister sans demande, là où ce genre de transaction est considéré socialement et politiquement légitime. Dans le cas du tourisme sexuel japonais en Thaïlande, le marché a été ébranlé par le féminisme japonais. Les décideurs thaïlandais doivent considérer qu'une source lucrative de demande commence à éviter les destinations du sexe. Les mouvements sociaux changent les choix des consommateurs japonais et leurs stratégies d'investissement et influencent les notions, parmi hommes et femmes, de la "haute politique" masculine dans la finance internationale et le développement économique. **Mots-clés:** tourisme sexuel, pouvoir doux, investissement, identité.

INTRODUCTION

Strictly in economic terms, international tourism will likely become the largest industry in the world within a decade, if it has not done so already. In addition to its financial power, however, the industry continues to do more to shape the roles and identities of its producers and consumers, or hosts and tourists, than does perhaps any other. Gender roles are among those to be most forcefully affected by interaction between tourists and hosts, and it therefore comes as no surprise that sex tourism is an important topic in the tourism literature (Fish 1984; Hall 1993; Hill 1993; Truong 1990). Unfortunately, some efforts to examine the sex tourism market have practically reified it, emphasizing the durability of sexual and economic power relations that are critical to its existence (Enloe 1989). Like all tourism, however, the

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shape of the market depends largely on a shifting array of political and sociocultural forces that determine the composition of the demand for international tourism. Social change in a source of tourism demand can have profound effects on the structure of the industry, the type of tourism, and on the gender roles it reproduces in host regions. In the case of Thailand, recent government efforts to curb the sex industry can be viewed, in part, as greatly facilitated by changes in the demand for tourism in the region. The growth of women as tourists, and particularly Japanese women, may be having profound effects on the economic calculations that decisionmakers must take into account in establishing development strategies.

There would initially appear to be many reasons for Thailand to direct its development strategy away from images of its citizens hawking their sexual wares. The threat of AIDS has grown rapidly in Thailand, but the belated reaction of the Thai government to this crisis, as well as the virtual non-reaction of other countries similarly threatened with the epidemic (Shenon 1992) together indicate that the possibility for governmental inaction is vast and terrifying. It seems that there is no numerical threshold of infections or casualties at which a government will automatically react. In addition, if the demand for tourism appears to have been a cause for the growth of the Thai sex industry, perhaps researchers should determine how shifts in demand might effect changes in policy.

In fact, the Thai government's efforts to limit sex tourism may have been facilitated by the growth of tourism market sectors, particularly from Japan, that respond negatively to the presence of a booming sex industry. Japanese tourists currently rank second (behind Thailand's neighbor, Malaysia) among incoming visitors to this country, making up about 11% of arrivals (World Tourism Organization 1993b). Because Japanese are currently the biggest spenders in the industry (World Tourism Organization 1993a), however, they are of greater economic significance for Thailand than even their impressive share of the inbound market might indicate. Additionally, although Japanese men do not constitute the sole source of demand for Thai sex tourism, Japanese foreign investment policies—specifically for tourism projects—make them doubly important for developing countries, because they are designed to reflect and encourage Japanese outbound tourism. The case of Japanese tourists in Thailand thus highlights not only the financial links that support the sex tourism industry, but also the ways in which sociocultural conditions in one state can be transmitted, through market means, to another.

In a recent article, Hall (1992) points out that the literature on sex tourism generally takes on highly moralistic tones. This is undoubtedly true, but prostitution represents a rather unstable livelihood, bringing moments of temporary affluence, but frequent concerns about safety and financial security (Cohen 1982). As will be demonstrated in this paper, in the Japanese case (where prostitution has been both morally and legally acceptable for long periods), the market for Japanese women has not been able to withstand greater benefits available for them elsewhere. As women's political and economic rights and opportunities have expanded, they have allowed women to avoid the risks and instability that appear to be prevalent in prostitution. Simultane-

ously, prostitution has been devalued and stigmatized there as an occupation, much as it often is in the West. This paper seeks not to justify or to condemn sex tourism, but rather to recognize that its existence relies on a peculiar and unstable combination of sexuality, nationalism, and economic power. A review of the literature sets the stage for this paper's examination of the political economy of international tourism.

In spite of tourism's vast importance in the global economy, political scientists have been slow to provide a study of the political economy of international tourism for two reasons. First, the discipline of political science has itself been genderized, or ordered along lines that have been discursively imbued with a sense of what topics are legitimate or illegitimate for research. Many feminist critics have begun to challenge conventional readings of domestic and international politics, claiming that they frequently privilege "masculine" notions of power while devaluing competing ones as "feminine" or "weak." Scott (1986), for example, notes that traditional conceptions of "high politics" emphasize the competition of military conflict or rational economic redistribution, and implicitly or explicitly downplay other perspectives or activities in politics. Similarly, Tickner (1992) finds that international relations theory works in much the same way, since it generally claims that a focus on something other than military or economic security is somehow "soft," or less important to the stuff of world politics than are bombs or finance. Tourism has generally been seen within this realm of "low politics," despite its clear relevance for economic strategy in many states.

In these traditional studies of politics, the genderizing of topics delimits the space for those deemed worthy of study, leading researchers to ignore important and relevant social phenomena. Enloe (1989), in her effort to bring women to the forefront of discussion of international politics, investigates sex tourism as an important economic and social phenomenon, focusing largely on the sexual imagery prevalent in advertisements and media representations. Enloe analyzes sex tourism as a static feature of the world economy, and thus largely neglects the importance of shifts in demand for the shape of the industry. Therefore, she thus robs herself of the opportunity to provide a more serious challenge to the tendency of political scientists to ignore issues such as these. As the roles of tourists (principally Japanese women, discussed in this paper) have changed, so too have the development options available to Thai government strategists. In other words, the "high politics" of economic development and international finance cannot be understood without attention to the "low politics" of tourism, women's rights movements, and changes in gender roles. Political scientists have, therefore, shot themselves in the foot, by steering clear of "soft" topics that clearly have explanatory relevance for their "hard" interests.

Second, when political scientists do address the industry, it is usually done within studies of more "conventional" topics, like environmental devastation, immigration law, or foreign aid (Matthews and Richter 1991), primarily focusing on the policies of states that seek to attract tourists. Tourism as an industry is, in general, more important to the tourists receiving rather than generating countries. For example,

government behavior is analyzed in terms of its efforts to limit the social and cultural impact of international tourism while allowing private enterprise the ability to freely attract tourists (Jenkins 1991), and not in terms of encouraging its own citizens to tour abroad, or of protecting its citizens once they arrive elsewhere. This is a more justifiable bias than is the one toward the study of "high politics;" the attraction of international tourists has increasingly become a viable development option for states without significant factor endowments besides natural beauty or places of historical interest. It has, however, led political scientists away from the interesting relationships between foreign tourism demand and domestic strategic exigencies. Indeed, the search for explanations for tourism strategies in poor states must take into account the preferences of tourists from wealthier markets (Lanfant 1980).

The relatively small amount of existing research on the political economy of international tourism can be divided into two schools of thought (Lea 1988). The first line of investigation, linked tightly to theories of liberal economics, holds that economic interactions usually have positive consequences, and that tourism is a rather natural business phenomenon. Most of the literature on the economics of tourism fall into this broad category. As Lea (1988) has noted, even many sophisticated economic models remain somewhat apolitical, ignoring important questions regarding a state's position within the international system or international division of labor, focusing instead on economic choices that are either efficient or inefficient. Other analyses address political issues involved, emphasizing policies as effective or ineffective, or as socially constructive or destructive. With her careful attention to the problems and benefits created by tourism, Linda Richter's (1989; 1993) pioneering work falls largely into this liberal category. Richter's focus on tourism policies in developing countries highlights the potential benefits of socially conscious development policies and the harm incurred by careless or corrupt ones, but she is only secondarily concerned with the international determinants of them. International demand for tourism is seen either as fixed or as exogenous to the study.

Richter's work, which primarily addresses policy dilemmas for states interested in tourism development, avoids one major pitfall of many economic and business analyses from the liberal perspective. These often overstate the direct benefits of tourism expenditures. Many business models have used the multiplier (the rate at which local employment and income increase given any growth in tourism expenditures) as the primary guide for study. In poor states, however, tourists frequently pay for imports (including food, or in the case below, foreign-owned lodging and travel arrangements), creating a massive leakage that undermines the validity of some basic econometric analyses of the value of tourism for developing countries (Peter 1969). As a result, foreign investment in tourism may skew the costs and benefits accruing to a development strategy based on tourism, thereby throwing liberal analyses off the mark.

The second school of thought, a variant of dependency theory, attempts to deal with this very problem, by reformulating Marxist and

Leninist conceptions of international relations and describing the systematic exploitation of less developed states by wealthier ones. As wealthy capitalist states expand outward, to provide their business leaders with new markets and investment opportunities, they develop certain sectors—which become politically active—of weaker economies, and thus make the countries dependent on continued flows of foreign capital. This relationship marginalizes Third World states, and is facilitated by the cooperation of local bourgeoisie and state actors with international capital (Cardoso 1972). Although this school of thought was originally created to deal with Latin America, its implications have been broadened by other researchers. Britton (1982), for example, conceptualizes tourism within this broader framework of dependency in the international system. Tourism from core to periphery may provide a few economic benefits to the weaker states and suggest the possibility of relative development, but the limitations of potential income generated by tourism activities reinforce dependency on the rich by the poor.

Unfortunately, the dependency school tends to view these relations in a strangely static way, in spite of the theory's reliance on a dynamic theory of capital transactions. Tastes change, and destinations have to adapt to them as they do. This affects the ability of developing states to attract tourists, as well as their policies for constructing "authentic" images for international advertisements. In addition to the dependency school's emphasis on a unidirectional model for shifts in tourism demand, it errs in understating the profound economic benefits that international investment in tourism can have, and thereby misidentifies the goals of states that seek to use tourism in an overall development portfolio.

Foreign investment, in addition to foreign tourism expenditures, can strengthen a government's ability to develop its economy, and many seek international financial assistance for tourism investment as part of a larger development strategy. In the long run, the roads, telecommunications, and sewage systems built for the hotel industry are often functional for other industries as well (Lea 1988). Furthermore, infrastructural investment and aid can be critical to the indigenous development of additional hotels and to the local entrepreneurs who will provide food and supplies to native- and foreign-owned hotels and restaurants (Sinclair and Vokes 1993; Walton 1993). The leakages that characterize the economic dilemmas of tourism can thus be reduced over time, even with heavy investment from multinational corporations. In other words, a strategy of development can be smart and profitable not because it facilitates growth in tourism expenditures as such, but because it places the country on a springboard to further economic development. Thailand continues to be desperate for foreign infrastructural investment, in part to prevent bottlenecks in the tourism trade (Tasker 1993).

This is not to suggest that studies of the political economy of tourism have been wrong, but rather that approaches from this area ought to combine the successes of liberalism with those of dependency theory. They must realize that financing of tourism is of critical importance to states, and that financial decisions are made within, and often reconfig-

ure, political constraints. The concept of "soft power" (Nye 1990) may be especially useful in the analysis of international tourism, and of sex tourism in particular. As opposed to "hard power," in which one state can force another to act according to the former's interests, "soft power" is the ability of a state to change another state's interests to bring them into line with its own.

In Nye's use, the term *soft power* is a relatively benign one; he focuses on the ability of the United States to lead, by example, other states into liberal democracy. His definition of "soft power," however, is more capable of dealing with the uglier realities of international relations than he might lead one to believe. By investing in Thailand, the Japanese government is reconfiguring social relations there, probably unintentionally, and making the Thai government more responsive to Japanese needs, by aligning interests. This may be a useful corrective for the problems inherent in both the liberal and neo-Marxist political economies of tourism. It unites the strengths of each perspective by combining the dependency school's focus on unequal power relations with the liberal paradigm's attention to market conditions and supplier choices. It also goes relatively far in explaining how Thailand's development options have been shaped by the preferences of Japanese tourists and, critically, the infrastructural investment that often follows them.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SEX TOURISM

The importance of international tourism to Thailand ought not be underestimated. Between 1982 and 1986, the foreign exchange earnings from tourism increased at an average annual rate of 11.6% in current price terms. It is, by far, the largest single source of foreign exchange earnings, and may yet eclipse the entire agricultural sector as Thailand turns toward a more industrial economy. In just one year (1986-1987), the number of tourists entering Thailand increased 24%, due to the Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) designation of 1987 as Visit Thailand Year, complete with tremendous international marketing and promotion (*International Tourism Reports* 1988). Even with the massive leakages that Japanese tourism development entails, foreign tourism remains an immensely profitable business in Thailand. Sex tourism, of course, is an important element. Although prostitution for local customers is more prevalent, foreign-oriented prostitutes remain extremely important to Thailand's accumulation of foreign capital (Cohen 1993).

Sex tours still dominate Thailand's incoming tourism market. Male travelers represent roughly 70% of Thailand's arrivals, far more than one might expect, taking business travel into account. If one assumes that *all* business travel is male and pleasure trips evenly split between men and women, Thailand still receives a tourist volume that is 55% male. Therefore, its inbound tourism is almost 30% more male-dominated than one could predict without using the appeal of sex tourism as the correcting factor (Edwards 1990). Correspondingly, men make up 75% of Japanese arrivals in Thailand (Corben 1991), but only 57% of the overall Japanese outbound market.

Needless to say, prostitution in Thailand has predated foreign tourism by hundreds of years. Thanh-Dam Truong (1990) traces current Thai mores on prostitution to ancient Buddhist conceptions of gender roles, noting that Thai law has historically made women legally subordinate to men, and it is only in this context that one can understand current patterns of male-female dominance. This is undoubtedly important, but the pattern of male-female dominance appears to have been almost universal, not confined to Thailand, and so the unusual prevalence of prostitution in Thailand cannot be ascribed only to ancient cultural traditions. Indeed, more recent political phenomena have been largely responsible for, if not creating, exponentially expanding the size of the Thai sex industry.

In fact, the most important shaping event in the history of the Thai sex business appears to have been the Bowring Treaty of 1855, which opened Thailand to foreign laborers. Most immigrants were young men from rural South China, planning to earn money for their families by mining tin in Phuket. A large number of Chinese prostitutes accompanied the men, establishing the largest sex centers Thailand had experienced to that time (Watanabe 1991). A 1909 law to prevent the spread of venereal disease effectively legalized prostitution, as long as some form of regulation obtained (Truong 1990).

The presence of foreign military bases has led to a quick upsurge in the number of brothels nearby, not only in Thailand, but also in other countries that have hosted US bases (Enloe 1989). In Thailand, the Vietnam War coincided with Thai Field Marshall Sarit's plan of developing the Thai economy through a major increase in international tourism. Consequently, the immediate economic imperatives associated with the presence of major military bases and R&R (rest and recreation) sites came into conflict with Thailand's apparent desire to comply with international norms restricting prostitution. Although the Thai government created new antiprostitution laws, they were routinely broken with the complicity of government officials. In fact, during the Vietnam War, the sex industry both grew and diversified, moving beyond the rudimentary structure of simple brothels, which had largely catered to local men, to massage parlors, dance halls, and other, more complex environments for the marketing of sex.

After the end of the Vietnam War, the greatly expanded sex market turned to the attraction of foreign tourists, in order to maintain its financial standing (Truong 1990; Watanabe 1991). In 1992, Thai police estimated that up to 800,000 prostitutes work in Thailand, 10% of whom are male. Between 50,000 and 80,000 children under the age of 15 were included in this number (Tunsarawuth 1992).

In Thailand, the sex industry is somewhat centralized and oligopolistic. At least for Japanese sex tourists, streetwalking prostitutes are of only secondary importance; far more critical are the prostitutes working in establishments like special hotels catering to Japanese guests or dance halls and massage parlors (Fish 1984). Furthermore, because of the oligopolistic nature of the market as well as the active involvement of state figures, including members of the military and the police, brothel owners are a viable political and economic force. On the surface at least, the configuration of power in the Thai sex market would

appear to confirm the finding of dependency theorists: that patterns of international capital migration reshape social relations in destinations, and ensure that states remain dependent on the policies of wealthier neighbors.

Sex tourism, as already noted, appears to be one of Thailand's most important and visible attributes in its attempts, over the past 15 years, to attract foreign tourists. One study carefully documents the history of sex tourism in Thailand and concludes that the demand for it is likely to continue, arguing that if changes are to occur in this business, they will come from within Thailand (Hill 1993). This repeats the unfortunate error of perceiving the demand for sex tourism to be static, rather than subject itself to changing norms and laws, which then take on some causal force through the workings of the market. Although sex tourism remains a big draw among many travelers, the growth of other sectors—sectors that actively avoid any destination with the moniker “sex capital”—still has an impact on the constraints to which policymakers must respond. Changes in government behavior toward the Thai sex industry may not be happening *in spite* of tourism, but rather in part *because* of changes in the market.

Development of Japanese Sex Tourism

Like Thailand's reputation as the world's sex capital, the “Japanese interest” in sex tourism might be viewed as the inevitable outcome of centuries of a patriarchal culture. This approach, however, would neglect the specific political choices that have shaped, prolonged, legitimated, and broadened the existence of sex markets both within and outside of Japan. Prostitution became particularly widespread in Japan in the Tokugawa area, when licensed areas were established, and then used by Tokugawa authorities to entrap rebels and political rivals. Even the US occupation, during which several edicts against prostitution were established, actually encouraged it through the creation of R&R sites, much as in the Thai case (Watanabe 1991).

The Japanese Anti-Prostitution Law of 1958 is often cited as evidence of firm official prohibition by the government. The law, however, forbids only public solicitation, provision of facilities, and management of prostitutes; it says nothing directly about the exchange of money for sexual services. Although the structure of the current Japanese sex market—massage shops, performance shows, and hostess bars—clearly runs afoul of this law, the provision against streetwalking has, in effect, centralized prostitution, making it easier, rather than harder, to manage. Police officers and litigators, for example, may feel that completely eradicating the sex market is hopeless; by centralizing its control, at least they limit its spread beyond certain spatially marked areas of major cities (Bayley 1990).

By centralizing the industry, this law has consolidated the control of owners of these facilities. Much of the *Yakuza's* (Japanese organized crime) estimated annual ¥5 trillion intake comes from prostitution, and their influence over how police choose to exercise this law should not be underestimated (Woronoff 1990). In addition, it is difficult to avoid speculation into how the 1958 law's peculiar form developed,

given what is now known of the extent to which the *Yakuza* has had ties with elected figures. It remains entirely plausible that the 1958 Anti-Prostitution Law's particular provisions were chosen to mitigate the potentially damaging effects—at least to organized crime—of government attempts to work within established international norms and law by eradicating prostitution.

Sex business, therefore, are not an inherent part of the Japanese psyche and not the result of an unchanging and reified “Japanese culture,” as some works critical of Japanese behavior tend to believe, but rather the results of specific political choices made over the past few centuries. The markets for Japanese women, in fact, have not been able to withstand greater economic and educational opportunities for women that have arisen over the past 30 years. Although many Japanese women continue to work as prostitutes, both full- and part-time, most prostitutes in Japan today are foreigners, primarily other Asians, reflecting a domestic labor shortage in the sex industry. Many of these women are willing to deal with the instability of the career in exchange for some measure of economic success, while many others are duped into coming to Japan and would be in danger if they were to try to leave. This points not only to a conflation of sexuality and nationalism, but also to Japanese women's economic, political, and social successes that have enabled them to move away from prostitution as a career.

Perhaps because of the constraints on domestic prostitution effected by women's economic success, customers began to look abroad in the 1960s and 1970s. Japanese tourist agencies, in part fueled by deepening ties between Japan and its Asian neighbors, began encouraging the inclusion of *kisaeng* (Korean term similar to the Japanese *geisha*, but now synonymous with “prostitute”) parties on tours for Japanese businessmen traveling in groups to Korea (Hall 1992; Takahashi 1975). Quantity and quality of “special services” became competitive points for Japanese tourism companies, demonstrating the extent to which market forces have encouraged the growth of sex tourism (Azarcon-de la Cruz 1985). This form of tourism hosting has spread to other parts of East and Southeast Asia as the Japanese economy and tourism as a whole have grown. Men still constitute 60%–75% of the outbound Japanese market to many Southeast Asian states, largely due to the appeal of sex tourism. In fact, Japanese men in their 30s and 40s now represent the single largest demographic segment of the sex tourism market in Southeast Asia (Edwards 1990).

Japanese Travel Policy

In the past few years, the Japanese government has initiated an unusual program to increase the leisure time of and consumption of tourism services by its citizens. To facilitate growth in the outbound market, the government has promoted overseas investment in the tourism industry. As already stated, it is this financing that is critical to economic strategists in developing states. Because the investment often follows waves of Japanese tourists, a state's ability to finance its future development may depend on its ability to capture sectors, like sex tours, of the Japanese outbound market. In directing investment

largely toward those areas that attract Japanese tourists, the Japanese government is, in essence, externalizing Japanese social mores and behavior through market means.

Japan, like many other countries, has witnessed an interesting conflation of nationalism and sexuality in the past century. Power relationships are frequently embedded in sexuality, and the combination of sex markets with questions of citizenship and nationality has further highlighted these. Although this phenomenon is evident in the trade in Southeast Asian women brought to Japan to work as prostitutes (Nogales-Lumbera 1987), it is even more so in the case of sex tourism. As MacCannell (1989) argues, modernizing countries construct images that will attract greater numbers of tourists. In sex tourism marketing, these images often feature representations of "beautiful, exotic, and submissive" women (Enloe 1989) that are clearly designed to appeal to racial and sexual stereotypes carried by the European, American, Japanese, and other men who make up the demand for sex tourism.

Although these stereotypes and the preferences they engender are not immutable, they have been prevalent in Japan, in varying phases, for decades. In World War II, the Imperial Army used military methods to externalize Japanese domestic values, affirming a type of sexual and racial dominance over Korean "comfort women." Today the Japanese state may also be externalizing similar preferences, but through more innocuous and sanitized market tools. The importance of sex tourism to the Thai economy has not forced leaders to comply, but has rather restructured political relations there to ensure that local entrepreneurs and state employees benefit from the industry. Japan does not coerce the Thai government into anything. Instead, the slow spread of market tools and penetration has largely aligned Thai state actors' interests with Japanese social preferences.

As noted earlier, the demand side for tourism is an area in which much work remains to be done in the field of political science. States are involved not only in attracting tourists, but also in controlling their travel abroad, protecting them while overseas, and representing them legally. The Japanese government, principally through the Ministry of Transport, has made it its business to increase the number of Japanese tourists going abroad. In September 1987, the Japanese government announced a "Ten Million Abroad" program, or a public program designed to double its international departures, from five to ten million Japanese, over the following five years. In its 1988 Transport White Paper (Japanese Ministry of Transport Annual), it claimed that the program was designed to return capital to other countries, decreasing the balance-of-payments surplus, and encouraging the growth of developing economies. Of course, a year earlier the *Unyu Hakusho* (Transport White Paper) had argued that the appreciation of the yen was the primary motive for increased travel abroad, but the program may still have had symbolic value for both Japanese guests and foreign hosts. It performed the dual purpose of announcing to trade partners that it was concerned about the balance of trade, as well as demonstrating to the Japanese that the government was officially endorsing their foreign travel, and would accept a heavier responsibility for their safety and pleasure.

Outbound tourism is attractive to the Japanese government for two other reasons. First, it is a relatively painless way to redistribute capital, being a somewhat more acceptable market to open than the almost sacred rice market or any high technology sectors, partly because of security concerns, and partly because of domestic logrolling in the bureaucracy and the Diet. Second, the government has become publicly aware that tourism reflects and shapes Japanese social behavior, and it has begun to promote newer, more socially conscious and individualized tours that increase the contact between its citizens and those of host countries (Japan Ministry of Transport 1992). In fact, tourism's symbolic value as a moral link between Japan and the outside world is evident even in the wording in the *Unyu Hakusho*. As Moeran (1983) notes, the "language of modernity" in tourist publications often means that words in tourist travel literature are Japanese phonetic equivalents of English terms, like "raifusutairu" for "lifestyle." Interestingly, in the 1988 *Unyu Hakusho*, the "Ten Million Plan" is written in both kanji characters representing a translation of the term's meaning, as well as in the phonetic alphabet for foreign terms as "Ten Mirion Puran." This is a useful linguistic device that symbolizes the government's interest in promoting contact between Japanese and foreigners, informing the domestic audience that this is part of the march of progress. This peculiarly Japanese attachment to internationalization appears to be at least one motive for its most unusual policy of encouraging outbound tourism.

Perhaps the primary importance of the plan, however, is in what it represents in terms of the government's role in outbound tourism. Mackie (1992) has addressed Japanese goals elsewhere, and so it is necessary here only to highlight those aims specifically mentioned the Japanese Ministry of Transport and its affiliated Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO 1989). By accepting a heavier burden for its outbound market, the government has further strengthened its position as a financier for the smooth traffic of its citizens abroad. In order to facilitate the growth of its outbound tourism, the Japanese government provides infrastructural development funds to favorite destinations of Japanese tourists, in order to ensure an unbroken and consistent flow of tourists. In addition, the Ministry of Transport established the International Tourism Development Institute of Japan (for assistance in international financing for Japanese tourist destinations) and started special international seminars for tourism development.

The desire to support Japanese outbound tourism may actually underscore financial contributions from other important Japanese economic actors, including those of the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF). Since the mid-1970s, it has promoted loans and investment, much of it for tourism infrastructure in developing countries. In the realm of tourism projects, OECF financing may be designed to respond to Japanese travel patterns and to precede the arrival of future waves of tourists (OECF 1992). This is an important point, but evidence remains sketchy, and further research is needed to determine the criteria by which public financing decision in tourism are made. Mackie (1992) is cautious about detailing the links between Japanese tourism and foreign investment, but at least some evidence indicates

that OECF investment follows initial tourist flows and paves the way for even greater numbers. For example, immediately after a one-year (1986–1987) 32% surge in the number of Japanese (and overwhelmingly male) tourists going to Thailand, the Thai government received a ¥6.25 trillion commitment from the OECF (*International Tourism Reports* 1988), concurrent with not only the Ten Million Plan but also a broader initiative to increase foreign aid and investment.

Finally, the government has engaged in a wide campaign to promote tourism through the establishment of an information network on overseas travel, as well as the reduction of departure taxes and closer cooperation with foreign states to ensure simpler visa and passport procedures (Japan Ministry of Transport 1989). A unique combination of industrial structure, in terms of the small number of competitors involved, and creative tax code action—providing tax breaks to firms that organize leisure trips for employees—further provides the government with impressive leverage in encouraging travel to any particular destination (Stuart 1992). Japanese tourists, moreover, appear to constitute an easily mobilized demand source, due to their high standard of living, a unified communications network, the predominance of several national newspapers, and the linguistic unity of the country (Noda 1975).

Japanese government support for outbound tourism embodies the government's willingness to reaffirm Japanese social behavior abroad, by rewarding those governments that market their locales, cultural experiences, and even people according to the tastes of Japanese tourists. The OECF may mirror the preferences of Japanese consumers by investing in those countries that are able to attract them as tourists. If the successful recipients are those that advertise their people as sexual commodities, it encourages the growth of the sex industry, presumably at the expense of other viable economic sectors. The customer is always right, particularly if the aggregated customers are backed by huge amounts of finance capital.

Ramifications for Thailand

The tastes of Japanese customers, however, are beginning to change. In recent years, Japanese Christians, feminist organizations, and labor unions have begun to press for an end to sex tours. Without clear evidence to support any explanations, it remains likely that any changes in sex tour practices that have been *directly* caused by domestic pressure are strictly cosmetic. One observer, while claiming that the "the end of the sex tours" is in sight, notes only that allusions to sex in newspaper advertisements for tourism destinations have diminished (Giarelli 1981). This may suggest more sensitivity to public disgust in public than in private. If a change in Japanese sex tourism is occurring, it is likely a result of the shifts in the composition of outbound travel, in which women play a growing role, and therefore only *indirectly* related to the success of feminist movements.

Little research has been devoted to the reasons for the increasing number of Japanese women traveling through the 1980s. Although this paper cannot provide any reasonable history of the women's rights

movement in Japan, a few background facts and some speculation on the involvement of international factors may be helpful. Women have been guaranteed equal political rights in Japan since the 1947 Constitution. Even so, economic and social conditions, reinforced by the Japanese male worker's long hours that generally prevent him from engaging in any of the reproductive activities in the home, have promoted inequality and led to social movements that challenge the dominant order (Buckley and Mackie 1986). As women's movements have sought to expand female political and economic roles while maintaining some parts of their traditional place, developments in Japan have mirrored those in other industrialized countries with somewhat more advanced movements (Pharr 1975).

The women's rights movement in Japan, therefore, may be linked to international patterns granting legitimacy to quests for individual rights. Indeed, Meyer (1987) sees this process in a world-systems approach that addresses the global spread of a rationalized, bureaucratic state form that confers universal citizenship rights within its territory. The political incorporation of women within a rationalized state-and-citizen relationship cements the further spread of these economic and political rights, recasting identity as it does so (Ramirez 1987).

This does not mean that all countries are becoming "westernized," but rather that identity-shaping political labels often conflict with "traditional" roles, and thereby recast political and social categories, including gender. The direct transplantation—via the writing of the Constitution—of political institutions that privilege individual politics onto the Japanese system has caused problems for their attempts to preserve traditional places. According to Pharr (1990), "successive waves of postwar 'rationalization' had increased women's share of the normal work of public bureaucracies without correspondingly decreasing the number of unofficial 'women's chores' [such as tea-pouring, office cleaning, etc.]," leading to new political conflicts for women's rights. This space for Japanese women's rights, emerging from postwar political and social struggles, has led to their greater personal mobility. They work, they have leisure time and money, and they have the personal, political, and social freedom to travel (often with one another) abroad. Their choices thus affect and shape those very social values that the Japanese government externalizes through promotion of and investment in tourism destinations.

More Japanese women have been traveling abroad in the past few years, both in absolute terms and in relation to Japanese men. The number of Japanese traveling abroad has increased from 3.9 million in 1980 to about 9.7 million in 1989, or a surge of roughly 150%. Women have been disproportionately involved in this process. While the number of men traveling abroad doubled during that decade, the number of female tourists departing from Japan grew almost 300%. Consequently, women, who in 1980 constituted about 25% of the departures (*Japan Ministry of Transport* 1990) today account for 43% of the total, and women in their 20s represent almost half that number (*Nikkei Weekly* 1994:B1).

The raw numbers of Japanese women traveling abroad tend to understate their economic significance for host countries. As already

noted, a large part of the average tourism spending can become a series of leakages back to the country of origin, in the form of hotel bills, tour packages, and airfare. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the Japanese case. Although Japanese travelers spend more per person than any other country in the world (*The Economist* 1987), 65%–75% of all spending on foreign tourism leaks back to Japanese firms, such as Japan Air Lines, the Japan Tourist Bureau, and any of a number of large Japanese hotel chains. Women, however, spend differently than men do. In Japan's large market of big spenders, women travelers tend to be the most important. Women in their 20s, most of them single, account for over 15% of Japan's departures, and their most frequent destinations are such shopping meccas as Hong Kong and Taiwan. In fact, women spend far more than men do on gifts and local goods, while men are more likely to devote the bulk of their expenditures to hotels and air fare (Morris 1990). Women thus constitute not only an increasingly large portion of the tourism market, but an appreciably lucrative one as well, since their spending patterns probably result in fewer leakages than men's do.

Thailand has apparently responded to this shift in demand. To the extent that direct tourism expenditures have an economic impact on the host country, Japanese men do not represent the most potentially profitable demand group; Japanese *women* do. Consequently, the rapidly increasing number of Japanese women traveling abroad may pressure the government to change Thailand's sex market image. TAT's designation of 1992 as "Women's Visit Thailand Year," a direct reference to its astonishingly successful 1987 strategy, signals such a development. The symbolic and perhaps only partial effort to eradicate Thailand's image as a sex market, therefore, may appeal to Japanese women travelers, who represent the wave of the future to a developing country hoping to increase foreign finance and direct foreign currency injections.

Japanese women do not travel in large numbers to countries regarded as sex markets. Any program designed to attract Japanese women tourists must rely largely on shifting the emphasis from a sex haven to a more respectable, clean, and safe destination that favors other types of market transactions. In Thailand, women represent only 25% of Japanese arrivals (Corben 1991), while holding over 40% of the general Japanese departures. Mechai Viravaidhya, recently the head of TAT (and also known as "Mr. Condom" for personally heading Thailand's anti-AIDS program), remarked that "The market wants a cleaner tourism. . . . So the market is driving [hotel and tour operators] to do the right thing" (Wedel and Pattanapongse 1991).

Although Viravaidhya places the credit for the move on private entrepreneurs, the Thai government has produced legislation to increase the budget for tourism police, to punish shops and travel agents that cheat tourists, and, significantly, to crack down on pimps and brothel owners, although only on those "operating on the sleaziest side of the sex industry," or, ostensibly, the most obvious and public offenders (Wedel and Pattanapongse 1991). Crackdowns occur periodically, but these recent efforts are working alongside a massive public relations effort to clean Thailand's image (Barnetson 1993), as well as

campaigns to end child prostitution (Branigan 1993) and to curb the spread of AIDS, particularly through help for prostitutes (Magistad 1994). Although the effort may still be a symbolic one, its breadth and growing depth may fuel further substantive attacks on the sex industry.

These steps, and any of their consequences, may stem from real pressures inside of Thailand, including growing public awareness of the AIDS crisis, as well as of the work of feminist movements inside the country. It remains difficult to believe, however, that they would be feasible were not the crucial tourism market and the investment patterns following Japanese tourism themselves changing. Sex tourism is not natural or endemic, but rather the result of decades of political choices and accidents. Social changes are beginning to weaken the cultural bonds in which the Japan-Thailand sex tourism trade is embedded, and the improved status of women in Japan may become the trigger for further decline in the Thai sex market. Thailand remains dependent on Japan's demand for tourism, and its development strategy may continue to reflect those changes in Japanese society that become transmitted internationally through market mechanisms.

CONCLUSIONS

The international sex tourism industry continues to shape and reaffirm gender roles of customers and suppliers. It highlights, advertises, and otherwise deepens power relationships that inhere in sexuality. Even so, the tourism industry itself is not static, and the imperative to construct images that will appeal to tourists suggests that when those tourists change, the images should as well. As a result, this paper has examined one important case, that of Japanese sex tourism to Thailand, and argued that the changing demographics of Japanese tourism may alter the constraints on Thai state behavior, leading to further strains on this destination's prostitution business. It is too early to tell how this will affect the sex market there as a whole, but the symbolic effort, at the very least, seems like a significant one.

This paper has neglected at least three important questions regarding the international sex tourism industry. First, how does prostitution, specifically for foreign customers, affect perceptions of gender in Thailand? Second, will there be new opportunities for Thai women if the government continues a crackdown, or will there simply be greater demand for them to act as prostitutes for the local market or to travel abroad to work in foreign ones? Third, how easily can new tourism-related economic concerns displace the sex-industry issues among state actors, and how can these lead to new, perhaps safer and more stable, patterns of "soft power" between Japanese financiers and customers and Thai producers?

Clearly, much more work needs to be done. In any case, the peculiar place of tourism — as both the world's largest industry and the commodification of cultural experiences — suggests that research on sex tourism should be equally mindful of the gender roles reproduced by the industry and the economic exigencies that force states and individuals to participate. Political scientists, whose theoretical program might contribute to the study of tourism, cannot ignore these issues, simply

because they initially seem to connote "low politics." Instead, they should begin to examine how the politics of identity and women's rights are affecting the "high politics" of economic development and international finance. In doing so, they may be able to identify those sociocultural constraints on economic strategies, and determine how international markets become conduits through which norms are transmitted and shared. □ □

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