Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives: Globalization, Gender, and Family Dynamics in Thailand

Sara R. Curran
Princeton University

Detailed Outline

Acknowledgements
Table of Contents
Preface

Chapter 1 – Boundaries and Lives Mediating Globalization and Locality

Opening with a description of the profound disruption wrought by globalization, the chapter highlights the literature on globalization and Thailand's place within that literature. I show how global markets shape, and are shaped by, individuals in the developing world. Missing from the literature on globalization are examples of how individuals both embrace but also resist various global economic forces through migration and education. These choices, which have only emerged in the last twenty years, have significantly impacted Thai family structure and gender relations. This first chapter provides a framework for interrogating the dialectic between global and local, as well as structure and agency. A theoretical and methodological approach is outlined that builds on evidence for the role of globalization in the changing social demographics of Thailand from the vantage of Nang Rong, a district in northeastern Thailand. The chapter concludes with a description of the contents of the remaining chapters.

Chapter 2 - Making Sense of Individual Life Stories in a World of Change and Chance

The chapter focuses on four stories of individuals and their families' experiences during the late 1980s and through the 1990s as pathways to understanding larger global processes. The stories highlight how individuals negotiate within social structures (gender, family, work, village, and communities in place of destination) with unintended consequences that have profound effects for future individual life chances and social structures. The four stories demonstrate different ways in which young people are embedded, detached, and reinserted in sets of social relations that include accountability schemas that create or discourage opportunities.

Chapter 3 - Shifting Boundaries of Globalization and Locality: One Country's and One District's Story

Stepping back from the very intimate perspective on the lives of individuals and families, this chapter examines the political economy of Thailand and how the nation has interacted and shaped the penetration of the global economy into the lives of Thai people. In the first part of the chapter Thailand's economic position is compared to other countries in the region and over time. National level historical economic data are presented in light of the political history within Thailand and its relationship to larger trading partners, such as the U.S. and Japan. These histories give shape to a particular way in which the Thai state promoted export lead economic growth and initially underinvested in secondary education. In the second part of the chapter the analytical lens begins to focus upon regional and provincial patterns of change in manufacturing production and employment, as the tentacles of the global economy begin to reach into the rural hinterlands of Thailand. The final portion of the chapter further focuses the analytic lens Nang Rong district. The highlight of this section is the pattern of school and factory establishments over the last 20 years in the province and district. A remarkable pattern is observed as textile factories mushroom throughout the district in the late 1990s creating significantly more jobs. Secondary schools also begin to sprout at the very end of the decade and their location highly correlated with factory establishment.

Chapter 4 – Expanding Identities, Challenging Traditions: Deciding to Study, Migrate or Work

The chapter opens with a radio announcer's call to listeners about work in distant factories. Building on the analysis in the preceding chapter, this sets the stage for an opportunity to analyze young people's patterns of migration, education, and work spanning ten years – between 1984 and 1994. These young people are aged eight to twenty-five years old in 1984 and are the most exposed to the dramatic changes occurring in the Thai economy. The results of the survey data are interspersed with the voices of people from Nang Rong as I heard them in 1992, 1994, 1997, and 2000 both in the village and in migrant destinations. The analysis shows how these variable patterns that we are observe in individuals' lives are not random but reflect the structure of opportunities at any point in time. These structures of opportunities are themselves defined by gender relations, family dynamics, and particular types of economic policies and growth and thus are constantly in flux.

Chapter 5 – Fitting in and Keeping in Touch: Connections within Destination and to Origin

The chapter examines the lives of migrants in places of destination, more specifically the friendships in the place of destination and the maintenance of ties to family and village. Central to the analysis are the flows of money and goods

within destinations and back to places of origin. In particular, the focus is upon how these flows are shaped by gender, educational attainment, social networks, and family relations.

Chapter 6 – Coming Home or Staying Put: Negotiating Identity, Family, and New Forms of Globalization

The chapter answers these questions: Who returns (and who doesn't)? Under what circumstances do they come home? How and when do families attempt to bring their children back home? What are the consequences for village and family life as a result of such returns? At the micro level, the chapter will focus upon which individuals return and what their returns mean for their families, including an analysis of marriage (marriage timing and who is married). At a macro level, the chapter will also show a growing inequality within and across villages, resulting in the consolidation of landholdings and growing inequality in village resources and demographic structures.

Chapter 7 – Being "Good" and the Redefinition of Gender

This is the first of two chapters that takes the three preceding analyses, which rely strongly upon quantitative survey results, and integrates them with the qualitative and ethnographic data. The chapter focuses upon the shifting boundaries of gender, showing how men's and women's lives have been transformed over the last twenty years. The entrée to discussing these transformations focuses upon the particular interpretations of young people and their parents of young people's life chances and choices, relative to others and their own (in the case of parents). Shifts in gendered expectations and gendered obligations towards parents and community are observed through villagers' own words (future caregiving responsibilities), their actions (remittances, visits, prior caregiving, decisions to return home), and my own observations. An important finding of this analysis is that what was once considered a gendered given as an attribute of daughters, "goodness," is increasingly becoming redefined as an attribute of either sons or daughters, depending on their demonstrated commitment to parental well-being. Rewards for this "goodness" are tangible shifts in inheritance patterns away from daughters and towards sons.

Chapter 8 - Interdependence of the Boundaries of Family, Locality, and Globalization

The chapter focuses upon shifting family boundaries, in particular the simultaneous widening of the physical boundary defining family (as children move to distant locals to work and study) and the narrowing social boundary of which family members can be relied upon for social support. Intergenerational relations are of particular interest, especially given the disruption wrought by the tremendous out migration of young people from the late 1980s through the mid1990s. Importantly, gender changes have not come about in a vacuum. Several stories demonstrate how families encourage and discourage their

children's choices. Examples of "wild daughters" who become hard to control after gaining education demonstrate actual and real concerns about shifts in power within families. These shifts are counterbalanced by increasing fosterage of grandchildren with grandparents as daughters and sons join the urban or globalized labor force that has little time and support for children. Finally, rapid fertility decline and tremendous disruption of traditional family relations leaves elderly parents wondering how they will be supported and wondering what family really means.

Chapter 9 – Shifting Boundaries, Transforming Lives: Where Global Meets Local

In this concluding chapter, the results from the analytical chapters are drawn together to make empirical connections to similar processes in other settings and provide a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamic between gender, family, and economic development, as well as the dialectic between local and global. In addition, a brief epilogue is provided about how the local community and the individuals interviewed for this project reacted to their stories and the story put forth in this book.