Book Reviews: Human Security Today Tomorrow: Thailand
Human Development Report 20096; Handbook of Theories of Aging; Refugees, Recent Migrants and Employment Challenging Barriers and Exploring Pathways; Pacific Perspectives on the Commercial Sexual

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Book Reviews


This recently published UNDP report is the fourth of its kind on human development in Thailand. The first such report was published over a decade ago to introduce the concept of human development and the state of human development in Thailand during the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998. Community empowerment and sufficiency economy were the themes of the second and third reports in 2003 and 2007, respectively.

In drawing attention to old and new risks and the threats posed by changes in the Thai economy, society and the country’s position in the world, the fourth country report focuses on two areas: human security and human development assessed by human achievement index.

The 2009 report begins with an audit of the current state of human security in Thailand across six dimensions:

- Economic security
- Food security
- Environmental security
- Health security
- Personal security
- Political security

On the economic front, the report maintains that Thailand enjoyed strong growth of more than 7 percent on average annually over the past five decades, while the population below the poverty line declined from 22.1 million or 42.2% of the total population of 52.4 million in 1988 to 5.4 million, or 8.5 percent of the total population of 63 million) in 2007, according to data obtained from the

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1 By Kua Wongboonsin, Patcharawalai Wongboonsin and Rungratana Kowantananakul
National Statistical Office’s Household Socioeconomic Survey that were calculated by the National Economic and Social Development Board. While the number of urban poor has declined slowly, the rural poor are still account for 1 in 10 households, particularly in the Northeast, Upper North, and Far South regions of the country. Lack of land and housing security are among the main problems in the rural and urban areas, respectively. A high incidence of debt, averaging seven months of disposable income characterized poor families in both rural and urban areas. About 58.3 percent of the employed were working in the informal sector. Given the notion of externally oriented growth, periodic worldwide fluctuations and crises are said to have major implications for economic security, especially employment, in an economy such as Thailand’s.

From the food security perspective, improvement in the availability of food is recorded through an increase in local production and imports. Yet, access remains a problem for minorities in the North and the Northeast as well as in urban areas. Monitoring and managing the balance between food crops and fuel crops are still key issues for making improvements in food security. This is in addition to the need for targeted programs to address persistent pockets of malnutrition in poor rural areas and for a better monitoring system as well as enforcement of standards of food quality.

On the dimension of environmental security, an increase in municipal and hazardous industrial wastes was recorded from 1998 to 2007, while conflicts over natural resources were recorded. Resource-rich Thailand was also said to be at some risk of geological and climatic instability. Despite improvements in early warning systems for tsunamis, landslides, flash floods, and inundation, insufficient collaboration between the agencies concerned provides an implication for measures to sustain those improvements. While weaknesses in resource and environmental management and appropriate measures remain a major concern, the report urges a stronger and broader framework for managing the environment, starting with legislation to supersede the Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act 1992.

From the perspective of health security, Thailand’s public health system is reported to have secured an extensive nationwide
network of provincial and district hospitals, community health centers, plus almost 1 million village health volunteers. The report also points out that Thailand recorded outstanding success in expanding primary health care provisions to combat major communicable diseases and emerging infectious diseases. However, it is yet to cope with rising health threats, which are defined in terms of the diseases of lifestyle and environment, including cancer, heart disease, and stress, as well as international epidemics.

On the personal dimension of human security, the following notions of concern are covered: crime, landmines, violence in the Far South, illicit drugs, domestic and sexual violence, and human trafficking. Effectiveness in management and commitment in combating these problems are considered key issues for improving personal security. More provision is also needed for the victims of domestic and sexual violence, while more progress in collaboration with neighboring countries is encouraged.

As for political security, corruption and conflict are touched upon, as are the notions of political and civic rights, political access, policy access, decentralization, a politicized judicial system, and political division. The report maintains that better mechanisms are needed to realize constitutional rights, while care is encouraged to ensure that the enhanced role of the judiciary results in a stronger and more even-handed application of the rule of law.

For a secure tomorrow, these six emerging issues are raised: water management, the future of small farmers, non-citizens, persistent inequality, an aging society, and climate change as well as its consequences. In this regard, the report notes that “Thailand is in transition with old problems of human security in retreat, while new problems arise as a result of the society’s growing prosperity and complexity” (p. 89).

Accordingly, the publication furnishes this short-list for action:
- Act now to ensure adequate supports for older persons over the long term
- Make strengthening the security of those in the informal sector a specific target of policy making
- Move to reduce the social acceptance of domestic and sexual violence by raising public awareness and restraining the media
- Deliver on the commitment to eliminate human trafficking
- Broaden the framework of policy making on migrant labor
- Manage the balance between fuel and food crops with the aim of promoting the interests of the small-scale farmer
- Launch a wide-ranging process to overhaul water management
- Strengthen environmental management by incorporating new knowledge and techniques in a revision to the primary legislation
- Put the goal of an equitable society on the national agenda, and make a start with some basic reforms, and
- Reduce political conflict by making the government more open and accessible.

In all, the 2009 report on human security in Thailand maintains that the country has overcome many of the most fundamental problems in human security that beset it a generation ago, and can be considered on an international scale as reaching more than a moderately secure level. This is despite the notion that certain groups of people are still at risk, and that some problems have defied solution. The report concludes that the “issues and priorities of human security are always changing in response to local developments and worldwide change. The pressure on natural resources, and the multiplication of political conflicts have dramatically changed the problems and priorities over recent decades. Climate change will change them again over coming decades. So too will problems not yet anticipated. Advancing human security requires constant vigilance” (p. 92).

It should be noted that this report is an independent publication by tUNDP. It was drafted by Chris Baker, as the principal editor, Parichart Siwaraksa, national consultant, and contributors of background papers, including Kulapa Vajanasara, Kritaya Archvanitkul, Sukran Rojanapaiwong, Sajin Prachason, Subhak Siwaraksa, and Parichart Siwaraksa. The report maintains that analysis and policy recommendations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Thai government or UNDP.

Aging is an issue of rising concern, that is looked at from different perspectives and different disciplines. Attempts to provide a collection of theories are on-going. Given the growing research interest in this issue and the call for a revolution thinking about aging, this voluminous handbook of theories about aging is timely in the advancement and application of such theories. After the first edition was published in 1999 to re-establish the importance of theory in the discourse about aging problems, this state-of-the-art second edition reflects renewed interest in encouraging theory-based research and a new emphasis on inter- and intra-disciplinary explanations of aging. This volume provides both historical information and the latest developments in theory in behavioral and social sciences. This is not only from the perspective of biodemography, biopsychology, psychology, sociology, and social policy applied to aging, but also from an interdisciplinary point of interest, as well as pointing to the wave of the future in aging research.

Comprising 40 chapters contributed by 67 experts in the field of aging, this handbook is organized into eight thematic parts:

- Part I: Setting the Context of Theories of Aging
- Part II: Theorizing Aging across Disciplines
- Part III: Biological Theories of Aging
- Part IV: Psychological Theories of Aging
- Part V: Social Science Perspectives on Theories of Aging
- Part VI: Society, Public Policy and Theories of Aging
- Part VII: Translating Theories of Aging
- Part VIII: The Future of Theories of Aging

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Part I sets the context of aging theories. Vern L. Bengtson, Research Professor of Gerontology and Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Southern California, and the co-authors, Daphna Gans, Norella M. Putney, and Merril Silverstein, contribute a chapter on theories about age and aging. They also address what theory is and how it is useful in research on aging. Meanwhile, W. Andrew Achenbaum looks at the theories of aging from a metahistorical perspective; the chapter by Hillard Kaplan, Michael Gurven and Jeffery Winking on evolutionary theory of the human life span focus on embodied capital and the human adaptive complex.

Part II comprises four chapters, starting from the perspective of biodemography as integrating disciplines to explain aging, contributed by Sarinnapha Vasunilashorn and Eileen M. Crimmins. The authors maintain that aging of the population and changes in health in humans and across various animal models are a composite outcome of complex processes replete with interconnections between the biological and social arenas. The biodemographic approach encompasses several strengths, which affect our understanding of populations. Among others, it adopts demographic approach analysis to analyze the effect of age-stratified processes on population characteristics and the individual life-cycle. Mathematical models and data from large representative population samples are relied upon. The approach can be adopted to study various areas related to health and aging, including the mechanism by which the social and economic environment, behaviors, and medical interventions affect health outcome, the relationship between health and social outcomes.

In highlighting the concept of time for an understanding of changes, Jan Baars, the author of the chapter entitled “Problematic Foundations: Theorizing Time, Age, and Aging,” argues that aging cannot be simply conceptualized as “attaining a higher chronological age” (p. 88). The perspective of human aging also requires a constantly renewed interpretation through stories that may offer inspiration, warning, or consolation to face the future (p. 97). While Neal Krause discusses meaning in late life as an overlooked forum for the development of interdisciplinary theory, Carol D. Ryff and Burton
Singer look into healthy aging and its key components. The authors define healthy aging at two different but parallel levels of analysis: the level of basic biological processes; and a more molar level involving biomedical processes and behavioral capacities. At the first level, healthy aging is defined as “fending off of cellular and molecular damage for the longest possible period of the life course,” while at the more molar level, it is “the maximal delay of illness, disease, disability, and hence mortality” (p. 118). The authors call for an integrative biopsychosocial process to the study of healthy aging.

Those interested in studying aging from biological and psychological perspectives may consult a number of chapters in Parts III and IV of the handbook. Those attempting to delve into the issue through social gerontology, life course, families, and a feminist lens, may find Part V lending a better understanding of the “how.” Meanwhile, Part VI includes institutionalism in aging policy development in the US, and the political economy theory of aging. This is in addition to a look at the life course as a tool for a public policy, and the impact of globalization on aging, as well as theories, policies, and realities of care for older adults in a welfare state. Those interested in the relationship between law and aging may go through chapter 35, contributed by Israel Doran in Part VII, where one may also find theories of the life span and mental health, as well as a wisdom-based model for psychological interventions to enhance well-being in later life.

The future of theories of aging serves as the concluding chapter. Contributed by Daphna Gans, Norella M. Putney, Vern L. Bengtson, and Merril Silverstein, it affords a review of some of the major themes, development and attempts to understand the multifaceted puzzle of aging. The authors maintain that there is a growing consensus across disciplines that this field of study should involve examination of the “interplay between factors that are intrinsic and extrinsic to the individual.” They also foresee as the goal of future theories of aging the likelihood for a comprehensive explanation of how and why aging-related change occurs.

Given the rising concerns about the labor market barriers faced by refugees, this book serves as a collection of 14 papers contributed by an equal number of experts who focus on the experiences and impacts of migration in contemporary advanced Western economies, at the time when restrictions on migration and the rights of entry of refugees have turned into a special focus of state policies. The papers are divided into three thematic areas: concepts and methodologies; state policies in relation to migration and refugees; and structural discrimination and strategies of response.

In the first part on concepts and methodologies contributes to research on the nexus between the labor market and refugees as well as recent migrants. It includes three chapters, the first of which is entitled “The Commonalities of Experience: Refugees and Recent Migrants,” written by Sonia McKay. According to the author, the experiences and motivation of an individual for migration vary according to the individual’s personal, political, economic and historic situation. Despite the notion of the different legislative and regulatory regimes governing refugees and recent migrants and the resulting different positions in labor market access, the author maintains that, in practice, refugees and recent migrants often end up working side by side.

In the second chapter, Allan M. Williams focuses on the theoretical perspectives of employability and international migration. The author sets out a conceptual framework for analyzing the complex relationship between employability and international migration. The author identifies four approaches to deal with the experience of migrants with regard to employability: the intersection of migration and employment regulations; intracompany mobility vs. free-agent movers; the changing nature of migration; and the employability of primary or lead migrants as opposed to “trailing migrants,” that may include spouses, children or elderly relatives. Three levels of analysis are discussed from the perspective of migrants’ employability:
national, firm/employer, and individual migrant levels. Given the
notion that the three levels are in fact interrelated, the author argues
that employability must be seen at the nexus of multilevel interests
and actions.

The author also takes note of the changing nature of
employability. Migration may be seen as an option for selective
migrants at times when the labor market is uncertain and may be
interwoven into the “flexpertise” – the ability to learn and adapt
quickly to changing circumstances – that allows “boundaryless
careers”. The author also discusses the question of whether the labor
market might turn into an entrapment or a stepping stone for migrants.
In the former case, the author refers to initial suboptimal labor market
entry with enduring consequences as migrants become trapped in a
particular job or a segment of labor market without being able to make
progress in their career path, with poor returns in terms of wages or
learning. In the latter case, the author maintains that migrants may use
their initial job to obtain another offering a better reward, given a
match of knowledge acquired by the migrants and the occupational
positions. The author ends his chapter by remarking that outcomes
do not always match aspirations and expectations, while raising the
question about migration functioning as a stepping-stone.

The third chapter, written by Sonia McKay and Paula Snyder,
highlights methodological challenges in researching the working
experiences of refugees and recent migrants. Key challenges and
methods used in response to the challenges are documented. Given
the notion that research is subject to provide the information of what
was and/or is the case on a truthful and honest basis, it is necessary for
a researcher to reflect carefully on “methodological issues and on the
consequences of the use of different methods in constructing the
research design and in conducting the research itself” (p. 49).

Part II focuses on state policies in relation to migration and
refugees, and furnishes case studies of five countries: Australia,
Canada, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.
In writing legal frameworks regulating the employment of refugees
and recent migrants, Tessa Wright and Sonia McKay rely on the case
of the United Kingdom to explore the historical account of
immigration policies and the access to welfare and the labor market,
with a discussion of the short- and long-term implications of excluding asylum seekers and undocumented migrants from the labor market. The impact of successive and increasing restrictive changes in immigration and asylum regimes on the employment prospects of those people is also explored.

In the Australian case, Val Colic-Peisker relies upon the data obtained from a three-year research project focused on the employment outcomes of three refugee groups in relation to their racial and cultural visibility and their likeliness to experience discrimination in the labor market. Given the notion of the authorities’ concern about social cohesion in Australia, the author maintains that the socio-economic and skills endowments of the refugees may be considered an important factor for their successful integration into society, but prejudice against people associated with refugee-generating countries and that on the basis of race, religion and ethnicity result in unsatisfactory employment outcomes. The author urges that the national system of qualifications recognition be more sensitive and flexible, with greater regulation of professional organizations and registration.

Part III on structural discrimination and strategies of responses focuses on the nexus between migration and labor market integration in Europe. In her chapter, entitled “Immigration and Labor Market Integration,” Anne Green highlights barriers faced by migrants and refugees in labor market access and in employment retention. At the local level, there is concern about the short-term impacts rather than long-term contributions of such employment. Case studies from the United Kingdom are provided to examine structural discrimination relating to employment. This is a contribution of Alice Bloch, based on a large-scale survey, to identify the interaction of personal characteristics, government policy and human capital with labor market outcomes. Besides the employability initiatives for refugees launched by the European Union toward good practices, contributed by Jenny Phillimore, an assessment of the future for refugees and recent migrants is presented by Sonia McKay as the concluding chapter. Based on an overall analysis of the existing barriers, routes are explored for successful labor market progress while the challenges are also identified.

Meanwhile, child sexual abuse is defined in terms of contacts or interactions between a child and an older or more knowledgeable child or adult, such as a stranger, sibling or parent, where the child is used as an object of gratification for the abuser’s sexual needs. According to ECPAT International, the actions are carried using force, threats, bribe or pressure. The activities do not necessarily involve bodily contact between the abuser and child. Abusive activities could include exhibitionism or voyeurism, whereby an adult may watch children undress or encourage or force children to engage in sexual activities with one another, while the abuser observes or films such activities.

Given the notion that both commercial sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse are under-researched in the Pacific and of the need for a better understanding of the situations in that part of the world, this book contains case studies of the situations in the Pacific from cultural, political, socio-economic and gender perspectives, with highlights on the root causes and consequences of both forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse.

Three papers commissioned by ESCAP are included, one of which is entitled “A Gender Analysis of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Sexual Abuse in the Pacific.” It was contributed by Ana Laqertabua of the United Nations

Based on a review of country reports from six countries, or areas, namely, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vauatu, the author provides an overview of key gender issues common to all of the studies, with a brief summary of the findings on the issue in each of those selected. The significance and impact of gender roles in commercial sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse are identified with a reference to Pacific traditions, cultures and beliefs, as well as the connections with the incidence of commercial sexual exploitation of children. The author maintains that there are different forms of such exploitation: child prostitution, child pornography, trafficking in children for sexual purposes, child sex tourism and child marriage, while the former three remain the primary forms.

Lagertabua also considers gender inequality and the socio-cultural environment as the root causes and significant contributing factors to the practices and tolerance of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse in that part of the world.

Focusing on five Pacific countries, namely Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, Naidu examines the trends at three levels: individuals, communities, and nation, in order to come up with a better understanding of the vulnerability from across a life cycle, changing individual and group values, norms and integrative institutions, the reactions of communities against changing social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances.

Naidu maintains that a combination of social, economic, cultural and political changes in those five Pacific island countries provides the context for increased child and youth vulnerability to
sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation. Amid growing income inequality and poverty, male dominance in power and the lack of protective laws contribute to male advantage over children and women. The formulation of appropriate policies is encouraged in order to protect children from such violations of their human rights.

Meanwhile, Rolls, the author of the third paper, argues that child abuse comes from all walks of life and includes respected members of society. Local offenders normally see a child as an object, while people are ranked by gender in all Pacific societies. Girls and boys are sexually abused and commercially sexually exploited.

According to Rolls, the combined influences of patriarchy, globalization, fundamentalism and militarism create an environment in which the right to live free from violence, particularly of girls and women, is not promoted or protected. Particularly in this part of the world, traditional authority or customary law operates alongside the formal, statutory legal system, which reinforces male power over women and authorizes violence against women by classifying acts of violence as acceptable under traditional or religious norms. To eliminate violence against women and girls, the culture and system of patriarchy must be addressed.

Rolls concludes her paper by highlighting the need for greater political and institutional support as well as increased financial resources to successfully mainstream gender equality and women’s and children’s human rights across key sectors.