Book Reviews

Siroj Sorajjakool

Human trafficking is a phenomenon, which has only recently caught global attention, and it has become quite infamous in Southeast Asia. In Human Trafficking in Thailand, Current Issues, Trends and the Role of the Thai Government, Siroj Sorajjakool seeks to clarify the problem, offering definitions, examining qualitative data, presenting a literature review, dissecting human trafficking into different types, scrutinizing what the Thai government has done, and positing ways to better understand and combat it.

Formerly a pastor, Sorrajakool is today Professor of Religion, Psychology and Counseling at Loma Linda University, California. He has written extensively on the issue of commercial sex work.

In Chapter One, Sorrajakool frames the issue of human trafficking. He stresses that the three prominent sources on human trafficking in Thailand are the US “Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report,” the UN “Global Report on Trafficking in Persons,” and Humantrafficking.org. All three reports found Thailand to be a source, destination and transit country for people subjected to human trafficking. Nevertheless, the author emphasizes that these studies tend to offer only fragmented data while governments sometimes refrain from cooperating with the agencies making the reports for fear of generating a negative perception of their country (22-23). Sorrajakool concludes that one can divide human trafficking into different types with one-third of the people trafficked into forced labor, another third in the sector industry and 80 percent minors (28).

The author, in Chapter Two, examines labor migration where Thailand is a destination and country of origin. He notes that economic and population growth in Thailand skyrocketing since 1960, led Thai employers to search for cheaper labor, which also produced exploitation in the workplace. But such
labor needs appealed to Burmese, Cambodians and Lao migrants. According to Sorrajakool, based upon an International Labor Organization survey, not all migrants had suffered from abuse or from human trafficking. However, he admitted that such surveys have had limitations. As for Thais migrating for work abroad, most tend to work in East Asia or the Middle East. Some of these, through deception, have ended up in forced labor or sexual servitude.

In Chapter Three, there is a discussion by the author of two types of human trafficking: on fishing vessels and in seafood-processing industries. The author begins by pointing out that Thailand is one of the globe's leading suppliers of seafood. As such, local suppliers are always looking for the cheapest labor. Thai, Burmese, Cambodian and Lao workers recruited into this industry are often deceived about salary or are sold to employers until they can pay off debt. In certain cases, individuals were kidnapped to work on fishing vessels. Some become slaves on such boats for months or years. Executions of crew by captains have occurred. As for the mostly Burmese people who work in seafood-processing factories, conditions are mixed. Some suffer extreme exploitation and brutality, while others work hard but make passable wages. Ultimately, Thailand's seafood industry appears to be where the country's worst victims of human trafficking work.

Chapter Four examines agriculture and human trafficking. In Thailand, more and more farmers have lost their land and have made less money. Thus, many Thais have gone abroad for agricultural work. In one case, farmers were deceived to go to the USA on the promise of higher wages. But upon reaching the new jobs, they tend to be underpaid, under threat and under restraint. Such human trafficking cases have been common. As for migrant agricultural workers in Thailand, unregistered workers have suffered much more than registered ones. Yet Sorrajakool implies that not enough is known about the human trafficking of migrant agricultural workers into Thailand (68).

In Chapter Five, the author looks at the human trafficking of domestic workers. Sorrajakool stresses that domestic workers are “neither recognized nor well protected by Thai...law (74).” While conditions for Thai domestic workers in Thailand have generally been positive, those for migrant domestic workers appear deficient. Reports of restraint of movement, underpayment, violence against employees, and verbal abuse abound. Many migrants allege that they were trafficked into their jobs, following coercion and deception.

Chapter Six is used by Sorrajakool to look at sex trafficking. He asks “What is the truth about...sex trafficking in Thailand? Will we ever really know the truth (89)?” He opines that in most cases, individuals are not the victims of human trafficking per se (since they knew they would be working as prostitutes). Instead, they “become trafficked” because when they arrive they some-