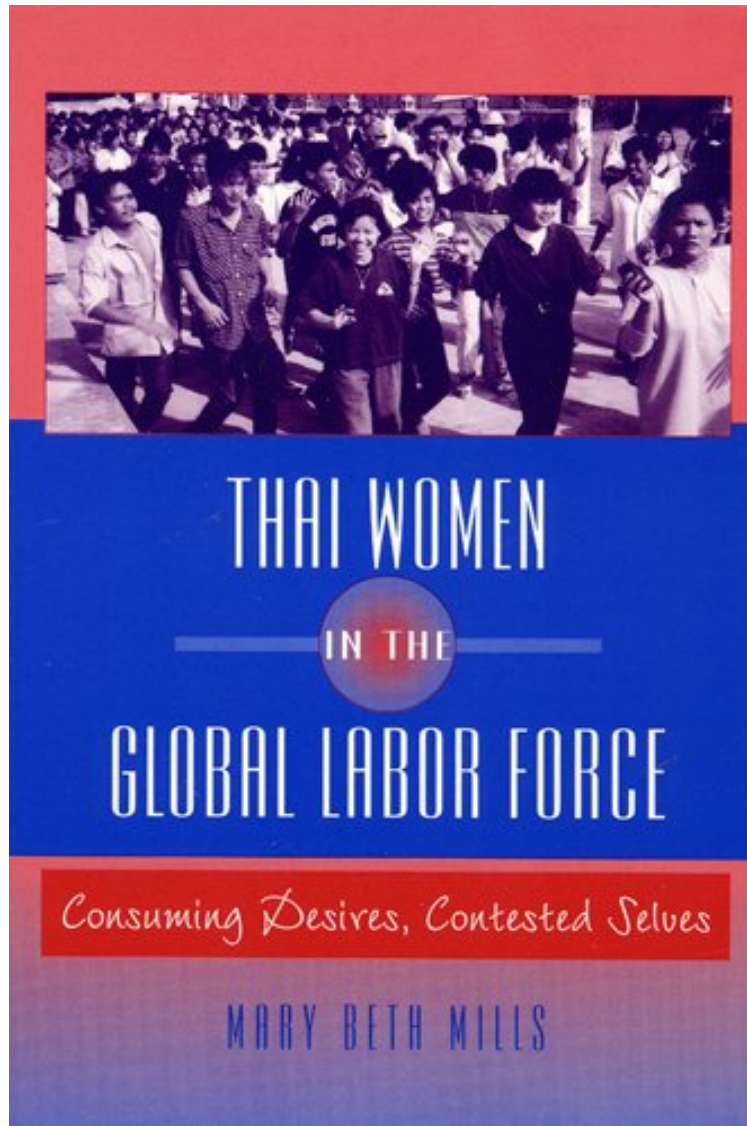


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Thai Women in the Global Labor Force: Consuming Desires, Contested Selves

Mary Beth Mills

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Most research on female labor migration in Thailand focuses on that country's infamous sex industry. Mary Beth Mills offers the first extended ethnographic analysis of rural women's movement into less visible occupations, paying particular attention to the hundreds of thousands of young women who fill the factories and sweatshops of the Bangkok metropolis. Mills follows the women as they travel from the village of Baan Naa Sakae to Bangkok, where they encounter new forms of consumption, new "modern" lifestyles, and a new sense of identity. She finds this rural-urban migration is more than a simple economic activity, but rather an elaborate process of cultural change. Mills describes the environments from which these women left, as well as the urban landscape they now call home. Hence, she examines key aspects of rural Thai community life, such as local consumption practices, gender roles, and the familial tensions that are often the catalyst to labor migration. Then she focuses on the city and the underlying tensions of urban employment as migrants pursue newly imagined identities as modern women, while still upholding economic and moral responsibilities to rural kin.

"Mills presents a thorough and complex picture of the kinds of changes and challenges confronting young Thai women today." -- Diane L. Wolf, author of *Factory Daughters* From the Back Cover Most research on the female labor force in Thailand focuses on that country's infamous sex industry. Mary Beth Mills offers the first extended ethnographic analysis of less visible occupations, paying particular attention to the hundreds of thousands of young rural women who migrate to Bangkok to fill the factories and sweatshops of the metropolis. She sees this rural-urban migration as an elaborate process of cultural change, with broad implications for the future of the labor force. Mills describes key aspects of rural Thai community life, such as local consumer practices, gender roles, and the familial tensions that are often the catalysts for labor migration. She then focuses on the underlying tensions of urban employment as migrants pursue newly imagined identities as modern women, while still upholding economic and moral responsibilities to rural kin. By departing from the most common ethnographic portrayals of Thai women-as peasants or prostitutes- this book expands our understanding of how gender and gender relations are constructed, contested, and transformed in contemporary Thai society. About the Author Mary Beth Mills is an assistant professor of Anthropology at Colby College.