

Mail Order Brides

Taking a Look From a New Perspective

by Sarah Rene Stone

Examining the increasing occurrence of the mail order bride industry in the US, leads one into a very interesting discovery, that there are so many outside factors that play into this controversial occurrence. In depth research will lead way outside the scope of US based mail order bride web pages and magazines and instead it becomes evident that the problem lies not in the business entrepreneurs themselves but in the system where their business thrives. Questions need to be address and responsibilities taken as to why this industry is present in the beginning? What type of conditions create a society to accept the co modification of women to such an extend, and what reasons are women so willing to put at stake everything in order to allow such behavior? This web site is dedicated to forming an answer to a very complicated problem, that of trying to comprehend how in the society that we live in today promotes the buying and selling of women.

There are several differing factors that I have found that may begin to explain this current situation. They are displayed on the tabs to left, by no means however am I implying that these are the only factors involved in the continuing mail order bride industry but in my opinion these topics represent some of the most influential. It is my hope that as students of all ages wanting to learn more about this will read through some of the facts I have compiled and then go out and do some research of their own. Through education there in lies the key to women's hope and salvation.

General Information About the Mail Order Bride Industry

It is important to note first and foremost the life of a mail order bride is not one luxury but of necessity. The position many of these women find themselves involves in many cases, abuse, slavery, bondage, and sexual assault. Although this situation is not a set norm for all relationships formed through the mail industry, however they do represent the majority. In the first place the relationship is not based on any sort of equal power structure, generally the address's and information of women is bought and sold as a form of capital. Many business flourish as a result of this sale, including such business such as hotels and airlines, immigration offices that help couples apply for citizenship, and agencies like private investigators that advertise to check the background of your future bride.

- A very prominent company known as Cherry Blossom Inc. sells a woman's

information starting at \$200 and up 7

- This companies gross income also has exceeded over ¹A a million dollars in the past. 12

The country that one could say exports the highest number of mail order brides is currently the Philippines. It is interesting to note however that such practices are outlawed in the Philippines, and yet the industry still continues to flourish. 6

- Women in the Philippines represent the largest marriage market. 5
- "Mail order bride companies were heralded as an unemployed Filipinas salvation" 9 (pg.77)
- Between 1989-1994 -94926 Filipinos became engaged to foreign men. By 1996 over 200 mail order bride companies operated in the US . 9 (pg.77)
- In 1990 legislation in the Philippines was passed banning and penalizing local recruiters and publishers of mail order bride companies. 12 (pg. 137)
- Also passed the Philipino Republic Act No. 6955 making the selling of women illegal. 15
- The Philippines exports the highest # of brides per year than any other country. 15

The US has a very important role in this economy of traveling women, it is no surprise that many US men seek out brides through these agencies. This trend has become over the past decade quite public and more readily accessible to more and more men. Perhaps it is due to the economy of the US and the ability of the male population here to purchase brides, which is not the case for the rest of the world.

- US is the #1 importer of mail order brides, then Australia and finally Canada. 12(pg.136)
- US is the tope importer of Philippine women...70% 18
- 2,000-3,500 American men find their bride through mail order catalogs each year/ interestingly many of these companies are owned by former mail order couples. 12 (pg. 137)
- Cherry Blossom claims to have brought together over 10,000 couples in 1996 alone. 7

Many men on the mail order web sites express their disappointment with the modern american woman, stating often times that she is to demanding and not willing to take on the traditional responsibilities of the household. Men are shrowded in a mythological reality about Asian women, many men believe that these women take on this more traditional value more seriously than american women, and that investing in a mail order bride will solve their problems. Essentially what is being commodified and sold to the predominantly white middle to upper class male is the image of a obedient, subservient maid/sexual servant that can be bought and purchased through the modern convenience of VISA, Mastercard or check. Of course however this is not the reality, and when fantasy meets reality it is the perfect combination for disaster.

- Filipina are normally younger than the men who they marry 5-30 years. 12 (129)
- Filipino culture of matriarchal/wanting to be in charge of family finances and

What would economics have to do with mail order brides, we know that the companies themselves are grossing for some in the millions but what is the incentive for women? Primarily women in the Philippines are faced with a situation of economic crisis. It is undeniable that the US is viewed as a land of opportunity, and clearly there is more wealth here than in many countries around the world. And so it becomes obvious that women are seeking a better life outside their current economic situation. Here are some shocking facts about the kind of poverty women in the Philippines are facing.

- No jobs available at high enough pay besides those that are outside the country or involve the sexual exploitation of one's body. 1
- In Philippines 70% of resources and capital are held by the top 10% of the population and 50.5 % live under the poverty level. 12 (pg. 134)
- Unemployment of women in 1991 in the Philippines was 18.3% compared to 11.9% for men. 12(pg.135)
- The Philippines Overseas Employment Agency estimated that in 1991 there were 476,693 Overseas Contract Workers (OCW's) an increase of 59% in less than a 7 year period. 12 (pg. 134)
- The second fastest growing ethnic group in the US is Filipino/ 2 million work and live and pay taxes in the US/ 60-70% are women. 13
- Over 70% of women in the Philippines live in poverty like conditions. 18
- 94.9 % of the population lives at or under \$2 a day in 1998 19
- Most women have worked in the before marrying in the US in Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, or the Middle East as domestic servants. 12 (pg.129)
- Many women view marriage as a much better situation than simply working as a domestic servant, it comes with a better status and more opportunities. 12 (137)
- 20 million women and children are estimated to be trafficked for the purposes of sexual service each year. 4

The above conditions also create an ideal climate for other forms of sexual exploitation such as prostitution. Those women who cannot find a husband online are forced to peruse other avenues. Clearly it is evident that the conditions under which these women are forced to try and survive creates the template for a thriving industry of sexual trafficking, where the body is worth more than the labor it can produce, instead the body becomes the commodity. The situation facing the women in the Philippines is not unique it is quite similar to that facing many other women around the world. This trade of sex and service is not limited to the women of the Philippines. Especially due to the tightening of US immigration laws it is believed that soon the only way for women to immigrate to the US will be through marriage. 12(pg.128)

Child Prostitution

Many children face the same economic crisis as women and are just as vulnerable to the sex industry as well. Younger women are being targeted for prostitution at an alarming rate, this type of atmosphere creates a climate where there are little or no other better opportunities for the young to seek except outside marriage.

- In 1996 UN reported that 1 million Asian children in the sex trade. 1
- Children are often preferred to adults for labor they will work under worse conditions/ yet they are more vulnerable to sexual abuse as well/ in case of child domestic workers sexual abuse is common. 10 (pg.67)
- According to CHIPS the NGO servicing children in Cubao/ 50% of them are forced into prostitution by relatives. 17
- About 20% in Metro Manila are minors who enter the profession at 14 years. 17
- there are 3,000 street children in Davao City some have sex for free they are called "buntog" these children have sex for free until they menstruate and graduate into paid sexual industry. 17

There are many organizations that are against the trafficking of children, there are some also listed below, along with a graph of the extraordinary amount of children in Asia suffering from malnutrition which may explain as to why some of these children are faced with going into prostitution.

Links

- NGO's working on Child Trafficking: Global March Against Child Labour

The Military

The conclusion of many who write about the mail order bride industry is that it has roots in the history of military bases and their exploitation of women and their sexuality. Because of a supposed need to boost moral or protect the local women the military has a history of cooperating with local business men around their bases to arrange for the sexual servicing of the soldiers. Here is some background information which will explain how eventually the mail order bride industry came to be born.

- Between 1957-67 US established 7 bases/prostitution rose 20,000-400,000 1
- On set of the Korean and Vietnam war the US helped to establish "Rest and Recreation" facilities to up morale of the US soldiers. 1
- Around GI towns in South Korea some 18,000 women were registered with local health authorities/and another 9,000 were employed outside the bars. 3
- US and Public of Korea signed status of Forces Act in 1967 which puts US military bases there indefinitely 3
- The sex industry in Vietnam War grossed 16 million US dollars for the Thai economy. 1
- Men in Honolulu paid \$3 for 3 minutes of sexual service/ close to 250,000 men per month were serviced between 1941-1944. 8
- 250 prostitutes paid \$1 a year to be registered as entertainers. 8 (pg. 145)
- May Act/ made prostitution illegal in Honolulu. 8 (pg. 146)
- Navy and Army made local policies in Honolulu regarding prostitutes
 - o women must have regular medical exams
 - o they were unable to buy property in Hawaii
 - o prohibited from buying a car
 - o had a curfew of 10:30

- o and forbidden to marry any members of the armed forces 8 (pg. 146)
- Women would have to sleep with at least 55 men per month to pay for everything
 - o the women only received \$2 from the men
 - o \$ 100 went towards rent each month
 - o \$13 for venereal testing 8 (pg.146)
- By the late 1960's the Philippines was hosting 10,000 service men a day/55,000 women which were referred to by the service men often as " little brown fucking machines" this name has extended into today as well. 16 (pg-13)

This history of the military created an industry for women and men to prosper out of, yet when the men left and the bases were empty so to were the pockets and lives of many women. Here it is believed that the industry turned into one of bringing the women to the men if the men could not be there for he women. Of course some military officers brought home brides with them, however these arrangements often do not differ much from those made online through match making companies. Even though the military denies that such things took place there is to much contrary evidence to deny the truth. And although to be involved in prostitution is illegal for the military it still takes place, and it's consequences can be seen clearly within society. There are many ways that the military is protected from prosecution from crimes against women as well, such as by president Bush's proclamation which can be read down below among other things.

- protection for US military personnel employ women with ID those without are prohibited from servicing US men. 3
- Roughly 3,000 marriages take place each year between Korean women and GI's/~80% end in divorce. 3
- Now there are still at least 35,000 troops and 120-180 military bases in Korea/ which is only a 1/4 the size of CA. 3
- One private bases even though there were confirmed knowledge of sex industry no soldiers could be prosecuted because as often happens the base was a private base and therefore not answerable to the same code as the US military. 5
- Even though ICC (international criminal court) can prosecute sex offenders president Bush refused to participate with UN peace keeping unless Americans were granted immunity from the ICC. 5
- On bases women who have contracted STD's have their picture displayed upside down on public notice boards. 8 (pg.149)
- Navy finally did acknowledge having a contract with Olongapo/ a sexually exploitative contract. 16(pg.15)
- Approximately 50,000 children have been fathered by US service men over the past 5 decades. 16 (pg-15)

Below are some links that will lead to other stories and facts about militarized prostitution and some groups that are fighting against it.

Links

- Danielle Knight, Women Demand End to Military Violence
- YWCA of Japan says military bases threaten women and children

Sex Tourism

There is a definite connection between the sex tourism industry and mail order brides, just as mentioned in the military section it is a modern way of shipping the product to the person with the modern convenience of experiencing the exotic from the comfort of your home. Men can now go to countries such as Thailand and the Philippines and enjoy the relations with a woman that they have no worries about being reported to anyone. This industry set up an area where such atrocities as mail order brides are as common as a sexual tour in an Asian country.

- In Manila "hospitality women" in 1981 there were 1,7000, and in 1986 there were 7,000.
- In Thailand women were forced to have sex with as many as 20 men a day, no condoms and cost of medical care and abortion added to their debt. 10 (pg. 67)
- Trafficking is often combined with debt -bondage which transports women across national boundaries for various purposes, of which domestic work, "mail order brides" marriage and prostitution are most common. 10 (pg.67)
- Marcos and advisors with the help of loaning banks have decided that the Filipino women should be the new "natural resource"/ resulted in 1980's 85% of tourists visiting country were men and sex tourism was crucial to the governments economic survival. 11 (pg. 38)
- Japan corners 97% of market for Entertainers. 12 (pg.136)
- By mid 1980's in the Philippines prostitution was a \$500 million industry a year. 16(pg.13)
- In 1995 of the Philippines 640 million dollar budget of the DOT 65% came from tourism to Philippines. 17
- Estimated earnings from sex trade is \$7 billion today. 18
- Philippines has 800,000 women in the sex industry more than any other country currently. 18
- In Thailand -60% of tourist visit solely for the purpose of sexual service. 1

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

There are many women due to the sex trade industry that become infected with HIV/AIDS or various other diseases and STI's. Due to the threat and danger of catching diseases many men today and in the past have started a terrible trend to fix the problem and put their minds to ease. This fix involves finding and using younger and younger women as prostitutes, the myth here is that these children could not possible have any diseases, even though this is completely to the contrary. Some experts estimate that due to the nature of how these diseases are transmitted in Asian countries and the rate at which they are spreading may make it possible for this epidemic to evolve to the same proportions that Africa now faces.

- Thailand-1.5 million women have HIV. 1

- UNAIDS warn that 1/2 of the HIV carriers in Asia are under 25 years old. 1
- Children have increased chance of contracting STD's due to "increased biological vulnerability" and "power in negotiating safe sexual behavior" 1
- 60% of the 30 hardcore street children in Cubao Quezon City suffer from Gonorrhea. 17

Groups Against Trafficking of Women

Some-groups against the trafficking of women have very differing views on to how the situation of sexual exploitation such be handled world wide. For example certain groups want to outlaw all types of prostitution and sexual trafficking of women, however others want to legalize certain aspects of prostitution in order to better protect those women whom voluntarily participate. Many groups however realize that there is a societal change that must be made first in order for any real difference to occur, for instance some governments have taken initiative to outlaw prostitution and then they arrest mainly targeting the women. However these governments offer no training or alternative job placement for these women, therefore where else do they go back to work but to what they know. This situation is a real problem that many groups are fighting and will continue to fight in the future.

- Kathleen Barry "Founder of the Coalition Against Trafficking of Women"
- Northwest Asian Weekly 2
- Cham Sarang started a shelter called "True Love Mission" 3
- Women's Campside Protection Council 3
- My Sister's Place " A shelter for young women married to service men" 3
- National Campaign for Eradication of Crime by US Troops in Korea 3
- CATW- is against all trafficking of women (it started in the Netherlands and has helped 900 women, yet an estimated 1,000-2,000 are trafficked into there a year. 10 (pg. 70)
- GAATW is against outlawing all forms of trafficking stating that is would eliminate women's right to choice. 10 (pg. 62)

Links

- Women taking the Initiative: The Women's Movement in South Korea
- The Purple Rose Campaign
- Nepal-Facts about Trafficking and Prostitution
- Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women
- Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATWAP)
- Actions around the world to stop the Trafficking of women
- APHD
- Gabriela

References

1. Kuo, Michelle. Asia's Dirty Secret. Harvard International Review:Cambridge. 2000. Vol. 22 Iss. 2
2. Consalvo, Mia. "3 shot dead in courthouse": Examining news coverage of

- domestic violence and mail-order brides. *Women's Studies in Communication: Los Angeles*. Fall 1998. Vol. 21 Iss. 2
3. Kirk, Gwyn. Speaking Out-Militarized Prostitution in South Korea. *Women's Center: University of Virginia*. 1995 n. 33 p. 40-6
 4. United States: abuse of Filipinas protested in 'frisco. *Off Our Backs Inc*. 2001
 5. US military contractors involved in sex trafficking in Bosnia. *Off Our Backs*. 2002.
 6. Tough Shove: A Mail-order Bride Finds US Marriage is Grounds for Exile. *Wall Street Journal*. Ed.v CCXXXIV n45 1999.
 7. Egan, Timothy. Mail-Order Marriage, Immigrant Dreams and Death. *New York Times*. National Edition 1996
 8. Enloe, Cynthia. *The morning After*. University of California Press:Berkeley.1993.
 9. Enloe, Cynthia. *Maneuvers*. University of California Press:Berkeley. 2000.
 10. Kempadoo, Kamala and Doezema, Jo. *Global Sex Workers*. Routledge: New York and London. 1998.
 11. Enloe, Cynthia. *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*. University of California Press. Berkeley. 1989.
 12. Ordonez, Raquel. Filipino Americans transformation and identity. *Thousand Oaks:CA*. 1997p.121-142
 13. Astorga-Garcia, Mila. Not a Love Story. *The Philippine Reporter*. Feb. 16-28.1994.
 14. Ali,Perveen. Kohl Amendment No.3848.Gabriela Network Northwest Chapter News. March 1998.
 15. Manalo, Armando. Mail Order Brides. Independent paper.
 16. Coronel, Sheila and Rosca, Ninotchka. *For the Boys*. Ms. Nov/Dec 1993 p. 11-15
 17. Gabriella workshop packet,
 18. Purple Rose Web site <http://www.purplerosecampaign.org/>
 19. The World Bank. 2003 World Development Indicators, p. 7,111.