

CHAPTER 6

THE COMPLEXITY OF FEMINIZATION OF GARLIC PRODUCTION

The previous chapter showed that while some garlic farmers positively adapt to the new market system by diversifying crops or expanding work to off-farm field and even enlarge farm land, other farmers gave up garlic production, to avoid going further in debt or to simply keep what they had and therefore never really adapted to the new structure. The result of this is a widening gap between the farmers, demonstrating multiple trajectories of livelihood strategies.

With regard to the garlic labor process, since the price of the garlic fluctuates every year, on the one hand, the farmers tried to get through the recession period by maximizing their source of income besides garlic production. On the other hand, they also tried to cut labor costs, even if a little, and it directly affected wage labor in the village. Now, the other important actor who contributes to the persistence of garlic production in Si Dong Yen Sub-district is wage labor.

Today, wage is an important second source of income for rural households whether it is from on-farm or off-farm (Goodman and Redclift, 1982; Kearney, 1996; Eder, 1999; Rigg, 2001, 2005; Yos, 2008). Thus, to study the hardening livelihood of paid work and their changing social relations is important for understanding of the whole picture of agrarian transition through the trade liberalization of certain agricultural crops.

In this chapter, I first look at the phenomenon of the feminization of agriculture from two perspectives: first, its physical representation, and then the deteriorating work conditions associated with it. In addition, despite adverse circumstances, which wage laborers are actually active and positive to work are pointed to in the next section. In the last section, I identify an increase in the use of migrant labor as a possible cause of the

marginalization of local Thai labor, and especially women, from the garlic production system, a trend that suggests the complex form of feminization in agricultural labor.

6.1 Physical Feminization: The Increased Presence of Women in Agriculture

Two factors in “feminization of agriculture” were fully explained in Section 1.5.3 of Literature Review and in the Section 1.6 of Conceptualization in detail already. The first relates to how more women than men participate in the agricultural labor force. The second indicates that the labor system and/or conditions experienced are “feminine” in nature: that is, with low wages, long hours, insecure hiring systems - such as the use of seasonal and temporary work, unhealthy work conditions and few or no opportunities to improve personal skill levels.

I have introduced detail labor process in garlic production and gender division of labor in it in Section 3.2 of Chapter 3, but how has the garlic production labor situation changed in terms of its gender balance as a result of the price drop brought by trade liberalization? First, it seems that men are still needed in terms of providing labor and in terms of decision making, as can be seen from one case in which a woman who lost her husband due to an accident had to give-up cultivating garlic altogether - although she continued farming other vegetables. There was also another case where a woman’s husband became so busy with construction work that garlic production within the family unit ceased completely. This woman told me that she stopped growing garlic because she was too tired to manage it alone – without the input of male labor, and that although she could have hired-in labor when necessary, she did not do so this because it would have increased her labor costs and thus her risk of falling into debt – particularly if the price of garlic fell. In short, in contrast to other farm crops, where women have continued to produce after their husband has left the agricultural sector, within the garlic production sector women have tended to halt their production activities completely when their husband’s leave, and as a result, the male-female component within garlic production has not changed that much in terms of garlic cultivators.

However, when I look at wage labor patterns in the village, the situation is a

little different. First of all, on farms that have reduced their garlic production levels (but not ceased producing garlic altogether), men have tended to continue cultivating other cash crops on the farms, rather than find off-farm work, whereas, in contrast, the women have tended to engage in agricultural wage labor to increase their income levels, as well as help the men with crop production activities when required. Second, for families where the men *have* left agriculture altogether, the women have tended to halt garlic production activities and instead continue with other cash crops, and/or have become agricultural wage laborers on other farms. In addition to these cases there have also been cases like Mrs. Daa and her husband, which I referred to in Section 5.2 of Chapter 5. The couples have had to give up garlic production because to continue would have meant increasing their debt levels. In such cases, people usually work as wage laborers while renting out their own land to others.

The important point to make here is that in both cases the situation has contributed to an increase in the amount of wage labor provided by women in the agricultural sector. Even in the case where the couple gave up their garlic production activities completely, the husband may find off-farm work in construction. Since the job opportunities available to women outside agriculture are limited in Dong Pa Sak Village and in Chai Pra Kan District, many, especially of 30 years of age or more and with a low level of education¹, have tended to remain in the agricultural sector in this region. Thus, since the garlic recession began, the number of women undertaking agricultural wage labor, those whose status is lower and more feminine than the growers in terms of income and other working conditions, has increased within the Si Dong Yen region.

With regard to age and working opportunity of rural women in Thailand, farm women, ranging in age from 35 to 40 years old and up, tended to be left behind due to their lack of education compared with current Thai youth (both men and women), or due to lack of off-farm wage labor opportunities in comparison with men villagers. In today's Thai village, many women in their 30s or at least 40s and above finished only

¹ In Thai villages today, many of the women above thirties have only attained a primary school education level, whereas women under 30 have often finished to high school or even university level.

primary school, which is different from those who are now under 30 years old, who often finish high school or even university. Even women from the village often gained a university degree if they were currently in their 20s.

Since wage laborers' livelihood conditions are hard and they receive a low wage, many people who have already worked as laborers explore other sources of income, including off-farm work. For those looking at other forms of paid work, one of the most common choices is to work on a construction site, though the jobs here are mainly for men. As I mentioned previously, the number of men from the Si Dong Yen region engaged in construction work seems to have been comparatively smaller. Yet when I spoke to some people in Dong Pa Sak Village, all of them, including the village headman, told me that many men go to work on construction sites, mainly because the wages are better (200 baht per day in general). For example, Mr. Lek, who is in his early fifties, now works exclusively on a construction site where he is the head of a construction team and earns 300 baht per day, which is double the wage in the agriculture sector today. Their older son, who is in his early 30s, also works at construction sites at 200 baht per day although he sometimes helps his mother in farming, including garlic production. They have another son who is in his late 20s. But this son does not work in construction, but mainly works in agricultural fields, helping his mother. He does not work in construction mainly because he does not think that the job is suited to him. The work at construction sites is also on a daily, weekly, or monthly contract bases and is not stable either. But as that work is still better paid than the feminine-type agricultural labor, most of the men in the village prefer it.

In another example of people working other than as wage laborers, I met two people who are vegetable traders; having given up their garlic production activities because they sometimes lost money. One, a woman named Mrs. Duang, became a garlic trader in around 2004 (I will describe her as a trader in the following section), whilst the other, Mr. Pong - in his early fifties, became a vegetable trader about 10 years ago. Mr. Pong, in partnership with his wife, buys green vegetables in Dong Pa Sak Village from the farmers - sometimes already harvested and sometimes direct from the field having harvested them himself with the help of hired laborers. He then sells

vegetables to wholesale markets in Chiang Rai, to the north of Chiang Mai Province. Both Mrs. Duang and Mr. Pong earn more money as traders than they would do as agricultural wage laborers, though they are lucky enough to have had funds available to set up the business in the first place, plus have a flair for business.

In summary a number of garlic producers have given up their garlic production activities – with the men tending to continue with other cash crops or find off-farm work, and with the women tending to stay within the agricultural sector as crop growers or wage workers. At the same time, agricultural wage workers in the area have tended to look for better paid jobs, with the men finding off-farm work on construction sites more easily than women, whose job opportunities are very limited in Chai Pra Kan District. These changes have resulted in an increase in the number of women working in the agricultural sector in the region, particularly as vulnerable wage laborers of low wage without negotiating power.

6.2 Symbolic Feminization: Vulnerable Wage Labor

Garlic production traditionally requires the intensive use of labor for both garlic planting and harvest largely supported by daily wage laborers (Figure 6.1). After trade liberalization, in addition to original wage laborers including migrant workers, female members of farm family who reduced garlic production level, came to join wage labor. There are farmers who have only a small amount of farmland, yet have stopped growing crops due to increasing debt, rent-out their land to others and began to work as wage laborers. The status of wage laborers is casual, unstable and low-paid, representing the second system of feminine-type labor covered in this work.

In terms of payment types, three methods exist: payments based on a time basis (either hourly or daily), payments based on a contract for a certain workload (*mao* in Thai), and piece rates. The first one and second one were similar, but their difference was important in the following situation. Suppose that there was a work involving planting garlic today. During 2006 and 2009, the daily wage for agricultural labor was



Figure 6.1 Wage laborers go back to home after garlic planting.

120 baht for a woman and 140 or 150 baht for men in the Si Dong Yen region. For the case of payment on a time basis, when laborers finished to plant garlic earlier, they received only a payment of a half day, or they had to do some other job to fulfill one day's work. For the *mao* payment there is a common understanding among farmers as to how much work deserves a 60 baht or 120 baht payment; for example, 12 people planting garlic over 1 *rai* are paid 120 baht per person, and in this situation, even if the workers finish the job quickly, such as within five hours, they receive 120 baht. In another case, a garlic grower may decide that he or she will pay 1,400 baht for planting garlic on about 1 *rai* of land, and so whatever number of laborers come to work on that day – whether 10 or 15 people, this 1,400 baht will be equally divided among the laborers. This is also called the *mao* system.

The *mao* system is often adopted by the garlic growers in Dong Pa Sak Village, firstly because they believe such a method is more economical than paying on a time basis and secondly because they are able to know in advance exactly how much money they will need to pay. Furthermore, the laborers also work harder and quicker when they know what their goal is. However, for the wage laborers themselves, the *mao* system means that they have to work hard as a group, and the individual wage often ends up smaller.

The wages of 120 baht per day or 3,000 baht per 25 days for women, and of 140 or 150 baht per day or 3,500 to 3,750 baht for men are quite low if compared with, for

example, about 5,000 baht monthly salary of new high-school graduates, about 8,000 baht of new university graduate student, and about 10,000 baht of new master-degree graduates². Yet, considering that the wages in farm work in 1986 was 26 baht per day for females, and 30.5 baht per day for males (Benchaphun *et al.*, 1987: 63), I notice that it is also rising.

It is true that hundreds of laborers work in the garlic fields every day during the garlic planting season starts in October and its harvesting season in February and March. However, there are also several types of work even in off-season of garlic, and wage workers are able to find some work at these times, though the demand each day may not be as high as during the garlic season. While the wage rate for women is 120 baht per day for those who work on the garlic farms, it might be 120 to 150 baht per day for other agricultural work, depending on the employers. In fact, prior to conducting my field research, I thought that most of the wage labor would be carried out in support of garlic production in Dong Pa Sak Village, but I was wrong. Since Dong Pa Sak villagers grow shallots, sweet corn, potatoes, chilies and various green vegetables besides garlic, many wage laborers said that there is a constant demand for wage labor throughout the year. Since there is such a variety of work available, several of the women laborers told me that they had not felt any adverse impacts from the introduction of the FTA in terms of the demand for labor.

While some wage laborers have not felt any of the impacts of liberalization within their work, two labor leaders or labor coordinators told me on different occasions that the opportunities available for waged work had decreased because the level of garlic production had decreased in Dong Pa Sak Village. A labor coordinator is a person who is contacted by the garlic growers directly in search of labor; for example, the farmers might tell a labor coordinator that they need 25 wage laborers on Sunday of the following week, after which the coordinator will find people who can work on that day, charging the farmers one or two baht per laborer on top of their wage. These coordinators look for laborers not only for the garlic producers but also in support of

² The general starting salary for new graduates recommended by Thai Labor Ministry in 2010.

other agricultural activities, but since farmers usually only contact the coordinators when they need a lot of labor all at once, it is mostly for garlic or potato production reasons that they call. If the farmers need only a few laborers they tend to find them by themselves, usually by contacting their neighbors. For this reason, the labor coordinators are probably the first to notice the decrease in the demand for labor due to the fall in garlic production levels.

Many farmers began to grow potatoes, corn and other vegetables instead of garlic following introduction of the government-led garlic production reduction program after trade liberalization, and as a result of this, the demand for agricultural labor in Dong Pa Sak Village began to fall. Garlic production requires the use of a significant amount of labor; for example, planting 1 *rai* of garlic alone requires 12 people working together. Compared with it, sweet corn requires less labor - both for sowing and harvesting. In addition, since sweet corn does not have to be sprayed with as many chemicals as garlic, farmers generally do not need to hire labor to carry this out. Potato cultivation also requires a significant amount of labor for the planting and harvesting activities, though not as much as garlic, plus potato growers tend to hire migrant labor, as will be shown in a later section.

Although the demand for wage labor in Dong Pa Sak Village seems still high except for the tendency of small decreases due to garlic production reducing, my other question is how they can live with such a small wage of 120 to 150 baht per day. Although it is 120 baht per day, it does not mean that the people can find work 30 days per month. A wage worker, Mrs. Bin, who is mainly working in agricultural fields, told me that she can find work on 20 days per month on average. It means that she can make 2,400 baht per month. Since her husband is also working as a wage laborer, his income is about 2,800 baht per month. Thus, their total income for the family is 5,200 baht per month.

Whether this amount of monthly income seems small or not depends on the persons. Following is a conversation with Mrs. Bin:

The author: Do you think the wage of 120 baht is too little?

Mrs. Bin: Yes, it is too little. Especially, under recent economics ---, goods are becoming expensive, and the rice also became much expensive.

The author: Can you make ends meet?

Mrs. Bin: Yes, we can live somehow. But... last year, my daughter had to take 20 baht to school for lunch fee. The son took 15 baht per day. This year it rose because my daughter joined Junior-high-school. She takes 30 baht per day because the price of rice went up. My son takes 20 baht.

The author: If you and your husband worked hard, how much can you make money a day?

Mrs. Bin: Two hundred and sixty baht per day. Sometimes we don't go to work. For example, today is also free. In one month, we go to work for about 20 days in average.

The author: It means that women can make 2,400 baht and men can make money 2,800 baht... And can you live with it?

Mrs. Bin: Yes, we can live somehow.

(Mrs. Bin, a wage labor in her early 40s, 25 May 2008)

During the interview, her voice was rather gloomy. When I asked whether they could make ends meet, she mentioned about her children's lunch fees; it is not at all easy to make ends meet.

Compared with Mrs. Bin, Mrs. Daa is rather accepting of her life although her livelihood is similar to Mrs. Bin:

The author: You make money 120 to 140 baht per day, and your husband makes 150 baht. Can you live with them?

Mrs. Daa: Yes, we can live somehow. --- But we have to live quietly.

The author: Does it mean that the expense of your family is not much?

Mrs. Daa: Not a lot. But we don't live better-off. We live day by day. Because even though we go wage labor, we cannot make so much money. We don't have saving. So we have to go wage labor every day. We don't need investment.

(Mrs Daa, a woman in her early 40s of Dong Pa Sak Village, 25 Mar 2008)

Mrs. Daa also has two daughters. Thus, her family structure is same as Mrs. Bin. Her

last words, “We don’t need investment,” comes from comparison with garlic production because she has in the past given up garlic production due to increasing debt. In fact, Mrs. Daa also seems to have had her own land to cultivate, but she had to sell it out of necessity of money for her family. Thus, she is not satisfied satisfy with being a wage laborer now. Whether accepting or not, making ends meet as a wage labor is not easy.

Different from above are two families. It seems that wage workers can live a better life if they do not have any children. Mrs. Yoo and her husband also work exclusively as wage laborers after giving up their own farming more than 30 years ago.

She said:

We live from hands to month. But we could also buy TV, radio, washing machine, and so on by working as wage labor. We saved the wages. Although we don’t have much money, we could buy.

(Mrs. Yoo, a wage labor in her early 60s of Dong Pa Sak Village, 28 May 2008)

So I asked that it was because they did not have children, so they did not have any burden. She replied:

Yes, it is correct. We have no burden. We don’t have to send children to school. Those who have child, they have to work a little harder. If the children go to Chiang Mai, they need a lot of money.

(Mrs. Yoo, a wage labor in her early 60s of Dong Pa Sak Village, 28 May 2008)

Although she owned various kinds of electrical appliance for house, her house itself was roughly-built, Northern Thai traditional wooden house, which was different from fore-mentioned, garlic farmers’ modern, well-built house. Thus, Mrs. Yoo is very much satisfied with her life. But I cannot necessarily conclude that her life is better in terms of economic status.

Although I explained that Mrs. Daa is accepting a life as a wage laborer, she does not think that it is a good occupation. She has two daughters: one is already about 20 years old; the other is still a schoolgirl. Since Mrs. Daa told me that her older

daughter is currently looking for work, I asked whether she would want her children to work in agriculture. She replied:

No. I want them to work in the city. Work like this is not stable. If they work in the city, they can get monthly salary.

(Mrs. Daa, a wage labor in her early 40s of Dong Pa Sak Village, 25 Mar 2008)

Even though she knows that to work as an agricultural wage laborer is instable and one cannot save money, she accepted it without being able to find any other job. Thus, I categorized them as feminine-type laborers or vulnerable wage laborers.

Since garlic production provides good work opportunities in terms of agricultural wage labor, its decline has been reflected in a decreased demand for labor in the village as a whole, and this reflects one aspect of the feminization of agricultural labor, which is often accompanied by a greater level of labor insecurity.

6.3 Exploitation of Women under the Piece-Work System

Although garlic farmers in Dong Pa Sak Village often seem better-off, on the whole, due to garlic's feature of a high return crop, for small-scale farmers, it is also true that their livelihood is always unstable because of high risks of garlic crops failing. That is why, most farm women of these families engage in wage labor, and the kind of work is often piece-work job, if there are jobs available.

Previously, I introduced three methods of payment for the work carried out within the garlic cultivation process: payments made on a time basis, payments for a certain workload (the *mao* system), and payments using piece rates. This third payment method is one based on results, a system very similar to that used in other industrial commodity production activities such as sewing clothes or embroidery; work prevalent among rural women in Northern Thailand, though not so much in Si Dong Yen Sub-district. This payment method has been adopted by the garlic processing industry, within which the post-harvest activities include drying the newly-harvested garlic,

tying the garlic into a bundle, hanging the garlic under a roof, removing a layer of skin and the root from the garlic bulb, breaking the bulb into its individual cloves for sale, sorting the cloves as part of a quality control process, and picking out the good-looking bulbs – then tying them up again as decoration for sale³. During the preparation period prior to cultivation, the garlic bulbs are also broken into their smaller cloves - to use as seeds. The preparation of seeds has been traditionally done by unpaid female family members at the growers' homes, with relatives, friends and male family members joining in depending on the situation. However, these days, garlic growers often ask for help from outside because, in addition to the decrease of the number of the family members, they have expanded their garlic production activities compared to the previous decade and cannot rely on their own family to cover all the work required, or because they and their family members are too busy doing other types of work. When they hire people for these garlic separating activities, they usually pay using piece rates. In some cases the garlic growers even outsource the whole of the activity to neighbors, and in these cases payments are made using the *mao* system as well as piece rates.

Most post-harvest garlic processing is carried out at small-scale warehouses in the village, which buy freshly harvested garlic from the farmers, although simple garlic processing activities can be found in each garlic farmer's house as well. When the work is carried out in a small warehouse, the wages are usually paid based on piece rates; for example, tying the harvested garlic into a bundle earns ten *satang*⁴ per kilo, while cutting the roots and sprouts, peeling the outside skin of the bulb and breaking the garlic into small cloves provides eight *satang* per kilo respectively. This sounds a very small amount of money, but one female farmer and wage laborer, Mrs. Kham, told me that one day she could make 200 or even 250 baht when she worked hard. In comparison with the normal wage of 120 baht a day it was quite good money, and to me she seemed quite pleased, although she said she was too tired to do anything the next day.

Garlic processing is carried out almost exclusively by women. Mrs. Duang, a

³ I have not included the making of garlic pickles here. Such processing is done on a large-scale in factories and is not seen in Si Dong Yen.

⁴ There are 100 *satang* to 1 baht.

garlic trader who owns a small-scale garlic warehouse in Dong Pa Sak Village told me “Men cannot do this detailed and sensitive work. This type of work is for women” (15th February 2008). In addition and on this subject, Mrs. Kham told me about her experiences when working with men:

There was one man in our group, but that man was so slow. We became irritated, because the wages are paid for the total amount of work done by a group on that day, not for individual work. So I don't want form a group with men in it next time.

(Mrs. Kham, a woman in her late 40s near Dong Pa Sak Village, 29th March 2007)

From this it can be seen that, when looking at the everyday lives of the women who work in the garlic processing industry, they are proud of what they do and are positive they can make money through their piece-work driven labor.

However, though the women in the case study village are quite positive about the income earning potential of garlic processing work, when looking at this form of work at a macro-level, I can also see that this payment system is exploitive. Mrs. Kham told me that she might earn less than 100 baht per day on some occasions - so the wages are not always so good. In addition, this type of work is favored by employers because they can hire workers on a flexible basis, and this has led to unstable working conditions for the workers, just like those in the “informal sector” in other industries. In Dong Pa Sak Village, women have taken up garlic processing work partly because they do not have many other job opportunities, and when they try to set up small businesses such as those selling food, they often return to being wage laborers in the agricultural sector when the businesses fail, and as part of this garlic processing is an easy choice. As a result of this, Si Dong Yen women tend to be utilized and exploited – and are offered low wage rates.

The decrease of wages and increase working hours through flexible accumulation were also observed in the garlic villages of Si Dong Yen. The garlic trader, Mrs. Duang, opened her garlic processing business as a small-scale warehouse in about

2004, which happened to coincide with the liberalization of the garlic trade. Regarding her business, she told me that she changed her wage rates slightly in line with changes in the garlic price, but that if the garlic price fell significantly, she could not do anything. I had a conversation with her in February 2007, when the price of garlic was very bad. She told me while in a very bad mood:

The price of garlic clove, which I usually process, is 12 baht per kilogram now (at Chiang Mai Wholesale Market). Thus, I cannot process. As investment, I bought garlic at four baht per kilogram. When I process them, I will get into the red. I cannot do it. It will show a loss even I buy garlic at 4 baht. So I cannot do anything... If I buy at 4 baht, I have to sell at least at 12 baht. When I break garlic bulb into cloves, the weight of remaining garlic is 25% of fresh ones. It means that, if I sell at 12 baht per kilogram... (she calculated), the cost should be less than three baht. Even this, the profit is zero. Then, I have to hire labor to break garlic. If I pay two baht like before, I don't have any gain.

(Mrs. Duang, a trader in her late 30s of Dong Pa Sak Village, 15 Feb 2008)

She continued:

It shows a lot of loss. I ship the garlic to Chiang Mai and propose 12 baht per kilo as price. Those who sell Burmese garlic or Chinese garlic propose eight baht, cheaper than us at four baht. Now our price is 12 baht, and Burmese or Chinese price is 8 baht. The customers, such as a factory that makes *nam prik*, they cancelled buying our garlic because buying the Burmese one and saving four baht is better. Their garlic clove is bigger, and cheaper as well. Thus, our garlic cannot sell.

(Mrs. Duang, a trader in her late 30s of Dong Pa Sak Village, 15 Feb 2008)

For traders like her, when the wholesale price of garlic is good it is easy to both buy and sell garlic, so even though she has to buy the garlic at a higher price from the farmers and also pay higher wages to the wage laborers, she can also sell the garlic at a good price, so business is still good. In contrast, when the wholesale price is low, she has to buy the garlic at a low price from the neighboring farms, can only afford to pay a low

wage rate for processing activities - to decrease costs, and finds it difficult to find a place to sell at a good price because the price is low everywhere.

It can be seen that the fall in the garlic price as a result of trade liberalization has been reflected in local wage levels, with local farmers finding that if they do not agree to pay lower wages they cannot hire local people, mainly due to the increasing prevalence of migrant workers from Myanmar. Since employers now have a choice on the labor market, the local workers, both men and women, have little negotiating power, and so as a result of trade liberalization their livelihoods have become harder and increasingly unstable, a phenomenon I refer to as the “feminization of labor”.

When looking at this feminine labor system, two polarized patterns seem to have developed since trade liberalization, one being a strengthening of femininity and the other a reduction in labor opportunities for local people. Although the scale of garlic production has decreased since trade liberalization, when the garlic price began to recover in 2007, some of Dong Pa Sak’s farmers have returned to or scaled-up their garlic cultivation activities, and the village has become lively again with a high demand for labor, although it is not as high as it was previously. As a result, wage workers have been able to continue working in the agricultural fields, though the reality of the situation has changed a little. I will come back on this point in Section 5.6.

6.4 Active Female Agency

So far, I have looked at feminine-type wage labor in the way that they are exploited by garlic growers as well as by today’s neoliberal economic structure, but it is only one side of picture, and here I would like to introduce a more positive and active feature of wage labor, especially for women, with reference to the concept of ‘female agency’. The feminist anthropologist is interested in the concept of a “feminist agency” or “female agency,” an agency that struggles to overcome patriarchal relationships (Wolf, 1992: 23; Ong, 1999: 3; Ramamurthy, 2000). Women are neither passive nor static, but for Wolf, to characterize most of the action and inaction of women in the Third World as resistance is also to over-compensate. Rejecting the view of women as

completely passive, or of showing hyper-resistance in a dichotomous way, the concept of 'female agency' tries to "view women's actions and motivations as complex, varied, and nuanced, depending on the situation...its constraints and [the] actors involved." (Wolf, 1992: 24).

Women who work in garlic production, are divided into two groups: garlic growers and wage laborers, and both categories of woman are often in a vulnerable position: the former is often vulnerable to men, market, and the state, among other things; and the latter is often exploited by their employer. Where these problems are found in both groups, there are also positive attitudes and consequences in both.

First, although I discussed female farmers' increasing burden with the concept of femininity in the preceding section, the status of women in Thai villages seems comparatively better (Earth *et al.*, 2008) in a certain sense compared with several other countries where lower status of women to men are reported. In other words, the relationship between women and men are comparatively equal in the Thai village partly because of its matrilineal social structure. Here, I wrote "comparatively," because it is true that it is difficult to find any gender gap in the families. When I asked women about family decision making, for example, all women replied to me, "We discuss and decide together." If I ask about the workload in the field, they answered, "We help each other." Yet, it is also true that there is some gender difference in family work, such as in cooking as I will mention below, and in opportunities to study: most women in the past were allowed to finish only the fourth grade of primary school, while some men could take higher education.

I have already written about farmers are enjoying chatting when planting and harvesting garlic. Usually planting and harvesting garlic are female jobs, but men also help them at first until they have their own job of putting straws or carrying garlic. Furthermore, whether due to progress of feminization of labor or not, men also help or work for pay in traditionally feminine fields. There, both women and men enjoy chatting. The topic of conversation ranges from about price of garlic or agricultural trend at that time to about breakfast of that day, children, school, TV drama of the day before, or the Valentine day (it was 14th February when I observed a certain garlic

harvest). Since many people sometimes said that it is hot or that their back hurts, all farmers are actually tired. Nevertheless, they keep chatting cheerfully as if the conversation drives away exhaustion.

There is also an interesting episode in terms of positive outcomes despite exploited-way of usage of female labor under ordinary circumstances. Traditionally, the work of breaking garlic bulbs into cloves, which is mostly done in September to use the cloves as seeds in October, is done by women – whether by family members or outsourced – in the evening and at night, when the day-time work of woman has finished. In other words, it is the extra work that women are obligated to do, while men have freedom of choice: they can have their own time including watching TV or going out for fun, or they can help women. Since women are often obligated to prepare meals and wash dishes in Northern Thai village while men have other choices, this work is possible to be regarded as heavy labor for women.

However, many older women told me that the time of breaking garlic after sunset was sometimes fun when they were young, because many young men often came to chat with them. In Dong Pa Sak Village, no small number of women met her current husband when they were breaking garlic in the old days. For example, Mrs. Mai in her early 50s replied to my question that how she met her husband:

By going out together for fun. At that time, it is not same as today. Today is by mobile phone. At that time we used motorcycle. After having dinner, men went out to have fun. Women stayed at home. Sometimes we broke garlic into cloves, or we tied garlic up into bundles. At night, young men went out to have fun. Oh, many people got together, and they went out as a group. In my house, there were young women..., three women. Thus, they also came to visit us. We chat together.

In the past we didn't have mobile phone. We haven't gone to have fun so much either. If today, they meet at school... or mobile phone, and use a car to go to have fun. At that time, we didn't have a mobile phone. After dinner, men visited somebody's house, the house of somebody whom they knew, such as relatives. They went to chat.

(Mrs. Mai, a farmer in her early 50s of Dong Pa Sak Village, 26 May 2008)

Since she married when she was 29 years old, this story is about 25 years ago. Other women also talked of a similar happy story, and if I calculated the period from their age, this custom can be found in Dong Pa Sak Village at least 1970s and 1980s. In Northern Thailand, in the past, a young woman and man often met by a group of man visiting a woman's house like this. But the time of breaking garlic provided a good opportunity to men to visit women in garlic villages. It was an important social space.

Next, I would like to look at the wage laborers. Although in the previous two sections, I showed the increasingly difficult situation faced by female wage laborers in the garlic processing process, within the concepts of the female agency, I can also find a very positive attitude in female wage labor. I have already mentioned that despite the small wages of around 100 baht per day, the occasionally higher wage gave women the motivation to work more and to work harder. When women worked on a daily basis, some of them had a positive reaction. I asked female labor groups at a field that, which was better, to produce garlic by themselves or wage labor? They separately replied:

A woman: We go to work as wage labor, because we have no money to invest.

Even though we go to wage labor, we can still make a profit.

Another woman: Wage labor is better [*sabai*].

Other woman: Yes, it is better.

The second woman: If we grow garlic, we easily lose. If we worked as wage labor, there is no burden.

(Female wage laborers in Dong Pa Sak Village, 25 Mar 2008)

In the conversation, for the part I translated as “better,” they actually used the word “*sabai*” in Thai language, which can also translate into “fine” of feeling.

Mrs. Yoo, who appeared in the former section as wage labor without child, also talked in the same way. I asked why she did not think of renting land and producing shallot by themselves again after their cease of it in the past. She replied:

To rent land is also expensive. If we work as wage labor, we don't have to invest.

We just go to work at their field. And we can make ends meet somehow. ---

Suppose that we produce garlic. We plant it, it grows, and we sell. Usually we borrow money from the BAAC. If we borrowed money, and the price of garlic

was bad, people fell into a red. They increase a debt every year. --- I don't have a debt now. Because I don't have to borrow money.

(Mrs. Yoo, a wage labor in her early 60s of Dong Pa Sak Village, 28 May 2008)

I have already mentioned that she has various kinds of electrical appliances despite work as wage labor. She explained how she bought them:

I saved money one year, and bought one thing. We go to work as wage labor. If we go one year, money is remaining. Ok, this year, we buy washing machine. It costs 5,000 baht. Like this. We bought little by little. We did not buy everything together. We don't have money. We saved, saved, saved, and if we could save a lot, we bought something. Then, we continued to work as wage labor so that we could buy foods. It took many years for me to buy this TV. This TV and the satellite broadcasting receiver was 9,000 baht. So we had to go on working!

(Mrs. Yoo, a wage labor in her early 60s of Dong Pa Sak Village, 28 May 2008)

For the last words, she said it cheerfully as if she encouraged herself. And she added, "We are *"sabai sabai."* They could save money partly because they do not have child. I asked, "When you get older, and you cannot go to work as wage labor, what will you do?" After thinking a little while, she answered cheerfully again, "There are a lot of nieces and nephews."

To sum up, due to the existence of cheap female labor, agro-food commodities in Thailand are kept low in price, enough to be competitive with Chinese or other foreign countries' agricultural products. However, this does not necessarily mean that women themselves think that they are exploited but rather are actively involved in the wage labor system seeking for a second source of income to support their livelihood. And yet such good will of women is exploited under the name of neoliberalism, which pushes the product price lower and lower. In the next section, I will show the other pattern of feminization of agricultural labor in comparison with increasing femininity in the labor force; that is, global feminization of agricultural labor.

6.5 Global Feminization in Agriculture: Increasing Use of Migrant Labor and Marginalization of Local Women

As part of the trans-nationalization movement we are experiencing today, two changes can be observed as having occurred in relation to garlic production in Thailand - one being trade liberalization and the other being the increased use of migrant labor from Myanmar. The migrant labor from Myanmar already plays a big part in the Northern Thai agricultural labor market, and the garlic production sector in the Si Dong Yen region is no exception.

When studying the development of flexible labor accumulation in manufacturing industries, both Ong (1991) and Pearson (1998) report that transnational corporations (TNCs) at first took-up the strategy in order to utilize female labor, but later increasingly began to employ a more heterogeneous workforce, one which included children, men and imported labor, resulting in the replacement of women with men once again. Pearson (1998) has called this “the global feminization of labor”, focusing on the increase of feminine-type labor in a transnational manner. It is said that a similar change has occurred within the garlic production labor market in Si Dong Yen region, in relation with neoliberal policy of trade liberalization as well as unofficially deregulated labor market by illegal migrant labor.

Outsiders may think that migrant labor is employed simply because it is cheap, and although some of the Dong Pa Sak villagers themselves told me as such, I found that migrant laborers often receive the same wages as the Thais; between 120 and 140 baht per day. Searching for another reason why people might employ migrant labor in the village, the village headman in Dong Pa Sak Village told me that it is because people there are getting older and so there is a lack of suitable labor available. It is certainly true that a labor shortage can be observed during the garlic planting and harvesting seasons, due to the out-migration of villagers, especially the young. However, the situation may also be a little more complex than it first appears. Since the wage of 120 or 140 baht per day is quite low, there is a general sense of dissatisfaction among the Thai wage laborers. However, under pressure to compete with the cheap

Chinese garlic, the garlic growers have tried to keep the labor costs low, and the presence of a cheap, alternative labor force from abroad has made it possible to pay these rates. In other words, if Thai workers do not accept the wage rate that has been set, the employers can find an alternative source of labor willing to work at that rate, at any time. In this sense, migrant labor is regarded as an alternative, feminine-type labor force whether they are male or female. While some local workers have left to seek work elsewhere, others have stayed on despite their sense of dissatisfaction - in the absence of other, better work opportunities.

The employers of migrant labor within the Si Dong Yen garlic industry can largely be divided into two groups: the small-scale and large-scale garlic growers. Some of the small-scale garlic growers hire migrant wage laborers as a complement to the male Thai labor force that sometimes face shortage, but in general they still prefer to hire local Thai women. This is because garlic planting; for example, which is seen as a woman's job, requires a certain amount of skill, as one needs to quickly sow the small cloves of garlic, one by one, in the soil. According to the Dong Pa Sak villagers I spoke to, if the migrant laborers have two-year's experience in the garlic field, their skills may be useful; however, when growers hire migrant laborers as a group, many inexperienced laborers come along with the experienced ones, and since they are hired on a *mao* basis (contracted by workload), the quicker they work, the earlier they can finish. As a result of this, new workers (who are slower at planting) sometimes bury many cloves in the soil at one time in order to finish quickly, which causes a problem when the garlic seeds sprout. Regardless of whether the new migrant laborers really do this activity, since it is well known among the garlic farmers, they tend not to risk hiring migrant laborers if they can help it.

The second group to employ migrant laborers is the group of large-scale garlic producers, and their way of hiring laborers is different from the small-scale producers. In Dong Pa Sak Village, a few large-scale land owners who own 25 or 30 *rai* of land have emerged recently. Since garlic production activities require intensive labor, such large-scale producers do not cultivate garlic using only family members alone. They take care of their fields in the manner of a land manager or owner: hiring a certain

number of live-in migrant laborers, paying a monthly salary, often providing them with a hut or a simple cottage in the corner of the fields, and allowing them work those fields. The wages provided under this system are lower than the local average, which means deepening form of feminization of agricultural labor.

In addition, I have already mentioned in Chapter 5 that since trade liberalization there has been a tendency towards land concentration with respect to garlic production. It became clear now that the increase in large-scale garlic production activities has not led to a concomitant increase in labor opportunities for local people. In fact the transition from small-scale to large-scale production can lead to a decrease in work opportunities, especially for the women, which will lead to marginalization of local feminine-type agricultural labor. Marginalization here indicates a social process of exclusion of a certain group of people, especially of women, during industrialization through a capitalist economy in developing countries (see Momsen, 1991: 68). This represents a complex form of feminization by replacement of the local feminine type labor with migrant labor of more feminine conditions.

Although I wrote before that when small-scale farmers hire migrant labor, they mostly paid the same wage paid to local workers. However, when they hired migrant laborers who were regularly hired by some large-scale land owners, the condition was a little bit different. That is to say, although the small-scale farmers paid general wages of 120 or 140 baht, they usually paid money to the master or the regular employer of the migrant laborers, and there were often cases when the masters took a cut of laborers' wages.

Garlic farmers' diversification of crops after trade liberalization (see Chapter 5) has also made the livelihoods of Thai local wage laborers harder in relation to migrant labor. After the liberalization of the garlic trade, the Thai government used a monetary compensation scheme in order to encourage farmers in Chai Pra Kan to change from growing garlic to growing potatoes. At first glance, the growing of garlic and potatoes might seem similar and equally beneficial, as long as farmers have something to grow. In addition, the potato price is guaranteed by the company involved in the contract farming agreement. Thus, the arrangement sounded as though it would be better for the

growers overall. However, for the wage laborers it turned out not to be as good, especially in terms of the labor process in the field as well as for post-farm processing.

First of all, the garlic and potato cultivating seasons are different, being October to February for garlic and August to October for the kinds of potato seed which Dong Pa Sak farmers consider a suitable crop for their land. Thus, if the farmers do not grow any crops that require much labor instead of garlic during the garlic season, the workers have no jobs to do.

Second, the labor process in the field, as well as the processing, is different for garlic and potatoes; for example, while 12 people per *rai* is the average number needed for garlic planting, only four people are needed for planting potatoes; although the number of workers needed is similar for the harvesting of both crops if potatoes have to be harvested within just one day⁵. Even for the harvest; however, while small-scale growers tend to hire local Thai women, as mentioned above, and while local villagers have traditionally worked on each other's land to help with the garlic harvest, for the potato harvest such a local labor culture has never developed because it is not a crop traditionally grown in the area⁶, so instead, they hire migrant labor. Furthermore, since potatoes are sent for use by the potato-chip factories directly after the harvest, there is no local processing carried out in the village, as there is with garlic. As a result, women have lost the opportunity to carry out piece-work both prior to cultivation and after the harvest. Even though the piece-work in garlic production is low-paid and lasted for only several months a year, it represented an important source of income for the village women, as mentioned previously. Thus, the change from garlic to potato cultivation has led to a loss of work for local wage laborers, especially for the women.

Mae Ai District, a neighboring district to Chai Pra Kan, is also famous within Chiang Mai Province for its garlic production activities; however, some of the farmers there have changed to growing oranges or mangoes. When compared to growing

⁵ For potato plantations, the hiring company has usually set a contract condition that the potatoes must be harvested on a specific day.

⁶ Regarding the word "traditionally", Dong Pa Sak villagers have never called the potato a traditional crop, even though it has been a cash crop in the region for about 30 years, as it is not usually found on Thai menus (or Northern Thai menus), even today.

vegetables, fruit trees require less labor in terms of care, except during the harvesting season, and no annual planting is required. Since the harvesting of oranges and mangoes requires little skill, and with these fruit being grown as cash crops, the owners mostly hire migrant labor - as seen in other regions where fruit are grown in plantations. Therefore, Thai women have also seen their labor opportunities disappear.

To sum up, although the increased use of migrant labor itself has not been due to trade liberalization, the presence of migrants in the Si Dong Yen region as an alternative and cheaper pool of labor has worked to weaken the negotiating power of the local wage laborers with respect to the garlic producers and traders, who want to keep labor costs as low as possible in order to compete with the cheaper Chinese garlic. Due to the nature of garlic production, in which the labor activities require a certain level of skill, the replacement of the labor force has not happened immediately. However, a phenomenon which can be called the 'local feminization of agricultural labor' has gradually taken place, in which the traditionally 'feminine' garlic production activities are marginalized.

6.6 Conclusion

In terms of the impacts of liberalization on the garlic trade this chapter has shown the complex form of feminization of agricultural wage labor in the garlic cultivating villages in northern Thailand. When the garlic producers have reduced their garlic production activities for several years, it was often the women, who worked as agricultural wage laborers of low wage, while the men cultivated other farm crops and/or had the chance to find non-agricultural wage work. This situation has led to an increase in the ratio of woman agricultural labor taking place, or to the feminization of agricultural labor. In addition, since garlic farmers are not able to reduce the costs associated with the procurement of agricultural chemicals and seeds, they have to try and reduce their labor costs, and the target of this exercise are usually the wage laborers – and more often than not the women, which has led to the increase of feminine-type labor conditions or second type of feminization.

This study has also shown that in line with another trend within the current globalization era, comparatively cheap migrant labor from Myanmar has been used within the garlic production in the Si Dong Yen region, especially on the larger-scale farms. Myanmar migrant laborers are regarded by Thai farmers as labor of lower status simply because they are immigrants, being paid wages as little as or less than Thai local women. Many of the female and a few of the male migrant laborers take on work traditionally allocated for women in garlic production villages – leading to the global feminization of agricultural labor.

This chapter has introduced the complex changes of agricultural labor forms in the era of trade liberalization: feminization of agricultural labor in two ways was explored first, and then the marginalization of them through global feminization of labor. If the competitive situation within the garlic market continues through the global feminization of agricultural labor in the region, there is a possibility that the existing Thai women workers will be replaced by more feminine-type migrant laborers and be marginalized from taking up job opportunities. As a result, these phenomena represent a complex form of exploitation by transforming the non-Thai labor into female value within this garlic-producing village.

In conclusion, the garlic production industry in Si Dong Yen region has managed to continue beyond its own depression period, but on the other hand, livelihood conditions for the wage laborers employed therein have worsened especially for the women. On top of the efforts put in by the garlic farmers themselves, garlic production has been sustained through the exploitation of women as well as feminine-type wage labor, or feminization, although as shown, those working as such have not simply remained passive in response to their situation.