

THE POTENTIAL
OF ^{WOMEN} FEMALE WORKERS
IN MODERN TECHNOLOGY

BANGKOK 93

การเปลี่ยนแปลงเทคโนโลยีกับผลกระทบต่อภาวะการจ้างงาน
ของแรงงานหญิงในอุตสาหกรรมสิ่งทอของไทย

Impact of Technological Changes on Employment Situations of
Women Workers in the Thai Textile Industry

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manufacturing sector, 80 percent of whom were women. Even though women workers have made a substantial contribution to Thailand's economic development, their entry into the categories of skilled employment remains low. Women often face unprotected employment situations and are paid less than men doing similar work. They are affected greatly by technological changes. Accordingly, this seminar wishes to provide a means for all parties concerned to discuss the new trends in the textile industry and their impact on women, as well as to develop strategies to reduce the negative impact of structural changes.

She extended a special thanks to Professor Alain Wisner from Paris, who was in Bangkok on a separate mission but cordially accepted an invitation to contribute to the seminar.

Summary of Professor Alain Wisner's presentation of "The Potential of Women Workers in Modern Technology"

The seminar session in the morning was preceded by Professor Alain Wisner's presentation. Assistant Professor Dr. Amornsiri Sunsurattikul, Vice-president of the Women and Youth Studies Programme introduced him to the audience as in the following:

Professor Alain Wisner received his Doctor of Medicine and of Philosophy in Anatomy as well as a diploma in psychology from the University of Paris. He

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had practiced as an ear-nose-throat specialist in hospital for fifteen years before transferring to work as an engineer designing safety seats in automobiles for the Reynault Automobile Company. Then he has become a professor at the Laboratoire D'Ergonomic et Neurosciences du Travail, Conservatoire National des Arts et Metiers in Paris, of which he is at present the director. Since 1990 Professor Wisner has come to Thailand once a year to give lectures at the Faculty of Engineering of Chulalongkorn University.

In his presentation, Professor Wisner pointed out that relocation industries to where labour is cheaper has become a worldwide phenomenon. He asserted relocation is a social disease leading to unemployment and other labour-related problems. The impressively rapid growth of GNP in Thai economy was mainly based on cheap labour which is now no longer the cheapest. Consequently either new technology is adopted or relocation takes place. Since the adoption of modern technology requires better qualified workers, training or retraining becomes a priority. In France and in Europe labour unions have played a central role in obtaining unemployment compensations and skills retraining programmes for workers.

Professor Wisner pointed out that workers have hidden competence and knowledge besides those directly

related to their work. For instance, experienced women workers in textile industry have important knowledge and skills. They know various kinds of fibers, maintenance techniques, and are competent in quality control. But they cannot articulate their knowledge due to little education. These knowledge and skills are not only ignored by the workers themselves but also are not recognized by the management.

Professor Wisner argued that intellectual ability and technical capacity of women and men are equal. The belief that women can do repetitive work but not the one that requires technical capacity is a fallacy or a social prejudice which has to be changed. Women as well as men should be trained for all technical activities. Women workers who receive training will give priority to their professional work and the rate of leaving their jobs for family work will thus become lower.

Professor Wisner formulated two recommendations, which were close to those in Dr. Pawadee Thonguthai's research. (see her presentation and paper in this report).

First, unemployed textile workers have moral rights to be employed in the new semi-automatized plants. These women textile workers are the best candidates. They are competent in many domains that remain with automatization. The nature of industrial operation themselves and what is done on the fibers have not changed; it is the techniques that is changing. Therefore, managers are misleading that young male

automation technicians coming directly from school will be more efficient. Experience takes time. Former female workers, after they get retraining, will be more adroit and surely efficient than those young male technicians.

Second, quality control and maintenance are the two keys for fully automatized system. So these skills must be included in training or retraining programmes for women workers in semi-automatized textile industry. Professor Wisner supported fully the idea of reserving training sessions for experienced women workers only, especially if they have to learn mechanics and electronics included in maintenance and quality control. Dr. Wisner said that Dr. Pawadee's research report in 1990 is excellent, and asserted that if her suggestions had been applied since then, maybe the effects of Thai textile industry's crisis would have been drastically reduced.

Summary of the Plenary Discussion on "The Current Situations and the Trends of Changing Technology in the Textile Industry and Their Impact on Women Workers"

Three resource persons participated in this seminar session, namely,

- 1) Associate Professor Dr. Pawadee Thonguthai, from the Faculty of Economics of Thammasat University,
- 2) Associate Professor Dr. Yongyuth Chalamwong from the Development and Research Institute of Thailand,