

Panel Proposal
EuroSEAS 2021 Conference

“Selling Thai-ness: Thai-Western transnational mobilities, tourism work and entrepreneurship, and gendered social outcomes”

Conveners

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Abstract

This panel brings together research that focuses on “transnational entrepreneurship” that results from the significant Thai-Western mobility and migration pathways, and in particular, the social gendered consequences for Thai women working in this sector. The panel will bring together contributions on the lives and experiences of Thai women, who may be employees or run a small-scale business, either in Thailand, or after emigration in their societies of settlement. On one side, we explore the opportunities for and social consequences of "selling Thai-ness" to foreigners within Thailand's strategy for tourist-driven development. This includes looking at small-scale businesses, such as spas or massage parlours, as well as larger-scale sport and leisure facilities, such as golf courses, in Thailand's tourism destinations. How is "Thai-ness" commodified as a cultural product for attracting Westerners? How does the relatively cheap and flexible gendered labour of Thai women constitute Thai hospitality in the tourism industry? What is the social impact on the working lives, life-chances and personal wellbeing of individual women working in this sector, and on their families? On the other side, we look at how "selling Thai-ness" works as a strategy for Thai women migrants in European societies in their efforts to improve their life-chances. This means looking at Thai women's initiatives as “ethnic entrepreneurs” and their efforts to build a life abroad, in the face of discrimination and stereotypes, and while retaining transnational links to family in Thailand. We aim to reach an understanding of how “selling Thai-ness” is a form of globalised commodification that importantly shapes the opportunity structures of women from relatively poor backgrounds who work in this sector generated by Thai-Western mobilities.

Single session