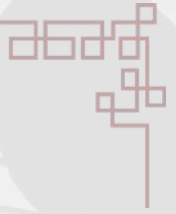


# THE RISE OF ASIA

EXAMINING SOCIAL, HUMAN AND  
ETHNICAL CHALLENGES IN ASIA

# ABOUT THIS MAGAZINE



Our team has created this magazine with a clear mission: to provide a thorough and authentic understanding of the critical issues shaping the dynamic and diverse region of Asia. In our magazine, we strive to select diverse and relevant topics. Indeed, by reading this publication, you will discover fascinating and often overlooked stories about international subjects that shape our world.

We have decided to focus on this crucial subject because we firmly believe in the importance of raising awareness about social, human, and ethical issues in Asia. These challenges are not only crucial for local populations but also for the world as a whole. By examining these questions closely, we hope to encourage meaningful discussions and to aspire positive change.

Every article we publish is the result of extensive research, rigorous investigation and a commitment to truth and justice. We firmly believe that knowledge is the first step towards change, and that's why we invite you to join us in this captivating exploration of contemporary Asia.

Whether you are a culture enthusiast, a truth seeker, or simply someone looking to broaden their horizons, "Examining Social, Human, and Ethnical Challenges in Asia" is your guide to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of our ever-changing world.

We express our sincere gratitude to Pr. Darwis Khudori, our master's director, for initiating this project and to our English teacher, Pr. Anouk Guiné, for her invaluable assistance throughout the writing process. We also express our thanks to all the contributors of this project who participated in the processes of writing, proofreading and editing.



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# SOUTH KOREA

*NORTH KOREAN DEFECTORS IN SOUTH KOREA FROM 1997 TO 2023*

**WRITTEN BY: SAMUEL HEREDIA**

2023 has been a significant year in the history of the Korean peninsula. On July 27th, the people of the two nations commemorated the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement. The Korean War occurred between 1950 and 1953 between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), supported by China and the Soviet Union, and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) aided by the United Nations and mainly the United States. The conflict began when North Korean forces invaded South Korea in an attempt to reunify the divided peninsula in 1950. The war saw significant back-and-forth territorial changes and intense fighting, with a ceasefire agreement signed in 1953. The Korean Peninsula remains divided along the 38th parallel, with the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating North and South Korea. The war had lasting geopolitical implications, but no formal peace treaty was ever signed, and the two Koreas technically remain in a state of armistice. Seventy years have passed since the end of this unforgettable war that divided the citizens from a common root, and the way to reunification still appears as a far and unattainable dream even until today.

Over the past years, the two Koreas have undergone a totally different economic development that has widened the gap between them - North Korea is among the poorest countries in the world today, while South Korea has experienced a rapid economic growth which is often referred to as the '*Miracle on the Han River*'. The poor economic condition prompted some North Koreans to risk their lives to defect to South Korea in search of a better future.



Source: Library of congress



Source: Australian War Memorial

According to the South Korea's North Korean Refugees' Protection and Settlement Support Act from 1997, North Korean defectors are defined as those who need protection by the South Korean government. This act was signed during the North Korean famine, also known as the '*Arduous March*' or the '*March of Suffering*', which took place between 1994 and 1998. At this moment, the North Korean people underwent a harsh period of mass starvation and economic crisis that were caused by several factors including the dissolution of the Soviet Union (and by extension of their relationship with North Korea), a series of floods and droughts that devastated agricultural crops, and wrong economic policies.

Thus, the Ministry of Unification of South Korea decided to pass a bill on January 13th 1997 to protect the North Korean defectors and support their settlement and in the same year, they began to construct facilities to accommodate the defectors. From this year up to the present day, the Ministry of Unification has made efforts to improve the support of the North Korean defectors in South Korea.

It is estimated that over 1,000 North Koreans escape their country to seek asylum in South Korea annually. As reported by the Ministry of Unification, in 2023, the total number of North Koreans who entered and resided in the southern territory exceeded 33,981. Some choose to escape through China, where they face various risks, including being captured and sent back to North Korea due to China's policy of repatriating North Korean defectors. Others might seek refuge in countries like Mongolia or Southeast Asian nations before ultimately reaching South Korea through diplomatic channels or aid from organizations supporting North Korean defectors.

These defectors are referred to as '*bukanitaljumin*', a term suggested by the South Korean government in 2020 and which literally means '*residents who escape from North Korea*'. North Korean defectors are allowed to claim their citizenship in South Korea and the government is responsible for providing them assistance. Unlike other groups of migrants, when they arrive in South Korea, they have a unique status. North Korean defectors have to enter the Settlement Support Center for North Korean Refugees (Hanawon) for a duration of 12 weeks, during which they will attend classes on human rights, economy, sex education, paying bills, driving, reading the Latin alphabet, and learning the South Korean dialect. This step is mandatory for the defectors to enter South Korean society. However, this support is still not enough to integrate the North Korean defectors in the society, and they still have to face challenges at school, in their professional life, and in their social life.



Although the two Koreas have shared a common culture and history for centuries, the two countries are now drastically different in many aspects. After more than seventy years of separation, the cultural gap between the two Koreas has become so huge that people from each side have difficulties to communicate with their counterparts due to the evolution of the language and dialects. Moreover, it is important to note that South Korea is one of the most developed countries in the world in terms of technologies, and many of the North Koreans are unfamiliar with modern technologies.



Considering the huge language and digital gaps, North Korean defectors often struggle to find qualified jobs, and are often obliged to work as laborers or to find jobs that do not require any academic background. However, according to statistics of the Ministry of Unification, the employment rate of North Korean defectors is increasing every year, going from 38,7% in 2010, to 59,2% in 2022. The dropout rates in school (primary, middle, and high school) have decreased significantly, and it was estimated that only 1,6% of Korean defectors dropped out of school in 2022.

# INTERVIEW

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For this article, I had the chance to interview Jisoo Lee, a South Korean student who majored in Korean language education at Kookmin University and who had the opportunity to give language classes to North Korean defectors in 2022 at Yeomyung School, an alternative school for those who escaped from North Korea and for their children.

According to me Ms. Lee, it was difficult to assess the proficiency of the defectors in Korean for the following reasons:

Not only did they use different vocabulary from South Korean, but there were significant differences in intonation, which is the characteristic of North Korean. The linguistic errors they made were totally different from those made by students from other countries. Vocabulary errors were more frequent than grammatical errors. Also, I could understand all of their speech, so I did not want to say that they were wrong, or that they must fix it. But I had to give certain feedback because it was definitely not 'Normal Korean'. The Korean they use is not entirely different from our Korean. It is really slightly different. However, South Koreans tend to notice these differences quite significantly.

North Koreans who came to South Korea at a young age easily adopted the South Korean intonation, but those who arrived at an older age continue to use the North Korean way of speaking. Even though they use the North Korean way of speaking, they have no problem with communicating with South Koreans, but they will never be treated like 'same participants in society.'

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Source: The Korea Herald

# INTERVIEW

As a South Korean, she noticed several common points in terms of culture. Both countries share almost the same holidays, the same food, the same clothing and for her, it was interesting to see that they both learned about the same Korean history until the division, with some differences in the details of the contents but with similarities when it comes to major figures (kings, generals, etc). Nonetheless, she also mentioned noticeable differences between the two cultures. Ms. Lee perceives North Korea as 'South Korea from decades ago', stating that 'South Koreans seem to be more open to embrace and create new things, while North Koreans tend to preserve and uphold traditions'.

She insists on the fact that their mindset is totally different, arguing that South Koreans tend to have strong individualistic tendencies, prioritizing their own happiness and benefits, and not caring about their neighbors or others. As South Koreans live in a super competitive and capitalist society, North Koreans might encounter genuine integration difficulties in integrating in this society. "South Korean people tend to do everything hard, like studying or seeking a job and so on. However, I have noticed that North Korean people do not study or work hard as much as South Koreans do. This might lead them to be 'losers' in the south korean society.", Ms. Lee adds.

Concerning universities in Korea, she explains that there is a designated number of students allocated for North Koreans (who escaped from North Korea or their children). This is usually one or two per major. But most of them struggle to adapt and drop out after one semester, with only a small number of students successfully adapting and continuing their university life. Furthermore, North Koreans find it demanding to achieve middle-class or upper-class status in South Korea. Their likelihood of receiving a south korean education is low, and working in service industries or the fourth industrial revolution sector can be difficult for them. As a result, they become more socially isolated from South Koreans, face more challenging living conditions, and find it harder to accommodate to life in South Korea.





Unfortunately, the situation for the North Korean defectors is more worrying since 2020, and their chances to enter South Korea have been reduced considerably. Respectively, only 229 North Korean defectors entered South Korea in 2020, 63 in 2021, 67 in 2022 and 139 in 2023. The main reason for this notable reduction can be explained by the policies adopted in North Korea after the COVID-19. The government had a lot of concerns about the virus and took measures to protect its people from the pandemic. Consequently, North Korea has closed its borders in 2020, which put an end to all traffic, including people and importation of goods.

The borders were still closed in 2023 and it has become more difficult for North Korean people to flee the country and the economic situation has worsened - North Korea is currently unable to produce and provide food for the population and they do not import resources from China and Russia anymore. In this sense, North Korea is experiencing a new period of starvation and the United Nations have estimated that 40% of the population was underfed in 2023.

The situation might change in the near future, and we hope it will in a positive way for both nations and for the defectors. One should keep in mind that the two Koreas are still in conflict, and the support of the North Korean defectors can be seen as a policy tool. The south korean government took the worthy decision to welcome and support the defectors, and is still making efforts to assist them in their integration. This integration may be challenging for the defectors and regarding all the points we stated, we can definitely question this so-called 'integration'. Even though the south korean government grants citizenship to all the defectors, they are hardly perceived as south korean citizens by the people.



Source: Amnesty International



# INDIA

## *CHILDREN OF SONAGACHI: INDIA'S PROSTITUTION PARADOX AND TALES OF SURVIVAL*

**WRITTEN BY: GAUTIER COURTOIS**

India, a land of rich cultural diversity and historical significance, stands as one of the world's most populous nations, captivating the imagination with its vast tapestry of tradition and modernity. India's take on prostitution is a subject of profound intrigue and contemplation, revealing the intricate layers of society's moral, ethical and legal values. While prostitution has deep roots in India the nation has undergone numerous legal and social changes in response to the trade, reflecting a continuous evolution in societal norms and policies.

Prostitution in India operates within a legal framework that mirrors both historical context and contemporary concerns. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, known as the ITPA, serves as the cornerstone of legislation related to prostitution in India. It criminalizes activities such as solicitation, brothel-keeping and trafficking for the purpose of prostitution while recognizing the right of adults to engage in consensual sex work. However, the stark verity is that the ITPA's provisions are often flouted and prostitution continues to flourish on India's streets, despite its legal status. The discrepancy between the legal framework and the ground-level reality underscores the dynamics surrounding sex work in India. It is a realm where the law intersects with socioeconomic disparities, gender inequality and cultural attitudes, creating a persistent challenge for policymakers, law enforcement agencies and civil society.

Prostitution's prevalence on the streets of India's cities not only points to the limitations of existing legislation but also raises questions about the effectiveness of social safety nets and opportunities available to those who engage in sex work. The reasons for individuals entering this profession are often rooted in economic hardship, limited educational opportunities and a lack of viable alternatives. Addressing the issue requires a comprehensive approach that combines legal reform with social and economic empowerment initiatives.

The interplay between legislation, societal norms and the realities of sex work in India reflects a complex and evolving landscape. As India continues to navigate the tensions between tradition and modernity, the nation's attitude toward prostitution remains a subject of ongoing scrutiny, debate and reform. It is a testament to India's dynamic evolution as a society striving to balance the preservation of its cultural heritage with the promotion of individual rights and social justice.



Calcutta, now known as Kolkata, is a city that embodies India's rich history and is known for its cultural vibrancy. However, the city has also faced its share of challenges, one of which is the border issue with the neighboring nation of Bangladesh. The border problem, often centered around enclaves and the sharing of river waters. Its roots in the partition of India in 1947 and subsequent events in 1971 when Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation. The issue includes disputes over the alignment of the border and sharing of the waters of various rivers, particularly the Teesta River.

Efforts to resolve the dispute have been ongoing, with both countries engaging in diplomatic discussions to find a mutually acceptable solution. These discussions are critical to maintaining peaceful relations and promoting cooperation between India and Bangladesh. The only problem is that Indians keep kidnapping young girls from Bangladesh to bring them to Sonagachi, the prostitution district of Kolkata.



In the heart of Kolkata, amidst the bustling streets and colorful markets, lies the Sonagachi district, an intriguing microcosm of India's complex relationship with prostitution. It stands as one of the nation's largest and most well-known red-light districts, housing more than 50,000 sex workers. The existence and operations within this district provide an insightful lens into the multifaceted challenges and dynamics surrounding prostitution in India. Sonagachi's historical roots stretch back several decades and over time, it has become a focal point for the sex trade, attracting not only sex workers from various parts of the country but also criminal organizations seeking to profit from this lucrative business. This amalgamation of legal sex work and illicit enterprises paints a vivid picture of the paradoxical nature of India's approach to prostitution.

The scale of sex work in Sonagachi is staggering, with thousands of women and transgender individuals involved in the profession. This sheer volume can be attributed to various factors, including poverty, lack of education and the social stigma associated with sex work. For many people in Sonagachi, prostitution is not a choice but a desperate means of survival in a society marked by economic disparities.

Despite its size, Sonagachi operates in a shadowy realm of semi-legality, regulated and monitored not by authorities but by local criminal organizations. These underworld figures wield significant influence over the district, overseeing the operation of brothels, controlling sex workers and profiting from their earnings. While this semi-legal status attempts to provide a degree of protection for sex workers, it also exposes them to exploitation and extortion by those who claim to be their protectors.

One of the gravest issues is the rampant human trafficking. Vulnerable women and girls from impoverished backgrounds are often lured into the district with promises of lucrative employment and a better life, only to find themselves ensnared in a cycle of abuse. Human trafficking, including both internal trafficking within India and cross-border trafficking from Bangladesh where young women are stripped of their passports and will never go back to their home remains a major concern despite various initiatives and laws aimed at combating it. Moreover, the social stigmatization associated with sex work further marginalizes the already vulnerable sex worker community in Sonagachi. They face discrimination from society at large, hindering their access to healthcare, education and other essential services. The social ostracization reinforces the cycle of poverty and exploitation that many in Sonagachi are trapped within.

The plight of children is a heartbreaking tale of vulnerability and hope. In a place where the living conditions are deplorable, the emotional landscapes of the thousands of sex workers reveal the grim truth they face daily. In this challenging environment, these women are often subjected to physical abuse and coercion, with some being forced into the flesh trade at an incredibly young age, some as young as 8 or 9.

Reshma's story is emblematic of the resilience and determination that mothers in Sonagachi exhibit. Despite her own harrowing experiences, she aspires to provide a profoundly different and empowered future for her daughter. Her dream is clear: she wants her child to never experience life in a brothel, to receive an education, and to pursue her dreams. Reshma's determination to break the cycle of intergenerational prostitution is an attestation of the strength of maternal love and the yearning for a brighter future.

Amongst this backdrop, there also are individuals like Tumpa Mondal and Pushpa Mitra, a couple who stand as beacons of hope. Tumpa, a part-time employee at the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, chose to stay in Sonagachi with her husband, defying familial opposition. Instead of moving to safer and more conducive areas as their economic condition improved, they remained committed to making a difference in the lives of the children of sex workers. Tumpa and Pushpa, along with other dedicated individuals create safe learning spaces for these vulnerable children during peak hours of the sex trade. Their work is not only about education but also about nurturing the emotional well-being of these young souls. They recognize that they are not just fighting against a deeply entrenched system but also against taboos, stereotypes, and the objectification of women as mere objects of pleasure.

The Art of Living, is an organization that conducts programs for marginalized communities and plays a pivotal role in empowering sex workers and their children in Sonagachi. Through free medical camps, providing nutritious food and offering stress-management and motivational training they aim to enhance the self-regard and opportunities of those living in it. What started as a small initiative in 2012 with only a few participants and facing immense opposition has grown into a regular engagement program with various activities. The milestone achievements include the establishment of an informal learning center, classes in various subjects and the active involvement of community members as teachers. This educational support, along with stress-alleviation and empowerment programs helps children and women regain their sense of self-worth and dignity.

The Udaan project, initiated in December 2015, marked a significant leap forward. With the foundation stone of a CBSE school for these children inaugurated by Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar the founder of the Art of Living and West Bengal's Higher Education Minister, Mr. Partha Chatterjee, this project aims to provide primary education, food and vocational training. This will equip the children with the skills and confidence they need to break free from the cycle of exploitation and poverty. The school will not only provide an academic education but also foster an environment that nurtures the physical and emotional well-being of the children. It is a sanctuary where they can grow without the threat of disease or the negative influences of their surroundings. Funding for this crucial project comes from dedicated volunteers worldwide who are committed to improving the lives of these children. Their proactive steps, like those of Ajay Tripathi, a donor to the school, reflect a deep concern for the immediate risk faced by these children, especially the young girls who are most vulnerable to being forced into the sex trade.

Within the sprawling labyrinth of Sonagachi, a thousand different tales of life's vicissitudes and the relentless fight for survival are etched in every shadowed alleyway and dimly lit room. Sonagachi encapsulates a paradoxical world where hope and harsh reality collide, where the dreams of a brighter future intermingle with the grim struggles faced by its inhabitants. The stories of the marginalized women and their children in Sonagachi are stories of resilience in the face of adversity. These women are thrust into a world of exploitation and degradation, often from an alarmingly young age. The dreams of many like Reshma, who yearns for a different life for her daughter, shine brightly against the backdrop of darkness that pervades this district. Her determination to ensure that her child escapes the clutches of prostitution and attains an education reflects a deep well of hope.

Individuals like Tumpa Mondal and Pushpa Mitra, living within the district, contribute to the narrative of hope. They defy societal norms, offering a glimmer of possibility by creating safe spaces for the children of sex workers. They stand up against the deeply entrenched taboos that have confined these women to the margins of society.



Source: Une famille vivant dans un bidonville à Sonagachi, Kolkata, en Inde. Photo ONU/Kibae Park

The efforts of organizations such as The Art of Living provide an essential support system. Through programs that encompass education, stress management and empowerment these organizations work to enhance opportunities of those living in Sonagachi.

However, as we delve deeper into the lives of those trapped within, we encounter the stark contrast between hope and reality. The truth is that for many sex workers, escape from this district is a perilous endeavor. The world beyond Sonagachi offers no sanctuary, and the threats they face are as horrifying as the reality they live within. The struggle to break free from the confines of Sonagachi is a journey fraught with danger. For some, the prospect of freedom carries with it the risk of violence at the hands of those who should protect them, the police. Shockingly, stories abound of sex workers who, upon attempting to leave, face not only brutality but also a horrifying violation of their dignity. The system, rather than providing refuge, further ensnares them.

The aspirations of its inhabitants to break free from the shackles of the past and forge a brighter future stand in contrast to the challenges they confront daily. While there are those working tirelessly to make a difference, the entrenched societal norms and systemic issues that persist in Sonagachi remind us that the path to transformation is arduous. The lives of those in Sonagachi serve as a powerful testament to the resilience of the human spirit which continues to seek the light of hope even in the darkest of circumstances.



# LAOS

## *ETHNIC MINORITIES IN LAOS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION, RIGHTS, AND DEVELOPMENT*

**WRITTEN BY: MAÏLYNE PEDOUSSAUT**

In general, the treatment of ethnic minorities can have various consequences often related to human rights, social inequality and political stability. Laos is a Southeast Asian gem with over 200 ethnic groups boasts a rich culture. While the Lao Loum forms the majority, the country officially recognizes 49 distinct ethnic groups, each contributing to the nation's diversity. Despite occasional tensions, especially related to land issues and political representation, Laos remains generally peaceful.



The diversity challenge lies in the historical, cultural and linguistic complexities. The government categorizes groups geographically but a more accurate classification based on language families reveals the intricate mosaic of Tai-Kadia, Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Lu Mien and Sino-Tibetan influences. The absence of official recognition of ethnic minorities can lead to systemic discrimination. Members of these groups may be excluded from certain economic, educational and social opportunities, contributing to inequalities.

***Why Aren't They All Recognized? How does the lack of official recognition of ethnic minorities in Laos impact social cohesion, human rights and economic development? What measures can be taken to address the resulting challenges and promote inclusivity? Can cultural heritage be preserved?***



Laos, home to around 6 million people, echoes a complex history shaped by political shifts and cultural identities. Officially, the government classifies ethnic groups into lowland (Lao Loum), midland (Lao Theung) and highland (Lao Sung) categories. The Lao Loum represent approximately 60% of the population. The other ethnic groups are grouped into two categories : the Lao Theung, who live in the hills and the Lao Soung, who live in the mountains. However, the reality is a diverse blend reflecting further distinct language families. This historical backdrop underlines the resilience of ethnic groups in contributing to Laos's cultural diversity. Each minority contributes to the nation's rich cultural tapestry. The history of Laos and its ethnic minorities is complex, shaped by a variety of historical, social and political factors.

## Historical background of Laos and ethnic minorities

The history of Laos dates back to ancient times when various ethnic groups inhabited the region. These groups developed their own languages, traditions and ways of life. In the early centuries, the Khmer Empire had a significant influence on the region. The Khmer Empire was based in present-day Cambodia and was a powerful kingdom from the 9th to the 15th century. This is a period that is considered the classical era of Cambodian history.

This influence had a lasting impact on the cultural, architectural and linguistic aspects of the region including parts of what is now Laos. The influence of Khmer civilization in Laos was not only a result of military conquest but also through peaceful interactions, trade and cultural exchanges. The decline of the Khmer Empire in the 15th century allowed for the rise of new regional powers and the area that is now Laos saw the emergence of local kingdoms and principalities. A long time ago, there was a powerful kingdom in Southeast Asia called Lan Xang, which means "Kingdom of a Million Elephants and the White Parasol".



Bringing together different groups of people under one rule played a big role in Laos' history. This kingdom started in 1353 when a prince named Fa Ngum, who was originally from the Khmer royal family, established it after being exiled. He got help from local leaders and the capital was first in Luang Prabang. Fa Ngum led Lan Xang to expand its land through alliances and conquests, trying to unite various groups, including the Lao, Khmu and hill tribes. However, in the late 1800s, Laos became a French colony and Lan Xang's traditional way of ruling came to an end.



## Colonial era and independence

Laos fell under French colonial rule in the late 19th century. Arriving in Vietnam in 1858, the French extended their domination over Cambodia and Laos and grouped them within French Indochina. The French colonial administration had a cultural impact on Laos. Western education systems introduced the French language and customs were promoted among the elite. In 1893, the French established a protectorate over Laos. It was characterized by the imposition of colonial administration, economic exploitation and the introduction of European cultural and legal norms. Large plantations were established and indigenous people were often forced into labor. During this period, some ethnic groups collaborated with the French, while others resisted colonial rule. They also developed infrastructure, such as railways and roads, to facilitate the transportation of resources. This led to a cultural divide between the Westernized urban elite and the traditional rural population. Compared to some other parts of French Indochina, Laos experienced relatively less open resistance and armed conflict. The Lao Issara (Free Laos or Lao Freedom) movement, which sought independence from both Japanese and French rule emerged during World War II.

In 1940, during World War II, Japan invaded and occupied French Indochina, including Laos. The Japanese aimed to control the region's resources and establish a strategic presence. The end of World War II in 1945 brought about significant changes in the geopolitical landscape. The negotiations that followed World War II resulted in the 1946 Franco-Lao Treaty, which confirmed Laos as a French protectorate within the French Union. However, the struggle for independence persisted, leading to the First Indochina War (1946-1954) as nationalist forces sought to break free from French colonial rule. Laos eventually gained full independence in 1954, following the conclusion of the First Indochina War and the signing of the Geneva Accords. However, the country soon became entangled in the larger conflicts of the region, particularly the Vietnam War. The experiences of World War II, including the Japanese occupation and the weakening of colonial powers, contributed to the growth of independence movements in Southeast Asia, including Laos.



***"LAOS, GUERRE CIVILE LAOTIENNE", 1953***

Pathet Lao, or Lao People's Party was a communist political movement in Laos that played a crucial role in the country's history particularly during the mid-20th century. The Pathet Lao was founded in 1955 as the political wing of the Lao Issara (Free Laos) movement. The movement adopted Marxist-Leninist principles and aimed to establish a socialist state in Laos. The Pathet Lao, a communist movement, played a crucial role in the struggle for control in Laos. In 1975, they took control of the government leading to the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The communist government implemented policies aimed at unifying the country but also faced challenges in managing ethnic diversity.

## Contemporary political landscape



Today, Laos is home to a multitude of ethnic groups, including the Lao Loum, Lao Theung and Lao Soung. Efforts are being made to promote national unity and development while respecting the cultural diversity of these groups. However, issues related to recognition, representation and rights of ethnic minorities continue to be relevant. Under a one-party system, President Thongloun Sisoulith leads Laos.

The communist party's dominance affects political structures. Ethnic minorities, though officially represented, encounter limitations on their political influence. Political issues related to ethnic minorities in Laos are varied and include issues such as human rights, political participation, representation, cultural preservation, local conflicts and access to natural resources.

Ethnic minorities may face challenges in political representation with concerns about their inclusion in governance bodies and participation in national decision-making processes. They face challenges in terms of human rights, including restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association. Reports indicate close surveillance and repressive measures, limiting the minorities' ability to freely express their opinions. Challenges include human rights issues, limited participation in decision-making and restrictions on freedom of expression since the 1991 Constitution.



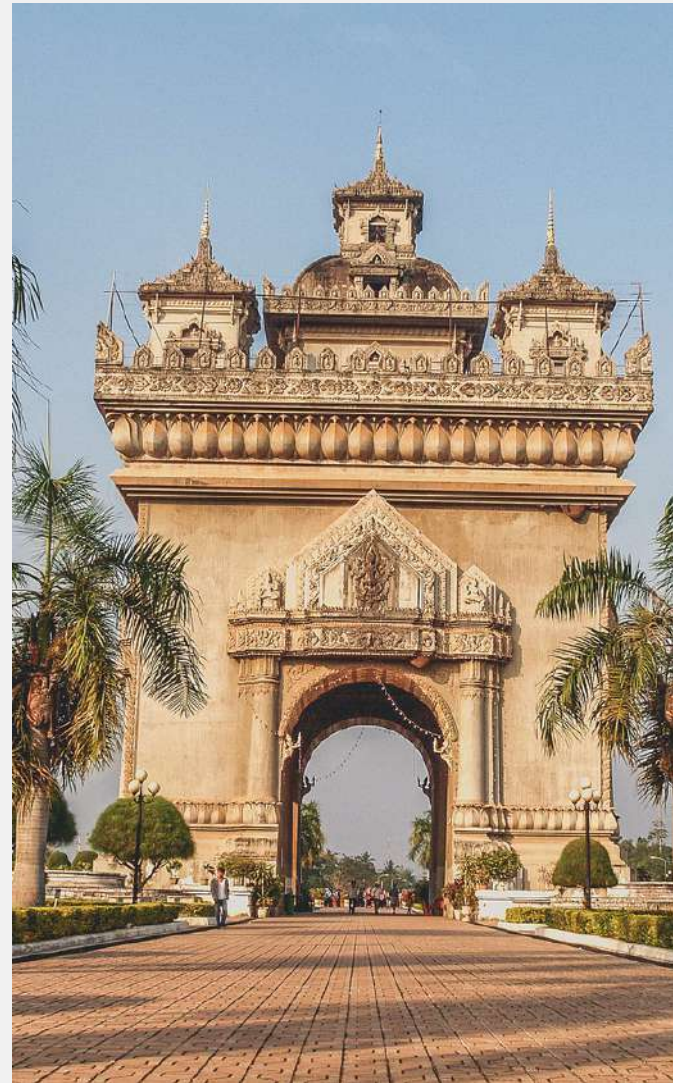
Indeed, the 1991 Constitution for the first time acknowledged the multiethnic character of the State and the concept of a multiethnic people. It granted the minorities a true legal status with, in particular, a right to cultural difference but political realities remain very unfavorable to ethnic minorities. Their participation in political decision-making is often restricted. In summary, politics in Laos impact the lives of ethnic minorities, with concerns over human rights, political participation and cultural preservation. Ethnic minorities continue to play an important role in the country's cultural wealth, despite the challenges they face.

## Economic development and challenges

While Laos has experienced overall economic development since the 1980s, ethnic minorities still grapple with significant economic challenges. Unequal access to economic resources remains a pressing issue, with certain groups facing disparities in opportunities and benefits.

This economic inequality contributes to disparities in living standards and overall well-being among different ethnic communities. Some groups have faced issues such as land displacement, cultural marginalization and limited political representation as we have seen before.

Indeed, ethnic minorities grapple with economic challenges affecting well-being and development. These include unequal access to economic resources, disparities in development projects, poverty in remote areas, impact on traditional livelihoods, income inequalities, etc.



One of the key economic challenges faced by ethnic minorities is the impact of large-scale development projects on their communities. Infrastructure initiatives, such as dam construction and deforestation, often lead to the displacement of these minority groups from their traditional lands. This not only disrupts their established ways of life but also raises concerns about their access to arable land and natural resources. They can lead to the forced displacement of ethnic communities, leading to the breakdown of cultural ties with their ancestral land.

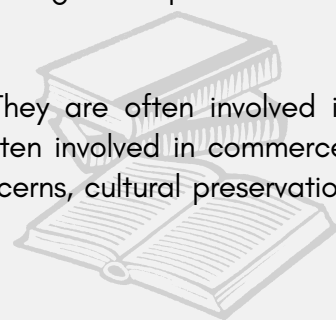
## Cultural preservation and educational challenges



Efforts to preserve cultural diversity also face challenges such as limited education access in native languages, assimilation pressures and the loss of traditional practices. Education is not adapted to their needs or conditions and they have access to fewer resources. The economic challenges extend to threatening traditional livelihoods, especially for ethnic minorities engaged in agriculture and crafts. Encouraging sustainable economic practices aligned with cultural values is crucial to preserving their unique contributions to Laos's economy. Income inequalities persist among ethnic minorities, restricting their access tinding investment in education and healthcare.

A comprehensive approach, involving both government policies and community-driven efforts is needed to address these challenges emphasizing equal opportunities for ethnic minorities. International collaboration with organizations and development partners is essential to exchange best practices and resources, contributing to the mitigation of economic disparities in Laos.

Laos' ethnic minorities play an important role in the country's economy. They are often involved in agriculture, livestock, forestry and tourism. The Lao Loum, for their part are often involved in commerce, administration and the liberal professions. But Laos's politics, human rights concerns, cultural preservation and economic challenges significantly impact ethnic minorities.

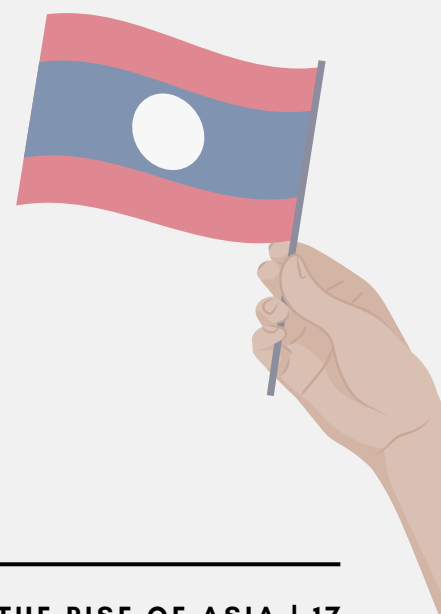


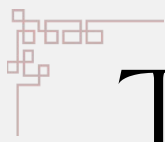
## Challenges and opportunities for ethnic minorities

Laos, where over 200 ethnic groups contribute to its cultural richness, the recognition, rights and development of ethnic minorities play a crucial role. Despite occasional tensions, Laos is generally peaceful, shaped by a complex history from the influential Khmer Empire to French colonial rule.

The political landscape, influenced by the Pathet Lao and struggles for independence, reflects the resilience of ethnic minorities. The absence of official recognition for these minorities leads to discrimination, affecting economic opportunities, political representation and cultural preservation. In politics, minorities have representation but face limitations. Economic challenges persist, creating disparities in resources and impacting traditional livelihoods. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach, involving government policies, community efforts and international collaboration.

The goal is not only to bridge economic gaps but also to empower ethnic minorities with equal opportunities and preserve their unique cultures. As Laos progresses, the journey toward inclusivity for ethnic minorities remains a crucial step for a harmonious and equitable future also to preserve Laos' culture.





# THAILAND

*EVOLUTION OF SEX TOURISM IN THAILAND FROM 1950 TO THE PRESENT DAY*

**WRITTEN BY: AMÉLIE CORMIER, FLORINE FAUQUEMBERGUE & MAÏLYNE PEDOUSSAUT**

In 2019, the arrest of a French national accused of multiple sexual assaults and rapes involving minors has thrust the issue of sexual tourism in Thailand back into the spotlight as reported by France 2. This situation has raised questions about the government's commitment to fight against this form of tourism. Is the government truly prepared to address and eradicate this issue? Sexual tourism in Thailand is a subject that has long captivated attention and concern on both a national and international scale.

Thailand, often referred to as the "Land of Smiles" has long been a cherished destination for travelers from around the world, drawing visitors with its picturesque beaches, majestic temples, and delicious cuisine. However, beneath this idyllic side lies a much darker reality. Thailand is also known for being a hotspot for sexual tourism, an industry that attracts a significant number of foreign visitors seeking commercial sexual encounters. This phenomenon raises complex questions about sexual exploitation, human trafficking, human rights, culture and the economy of this Southeast Asian nation. We will delve deep into the world of sexual tourism in Thailand, examining its history, social, ethical and economic implications, as well as the efforts undertaken to address it.

## **From Origins to the Boom of Sex Tourism**

Before talking about sex tourism, we need to talk about prostitution. Prostitution in Thailand began six centuries ago. It started with the wave of Chinese immigration, making Chinese women the country's main prostitutes and sex slaves. During the legal era, the state itself managed the brothels and prostitution. Over the years, Thailand became known as the country of sex work. It developed significantly at the beginning of the 20th century with the Japanese occupation and then really took off during the Vietnam War (1955-1975) with the occupation of American soldiers. At that time, prostitution was not regulated. In 1960, the State prohibited prostitution, but remained very unclear about the penalties. In addition, no measures were taken to control sexual activities in the country. No age limit was given. As a result, despite this prohibition, the number of underground bars and "massage salons" increased dramatically, mainly in the tourist cities of Bangkok and Pattaya.



By the 1970s, the country's reputation had spread worldwide, and films such as Francis Ford Coppola's "Apocalypse Now" (1979) even began to portray Thailand as the capital of sex and prostitution. This image was shared by the whole world and encouraged Westerners to travel there to take advantage of Thai women. In 1996, following various media and film representations, the government redefined the law on the prevention and suppression of prostitution. This law increased the number of convictions and possible sentences and covered child prostitution and human trafficking linked to the development of sex tourism. In 2003, another law was added to the penal code to regulate the situation, in particular regarding child prostitution, which carries a maximum 10-year prison sentence for the client. This law was just as unclear as the first one and still did not use the term "prohibited" but "punished".

Today, the problem of prostitution remains one of the major social problems in Thailand. Although it is banned, tourism remains the country's main source of revenue. This raises questions about the government's desire to abolish prostitution. More and more awareness campaigns are being launched but the situation does not seem to be taken seriously for the moment.

Exact numbers on sex tourism can be challenging to obtain due to the clandestine and often illegal nature of certain activities, as well as the reluctance of individuals involved to disclose their reasons for visiting. Additionally, governments and tourism agencies may not explicitly track or report on the specific purpose of tourists' visits.



*Source: Nato Association of Canada*

Much of the available data on tourism in Thailand tends to focus on overall tourist arrivals, economic contributions and general travel trends. In 2022, Thailand received 11.15 million foreign visitors but it is important to note that not all tourists who visit Thailand engage in sex tourism. Nevertheless, a large part of Thailand's GDP is devoted to tourism, in all its forms (12 to 15% of GDP in 2019). It would be hypocritical not to recognize the state's role in abolishing sex trafficking. The economic benefits derived from tourism, including sex tourism, may be a significant factor influencing government policies. It might be perceived as a source of income, foreign exchange, and employment for locals. Indeed, sex tourism attracts a substantial number of international visitors who spend money on accommodations, entertainment, food, transportation and other services leading to a substantial influx of foreign currency.



Source: *China Morning Post*

The economic benefits derived from tourism, including sex tourism, may be a significant factor influencing government policies. It might be perceived as a source of income, foreign exchange, and employment for locals. Indeed, sex tourism attracts a substantial number of international visitors who spend money on accommodations, entertainment, food, transportation and other services leading to a substantial influx of foreign currency.

The sex tourism industry creates jobs in various sectors, such as hotel trade, entertainment, transportation, and services. This is particularly relevant in areas heavily dependent on tourism. Locals working in the sex tourism industry, including those in bars, clubs and related services, may earn a living through tips, commissions or regular wages. In regions where other economic opportunities may be limited, the sex tourism industry can act as a diversification strategy, providing an alternative source of income for local businesses and individuals.

However, the distribution of wealth is a problem. For example, the government can generate tax revenue from the sex tourism industry, which can be used to fund public services and infrastructure development. And yet, with the money generated by tourism, the state doesn't devote any of its annual budget to fight against sex tourism.

### **"The Disturbing Realities of Thailand's Sex Industry"**

A particularly disturbing aspect of this industry is the diversity of people involved; it's not just women but also "ladyboys" (transgender individuals), even children and the differing levels of consideration that exist for them are just as diverse.

Women, as the primary beneficiaries of this industry are often exploited and treated in a dehumanizing manner. Thailand remains at Tier 2 in the latest 2023 TIP (Trafficking in Person) Report (released by the US State Department) along with 104 other countries and territories out of 188 assessed worldwide, meaning it does not fully meet the minimum standards for eliminating human trafficking. Women working in the sex industry in Thailand are often victims of trafficking and sexual violence, with limited access to human rights and legal protection.



Source: *aljazeera*

According to a 2016 study by UNICEF, there were approximately 120,000 child victims of prostitution in Thailand, of whom approximately 60,000 were girls and 60,000 were boys. However, these figures are likely to be underestimated as it is difficult to collect reliable data on child sex tourism.

In contrast, “ladyboys” are sometimes better treated within the sex tourism industry. Their services are more often expensive since they are seen as an exotic curiosity by tourists. Some trans men in Thailand choose to work in the sex industry due to the relative acceptance of their gender identity compared to other countries. However, it's important to note that many ladyboys still face discrimination and violence despite this positive perception.

The most alarming aspect of this situation concerns children involved in sex tourism. According to the NGO ECPAT (International Organisation for End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes), which fights against the sexual exploitation of children,

Thailand is a major destination for child sex tourism. Children, often from impoverished families, are extremely vulnerable and subjected to abuse. The Thai government has taken steps to fight this exploitation but the problem persists.

To fight against this illegal practice, the government has enhanced legislation and penalties against human trafficking and sexual exploitation imposing stricter prison sentences for offenders. It has also launched awareness campaigns to educate the public about the dangers of sex tourism and to encourage reporting. The government collaborates with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international agencies to fight the trafficking of children for sexual purposes.



Source: *academic-accelerator*

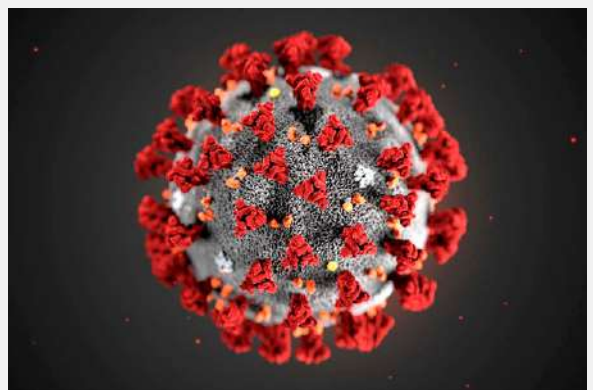


## "The Impact of the covid-19"

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand has witnessed a concerning surge in issues related to prostitution, exerting a profound impact on the nation's economy particularly its pivotal tourism sector. This has resulted in an increase in vulnerable populations turning to sex work. While obtaining precise statistics on the exact rise in prostitution during the pandemic remains challenging and discernible trends and concerns have surfaced.



The implementation of global lockdowns and travel restrictions aimed at curbing the virus's spread severely impacted Thailand's tourism industry, a major economic contributor. The resultant economic downturn, combined with widespread job losses and financial instability, has compelled individuals (some of whom may not have considered sex work previously) to turn to such activities as a means of survival.



Reports and anecdotal evidence indicate a shift in the demand for commercial sex services during the pandemic, with a potential increase in online and informal transactions. This imbalance, characterized by a low demand for a high supply, presents additional challenges for monitoring and regulation, making it increasingly difficult to safeguard individuals involved in sex work and effectively combat human trafficking. The prevalence of online transactions further complicates these efforts, underscoring the urgent need for adaptive strategies to address the evolving landscape of prostitution in Thailand amid the ongoing global health crisis.



COVID-19 has disproportionately affected marginalized groups, notably exacerbating existing inequalities for transgender individuals in the context of the sex tourism industry. While specific figures detailing the extent of these changes may be elusive, it's crucial to recognize the intersectionality of the issue, taking into account the implications for various marginalized groups.

Addressing the surge in prostitution in Thailand during the pandemic requires comprehensive measures, encompassing economic support, access to healthcare, and initiatives to combat discrimination and stigma.

## **Beyond Stereotypes: The Real Stories of Sex Workers in Thailand**

Obtaining testimonies from sex workers in Thailand can be challenging due to the clandestine and often stigmatized nature of their work; however, some accounts provide insights into the complex realities they face. These narratives shed light on the diverse experiences within the sex tourism industry, encompassing women, transgender individuals and others.

One sex worker, who wishes to remain anonymous, shared her perspective:

“I entered this industry out of necessity. With the pandemic, many of us lost our regular jobs and we had to find alternative means to survive. It's not a choice we make happily, but it's often the only option left.”

Another account, this time from a transgender sex worker, reflects the nuanced dynamics within the industry:

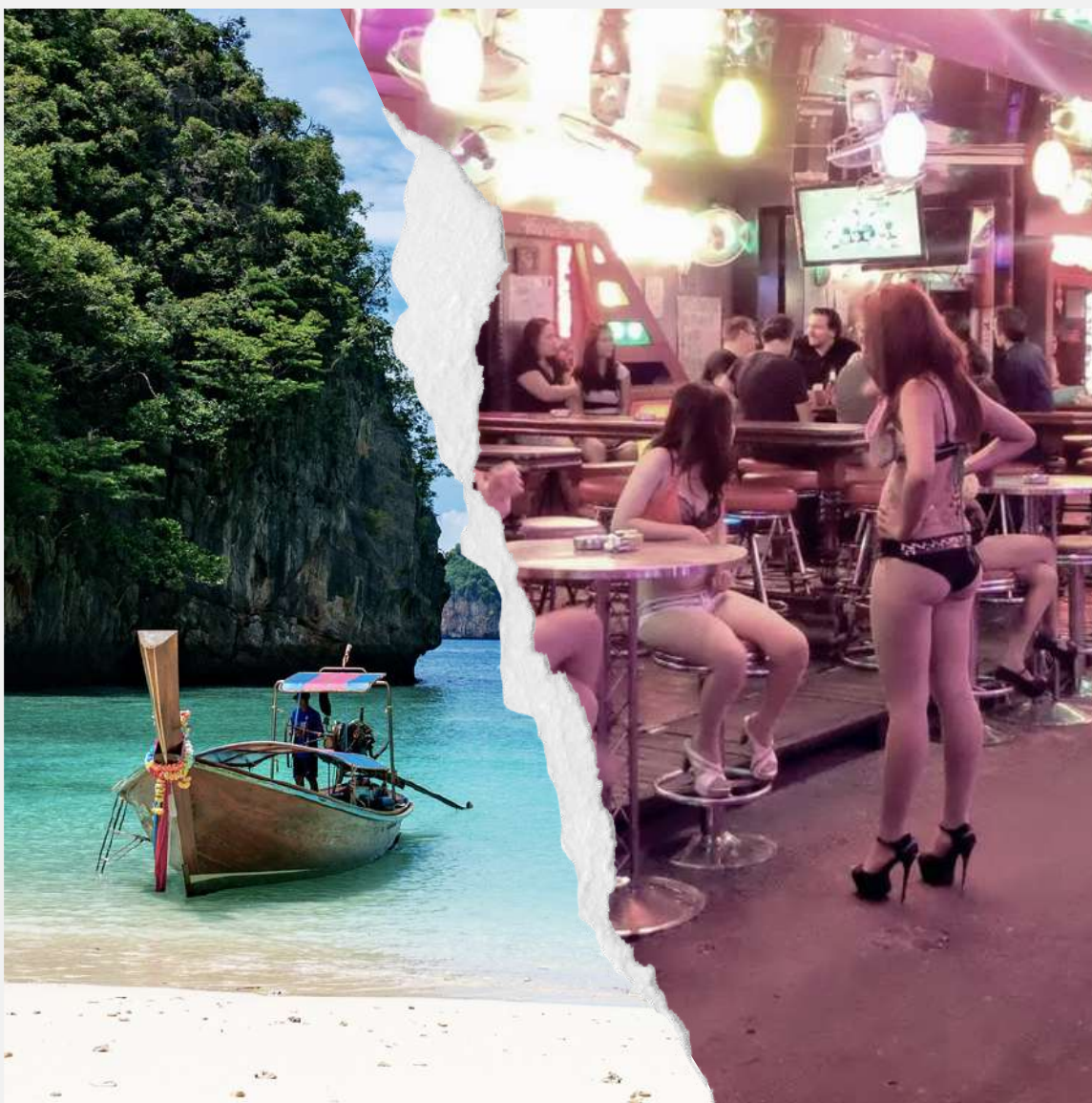
“Being a 'ladyboy' in the sex tourism business can be both empowering and challenging. While some clients treat us with interest and even respect, others still discriminate against us. It's a constant negotiation between acceptance and prejudice.”

These testimonies highlight the economic pressures that drive individuals to engage in sex work, especially during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The narratives also underline the diverse attitudes and treatment that different groups of sex workers face, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of their experiences. An additional perspective from a sex worker addressing the government's role in regulation and support:

“We need policies that protect us, not just penalize us. The government should acknowledge our existence, ensure our safety, and provide resources for alternative livelihoods. Criminalizing us only perpetuates the cycle of vulnerability.”

These real-life accounts underscore the importance of considering the voices of sex workers in discussions about the industry and the policies that impact their lives. It is crucial to approach the topic with sensitivity, acknowledging the various reasons individuals enter sex work and recognizing their agency, while also advocating for their rights, safety and well-being.

In essence, these narratives encourage us to question not only the complexities of the sex tourism industry but also the frameworks we use to discuss and regulate it. How can we, as a global community, foster an environment that respects the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their involvement in sex work? It's a question worth pondering as we navigate the intricate intersections of culture, economy and human experience. It is essential for Thailand and the international community to continue working together to eliminate this heinous form of exploitation because, don't you think every individual regardless of their color, ethnicity, or gender, has the right to claim their human rights?



Source: Thailandfr

# JAPAN

## *FUNERARY RITES IN JAPAN BETWEEN TRADITIONS AND MODERNISM*

**WRITTEN BY: FLORINE LINSELLES**

### **"The family honoring their dead"**

In the midst of Japan's evolving societal landscape, the age-old tradition of "The family honoring their dead" stands as a testament to the enduring ties between the living and the departed. Rooted deeply in the amalgamation of Buddhism, Shintoism, and ancestor veneration, this spiritual practice has been a cornerstone of Japanese burial customs for centuries.

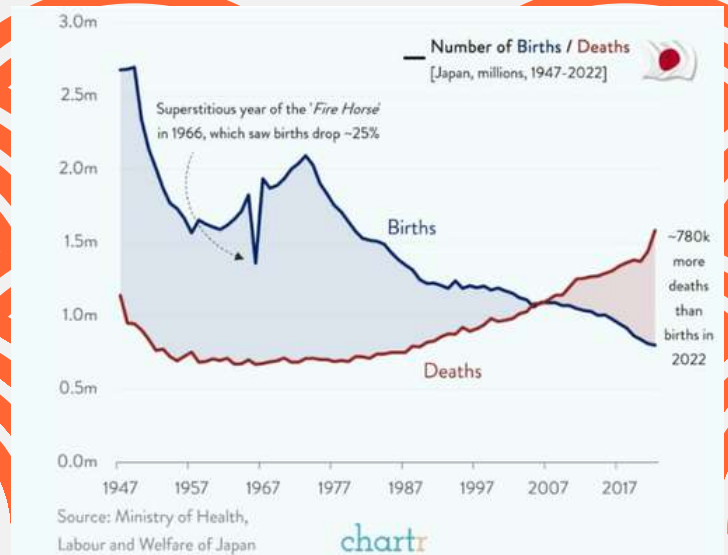
As the 20th century dawned, Japan's burial practices underwent a subtle metamorphosis, influenced by a confluence of historical, legal, and demographic factors. The traditional custom of interring the deceased within the family grave, a symbolic representation of the transition into ancestors, continued to persist despite the official dismantling of such practices post-World War II. The resilience of this tradition was a poignant nod to the sanctity of familial connections, fortified by the enduring commitment of descendants who dutifully tended to the graves and made offerings.

The late 1800s marked a significant period when modernization laws sought to formalize these age-old practices. The cultural fabric of Japan was intricately woven with threads of reverence for ancestors, creating a symbiotic relationship between the living and the dead. However, the 21st century was marked by challenges, with Japan grappling with demographic shifts characterized by a declining birth rate and an aging population.



In 2023, the death rate in Japan stands at 11.74%, a stark contrast to the modest 7% birth rate. This demographic imbalance has cast a profound shadow over the venerable tradition of familial reverence for the departed. As the number of deceased individuals rises, a palpable tension emerges within the societal framework, prompting a reevaluation of established practices.

In the heart of Japanese culture, family members assume a pivotal role in preserving the memory of those who have passed away.



### “Metamorphosis of the family and demographic changes”

However, the changing demographics pose a poignant question: How does society perceive the lonely deceased in this evolving landscape? The once unquestioned practice of family members dutifully tending to the family graves becomes a subject of reflection, as societal dynamics shift.

The narrative unfolds against a backdrop of conflicting perspectives, where the sanctity of familial bonds clashes with the practical challenges posed by an increasingly aged and dwindling population. The descendants find themselves burdened with the responsibility of honoring generations past. Debates ensue about the sustainability and relevance of traditional burial customs.

In response to these challenges, several contentious practices have emerged. Some families, faced with the logistical difficulties of maintaining ancestral graves, turn to alternative forms of memorialization. Digital platforms, virtual spaces and technological interventions become avenues through which the memory of the departed is preserved. These modern approaches to honoring the dead reflect a nuanced response to the evolving needs of a society in flux.

The tradition of "The family honoring their dead" is thus undergoing a metamorphosis, navigating the delicate balance between reverence for the past and the pragmatic demands of the present. In this intricate dance between tradition and modernity, Japan's burial customs are reshaping themselves, echoing the broader shifts in the cultural fabric of a nation at the crossroads of tradition and change.

## The Lonely Death, or "Kudokushi"

IN RECENT YEARS, JAPAN HAS WITNESSED A STAGGERING SURGE IN "KODOKUSHI" CASES, A TERM DESCRIBING INDIVIDUALS WHO DIE ALONE AND REMAIN UNDISCOVERED FOR PROLONGED PERIODS.



This grim phenomenon spares no age group, affecting both young and elderly, reshaping Japan's relationship with mortality. It has deep-rooted connections to pressing social issues such as isolation and the ostracization of individuals by their own families and society.

One sex worker, who wishes to remain anonymous, shared her perspective: "I entered this industry out of necessity. With the pandemic, many of us lost our regular jobs and we had to find alternative means to survive. It's not a choice we make happily, but it's often tAlarming as it may be, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare officially reported 3,700 "unaccompanied deaths" in Japan in 2013. However, experts unanimously concur that the actual count of uncared-for deaths annually soars to a staggering 30,000, unveiling the gravity of the crisis.

In the grim aftermath of lonely deaths, Toru Koremura emerges as a critical figure, tasked with cleaning up the remnants of these solitary passings. With a job that he candidly characterizes as nauseating, he admits to having shaved his hair to escape the clinging scent of decomposition. He contemplates the profound existential questions evoked by his work but asserts his contentment with his life, despite it not aligning with childhood dreams.

Despite the grim nature of his work, Koremura finds a sense of fulfillment in his unconventional career. He notes the success of his business, highlighting a clientele that requires his services around 60 times a month. The monetary compensation, ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,000 per assignment, underscores the economic dynamics intertwined with the challenging moral aspects of his job.



Source: *Le Monde*

This paradoxical blend of existential contemplation and financial pragmatism paints a vivid picture of the evolving societal landscape in Japan, where the stark realities of capitalism intersect with the profound questions surrounding life and death.

## The Homeless Death

The escalating issue of homeless fatalities has become an alarming concern for individuals without a place to spend their final moments. In Japan, access to a cemetery plot is restricted solely to those possessing a legally designated successor who can assure the maintenance of the grave and cover related expenses. Those who fail to meet these stringent criteria find themselves at risk of becoming the unfortunate "homeless deceased."

In Japan, traditional burial practices have long been ingrained in cultural and familial norms. However, the evolving demographic landscape, marked by an aging population and one of the lowest birth rates globally, has strained the traditional support structures. The conventional family grave, accessible only to those with legal successors becomes a poignant symbol of exclusion for the growing number of individuals who don't meet the criteria.

Deceased individuals without any family claims to their remains often find their final resting place in the Kuboyama Public Cemetery, administered by the municipal government of Yokohama. The Kuboyama Public Cemetery emerges as a final resting place for many unclaimed bodies, painting a stark picture of societal neglect. The high cost associated with death further exacerbates the problem, with the aging population often surpassing the capacities of family care, as noted by Yasuyuki Fukukawa, a psychologist at Waseda University.

Yasuyuki Fukukawa, a psychologist affiliated with Waseda University in Tokyo, posits that the aging population has reached a juncture where it has surpassed the limits of family-based care. Presently, one in every five Japanese citizens is aged 65 or older. Private healthcare services come at a premium and facilities for the elderly are in short supply. Consequently, those unable to locate or afford assistance may opt not to burden their family members, willingly embracing the status of a "homeless deceased."

The evolving nature of this issue suggests a paradigm shift in societal values and responsibilities. The notion of becoming a "homeless deceased" is no longer solely a consequence of familial circumstances; it reflects broader challenges in providing adequate care for an aging population. As private healthcare proves expensive and facilities for the elderly remain insufficient, individuals who cannot afford assistance may willingly choose to bear the burden alone, contributing to the rising phenomenon of lonely deaths.





## "The Dead Industry", or "Shukatsu"

Japan's aging population is revolutionizing the end-of-life industry. With a record 1.57 million deaths in 2022, there is a glaring lack of crematoriums and mortuary space. Companies like Sanyo, once known for cooler bags, have capitalized on this, developing refrigerated boxes for temporary body storage. A morbid solution and profitable venture.

The demographic challenges have spurred a shift in traditional funeral customs. Families opt for smaller, cost-effective ceremonies and crematorium-based services, reducing financial burdens. This shift highlights the need for rapid adaptation in the industry, where capitalism is reshaping age-old practices. Digital technology is also changing the game, with robotic columbariums and online funeral services on the rise.

Younger generations are embracing digital tools to manage end-of-life affairs, while traditional customs retain cultural significance. The most unsettling change is the use of robots like SoftBank's Pepper as budget-friendly Buddhist priests at funerals. These machines reflect the commodification of death in a capitalist world, with the sanctity of tradition giving way to economic pragmatism. The winds of capitalism have infiltrated the sacred realm of death.

As Japan confronts the stark reality of depopulation in its rural regions, digital technology emerges as an unlikely savior. The funeral industry is undergoing a digital renaissance, with robotic columbariums and online funeral services rapidly gaining ground. Younger generations, discerning the practicality of digital tools are entrusting their end-of-life affairs to apps and online platforms. This modern-day approach threatens to eclipse the age-old customs still held dear by society.





## Difficult religious cohabitation

Japan's Homogeneity has been shaken by the presence of a growing Muslim community, revealing stark challenges in the realm of religious cohabitation. With around 230,000 Muslims residing in Japan, the difference between their burial customs and Japan's cremation practices emerges as a real issue. Japan's status as a homogenous society has been a point of pride. However, the influx of foreigners with diverse religious backgrounds sparks complex hurdles. Cremation is deeply ingrained in Japanese culture, in contradiction to Islamic traditions, prioritizing burial.

Japan's deeply rooted cremation culture stands in stark contrast to historical burial practices, with more than 99% of the deceased in 2019 being cremated, a figure much higher than in many Western countries. This radical shift is a reflection of Japan's relentless pursuit of modernization and societal change in the 20th century.

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