

Social Capital in the Process of Migration, and Adaptation in Economic, Politic, Society and Culture of Myanmar Migrants in Thailand: Case study in Chiang Mai

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Abstract

This study aims 1) to study social capital in the migration, supporting succeeded migrants from Myanmar into Chiang Mai, and 2) to analyze the adaptation in economic, politic, society and culture of the Myanmar migrants in Thai communities. The study found that the process of the first time migration, mostly the Shan, from Myanmar into Chiang Mai, employed the agencies. Migrants who succeed in the first migration have become “**pioneers**”, which have developed to the social capital facilitating the next generation of migrants. Later on, the migration did not prefer the agencies, but has relied on the migration network that is social capital of pioneers, including family members, cousins, friends, who work as the agents. For the analysis of the adaptation, most of the Shan migrants give the importance to economic, social and cultural adaptation. They rarely adapt to politic because in their opinion, it is not important for them. In fact, the economic and social adaptation has rapidly developed; the Shan migrants can develop from a labor to be “**an employer**”, “**a reseller**”, “**a tenant**”, “**an activist**” against the Government of Myanmar through the media, “**a cultural promoter**” with international network, and so on. Such adaptation affects social status that has been more accepted from Thai and the Shan together.

Keyword: Social Capital, Illegal Migration, Shan Migrants, Myanmar Migrants, Adaptation of Migrant, Chiang Mai Province

1. Introduction

In the past, the structure of the process of migration was complicated, resulting in the difficulty in migration and high cost of travel. Consequently, the obstacles of migration occurred. But in the era of liberalism, the capital freely moves. Such movement therefore leads to displacement of people, technology, and culture. However, the migration cannot be accepted because of the impacts on country security, especially the illegal migration, intrusions sovereignty that is unable to provide consent. In Thailand, the movement of illegal workers from neighboring countries, especially from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia into Thailand still continuously occurs. This is because Thailand border is near three those countries. Across boundaries can be done easily by using the natural crossways that is no Thai Immigrations. Furthermore, the rate of economic growth of Thailand has increased compared with neighboring countries. This significant factor attracts labors from neighboring countries come to work both legally and illegally.

Chiang Mai has the most of illegal Myanmar migrants in the Northern provinces who are allowed to work only 3 years back in each October between 2009 to 2011 with a number of 65,695 person, 52,519 person and 51,619 person. [1] However, that number consists of just only Myanmar workers who registered with Chiang Mai Employment Offices. In contrast, the in-depth interviews of key informants have found that there are at least 150,000-200,000

the Shan labors working in Chiang Mai but they are not in the government system.

To migrate into Thailand to be low-level workers of Myanmar causes by the impulsion from the source countries, such as political conflicts and fighting in countries. The process of production and low income affects the difficulties in livelihood, in particular accessing to social services both in health and education. Most of the migrants in Thai society have minor social status [2] in Myanmar since the Shan is minority. In addition, the labor shortage in the agricultural sector at all levels; from household level to large agriculture level, as well as the construction sectors, and service sectors of Chiang Mai leads to a strong demand of this group of workers in order to substitute Thai workers that usually value convenience, and decline intricacy. [3]

Most of illegal Shan migrants from Myanmar to Thailand to be low-level workers in Chiang Mai have succeeded. Because of illegal migrating with the necessity in economic development, thus Thai Government allows work permit to those by worker registration, which has become motivation to migrate; consequently, there are more illegal migration of the minority in all forms of practices. However, the migration is the process of attempting to make this trip successful because they are illegal migrants. Edward Taylor explains that the migration is successful because of pioneers,[4] who provide financial assistance for traveling to work as well as information about workplace. According to Douglas Massy explains that Kinship Network [5], and Porath (1980 cited in James Coleman) determined that “F Connection”[6] were the factors facilitating the migration, consisting of Families, Friends, and Firm. These components are basic social capital supporting the successful process of migration.

After the migration of the Shan from Myanmar to work in Chiang Mai, they need to adapt to economic, politic, society and culture. To ensure the stability

of the workforce and to maintain the identity of the Shan, the adaptation is a way of survival in a different society, which differs in almost dimensions. This study therefore aims to study the social capital of the illegal migrants from Shan, Myanmar to be workers in Chiang Mai. Also to study those workers’ adaptation to survive in Thai communities as the lower-level workers who still have illegal immigrant status. This study may provide their forms and methods of the adaptation to survive in Thai society, leading to better understand people who differ in races, linguistics, and culture in order to be ready for ASEAN community, where people need to live together in a borderless society.

2. Purposes of the study

This research aims 1) to study the social capital that encourages the successful migration of workers from Myanmar into Chiang Mai, and 2) to analyze the adaptation to economic, politic, society and culture of Myanmar workers in Thai communities.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study consists of 2 theories. The first theory is **international migration**. Myron Weiner [7] found that three variables have a role in determining the possibility of international migration: 1) differential variables (the differences between areas); 2) affinity variables (the variable of bordering areas); and 3) access variables (the ability to access the destination areas). Additionally, Myron also suggested that these variables may not be able to explain the entire phenomenon of international migration, one should study the variable group related to regulations of border crossing. This is in line with Supang Chantavanich, et al.’s study. [8] They discuss that the migration is a system covering the economy, social, cultural, legal, and internationally political factors. In addition, the migration system refers to the process starting from the decision to

depart the source country to the destination country. The migration system can be divided into 3 major steps (Supang Chantavanich, et al.): 1) the initial migration: the most important reason of this step is economic variables, including the migrants' economic disadvantages, the cultural variables, such as the values of traveling, especially young people who are in age to work and migrate to find jobs abroad. At the same time, one more important variable is immigration laws of a source country, which encourages their citizen to migrate to work in a foreign countries without discrimination; 2) during the initial migration includes the process and convenience of travel, such as traveling, commission, and the bounty money paid for the agent who is manager and facilitator; 3) arriving and staying at the destination country: when migrants arrive at the destination country and sustain their lives by working in those countries, the economic impact caused by the migrants is to have a higher wage job, the employment contract, which defines the length of time to work and live in that country, sending savings money back to the source country to family or relatives as well as their other economic activities.

The second theory is **social capital**. Douglas Massey explains that the migrant network [9] is a key factor that plays a role in both legally and illegally successful migration. The social capital theory describes social networking in migration, which is often found on the kinship network. Since both legal and illegal migrants will succeed if they have social networking. Edward Taylor [10] describes the role of the migration network that the migration is an important component of the globalization and the economic development in many underdeveloped countries. The decision to migrate is similar to other typical human behaviors, which make decisions by looking other people as examples. The critical variable of migration is the migration network; sometimes those are neighbors who are formerly immigrants, called pioneers. They provide financial assistance

for traveling to work as well as information about workplaces, such as application or work illegally, income, travel expense to the destination countries, or even travel risks and how to resolve that issues and risks. When arriving at the destination country, these pioneers gradually educate in all aspects, particularly finances and awareness of the risks. Porath (1980 cited in James Coleman) [11] points out the function of F Connection, consisting of Families, Friends, and Firm, is social organization, facilitator of the migration. Coleman considers the social capital as tool to facilitate the actions of people to meet expected goals. Social capital, which they say important is the proximity of people in a social structure. This proximity needs to be a truly tight relationship, leading to trust and sincerely treat each other. Accordingly, the social capital is the primary facility for any successful action. In other words, the process of migration of the minority from Shan to be workers, the social capital plays a crucial role in enabling more easily migration, which is based on the trust between the pioneers and the new migrants who are not in family.

4. The Study Methods

4.1 Scope of the study

This research is the study of social capital facilitating the migration of people from Shan to be workers in Chiang Mai. Also, the research aims to study the adaptation in economic, politic, society and culture of those migrants in Thai communities. The data collection was performed during May 2010 - November 2011.

4.2 Research Methodology

This study employed qualitative approach for data collection and data analysis. Documentary research, such as research reports, thesis, and review articles, was used along with the survey and in-depth interview of 4 groups of key informants, which are 1) 4 Shan workers; 2) 2 NGO staffs in journalism for the Shan and in the migrant worker protection in

Chiang Mai; 3) 1 government officer who is the headman of Moo 2, Tambol Suthep, Muang, Chiang Mai; 4) unofficial leader of Moo 1, Tambol Pongyaeng, Maerim, Chiang Mai. There are 8 examples in total. Collected data was content analyzed, interpreted, and summarized according to the given purposes.

5. Findings

The analysis of documents found that the social capital is the primary mechanism to facilitate the migration from Shan into Chiang Mai. Mostly, this social capital is family members, relatives and friends, and a few agencies. Kritaya Archavanitkul, et al. [12] studied 409 the first time migrant workers in Chiang Mai. 73 percent of them migrated without agencies; the other 27 percent used agencies to enter Thailand. In fact, men workers used agents more than women workers. Kritaya Archavanitkul, et al. explain that men need to find job and housing, then the other members of the family and relatives will come later. The study suggests that those men can be considered pioneer in establishing the migration network to those who want to migrate both within and outside the family. According to Edward Taylor’s opinion, the study suggests that the new immigrants who want to become workers in Chiang Mai do not need the agencies anymore. They rely on information providing about the routing, traveling, obstacles, job hunting, and housing from the former migrants. Furthermore, this study also suggests that most of the first time migrants come with the family. As can be seen, family members are the most trust people whom they choose to travel with. This indicates that there are risks of the migration in the opinion of the first time migrants. Hence, they have to choose the most reliable ones to travel with. This is consistent with the findings of the Nattaporn Chaikaw,[13] who in-depth interviewed a diverse group of 40 samples about how to become workers in Chiang Mai. She found that 30 samples came without using agencies. However,

she does not provide any information about who encourage those migrants or who facilitate them migrating to work in Chiang Mai. However, the researcher believes that the migrant network, as described by Douglas Massey, provides information for the migration trip. Because more than half travel by bus rather than travel by foot, this requires person who knows the bus routes. Moreover, to come to the Thai borders requires several continuing buses. The remaining 10 samples used not only Myanmar and Thai agents but also the owners of workplaces and Thai police. In fact, agencies are the important group in the migration network, which is the key to a successful migration. Being the pioneer, the first generation migrants have served as a substitute of the agents after already working and living in the destination area.

The findings of the above study are consistent with information from “Mr. Tee”[14] (aged about 30 years). He is a Shan labor working as construction worker in Chang Puek, Chiang Mai. He said that he migrated with his mother when he was a teenager. He crossed the border at Piang Luang village, Wiang Haeng district after his father has been employed as worker in the gardens of the villagers in that area. Mr Tee moved to be a worker of the flower garden in Pongyaeng, Maerim because his relatives working there encouraged him. This is consistent with the survey, the researcher found that such area is the main winter flower plantation source of Chiang Mai, especially the Chrysanthemum, with a good price and can be grown all year. An unofficial leader of the village [15] mentioned that villagers now mainly cultivated chrysanthemum because they can plant 2-3 times per year. Some plant 4 times per year. Thus, they need to hire additional Shan workers. They basically hire at least 2 workers per family, mostly a couple. Mr. Tee has been working only a year in Pongyaeng, and then turned into a construction worker because his Shan neighbors’ persuasion and

the higher wage. This is similar to the analysis of data from the interviews of “Mr. Lao”[16] (aged 35 year old) who is now married to Shan construction worker. Mr. Lao easily made decision to migrate to find job because his parents are migrants employed in the garlic garden in Chaiprakarn district for 5 years. Mr. Lao, living with his sister earlier in Shan, migrated into there with his relatives. When arriving Chaiprakarn district, he has become a worker and stayed at several construction sites in Chiang Mai, such as Sansai, Doi Saket, and Muang district. The wage a day is 180 baht. To be in the construction profession of Mr. Lao is because his relatives already working in this area. This person applied for him to the Thai construction employer in advance, called “Nai” (Engineer) by the Shan workers. Nai also required a lot of workers, so the migration of Mr. Lao has a position in advance.

The case of “Uncle Chai”[17] (aged 76 years old) is different from the first two examples. Becoming a worker in Chiang Mai because of his family member, the eldest daughter of his 8 children, who was the first migrant of the family. She also crossed Thai border at Piang Luang village like Mr. Tee’s family. However, Uncle Chai’s daughter came to work at Samoeng district as forest planting employee of the Department of forestry. She encouraged Uncle Chai, his wife, and the remaining of her brother and sisters traveling by foot. When arriving Wiang Haeng, his daughter rented car to pick them up. Uncle Chai and his wife have worked as forest planting employees at the same place as his daughter. Most workable children work for the garden in Samoeng district.

“Por kru” [18] (aged about 70 years old), formerly a writer in Shan, prefers writing of Kurab Saipradit and Jit Pumisak. He migrated and traveled by foot alone. At first, he resided and worked in Fang district. After he got high-area identity card by paid to the Government official in that area, and then he migrated to work in Muang by bus. Currently, he works as the successor of the Shan tradition to the Shan young people who

come to work in Chiang Mai. The new generation migrants come to work and take care him.

For the finding on the adaptations to economic, politic, society and culture, the researcher found that all 4 Shan workers give the importance to the economic, social, and cultural adaptation, not the political adaptation. They think it is far from them, and it does not affect them. Moreover, they think that to survive in Thai community, they require only job, income, and have any opportunity to make merit on Buddhist day as well as significant traditions of the Shan. Mr. Tee always seeks for job with a higher wage. He wants to work with “Look Pee” (boss), who hire workers with fair income. Mr. Tee told that he currently works for “Look Pee” who is the Shan, and he more understands the Shan than Thai employer. For example, he can leave to join major activities, such as Children’s day. Since his child is studying 1 level at the primary school in Tambol Suthep, and the school requires parents to participate in this activity. Unlike the Thai employer, he cannot leave to join such activity. He can leave only on the Shan New Year festival held every year at Wat Ku Tao or Wat Pa Pao. This data indicates that even high income requirement, but if that cannot meet the cultural and social needs, migrant workers dispute that higher income. Also, it reflects the development of Shan worker whom Mr. Tee calls “Look Pee”, from originally the construction worker to “**employer**” after obtaining experiences and sufficient funds. In the form of subcontracting from Thai contractors, they can purchase construction materials and a private truck.

Mr. Lao has obviously adapted in economy. After the marriage with his wife, who is Shan and a construction worker, his wife was the first child pregnant. She had to stop working in construction. With the high cost of living, but half of the income is vanished, they require to seek for a solution. They spent all money to buy personal stuffs and dry food to sell in a worker camp. His wife is a manager. This

can sell to residential workers impressively, and sell better if no car resellers comes in. As can be seen, Mr. Laos has economic adaptation into “a reseller”. Even though it is necessary, he can earn more income than being a construction labor. The case of Uncle Chai is the example of adaptation from forest planting employee in the government office to “a tenant” of a garden of the farmers in Tambol Pongyaeng to grow chrysanthemum, which currently his children run it. Subsequently, Uncle Chai has become the center of descendants and relatives as well as the Shan migrants in Tambol Pongyaeng, and a good example for descendants regarding social adaptation. Uncle Chai always participates in every Thai holiday. For example, the development of villages and temples on December 5 and August 12 held every year. He also donates money to improve schools and temples in his village. Mr.Lao and Uncle Chai have higher economic improvement compared to other ShThe case of “Por Kru” is slightly different from other informants because his former status is middle class. He is educated and has a career as a writer. His migration into Thai society is not for only earning income. He works when he does not have money as well. He spends most of his time in Wat Pa Pao; therefore, he has gained experiences with government representative, the police, who always inspect migrant workers in the temple. Uncle Chai told that the police always “play” on him, which means trying to impose charges. Although he has high-area identity card, and he cannot be arrested, they will try to charge other allegations. He thinks it is unfair to minorities. He said that *“I will be compassionate to that police when we meet each other ... I think it works because he does not play on me anymore.”* Uncle Chai and “Mrs. Kam-In” [19] (aged about 40 years), a NGO staff in journalism for Shan, have attempted to maintain the Shan ethnic group, together with the Shan in Chiang Mai and foreign countries, such as America and Australia. The linguistic and cultural

groups were established in Wat Ku Tao in order to be the Coordinating Center. It is targeted to young people to learn the language and Shan cultural inheritance, particularly Tai New Year festival and Poy Sang Long. Mrs.Kam-In is the one who developed from a labor to a NGO staff, which provides a better social status because she has been encouraged to learn English from international organizations. There are volunteers coming to teach at a language center for migrant workers in Chiang Mai. The same as “Ms.Pui” [20] (aged about 25 years), originally employed in a restaurant, and then became a NGO staff working on protection of labor rights after having car accident and this organization provided assistance. After recovery, she became the volunteer and a full time staff. She was promoted to train in Canada in women workers of international organizations like Mrs. Kam-In.

The information from key informants suggests that the Shan workers focus on economic adaptation first. Second is the social and cultural adaptation. The last is political adaptation. For example, Uncle Chai always contributes to his village when he is requested to join the development from the headman. Similarly, the interview with the headman of Moo 2 [21], Tambol Suthep indicates that the Shan workers in Tambol Suthep interest in daily life rather than politics. However, if they are asked for cooperation, such as the government announcement of the cur field, they provide good cooperation. In conclusion, the Shan workers in Thai communities need to learn to adapt themselves so as to survive in the society by encountering the least problems. But some migrant workers have a rapid development, resulting in changes in social status. Such adaptation reflects the words of Uncle Chai *“the Shan have to adapt like a “Tok-Tae” (gecko), which when it goes anywhere, it needs to hide themselves so people cannot notice it.”* [22]

6. Conclusion and Suggestion

6.1 Conclusion

From the findings of the study, the researcher can conclude that in the process of migration, there is the migration network involved, including family members, relatives, friends, the Shan and Thai agencies, and government officers facilitating the successful migration. The first time migrants require payment to the agents. However, after working and staying in Thai society for a while, the first migrants have become pioneers. Consequently, the migration of the next generation can be done more easily. These migrants will develop the migrant network, extending widely to increase the number of migrants into Thai society, especially illegal migration. In the adaptation, there is a high development of the adaptation of the Shan migrants, from low-level labors to “**employers**”, “**resellers**”, “**tenants**”, “**activists**” against the Government of Myanmar through the media, “**a cultural promoters**” with international network, and developers in private organization to support and protect the Shan labors’ rights.

6.2 Suggestion

The Quantitative approach should be employed to study primary data in Chiang Mai along with qualitative data in order to obtain more complete study, which can substantially describe the phenomenon of migration of people from neighboring countries.

7. Acknowledgements

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