BURMESE TEENAGERS' NEED AND DECISION ON MIGRATION IN THAILAND

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Abstract- This research aimed to investigate the migration pattern of the teenage Burmese immigrants (migrating back to their homeland, migrating to new regions or continuing staying in Thailand) and to explore the support suitable for the teenage immigrants after identifying their specific needs such as education, health care, jobs. This research is qualitative research which gathering data and analyzing conclusion by taking in-depth interview from Burmese immigrant workers aged between 12-25 years whose parents are also immigrant workers for their opinion and life goal with the extra comment about Thai government from their point of view. The study of this research found that the young generations of Burmese immigrants have different kinds of perspective according to their experience. However, the economics factor and social and networking factor are what matter most to them so they are likely to migrate again.

Keywords- Burmese teenagers, migration, decision

I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of migration has been deeply rooted in Thai society for a long time. Even though the guidelines for the problem's solutions have long been explored, including treatment and prevention, such implements seem useless. The problem, moreover, is seen negatively in the Thais' point of view since they are afraid that this might result in a negative effect to their country. Furthermore, with the coming of ASEAN Economic Community, the issue, especially the labor migration issue, is even more addressed, and Thailand as one of the destinations for migrant workers from ASEAN countries, therefore, needs to be ready for such a transformation. This leads to a lot of questions bombarding Thai people and governmental institutions. Such doubts, for example, include how serious the effect would have on Thailand, a destination country, and whether the increase in immigrant workers would negatively affect Thailand in general. However, these are thoughts only on the one hand. On the other hand, these problems are regarded as the points not too difficult to handle; proper education and view adjustment towards the issue of labor migration could possibly lead to appropriate solutions.

Since 1990 the major economic expansion in Eastern Asia has brought about a lot of new labor supplies, resulting in the transformation of the pattern and destination of transferring the foreign workers in many different ways. These, for instance, are the dramatically increasing amount of laborers from Asian economic integration, the even more complicated employment structure based on growing international demands and supplies, more open policies regarding immigrant workers from each country, the mounting import of immigrant laborers due to the approaching aging society in Asia, and the fact that workers in professional occupations no longer long for work opportunities in the Western market. These changes would result in the new era of Asian workforce mobility, and Thailand is required to greatly adapt to those changes, including the policies, education, employment and the better collaboration between demands and supplies in Thailand and Asean. (Sakkarin, 2011)

As for Thailand, Thai government has started the policies to attract professional and technical workers since 1978 B.E.; however, there is still a need for low-level labor in the manufacturing sector. Due to the fact that Thailand is now regarded as a newly industrialized country, Thai government has issued a stricter law on foreign workers registration since 1996 B.E. Despite the strict law, problems still occur. It is more of a financial burden from the registration process, affecting both workers and employers alike. This leads to a huge number of unregistered workers and difficulties Thailand, as one of the foreign workers' destinations, has been bearing. This, furthermore, causes a different structure in workforce mobility, urging Thailand to reform its education, employment and the general collaboration between demands and supplies in Thailand and ASEAN.

year	The number of foreign workers		
	legal	illegal	Total
2555	940,531	193,320	1,133,851
2554	678,235	1,272,415	1,950,650
2553	379,560	955,595	1,335,155
2552	210,745	1,334,157	1,544,902

year	Burmese	
	legal	illegal
2555	611,944	63,768
2554	404,008	905,573
2553	137,931	812,984
2552	905	1,078,767

year	Laotian	
	legal	illegal
2555	41,244	39,704
2554	61,507	106,970
2553	53,389	62,792
2552	50,094	110,854
year	Cambodian	
	legal	illegal
2555	137,198	64,409
2554	112,079	235,521
2553	80,123	56,479
2552	54,362	124,761

Source: Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Reports on the Labour Statistics of the Year 2006 – 2012

From the table above, it's clearly seen that most of the foreign workers in Thailand are Burmese, Laotian and Cambodian people, with the majority of Burmese laborers both legal and illegal. The main reason they choose to work in Thailand is because they hope for better income and quality of life, compared with the benefit they could have in their own countries. Though the positions available are in a low-level standard, the benefits they will have in Thailand are still more motivating. (Sivilai, 2012) However, the studies are conducted basically focusing on the numbers, with no mention of further studies on the age ranges or other specific characteristics of the sample.

A lot of children from Burmese workers have been born in Thailand. For example, from the estimation of NGO, mostly working in the fishing and cold storage - frozen food industries, around 300,000 Burmese workers at Mahachai, from overall 3 million in Thailand, have about 18,000 children. From the figure, about 2,000 children have an opportunity to be educated at 15 schools which use Burmese language in teaching (not certified by both Thai and Burmese governments). From 2,000 children, around 600-700 children are educated at schools which mainly use Thai language in teaching since the parents hope that their children could read and write Thai, and thus help empower them in living here in Thailand. There are 7 schools which conduct their teaching in Thai, mostly organized by Thai NGOs. There are still few students studying at Thai public schools. Though some have the opportunity to be educated, there are still as many as 16,000 children who does not, with no mention to specific reasons of why they aren't being educated. (Achariyach, 2014) However, these children are growing up, also considered as immigrants in which their process of immigration has long been done whilst they were still young, or just born in Thailand. The interesting point is what decision these growing-up-and-soon-to-be-in-the-labor-market immigrants will make regarding their need on migration, considering the fact that they all have been through the initial process of immigration and have an opportunity in living in the destination country their parents choose. They may need to migrate to other regions, stay at the same area or move back to their own country, which is Burma. Due to the considerable number of these immigrants, knowing their needs would absolutely be beneficial to Thailand more or less.

II. DETAILS EXPERIMENTAL

2.1 Objectives of study

1. To investigate the migration pattern of the teenage Burmese immigrants (migrating back to their homeland, migrating to new regions or continuing staying in Thailand).
2. To explore the support suitable for the teenage immigrants after identifying their specific needs (education / health care / jobs)
3. To examine the processes and solutions Thailand needs for these immigrants.

2.2 Scope of study

The information gained from immigration process is normally difficult to keep on track. This difficulty happens for various reasons such as the limited sources of information during the information gathering process, difficulty in reaching information sources, permission from parents since some sample, as a part of information sources, are basically in pre-teen ages, and does not have well-developed plans for their future or ideas. Furthermore, though there are studies on migration relating to Thailand, it is hard to find ones deeply focusing on the teenage immigrants. Most of the studies on teenage immigrants are international studies; therefore, there are not enough proper evidences to support the studies on subject matter. Lastly, since the Burmese immigrant workers migrate illegally and are now in a low-level labor market, the process of information gathering is quite problematic.

2.3Methodology and Data Analysis

The information is gathered from the interviews with 7 Burmese immigrants whose ages are varied from 12 to 25 years old (Sriruen, 2002), and whose parents' jobs are varied. After the interview, the information gained is analyzed to produce a qualitative research.

III. RESULTS AND SUGGESTIONS

After interviewing the sample, using questions according to the conceptual framework, it is revealed that the language barrier is a part of obstacles found. Since some of the interviewees are still young, they cannot choose appropriate choices of vocabulary and provide suitable ways of communication even though they understand the questions well. However, realizing its future benefits, all of the interviewers are happy to continue the research.

According to the conclusions of the interview on general ideas towards migrating to and working in Thailand, it is found that most of the interviewees have already started working, both part-

time and full-time jobs. They need to help their family financially despite the fact that they are still young. The idea of earning money since a young age is firmly rooted in their mind because they see this as an advantage for themselves in the future. Almost half of the interviewees have had an opportunity to be educated in Thai schools before. They nevertheless see that it is not quite useful having only basic education. To pursue their study further, they need to have a lot more time and find educational institutes on their own, which definitely mean less time for working and earning more money. On the other hand, even though having few opportunities, all of the interviewees confirm that they want to pursue their education further, especially on studying languages and occupational skills, which would help them develop themselves and land them in the positions in a better labor market. One of the interviewees mentions that "if you want to study, you need to do it by yourself, secretly. If you want to be able to speak Thai, you need to work hard, practicing listening and speaking a lot. If you are mocked due to your accent, be patient. This is because if you can speak Thai, it will be easier for you to work here." The main reason why the Burmese immigrants want to study Thai language is their own eager to learn the language, which is rarely used due to the fact that Burmese language is the main mode of communication in their families. However, some interviewees say that age is not related to the learning ability; it is just how accurate the accent you could have. For them, the knowledge coming from their eager to develop themselves is always better. It means better job opportunities.

Moreover, when asked about migrating to other countries, all of the interviewees agree that if it means better opportunities and income, they will definitely consider taking those opportunities. After analyzing the interview in detail, the idea all of the interviewees similarly shares about migration well corresponds with Lee's pattern though having different push and pull factors. 3 of the 7 interviewees reveals that migrating to other countries while having more mature ages and experiences possibly means better jobs, income and, of course, the quality of life. These 3 interviewees mention that, apart from the income and opportunities, one of the push factors they experience is Thai laws, which are not yet well developed to protect foreign laborers and immigrants. One of them says that "I don't know if the health coverage right is applicable here for me. The hospital I went to is also not so good. Buying medicines for myself is easier." Furthermore, the immigrants lack proper care and help, leading to insufficient rights they should have. Possessing negative views, Thai people themselves also look down on these foreign workers. While experiencing some difficulties living in Thailand, these immigrants surprisingly have positive views for their own future. As long as they start working since a young age, they would have more opportunities in continuingly developing themselves and possessing more skills. These increasing experiences will then lead them to the migration for a better labor market, both in Thailand and abroad.

However, the idea of another 4 interviewees more corresponds with Lee's pull factors. They think that working in Thailand, or living right where their previous generations live, is far more convenient. Staying at the same places provides them supports and connections from their families, contrasting to settling down in a new place, where there are more risks in settling down and finding connections. One of the interviewees mentions that "we live together with many families here, taking care of one another. When there are festivals or holidays, we celebrate together." With these experiences, the immigrants then feel warm and relieved. They can still be themselves even though they are now living in a foreign land. In addition, Thailand is one of the immigrants' neighboring countries; they can live close to their families. Even though Thailand is more economically developed, it is also a Buddhist country that shares quite similar cultures. A Burmese interviewee says that "there are a lot of temples here in Thailand, just like my home country. My parents take me to the temples since I was still young." These Burmese immigrants also think Thailand is their major source of jobs and income, compared to their native country. However, they possess a different view from the other 3 workers mentioned in the previous paragraph. They confess having no serious problems working in Thailand since Thai people are now more familiar with them being here. Their friends and relatives are gaining more income and getting promotion due to their hard work and dedication. They are trusted to be responsible for more tasks. Because of these reasons, the Burmese immigrants feel that there is no separation between Thai and Burmese workers. They strongly believe that if they dedicate doing their jobs and continuingly develop their skills, their income would be increasing without having to migrate to other countries.

Regarding to the related environment, every interviewee agree that one of the major things they have to consider is the economic environment. This is because they have to work in the labor market; therefore, the country's economic conditions, currency and financial flexibility of the country in which they are living are very important when they consider migrating. These immigrants also pay attention on Thai politics. It is found that there are small changes and no specific investigation in the process of migration, meaning that the immigrants could easily move into Thailand, and there is no need to hide if they migrate illegally. However, it also means that they would have no proper benefits, care and attention. Apart from these, the immigrants are quite watchful for the rapid changes in Thai

governments, leading to changes regarding labor and migration laws.

In conclusion, the ideas on migration of the Burmese migrants in the second generation could be both continuing living in Thailand or migrating to other countries. It is interesting that no one mentions a plan of moving back to their native country. The reason for such a decision is that the immigrants were born in Thailand, or migrated to Thailand with their parents since they were young. They are thus far more familiar with Thai society. Besides, there are less job opportunities and development in Burma. If they decide to migrate back to their country, it means that they might not be able to earn sufficient income for themselves and their families. The Burmese labor market itself is also less varied, compare to Thailand's. The main factor affecting Burmese teen workers' decision is economic environment. However, the interesting point needing further study is teenagers' psychology, which is already mentioned in the related literature section. The interviewees are still in teen ages and about to be in working ages. It is possible that they might have different points of view, based on their family backgrounds and their increasing experiences, which need to be further examined psychologically. Technological factor also affects the second-generation immigrants' decisions as well. Furthermore, due to the variety of work backgrounds, they might develop different decisions on migration for better jobs.

SUGGESTIONS

Some difficulties are found when approaching the immigrants for the interviews. The interviews are needed to be conducted only when the immigrants are free from work, resulting in less time for the interviews. Moreover, some interviewees illegally migrate to Thailand, which means they do not have official documents such as work permit and alien registration card. These immigrants are then not convenient in answering some questions or giving some personal information about themselves and their families. Language barrier sometimes plays a role in the interviews as well. In order to improve the quality and accuracy of the research, interpreters are highly recommended to help communicate with the immigrant workers. Relying on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in approaching the workers is also suggested to have higher numbers of and easier access to the interviewees.

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