The Quality of Working Life of Burmese Labors
in Chiang Mai

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were to study the quality of working life of Burmese immigrants in Chiang Mai and to survey their working problems, needs and their living requirements. This research was a mixed method of both quantitative and qualitative. Data were collected from 400 subjects by questionnaires and from 20 subjects by interviews. This research analyzed by content analysis and descriptive statistics. The findings showed that the labors were females more than males, aging from less than 20 to over 40 years. Most labors were married without children and unemployed before coming to Chiang Mai. Their friends and relatives in Chiang Mai suggested coming here. Most samples, staying with their employers about 3 years, had work permit licenses to work daily in construction and service areas. They worked 8 hours a day and 6 days a week. The wage ranged from 120 to 390 baht a day with the average of 178 baht a day. Five areas of life quality included mind, environment, social relationship, physical condition and enough payment with the average of 4.05 3.67 3.66 3.65 and 3.51 respectively. For their working problems, hard and dangerous work was the first two most serious problems. For their personal living, crowded and dirty homes, lack of medical treatment, inconvenient travel to work were their problems. For their work aspect, most required work permit licenses, social welfare, social insurance, a rise in wage and better treatment. The results suggested that Thai authorities should let Burmese labors have equal rights to Thai citizens. As a consequence, the equal rights will provide good image to Thailand.

Key word: Burmese labors, Immigrant workers, Quality of life, Quality of work life, Burmese labors in Chiang Mai
Background

Chiang Mai Province is an area with many immigrants workers who wish to work and stay in Thailand. Most come from Myanmar (The Republic of Burma). Chiang Mai is an economic centre so there are many illegal immigrants trying to live and work here. The total number of immigrant workers in Thailand is as high as 586,000 of which as many as 119,000 work in the northern region. In Chiang Mai there more than 58,000 illegal immigrant workers, the highest number in the north of Thailand. There are about 28,000 people in Chiang Mai and 14,000 in Chiang Rai (The information news office estimated in 2009). Most of these immigrant workers work in agriculture, factories, domestic duties and some work in the adult entertainment business eg, karaoke, clubs, and bars (approximately 12,000). We found that most of them work in the city (7,000+), Sansai District (1,000) and HangDong (640). However the Chiang Mai Office of Employment said that the most immigrant workers who ask for work permits work. In the following fields: construction industry, agriculture and domestic service. Most of them work in Central. Sansai, Fang, Maeai, and Chaiprakan Districts. Today the economy has had a negative influence on agriculture and industry causing a reduction of production and the closure of businesses. The director of the Foundation for workers and quality promotion said that Thailand has about 3 million immigrant worker who come from Burma, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. (Chiang Mai Employment office, 2010)

According to the ‘Crisis Economy’ there are going to be in Maesod District, (Tak Province) 400-500 immigrant workers who will be unemployed in the industrial sector in Maesod District. (Matichon newspaper, 2009) This will cause many to leave Thailand. Throughout the country many thousands may or may not return to their countries leading to uncertainly in the number immigrant workers residing in our country.

If we think in sociology, population studies and law all these immigrant workers who are irregular migrants will cause many effects in their destination countries (with stable governments) such as assessing the rates of births and deaths and changes in population structure. eg. age, sex rate of population growth and demographic. There may be social problems especially in social welfare and health with these countries who need to respond may with vaccination programs for disease prevention and control. (Pajon Chalermsan, 2008)

The problems of these migrant workers comes from their lack of education and skills. Most of them are rural people who have their own ways of life and culture. Now they live in cities which give them access to a higher quality of life and increased payment from
employers. Other problems of immigrant workers include, Fear of contacting government officials to find solutions to problems they have. This could lead to drug and alcohol use, causing antisocial behavior in the future. They sometimes take children as hostages if they feel depressed over money because they cannot find solutions to their problems. All these situations have solutions in the long term, but we must find ways to help and resolve their fears and dilemmas. (Korkaew Wongpan, 2010)

The official statistics of Burmese immigrants seeking work permits in September 2010 was 26,895 males and 25,586 females for a total of 52,481 people. Nowadays the Ministry of Labor is operating the ‘Developing Workers Plan’ of 2008 by having targets to protect workers who work in shops, and entertainment entrepreneurs for social welfare and labor has set targets to save, promote and support the quality and quantity of workers such as a stable working environment, better quality of life and an immigrant workers administration. (Chiang Mai Employment office, 2010)

Many years ago, the Thai government had many rules and regulations for controlling illegal immigrant workers but put less importance on safety and quality of life. That is why it is necessary to study the quality of working life for this group of people in the Upper Northern part of Thailand. It is necessary to bridge the cultural gaps and give them opportunities to improve their lives. Some of this data may be useful to the government or other agencies to plan and implement The Asean 2015 Plan. Workers are willing to accept the plan because it allows free migration between Asian countries. Workers and people will drive the economy by providing higher incomes and employment in the society.

Objectives/Research Questions

1. To study quality of working life of Burmese Labors in Chiang Mai
2. To survey their working problems, needs and their living requirements

Research Methodology

This research is a mixed method of both quantitative and qualitative research by using both participative and non-participative observations and interviews. The quantitative research used questionnaires to collect information from 400 subjects and 20 persons by an interview sample. The period of this study was August 2010 to August 2011.

Data analysis
1. Data obtained from quantitative research will be analyzed by content, analyzed in order to ascertain the problems and needs of Burmese workers and a descriptive conclusion.

2. Data was acquired for quality of life and the researcher will analyze data by group division. Statistics for data include percentage, means, and standard deviation.

**Findings**

The random sampling of this research is work for females than males and the average of age is between 20 to 40. Most of them were married, without children and were unemployed before coming to work in Thailand. The reason for coming to Thailand was to get jobs by persuading their friends and relatives. Most workers will stay with their employers for more than 3 years and work in domestic service and construction. They find work through brokers who are Burmese friends and relatives and have work permits to work 8 hours per day and 6 day per week. The daily rate of pay for work on average is 390 – 120 baht and our random sampling group were paid 178 per a day on average.

When considering the 5 aspects, it was found that the overall mean fell fair to 5 factors of perception and satisfaction (used 5 point of Likert Scale) to the quality of life; mind, environment, social relations, physical and payment followed by having means as 4.05, 3.67, 3.66, 3.65 and followed by 3.51.

The conclusion of the problem and the need to the quality of life from the questionnaire found 4 aspects; First, problem working conditions it was found that working too hard was the biggest issue (61.20 %) followed by unsafe working conditions (48.55 %) and working long hours with little time for relaxation (50.83 %).

Second, problem daily living it was found that the greatest concern was overcrowded and dirty accommodation (52. 5 %) followed by healthcare and a lack of medical care 77.14 % and daily travelling problems (27.74 %).

Third, worker needs it was found that most needed more work permit (26.67%) followed by medical welfare higher payment (20.00 %) and more consideration and attention from their employers such as holidays, welfare and safety.

Fourth, the needs of personal living it was found that most need child welfare (41.67 %) followed by education (33.33 %) also there was a need for more convenient travel as must did not have cars (16.67 %) there was also a need to be able to rent accommodation ( 6.67 %)
Discussions

This research have defined the quality of life is perceiving and satisfying a better happier living condition under social and culture of migrant labor with 5 aspects health mental social and environment relationship and adequate payment. Also studying about the problems and needs of Burmese laborers.

This research is related with the research of Sumalee Pitayanon (2008) which says that the factors effecting the regular migration are:

1. Persuasion by relatives and friends about opportunities of working.
2. The city economy where one can earn more money even if they have less skills. They can earn more money and have a better life style than in their own countries.
3. The difference of payment because Thailand pays more than their own countries and they can send money back to their parents and families.

Moreover, this research is related to the research of Montri Promwan (2009) who said that the causes of Burmese Labor coming to Thailand to find job are through contact with their Burmese friends or agents. There is a payment which is paid per day and there are 3 concerns which are working too hard was the biggest followed by health and safety. Working problems in daily life were overcrowded accommodation and other concern was health with a lack of medical care. This related to the research of Korkaew Wongpan (2000) which spoke of the important role of female Burmese laborers who work in Thailand and their biggest concern was with the stability of their families. So there are more female Burmese laborers because after they come to Thailand, they will not return to their countries again. They will stay with their relatives who have worked before them.

Furthermore, all Burmese laborers have to pay a fee agencies before crossing the border. Some of them have to withdraw money or deposit their home or land to the bank and some female immigrant labors have to pay 3,800 baht get a pink permit card and extend the card year by year. but there are still illegal immigrant laborers who try to work in Thailand. If they are arrested they have to sent back to the Republic of Burma. For female Burmese laborers it seemed to be better because they have more side opportunities of work responsibilities and are cheaper. Men only did hard and skillful work which females workers cannot do. Moreover female Burmese laborers have less education and are looked down as
lower class people in society. Most of them have to work hard and never go back to Burma. They only have to earn a lot of money and send money back home which is the most important thing while they are working in Thailand.

**Recommendations**

1. The entrepreneurs who are in Chiang Mai still need more immigrant labors especially unskilled laborers in low class business. Most Thai laborers are not interested in this kinds of works. We cans see that Thailand can get more benefits from this labor force, so the Thai government should reward them with something eg. The Thai government should give them legal work permits to help them with the cost of living life.

2. It was suggested that the human rights of Burmese immigrants should be considered to be one of the problems for workers and that the government should give them equal rights as to other people in the country. Therefore the government should pay more attention to human rights because good labor law is good for the international image of Thailand.

3. Further research should study the quality of working life of immigrant workers of both males and females in the upper northern part who differ in ages and have different needs of working.

**References**


