

Chapter 1

Introduction

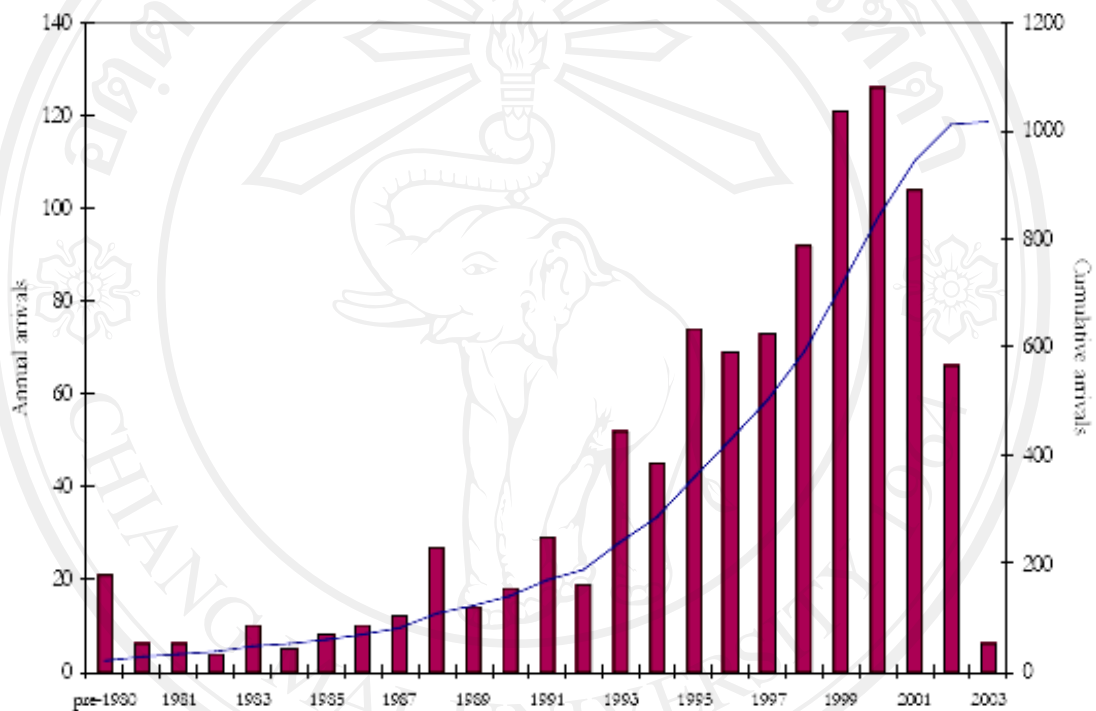
1.1 Significance of the Study

During the socialist period of (the 1960s and 1970s), the Myanmar government pursued an economic policy which moved into a closed-door or inward-looking direction. It led Myanmar's real GDP growth rates to drop from 6 percent in the 1950s to 3-4 percent annum. When the military took power in 1988, Myanmar's economy turned into open-door policies (Monique and Wilson, 2008). After 1988, the politicians who fled arrest by the military government migrated to neighboring countries. Due to the economic crisis and political turmoil in Myanmar, people lacked job opportunities and sufficient income to survive and they migrated to neighboring countries.

Thailand has remained one of the most open economies in Asia during the period of increasing globalization. Thailand experienced rapid economic growth and has actively participated in two-way exchanges of investment, technology, trade and tourism which has resulted in large flows of international migration (Huguet and Punping, 2005). On the other hand, Thailand is the major receiving country for 2-2.5 million migrants in the region (GMS, 2007). In addition, high demand for bottom level and cheap labor force caused waves of migrants to move into Thailand. Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia have the highest migrant populations in Thailand.

Annual and cumulative arrivals from Myanmar entering Thailand have been steadily increasing since 1980. It remained steady until 2000 but the number of new arrivals dropped in 2001 and 2002 (Bradford and Vicary, 2005).

Figure 1.1: Annual and Cumulative Arrivals, by Year



Source: Burma Economic Watch 2005

In 2008, the number of migrant workers was lower than in 2007. However, Myanmar still maintains the highest number with 489,282 in 2007 and 476,676 in 2008 compare with Laotian, 21,659 in 2007, 12,800 in 2008 and Cambodians, with 24,791 in 2007 and 12,800 in 2008.

Table 1.1: Number of Documented Migrant Workers (Myanmar, Cambodian and Laotian) in Thailand (2007-2008)

Migrant Workers	2007	2008
Myanmar	489,282	476,676
Laotian	21,659	12,800
Cambodian	24,791	12,094

Source: Map Foundation (2008)

In Southern Thailand, before the tsunami, thousands of Myanmar migrant workers in Southern Thailand were suffering daily from local authorities' restrictions, maltreatment, sexual abuse of Myanmar women in front of their husbands and negative discrimination from the local Thai community according to one NGO officer in Phang-Nga Province.

When the tsunami hit Thailand, 2,500 to 3,000 migrant workers from Burma were killed (The NGOs, 2005). Myanmar migrant workers suffered heavy casualties. Some were arrested by Thai police and repatriated. The source of this crackdown was that some of them were undocumented, or some had lost their ID and work permit and some were workers whose employers were killed when tsunami waves struck (ANM, 2005).

The NGOs found that discrimination against Myanmar migrants in Phang-Nga was incredibly high. Very poor education on health and awareness of security were found in Myanmar migrants.

After the tsunami hit, a number of NGOs were established. The biggest NGOs active in Phang-Nga were MAP Foundation, World Vision Foundation of Thailand (WVFT) and Grassroots Human Rights Education and Development (Grassroots HRE). MAP Foundation has been established in Phang-Nga since the registration policy changed in 2001 and it was completely active in 2002 as per an in-depth interview with one of the officers. Grassroots HRE is an organization doing extensive work in the Phang-Nga area, focused mainly on the welfare and development project in this region.

The establishment of NGOs has decreased some discrimination and maltreatment of Myanmar migrant workers by the local Thai community. Even though these incidents have decreased compared to the situation before the tsunami, the numbers of Myanmar migrant workers who suffer low pay, overwork, and sexual abuse are remain high as per information from the GHRE organization.

There are many incidents causing migrants to flow into Thailand. Global networks such as transportation, telecommunication and tourism are also a massive force on people's desire to migrate. Most of those who migrate to Thailand are low skill laborers and work at the bottom level of the Thai labor force. Thus, they are vulnerable to exploitation.

In 2004 when the tsunami hit Thailand, Myanmar migrants in Phang-Nga province were faced with certain kind of exploitation problems which the researcher has mentioned above. Because of a lack of knowledge as well as fear of being arrested by Thai authorities, when migrants could not stand exploitation by Thai employers, they just changed the jobs.

Myanmar news has begun to bring up the issues of trafficking and exploitation of Myanmar migrants e.g., from the Inter Press Service news, “the victims of 54 dead bodies were found in the truck among the group of 122 Burmese who had slipped into Thailand to secure jobs in the resort areas of Phang-Nga and Phuket” (IPS, 2008).

On 10th June 2009, Grassroots HRE news said “many Burmese women who come and work as house maids in Thailand are often faced with grave dangers of sexual and other forms of abuse, violence, exploitation, and are often totally isolated from the outside world” (GHRE, 2009). In 18th August, “95 workers were on strike because of general dissatisfaction about their working conditions. Among the reasons reported by workers were; irregular payment, termination of the credit system for buying food, forced overtime work and insufficient drinking water” (GHRE, 2009). Burma news international on the 17th of February, reported that “the strike occurred by Myanmar migrant workers on rubber plantations, where managers failed to pay them their promised wages in full. The workers received only half of the amount owed them on the 15,000 tree plantation” (BNI, 2009).

This study examined whether Myanmar migrants in Phang-Nga Province are still facing exploitation problems. What is the reason causing them to migrate even though there it is a risky migration journey?

When we look at the Myanmar-Thai border, Myanmar shares its border with Thailand in the south and its border with Thailand is 1,800 km long (Wikipedia, 2009). Migration was easy in the early years. After the military government extended their amount of troops on the border area, combined with a change in border control policies and strict rule of indirect routes in both Thailand and Myanmar, the ease of the journey into Thailand was impacted.

According to the survey of Bradford and Vicary (2005), the largest numbers of Myanmar migrants entering Thailand were from Tenasserim Division, Mon State, Shan State and Karen State. Most migrants who are migrating to the southern part of Thailand passed through the Kawtung-Ranong border check point which can be seen in Figure 1.2. Migrants who migrate through this check point are mostly from Tenasserim Division and Mon State. For those Myanmar migrant workers in Phang-Nga Province, most used the Kawtung-Ranong route and then entered Phang-Nga.

Figure 1.2: Map of Myanmar-Thai Border Check Point



Source: Department of Health Service Support, MOPH (2006)

In Southern Thailand, the number of Laotians and Cambodians is apparently lower than that of Myanmar migrants. As we see in Table 1.2, among the five highest numbers of migrant work permits in Southern Thailand in 2008, Phang-Nga has the second lowest number of Laotian and Cambodian migrant workers even though it has the fifth highest number of migrants in Southern Thailand.

Table 1.2: The five highest number of migrant work permits in Southern Thailand in 2008

Province	Total	Myanmar	Laotian	Cambodian
Phang-Nga	12,452	12,417	35	0
Phuket	29,431	29,336	91	4
Ranong	18,494	18,488	0	6
Songkla	14,460	13,550	309	601
Suratthani	30,123	29,455	621	47

Source: Map Foundation (2008)

The occupations of Myanmar migrant workers in Phang Nga Province are working on fishing crews, in the seafood processing industry, in hotels or as farmers and as construction workers for meager subsistence wages (The NGOs, 2005).

Fishing includes two sub-sectors: fishing boat workers and fish processing areas/factories. Fishing boat workers worked off-shore on boats operated by seafarers and fishermen. Fish processing workers were on-shore, doing such work as cleaning, peeling and sorting fish and manufacturing fish products in formal or informal

workplaces. Workers on rubber plantations cultivated and produced raw rubber. Construction had basic operators and final operators. Shrimp farming included feeding and harvesting shrimp. Shrimp is harvested two to three times a year.

Fishing boat and fish processing workers earned different wages. Fish processing workers received only basic wages. Those on fishing boats had a basic wage rate plus incentives from fish caught. Shrimp farming had a monthly wage rate plus incentives from shrimp harvested two or three times a year. In the construction sector, basic operators earned lower than final operators. Rubber plantation sector workers received only a percentage of produced and sealed raw rubber which caused a totally different wage rate from the other sectors.

1.2 Objective of the Study

- 1.2.1 To study demographic characteristics and socio-economic characteristics of Myanmar migrant and their reasons for migration
- 1.2.2 To study the decent work of Myanmar migrant by analyzing the level of key indicators of exploitation in four sectors (construction, rubber plantation, shrimp farming and fishing) in Phang Nga Province
- 1.2.3 To study migrants' expenditure in order to examine whether their minimum wage covered the living expenses of themselves and their family members

1.3 Scope of the Study

The study investigated migration, 'decent work' and expenditure of Myanmar migrant workers in Phang-Nga province. There were limitations on interviewing undocumented migrant workers. On the other hand, when the Thai government opened registration for migrant workers, most of them registered and became documented workers. This study was not mainly focused on the age group below 25, thus there was a limitation on the number of age groups below 25 to meet the criteria of 'forced labor'. The study on migrant's expenditure behavior was part of the aim of this study. The survey data of the exact amount of each item on which migrants spent was hardly collected since most of the Myanmar migrant workers had not memorized or recorded their expenses. There were constraints on reaching all 8 districts of Phang-Nga province during the data collection. The reason was that migrants' key person were unable to reach further due to security concerns. In shrimp farming, the sample size did not reach the target of 50 respondents. Certain difficulties were experienced during the survey on shrimp farming. The reason was that there was a difficulty to reach the workers since employers did not allow outsiders onto the farm. On the other hand, the number of migrants working in shrimp farming was less than expected.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Research Design

This research is an exploratory research study on Myanmar migrant workers from an economic point of view. The research was designed to record Myanmar migrant worker's demographics, reasons of migration, exploitation levels and expenditures. Migrants of Myanmar origin will be considered in this study.

The five key informant interviewees were comprised of one community leader, one education project officer, two Myanmar migrants' project officers from NGOs and one Myanmar migrants' key person (who helped by offering staff and a living place to migrants when the tsunami hit and currently help them in the case of their socio-economic status).

1.4.2 Data Source

The actual data regarding numbers of Myanmar migrants in Phang-Nga, as well as their socio-economic and demographics, is hard to get from both the Thai government and the NGOs since migrants are a highly mobile population. Furthermore, the secondary data on the number of Myanmar migrants is less reliable. Thus, primary data was gathered and used in this study.

1.4.3 Target Population and Sample Size

Fishing, construction, rubber plantations and shrimp farming were the target groups of this research. The target population is the people of Myanmar origin, aged 15 and above who were currently working in these four particular sectors for at least

two months. Data was collected at various workplaces for each sector. Fieldwork was carried out in Phang-Nga province.

The research questionnaires survey these four sectors with 170 sample sizes of Myanmar migrants currently working in these four particular sectors for at least two months. The target of the study population and sample size is presented below:

Sector	Migrants	Sample size survey
1. Rubber plantation	Myanmar origin male and female age 15 and above, registered or unregistered	50
2. Fishing	Myanmar origin male and female age 15 and above, registered or unregistered	50
3. Shrimp pond	Myanmar origin male and female age 15 and above, registered or unregistered	20
4. Construction	Myanmar origin male and female age 15 and above, registered or unregistered	50

Total Migrants: 170

1.4.4 Sampling Method

Researcher was relying on “snowball sampling” with referrals from Myanmar migrant workers themselves. The key person for Myanmar migrant workers was very important in order to support this sampling method as well as to gain trust and obtain reliable answers from respondents. In some instances, the researcher conducted surveys over the telephone. This method was also reliable in the case of some places where employers did not allow outsiders and visitors to approach them. All surveys was conducted face-to-face with the migrants. The surveys were deliberately kept as short as possible to allow respondents to be more willing to participate.

1.4.5 Type of Questionnaire

An individual questionnaire was used to purview the differences in the individual characteristics of Myanmar migrant workers. The individual questionnaire was divided into three parts. Individual demographic and migration, forced labor/ exploitation and expenditure were the main constituents. The exploitation part of the questionnaire followed ILO’s “the Mekong Challenge” (2006). The questionnaire was administered to respondents aged 15 years and above.

1.4.6 Operationalisation of Variables

1.4.6.1 Migration

The study of migration examined migrants who have migrated to Thailand. The reasons for migration may be different from one region to another and from one country to another. The study examined Myanmar migrants' socio-economic characteristics, demographic characteristics and motivation for migration.

Motivation for migration is defined as the individual decision to move caused by of non-economic factors, such as social, cultural, natural disaster or political factors, or by economic factors such as income and employment. If given the choice between two places, migrants would prefer going to one where they already had relatives or friends or even acquaintances of their own friends (Jansen, 1970).

Demographic characteristic: included age, sex and marital status.

Socio-economic characteristic: included occupation, education, ethnicity and their place of origin.

Migration information: included reasons that migrant decides to move and their association in Thailand.

1.4.6.2 Decent Work

This distinction was adopted in order to better investigate to different degrees, the international ILO Conventions on Decent Work, and analysis of the level of key indicators of exploitation during employment is crucial. Firstly, the study explored the level of the key indicators of exploitation. Secondly, it examined whether Myanmar migrant workers in Phang Nga had met the minimum level of

‘decent work’ from the result of the analysis of the key indicators of exploitations. For the purpose of the Protocol;

“Trafficking in persons’ shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the bad treatment or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

Furthermore, to signify severe labor exploitation, the ILO has considered this situation under the definition of ‘forced labor’. Forced labor has been defined by the ILO Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No. 29) as follows:

“All work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily (Art.2.1).”

The ‘menace of penalty’, as mentioned in the definition, is seen to include not just penal sanctions, but may also take shape of the loss of rights or privileges (ILO, 2003).

To meet the subjects of decent work the study will examine the characteristics of key indicators pertaining to exploitation by ILO (2006) which are crucial to this study, such as, being forced to work, constraints preventing a migrant from leaving their job, freedom of movement, retention of ID document by employers, violence, payment violations, working hours, days off and written

contracts. In order to get clear understanding of these indicators, the UN's tools of trafficking for labor exploitation (2009) express as follow:

Forced to work: includes migrants belief that they are forced to work against their will or will be forced to work under certain conditions.

Constraints preventing a migrant from leaving their job: include migrants unable to leave or show fear or anxiety.

Freedom of movement: include the condition of being unable to move freely, migrants are unable to leave their work environment or never leave the work premises without their employer or show signs that their movements are being controlled or they allow others to speak for them when addressed directly.

Retention of ID documents by employers: migrants were afraid of revealing their immigration status, or they were not in possession of their passports or other travel or identity documents, as those documents were being held by someone else, or they lacked basic training and professional licenses.

Violence: included the being subject to insults, abuse, threats or violence, being subjected to violence or threats of violence against themselves or against their family or suffering injuries that appeared to be the result of an assault.

Payment violations: included receiving little or no payment, being under the perception that they were bonded by debt, being disciplined through punishment by payment deduction and having no access to their earnings.

Working hours: work excessively long hours over long periods.

Days off: migrants having no days off.

Written contracts: included migrants having no labor contract with their employers. An additional indicator based on the UN's labor exploitation indicators is migrants living condition.

Living condition: included migrants living in groups in the same place where they worked and leaving those premises infrequently, if at all, living in degraded, unsuitable places, such as in agricultural or industrial buildings, or having no choice of accommodation.

1.4.6.3 Expenditure

The description of one of the international ILO Conventions on Decent Work called 'work and wages' included the subject of minimum wage. "The minimum wage must cover the living expenses of the employee and his/her family members. Moreover, it must relate reasonably to the general level of wages earned and the living standard of other social groups." (ILO, 2009)

This study of expenditure has the purpose of indicating whether migrants wages met the minimum wage as per the description on ILO convention of decent work.

Since migrants had no bargaining power with their employer, they had to accept the wage rate which employers offer and adjust their expenditure by this particular wage rate. This study can indicate migrants' real poverty or sustainable spending with their real low wages. The study on migrants' expenditure includes durable goods, non-durable goods and services. **Non-durable goods:** corresponds to all spending on both food and non-food items and including rent payment. The

expenditures for food include spending on meals eaten regularly. Non-food items include fuel, personal products, textiles, clothing and footwear.

Non-durable goods: corresponds to all spending on both food and non-food items and including rent payment. The expenditures for food include spending on meals eaten regularly. Non-food items include fuel, personal products, textiles, clothing and footwear.

Durable goods: correspond to items such as electronic equipment, furniture, and vehicles.

Services: correspond to transport, social work, health care, education, child care and public utility such as water, electric power and telecommunications.

Finally, while migrants had no bargaining power, they expected higher earning at a new job or current job or from their household members, or an expected decrease in household expenditures due to children leaving the home after graduating or an expected decrease in expenditures on certain goods etc.

1.4.7 Analysis of Data

On empirical analysis, descriptive statistics will be employed. Uni-variate analysis will mostly apply in this study in the comparison of Myanmar migrants per sector of force labor/ exploitation, migration and expenditure behavior by percentage through excel soft ware.