

Life and the formation of families within the community of laborers from Myanmar in Mae Sot, Phop Phra, and Samut Songkhram (Thailand)

Year: 2008

Place of fieldwork: Mae Sot and Phop Phra in Tak province, Samut Songkhram province

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Key Words: Laborers from Myanmar, community, families, crossing the border, migrants, laws and policies, Mae Sot and Phop Phra in Tak province, Samut Songkhram province

Research Background

Thailand and Myanmar share border areas in many places. As a result of the political and social unrest in Myanmar, families have been greatly affected. This has altered people's way of life significantly as holding a stable job and bringing in a stable income becomes impossible. This has resulted in the migration of many citizens of Myanmar to various other places to seek better opportunities so as to avoid the problems of their motherland. For the past few years, Thailand has experienced a large migration of Myanmar citizens. This has led to the formation of new Myanmar migrant laborer families in several locations within the kingdom of Thailand. This research aims to draw a comparison between Myanmar laborers working in Mae Sot and Phop Phra in Tak province (both of which are in border areas and involve people crossing the border each day) and Myanmar laborers working in Samut Songkhram province, which is closer to Bangkok province (approximately 68 kilometers from Bangkok). Laborers in both places adapt to their situations differently.

Research purpose and aim

The main objective and focus of this research is to gain a greater understanding of the life and formation of families within the community of laborers from Myanmar. Significant findings from fieldwork in Myanmar communities in Mae Sot and Phop Phra in Tak province and in Samut Songkhram province have generated data that enable the following issues to be explored: How do they adapt to the new location? How are families of laborers from Myanmar formed? How do they pass life experiences on to the next generation? What are the differences in the local policies and methods of control by the government towards migrant laborers?

Fieldwork results and achievements

It can be concluded that all localities and their inhabitants differ in many respects. Some of these differences derive from geographical location. Mae Sot and Phop Phra in Tak province are closer to the border whereas Samut Songkhram province is closer to Bangkok and further from the border area. Second, in terms of employment, individuals in the Mae Sot region are involved in the agricultural sphere, animal husbandry, and clothing industries. Laborers in Samut Songkhram, on the other hand, are involved in fishing and industries that produce seafood. Third, in terms of wages, those in the Samut Songkhram area are higher than those in Mae Sot and Phop Phra.

Myanmar laborers in Thailand can be divided into two. The first is laborers who already had a family in Thailand before they came. The second is laborers who started a family once they moved to Thailand. Myanmar laborers have an ongoing or continual relationship with their relatives. Those who newly move to Thailand, therefore, very often have someone to accommodate them and to advise them. This advice extends to employment, job opportunities, familiarizing themselves with the new social environment, medical care, and education for their children. Such advice is sometimes given to newcomers by leaders of the community. Despite the fact that people in these communities have different ethnic origins, they tend to get along.

The Thai government makes policies that extend to localities that are largely inhabited by Myanmar laborers, such as Mae Sot and Phop Phra in Tak province and Samut Songkhram province. Such policies that are related to health care and education have proven quite beneficial for these migrants and their families. There are differences in terms of the strictness of regulation imposed by authorities in the area. Areas near the border in Tak province are constantly threatened by illegal migrants and, therefore, these areas are stricter than Samut Songkhram province in terms of regulations.

Implications and impacts on future research

The experiences of migrant laborers dynamically affect the way in which they and their families adapt to the environment. These factors influence families and play a major role in the local policies imposed by local authorities. This fieldwork will enable us to understand and reconsider the impacts of migration on individuals, households, and the foreign laborer community in Thailand and will form the foundation for further studies regarding foreign laborers and their communities in Thailand.



General surrounding and living conditions within a Myanmar community

Date Taken: August 27, 2010

Place: Myanmar laborers community at Phop Phra in Tak province, Thailand

Taken by: Nobpaon Rabibhadana



Children of Myanmar laborers about to sing the national anthem
Date Taken: August 25, 2010
Place: Officially listed learning center: Mae Sot in Tak province, Thailand
Taken by: Nobpaon Rabibhadana



Myanmar laborers grinding squid in their rented room

Date Taken: September 14, 2010

Place: Inside a rented room in a Myanmar community in Samut Songkhram province, Thailand

Taken by: Nobpaon Rabibhadana