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**MYANMAR MIGRATION WORKERS IN THAILAND:
 CASE STUDY OF SAMUT SAKHON**

The research aims to study Myanmar migrant workers in the Samut Sakhon province of Thailand. The information was collected by conducting a survey. The research found 4 specific reasons for choosing migrant work in Thailand: job expectation, higher compensation, a generally positive attitude to working in Thailand, easy entry into the country. Myanmar workers expect to work on average 0–5 years due to 3 principal reasons: poor career opportunities and social acceptance, becoming a Thai citizen is nearly impossible, family members or children still living in Myanmar. Additionally 9.3% of Myanmar workers have opened own businesses, though they are prohibited from doing so; 57.2% have been in and out of the country more than once; 64.5% of the respondents have no medical care or social security. The current pattern demonstrates that individuals engage in employment in Thailand on a short term basis, this pattern additionally elucidates that the frequency by which individual migrants rotate between their activities within Myanmar and Thailand is increasing. Consequently, this no foreseeable labour shortages within provinces despite some concerns.

Keyword: Myanmar; Thailand; migrant workers; labour migration.

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**М'ЯНМАНСЬКІ ТРУДОВІ МІГРАНТИ В ТАЙЛАНДІ:
 ЗА ДАНИМИ ПРОВІНЦІЇ САМУТ САХОН**

У статті досліджено ситуацію з трудовими мігрантами з М'янми в провінції Самут Сахон, Таїланд. Інформацію для дослідження було зібрано методом опитування. Дослідження виявило 4 ключові причини для трудової міграції з М'янми до Таїланду: очікування отримання роботи, вища оплата праці, загальне позитивне ставлення до роботи в Таїланді та легкість потрапляння до країни. М'янманські мігранти в середньому розраховують пропрацювати 0–5 років в країні, чому є 3 причини: мало можливостей для кар'єрного зростання та соціального включення, отримання тайського громадянства є практично неможливим, вдома лишаються родина та діти. Крім того, суттєвими та цікавими є наступні результати опитування: 9,3% м'янманських мігрантів мають свій бізнес, хоча законодавством Таїланду це заборонено; 57,2% мігрантів знаходяться в країні на заробітках не вперше; 64,5% не мають медичного страхування або соціальних гарантій. Результати опитування свідчать про те, що трудова міграція з М'янми до Таїланду має переважно короткотривалий характер, однак частота ротації таких мігрантів постійно зростає. Це свідчить про те, що – незважаючи на озвучені побоювання – у найближчому майбутньому не варто очікувати на дефіцит робочої сили в групі трудових мігрантів.

Ключові слова: М'янма; Таїланд; трудові мігранти; трудова міграція.

Табл. 10. Літ. 13.

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 ПО ДАННЫМ ПРОВИНЦИИ САМУТ САХОН**

В статье исследована ситуация с трудовыми мигрантами из Мьянмы в провинции Самут Сахон, Таиланд. Информация для исследования была собрана методом опроса. Исследование выявило 4 ключевые причины для трудовой миграции из Мьянмы в Таиланд:

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ожидание получения работы, более высокая оплата труда, общее позитивное отношение к работе в Таиланде и лёгкость пересечения границы. Мьянманские мигранты в среднем рассчитывают проработать 0–5 лет в стране, чему есть три причины: мало возможностей для карьерного роста и социального включения, получение тайского гражданства для них практически невозможно, дома в Мьянме остаются семья и дети. Кроме того, показательными являются следующие результаты опросы: 9,3% мьянманских мигрантов имеют свой бизнес, хотя законодательством Таиланда это запрещено; 57,2% приезжают на заработки не первый раз; 64,5% не имеют медицинской страховки или социальных гарантий. Результаты опроса свидетельствуют, что трудовая миграция из Мьянмы в Таиланд носит преимущественно краткосрочный характер, однако частота ротации таких мигрантов постоянно растёт. Это свидетельствует о том, что – вопреки озвученным опасениям – в ближайшем будущем не стоит опасаться дефицита рабочей силы в группе трудовых мигрантов.

Ключевые слова: Мьянма; Таиланд; трудовые мигранты; трудовая миграция.

Introduction. Samut Sakhon is one of the largest industrial districts in Thailand. In 2013, the gross provincial product increased from 318,639 mln baht to 351,097 mln baht (Samut Sakhon Provincial Treasury Office, 2013). Samut Sakorn has the third largest number of Myanmar migrant population, following Bangkok, and Chonburi (Office of Foreign Workers, 2013: 1). The Government has raised concerns about the vulnerability of temporary migrant workers, taking seriously its responsibility to ensure migrants are lawfully employed and are not exposed to workplace exploitation.

Myanmar workers have a significant role in Samut Sakhon industries. In September 2013, there were 173,670 registered Myanmar workers living in the province (Office of Foreign Workers, 2013). However, there are many of non-registered Myanmar workers. There is currently very little information about short and long-term career transition experiences of Myanmar workers who have successfully re-entered their pre-migration occupations in Thailand.

As a result, foreign workers migration trends need to be clearly studied in order to support government agencies in establishing social policies.

Research objectives:

1. Study the factors related to movement of Myanmar workers to Samut Sakorn, Thailand.
2. Study the expected time of residence and migration procedure of Myanmar migrant workers in the Samut Sakorn area.

Literature review. Migration is the movement of large populations from a specific area to another with the intention to reside in a new location either temporarily, or permanently (Chantavanich, 1999). E.G. Ravenstein (1889) described push and pull factors to be the contributing reasons for people to migrate. Push and pull factors are the forces that can either induce people move to a new location or oblige them to leave old residence; these factors can be economic, political, cultural, and environmentally based. Push factors are the conditions that drive people leave their homes, they are forceful, and relate to the country from which a person migrates. A few example of push factors are: not enough jobs in the country, few opportunities, poor living conditions, desertification, famine/drought, political fear/persecution, poor medical care, natural disasters. Pull factors are exactly the opposite of push factors; these are the factors that attract people to a certain location.

Theoretical background:

1. Migrants move mainly over short distances; those going longer distances head for great centres of industries and commerce.
2. Most migration is from agricultural to industrial areas.
3. Large towns grow more by migration than by natural increase.
4. Migration increases correspondingly with the development of industries, commerce and transport.
5. Each migration flow produces a counter flow.
6. Females are more migratory than males, at least over shorter distances; males form the majority in international migration.
7. The major causes for migration are economic ones.

Research methods. This research uses the following mixed research methods:

1. Qualitative research method was employed to collect data from Myanmar workers and business owners in the following districts in Samut Sakorn (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Qualitative data, 8 business owners in 3 major districts of Samut Sakhon, own survey

Business Owner	Mueng	Kratumban	Bann Paew
1. Small business, less than 20 employees	1	1	1
2. Medium business, between 21–100 employees	1	1	1
3. Large business, more than 100 employees	2	-	-

Table 2. Qualitative data, 11 Myanmar workers in 3 major districts of Samut Sakorn, own survey

Business Owner	Mueng	Kratumban	Bann Paew
1. Small business, less than 20 employees	1	1	2
2. Medium business, between 21–100 employees	1	1	2
3. Large business, more than 100 employees	3	-	-

The data was obtained through the methods of Snowball sampling technique (Snijders, 1992) and unofficial interviews. An interview is more than simply asking questions and receiving responses; the goal is to create a safe and open dialogue whereby a participant may authentically discuss his her experiences. The topics are: travelling patterns between Thailand and Myanmar, job search, living in Thailand, work expectations in Thailand. The researchers contacted a Myanmar-Thai interpreter to help in data collection. Qualitative data analysis involves identification, examination, and interpretation of patterns and themes in textual data to determine how these patterns and themes help answer the research questions.

2. Quantitative research area was assigned to collect data from 400 Myanmar workers using a questionnaire. The participants for this study were selected through the process of purpose sampling. The sample included 400 Myanmar workers participating in various types of work who live in Samut Sakorn in 2014. The questionnaire was reviewed by the preceptor and advisors from the Rajamangala University of Rattanakosin and as well as other researchers, then translated into Myanmar, the translation was submitted to a licensed translator. The questionnaire was comprised of the following 6 parts:

Part 1. Demographic characteristics including gender, age, ethnic, marital status, family, education, and language knowledge.

Part 2. The economic factors include occupation, work duration, income, and expenses, both in Thailand and Myanmar.

Part 3. Social factors include family relationships, relationships at work, social relationships through community clubs, associations or clubs, religious factors, and attitudes to societal problems.

Part 4. Health factors including social services and public health issues in Thailand. In addition, there are hidden questions about the legality of immigration situation. This is surfaces from their right to claim for medical fees since they are only available to legal immigrants.

Part 5. Immigration methods used to work in Thailand including travelling costs, fees, methods to get a job, and the expected expense in order to work in Thailand or the willingness to pay for that.

Part 6. The migration of Myanmar workers, including the awareness about opening of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the factors surrounding the decision-making behind the return to their country of origin.

Result. According to Table 3, most of Myanmar workers are males, age 16–30 years, single.

Table 3. Demographics of the workers, own survey

	Demographics	%		Demographics	%
Gender:	Male	59.8	Race:	Myanmar	62
	Female	40.2		Mon	20
Age:	0–15	1	Karen	11	
	16–30	66	Thai Yai	7	
	31–45	26.5	Status:	Single	50.3
	46–60	6		Married	44.4
	61+	5	Divorced	5.3	

According to Table 4, most of Myanmar workers (74.1%) have education lower than high school level.

Table 4. Education Background, own survey

Education	%
Uneducated	28.8
Primary school	45.3
High school	20.5
Bachelor degree	5.5

According to Table 5, most of Myanmar are engaged in agricultural industries and 16.4% of the workers were previously unemployed. Overall economy in Myanmar is in heavy recession.

According to Table 6, 42% of the workers are employed by a private company in the area and 9.3% of Myanmar workers are business owners though this is prohibited for migrant workers by Thailand legislation.

Table 5. Career of Myanmar workers before coming to Thailand, own survey

Career	%
Student	18.6
Agriculture	42.4
Private Company	12.8
Business Owner	7.0
Government Officer	2.9
Unemployed	16.4

Table 6. Career of Myanmar workers living in Thailand, own survey

Career	%
Fishery Industry	4.8
Construction Worker	21.3
Agriculture	15.8
Business Owner	9.3
Private Company	42
Unemployed	7

According to Table 7, Myanmar workers expect to stay in Thailand on average 3.75 years. The majority (63.9%) expect to stay only a short period, from less than a year to 5 years.

Table 7. Time of expected stay in Thailand, own survey

Time of expected stay	%
0–5 years	63.9
6–10 years	25.8
11–15 years	4.6
16–20 years	1.0
more than 20 years	1.2

Table 8. Binary logistic regression analysis, own survey

Cox and snell R square = 0.034, Nagelkerke R square = 0.052

Observation data		Estimated value				
		Stay	Move back	Ratio		
	Stay	313	0	99.7		
	Move back	87	0	4.6		
				79		
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Children living in Myanmar	.318	.109	8.423	1	.004	1.374
Constant	.627	.597	1.102	1	.294	.534

According to the binary logistic regression analysis, Myanmar workers who have children living in Myanmar tend to move back to Myanmar.

According to Table 9, most Myanmar workers have visited Thailand more than once.

This question was used to estimate the number of Myanmar workers working illegally in Samut Sakhon. If they did not qualify for social security, this means they are working illegally. According to Table 10, 64.5% of Myanmar workers did not qualify for medical and/or social insurance.

Table 9. Frequency of visiting Thailand, own survey

Frequency	%
1	42.8
2	26.3
3	21.5
More than 3	9.5

Table 10. Medicare, own survey

Medicare	%
Social Security	35.5
Workplace	17.5
Other	39.0
Unknown	8.0

Conclusion and discussion.

1. Factors Affecting the Decision to Work in Thailand. According to the mixed research method used, the factors related to migrating to Thailand can be summarized into 4 issues.

Employment expectations concerning the improvement the of life quality: Myanmar workers acknowledge the problems of working as unskilled laborers in Thailand, but considering the economic condition in Myanmar, living in their country is even more difficult because there are few jobs available and resources are concentrated in major cities. The predominant job available in their local community is farming and in some areas no jobs are available at all.

Higher compensation: the maximum wage of an unskilled worker in Thailand is greater than those in Myanmar.

Stereotypes and attitudes towards work in Thailand are considerably good. Most of local people in Myanmar do not have access to Thailand economic data. They receive information from people or relatives who already worked in Thailand to support their relatives by sending money or buying property. There are some cases when workers either failed, or faced a lot of problems. However, the attitudes of most Myanmar workers towards working in Thailand are high because of the opportunity for better life quality.

Travelling in and out of Thailand today is convenient. The process of working in Thailand is easier than in the past. With the possession of a valid passport, an individual can travel to work in Thailand by public transportation. During the holiday season, such Thai New Year, they can easily travel back to visit their families. Working in Thailand has become a common choice of occupation for Myanmar population.

2. Duration of work stay in Thailand. Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand expect short-term work, 0–5 years, or an average of 3.75 years, mostly for 3 specific reasons.

The opportunities for career and social acceptance when working in Thailand are relatively low. Myanmar migrants sometimes act as criminals that destabilize Thai society and do not follow Thai laws and norms. Thai media commonly plays on "themes of chaos, rebels, drug-running warlords, and dangers" within Myanmar borderlands (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2004). Although the quality of life for migrant

workers is better than at home, there is a lack of social acceptance for Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand.

Myanmar migrant workers have a narrow chance at acquiring Thai citizenship. Therefore, their choices are limited to either staying long-term with restricted rights, or staying short-term to seize the opportunity to work, collect money, and send money home before returning to their country. It is difficult to obtain Thai citizenship and receive the same civil rights as Thai citizens. According to Sections 7–12 of Nationality Act B.E. 2508 (Office of the Council of State, 2014), acquisition of Thai nationality is possible in two cases only.

Section 7. The following persons acquire Thai nationality by birth:

- 1) a person born of a father or a mother of Thai nationality, whether within or outside the Thai Kingdom;
- 2) a person born within the Thai Kingdom except the person under Section 7 *bis* paragraph one.

Section 7 *bis*, amended by Nationality Act (No. 2) B.E. 2535, states that that a person born within the Thai Kingdom of alien parents does not acquire Thai nationality.

Section 10. An alien who possesses the following qualifications may apply for naturalisation as a Thai:

- 1) becoming *sui juris* in accordance with Thai law and the law under which he/she has nationality;
- 2) having good behavior;
- 3) having consistent occupation;
- 4) having a domicile in the Thai Kingdom for a consecutive period of no less than 5 years till the day of filing the application for naturalisation;
- 5) having knowledge of Thai language as prescribed in Regulations.

This can be summarized as follows:

1) according to Section 7, children born of migrant worker parents of Myanmar nationality do not acquire Thai nationality by birth, which directly affects their rights including education opportunities;

2) there is a small number of Myanmar workers who have qualifications as stated in Section 10. Most workers only have a chance to work as laborers and only a small number of these workers are fluent in Thai language;

3) most Myanmar migrant workers have children in Thailand and want to return home since their children still acquire Myanmar nationality although being born in Thailand. Their children's social opportunities, such as education, are very limited;

4) Myanmar migrant workers married to Thai citizens and whose children acquire Thai nationality tend to stay in Thailand longer.

Myanmar migrant workers' families still live in Myanmar. Having children back in Myanmar significantly influences migrant workers' decision to return home. Still, this slightly explains the overall picture of Myanmar migrant workers' decision ($R^2 = 0.032$).

3 Frequency of travel to Thailand. 57.2% of Myanmar migrant workers travel to and from Thailand more than once.

4. Conclusion of Myanmar migrant workers mobility. Media reports do not mention Myanmar migrant workers moving back to their home country from Samut

Sakhon until the province faces labour shortage. The expected duration of stay for Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand is short, but labour turnover has increased. Myanmar migrant workers either enter Thailand legally or illegally, as that does not make a significant difference for them (Panjatewakooop and Sattayathamrongthian, 2014). They tend to continue coming back to work in Thailand until their family or themselves are able to improve their quality of life, or until there is a substantial change in Myanmar.

5 Event that might affect Myanmar migrant workers' return: ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). With the onset of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), Myanmar has become attractive to investors. There is a possibility that Myanmar would experience a positive transition which might impact Myanmar migrant workers' motives to return home. According to the interviews with Myanmar migrant workers, only one worker mentioned a concrete change, stating that the price of land near the Dawei deep-sea port, which is owned by his family, has substantially increased. Most villagers residing in the area decided to sell their lands to interested buyers. However, most rural villagers hardly experience changes. Therefore, most workers still continue working in Thailand.

The quantitative data based on the worker sampling shows that 78.3% of Myanmar migrant workers have decided to continue working in Thailand after the AEC was enacted. Accordingly, Myanmar labor shortage is unlikely to happen in the Samut Sakhon province after the AEC actualization.

Recommendations for further research:

1. Data collection on alien workers is sensitive, thus requiring researchers be particularly careful. From onsite data collection, most Myanmar migrant workers did not cooperate well and were afraid to give information.

2. It is more effective to hire a Myanmar person who speaks both Thai and Myanmar languages to accompany the research group when collecting data onsite. The group should contact Myanmar workers through their employer.

3. Those interested in the topic of alien workers' mobility should also study into the current economic slowdown in Thailand, whether it affects the mobility of Myanmar workers.

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