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QUALITY OF LIFE OF MIGRANT LABOR: A CASE STUDY OF LAOTIAN LABOR IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were 1) to study the quality of life of Laotian migrant workers who come to work in Bangkok, Thailand and 2) to study the obstacles related to the quality of life of the Laotian migrant workers. The qualitative research method used the in-depth interview. The researchers followed the steps according to the research methodology. The data has been studied and analyzed. The interview was done for the data collection on 18 people. The research findings showed that 1) For the labor quality of life, Laotian migrant workers are quite satisfied with work and with the quality of life from earning more income and being able to help their family and living in Bangkok. The danger that will occur is minimal because most of them come to work in the service category. Problems in communication are found after working for 1-2 years. The employer will issue a legal immigration card for illegal immigrant workers. 2) There are two reasons for coming to work for Laotian: illegal and legal immigration. The problem of illegal migrant workers is that it is difficult to access legal medical care. There is discrimination in some cases but in a minority. Traveling for relaxation or sightseeing is difficult. The laborers must hide themselves in living and working. As for migrants who enter legally, there are very few problems and obstacles.

Keywords: Migrant Worker, Laotian Labor, Quality of Life, Bangkok

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Background and Significance of Problem

Currently, the number of migrant laborers coming to work in Thailand has been steadily increasing, according to the statistics of the Office of Foreign Workers Administration. In fact, more migrant laborers have arrived than those registered with the Office of Foreign Workers Administration's summarized statistics. The main foreign laborers who come to work in Thailand include those from Myanmar, Cambodia, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. These laborers come to seek better job opportunities and improved living standards, which have had an economic impact.

Thailand and ASEAN have been affected both directly and indirectly by the situation that has emerged in various aspects, including society, the economy, and politics. Migration has occurred as a means of survival. The regional situation around Thailand is similar, and the economic disparities have led to both legal and illegal border crossings. The situation of fighting in Myanmar, the inflation in the world's top rank in Laos, the influx of Chinese investors in Cambodia (Pheap & Sripokangkul, 2017) have all contributed to a significant increase in the phenomenon of relocation and migration.

However, foreign laborers who come to work in Thailand have significantly contributed to economic development. If these foreign laborers are not efficient at work, it may negatively impact the Thai economy. When foreign laborers are well taken care of, they can have a positive impact on the Thai economy. The reasons mentioned above have made researchers interested in the quality of labor that comes to work in Thailand, especially Lao laborers who come to work legally or as tourists and then engage in work. This labor migration has consequences for the Thai economy, both directly and indirectly (Pimonratnakan & Sungrugsa, 2017). Nevertheless, the Thai government has a policy of legally admitting foreign laborers. As of December 2022, there were 2,994,453 registered foreign laborers working in Thailand according to the Cabinet's resolution, Section 9, Section 63/2, and Section 64. Especially in Bangkok, 685,294 of the migrant laborers were documented legally (Department of Employment, Ministry of Labor, 2022). However, there are many laborers from all three countries who entered illegally, potentially leading to criminal activities, violations, and human trafficking. These issues may have negative implications for the utilization of Thai labor. Hence, the researchers are interested in studying the quality of life of Lao laborers who come to work in Thailand.

Literature Review

Migrant Workers

Foreign labor mobility is an adjustment to the labor market mechanism that significantly affects labor allocation efficiency. Factors influencing the foreign labor movement include the economy. The Ministry of Labor classifies foreign labor into 4 categories according to the Alien Employment Act 1978 which are registered foreign labor, foreign labor with nationality verification, foreign labor entering the country through bilateral agreements between the Thai government and Myanmar or Thai government and Laos PDR in 2002 and 2003 which is the agreement for unskilled migrant workers to come to work in Thailand legally, and unregistered foreign labor. The foreign labor is further divided into seven categories based on the employment, namely agricultural and fisheries sector, construction sector, industrial factory production sector, retail and wholesale trade sector, service sector, transportation sector, and household sector (Ministry of Labor, 2022). The main reasons for foreign labor movement are wage differentials in countries and abroad for similar occupations, lack of motivation for career advancement in skilled but stagnant occupations, social and political factors (Pheap & Sripokangkul, 2017).

Quality of Life

As the quality of life must be related to the environment, humans need to rely on factors that support their lives. The topic of quality of life began to be used in the 1960s, which was the beginning of the study of quality of life in the relationship between workers and their working environment (Kitjarak, 2018). Mentioning the quality of working life, it is a feeling of satisfaction at work, colleagues, and a work environment that responds to physical and mental needs. The components of quality of life, sufficient and fair remuneration, safe and healthy environment, development on individual potential, growth and job stability, relationships in the organization, administration that respects rights and equality, work-life balance, social responsibility of business are important elements in creating quality of life because work is part of the human to survive in the present era (Kanaphantu & Rathachatrannon, 2015; Chanvibol, Luengalongkot, Thampithak & Anantanorn, 2020). Since the time of the industrial revolution, the concept of quality of life at work has arisen. It aims to create awareness of labor and the humanity of working people that have improved working conditions. The aims are to improve working condition and the quality of life at work so that workers can be satisfied leading to the consequence of the organization's improvement. For the elements to make better quality of life, the adequate and fair remuneration, the safe and healthy environment, the development on individual potential, growth and job stability, relations within the organization, management that respects equal rights, work-life balance, and social responsibility are required.

Relevant Laws

Office of Foreign Labor Administration has documented the statistics on the number of foreigners allowed to work remaining throughout the kingdom. This edition is a compilation of information on foreigners who are permitted to work throughout the Kingdom, section by section. It contains the information on foreigners who have been granted permission to work, Section 59, lifelong type, the information on foreigners who have permission to work, Section 59, general type, the information on foreigners, Section 59, imported according to the MOU and who have permission to work, the information on foreigners who are permitted to work, Section 62, investment promotion type, the information on foreigners who have been granted work permits, Section 63, minority type, the information on foreigners who have been granted work permission, Section 64, on a round-trip basis or seasonal.

This includes related laws which are:

- 1) Lifelong foreigners include foreigners who are allowed to stay in the Kingdom and work according to the Notification of the Revolutionary Council No.322 dated 13th December 1972
- 2) Section 59 foreigners, general type include foreigners who have residence in the Kingdom or have been permitted to enter the Kingdom temporarily in accordance with immigration law without permission to enter as a tourist or travelers passing through and does not have prohibited characteristics as specified in the ministerial regulations.
- 3) Section 59 foreigners imported according to the MoU include foreigners of Myanmar, Lao, Cambodian, and Vietnamese nationality who come to work according to the agreement between the Thai government and the government of their country of origin.
- 4) Section 62 foreigners, Investment Promotion type, include foreigners who come to work in the Kingdom according to the investment promotion law (Investment Promotion Act 1977) or other laws include the Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand Act 1979 and the Petroleum Act 1971 such as investors, craftsmen, experts.
- 5) Section 63/1 foreigners, minority type, include foreigners who do not receive Thai nationality according to the law on nationality and the Ministry of Interior has issued documents waiting to prove the status of the work permit application.
- 6) Section 64 foreigners include foreigners of Myanmar, Lao, and Cambodian nationality who come to work at the border on a round-trip or seasonal basis in the area of the agreement on

cross-border movement between the Kingdom of Thailand with countries bordering the Kingdom of Thailand.

7) Section 63/2 foreigners: 7.1) Type of foreigners according to the Cabinet resolution of 13th July 2021, include foreign workers of Cambodian, Lao and Myanmar nationality who are allowed to stay in the Kingdom as special cases. To request permission to work, there are 4 subgroups as follows: 7.1.1) Group of foreigners according to the Cabinet resolution on 20th August 2019, 7.1.2) Group of foreigners according to the Cabinet resolution on 4th August 2020, 7.1.3) Group of foreigners according to the Cabinet resolution on 10th November 2020 (MoU group completes 4 years from 1st Nov, 2030-31st Dec, 2021), and 7.1.4) A group of foreigners of 3 nationalities, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, whose work permits have been terminated as a result of the law.

7.2) Type of foreigners according to the Cabinet resolution of 28th September 2021, allowing foreigners to work in the kingdom as special cases. For foreigners of 3 nationalities; Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, foreigners who come to work in the Kingdom without permission or whose permission period has expired.

7.3) Type of foreigners according to the Cabinet resolution on 5th July 2022, allowing foreigners to work in the Kingdom as special cases for foreigners of Cambodian, Lao, Myanmar and Vietnamese nationalities. According to the Cabinet resolution on 5th July 2022, the government has relaxed measures to control and limit travel into and out of the country so that foreigners can travel to work in the country according to the memorandum of understanding or memorandum of agreement that the Thai government has made with foreign governments. However, due to problems from the economic conditions and internal security problems of the country of origin, the number of foreigners who will travel to work is not consistent with the demand for labor in the country. Therefore, in order to revive the economy and effectively solve the labor shortage problem, it is necessary to specify that foreign nationals of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam who enter the Kingdom without permission or whose period of permission has expired, who wish to work properly, are able to stay and work in the Kingdom as special cases (Ministry of Labor, 2022).

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative research. The researchers collected data from documents related to theoretical concepts including various documents to design questions. The Induction interviews were used in surveying from 1st April 2022-31st January 2023. The questions used as interview tools are therefore semi-structured. The Colaizzi's tool was used in the data analysis (Vorayut, 2006) consisting of 7 steps.

- 1) Read all the information or listen to the tape for the detailed interview in order to understand the overall picture which must be read or listened to over and over many times
- 2) Retrieve text or phrases clearly related to the quality of life by using a pen to underline or highlight important information. Those messages will tell a story or an individual's life experience. This step will help reduce unimportant messages.
- 3) Give meaning to a message or important phrase, keeping in mind the context that exists at that time to determine the meaning. It is important to emphasize that the researchers must not have bias or use various knowledge or theories come to affect the meaning of those who want to convey.
- 4) Categorize the obtained messages or phrases into important content groups and classification according to the meaning and essence that reflects the quality of working life.
- 5) Describe the details that were discovered from the phenomenon by collecting and combining the classifications that have been used to explain the meaning of the phenomenon that shows the quality of working life of migrant workers, causing a phenomenon that is studied to become clear.

6) Describe the basic structure of the phenomenon obtained from the study clearly. The results were used to explain the concept of quality of life for migrant workers.

7) Verification of the obtained study results will be used to explain the concept of quality of life.

The group of key informants comprises foreign laborers from Laos who work in Bangkok. They are categorized into two groups; those who entered the city legally and those who entered illegally. According to statistics, in December 2022, the total number of Laotian foreign workers in the entire kingdom was 95,756, with 37,491 of them residing in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (Ministry of Labor, 2022). The data collection involved specific and targeted selection of informants from both legal and illegal immigrant groups. These informants were chosen from various occupational sectors, including restaurant workers (servers, dishwashers, cooks), hotel workers (front desk staff), coffee shop employees, clothing store owners, and general laborers.

For the data analysis, the researchers have proposed a framework to analyze the quality of life, focusing on five dimensions; work, family, health, workplace environment, and overall living conditions, to draw conclusions and evaluate the research findings.

Research Findings

The quality of life is the access to happiness of work. The working environment is convenient and relatively safe to work in. All migrant workers' workplaces are equipped with safety equipment. All can be accessed according to the quality of life as Thai workers receive, including the living environment that is up to standard. Most of the work of Lao nationality workers comes either legally or illegally. *"I came to work for more than a year, came in as a tourist and then worked at a restaurant as a waiter. My friend already worked before. The environment, utility systems, rooms, normal life, monthly rental rooms are general in Thailand"* (Interviewee No.1). As for the nature of the work, it is service work. The communication is quite united with Thai people as being influenced by the media in Thailand. Everyone can read Thai books and can write in a simple way. The nature of the work is service work. *"I have been living in Thailand for 7 years now. I can read and write in general. It may not be correct, but Thai people can understand. I write in karaoke style. It makes me live a normal life"* (Interviewee No.2). There are some people who are able to work in the hotel because they speak Thai, English and Chinese. *"I live a very normal life. I rent a condo to work. I have worked for 4 years now, and I already made a deposit to buy a condo"* (Interviewee No.3). *"Selling products to Chinese people in Thailand makes the quality of life and work go smoothly when coming to work in Thailand"* (Interviewee No.4). In this research, only 1 case was found to provide information on the subject of opportunities for having a career where an employer neither follows the agreement nor following the law after working for 2 years. *"The employer says you are doing good work, close to the end of 2 years, and they will provide insurance and do things legally. However, once complete, the employer keeps postponing it"* (Interviewee No.5). Regarding health and hygiene, when sick, they go to private hospitals. As for Lao workers who enter legally receive treatment according to their rights at a hospital. In addition, the quality of life of Lao nationality workers attracts them to come to work in Thailand.

Conclusion and Discussion

The research was found to have satisfaction and quality level of Lao nationality workers, both illegal and legal immigrants. They receive care or receive actual fair wages. From the factors that promote Lao nationality workers having an advantage over workers of other nationalities coming to work in Thailand from language, it is easy for Lao workers to move to new workplaces, allowing entrepreneurs to take care of the quality of employees' work according

to standards. This is different from the research of Tusawut (2019), for the quality of life for migrant workers of Burmese nationality, in Mahachai, Mueang, Samut Sakhon, discrimination is still found. Problems encountered are often related to language and pressure from some parts of society that have a bad attitude towards Burmese workers. As for workers who enter the country illegally, they live in hiding. However, the private sector should provide justice to migrant workers as same as Laotian migrant workers. The research on the quality of life of migrant workers aims to improve the quality of life of migrant workers before they come to work and study the process of traveling to work. This includes studying the quality of life at work and lifestyle of migrant workers in the Mueang, Chanthaburi (Namsanguan & Hora, 2018). The quality of life of migrant workers in terms of adequate and fair compensation, stable work opportunities, quality of life at a high level are in the same way. When comparing migrant workers of all 3 nationalities, only Myanmar workers have a poor quality of life than other migrant workers. Regarding the quality of working life of Laotian migrant workers working in Bangkok, they have a better life when working in Thailand.

The suggestions obtained from this research are 1) The role of entrepreneurs should be promoted from the beginning by supporting the government sector in selecting and providing opportunities for immigrant workers to work in Thailand legally and with working skills in order to alleviate the labor shortage in some occupations that Thai people do not like to do. 2) The government should have channels to help migrant workers without discriminating whether they entered the country legally or illegally. 3) The government sector should proactively participate in providing knowledge about labor laws, rights and benefits that workers can rely on including matters related to public health.

Suggestions for future research are 1) The study should be conducted on the security problems with migrant workers. 2) The study should be conducted on the justice process for migrant workers.

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