

**Thailand's approach in managing labour migration since 1970s:
A dynamic of policy-making**

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Overview

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I started my PhD field research in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, Thailand for 2 months, from 25 August - 24 October 2015. At Chiang Mai University, with an academic community providing me a valuable view in conducting a migration research. For all documentary research papers, my useful sources are collected at Department of National Security and Secretariat Office of Parliament. With a great support of the librarians, the whole picture of the government's approach in dealing with labour migration can be drawn.

As a part of the research about Human Trafficking in Second Generation of Migrants from Myanmar which was completed in 2011. Main focus is on a case of Thailand where its location is in favor to become a place of origin, transit and destination of human trafficking activity in the region. After study about situation on Human Trafficking, I have found that Thailand's policy in managing a massive of migrant workers is still unstable and Thai government also plays an inactive role in dealing with this problem, this issue then is the main part of my PhD dissertation.

As a newly open country Thailand had no experience in dealing with new situation like migration policy and felt difficult to manage a huge number of foreigners who settled permanently in the country. It should be noticed that a large number of people from neighboring countries like Myanmar, Loa PDR, and Cambodia had migrated to Thailand longer than century ago because there was no real definition of country border in former period that made all people in this region moved in and move out from their homelands to Thailand freely. Even now Thailand shares border line with her neighboring countries many thousand kilometers and it is not possible for Thailand to protect an entry of migrants from those countries. More difficult, Thailand is facing a problem of labor

shortage within country and needs to welcome cheap labor force from countries around it makes Thailand fallen in an uneasy situation to cope with contradiction condition. Currently, Thailand does not have an explicit policy on international migration and fails to adequately protect migrants and in particular the rights of migrant women and girls.

My fieldwork in Thailand

A purpose of visit to Thailand was to collect documents available at Department of National Security and Secretariat Office of Parliament which have been defined as a main policy's stakeholders and also to investigate other related stakeholders that influenced the policy making process.

Due to the fact that most of data and information related to my research are available in Thailand, my concentration is paid to policy formulation process which are scattering in many documents like the Investment Promotion Act, Immigration Act, and Foreign Employment Act, for instance. All these laws have been improved and enforced continually. It is evident that in order to solve this situation, Thai government prefers to introduce a policy of mitigation on seriousness of problem but no permanent action policy was found. In many occasions, Thailand had no proper policies due to a lack of information either on a truly understanding in economic development or situation of labor market in the country. Economic development has been acclaimed as a core policy of the country but in fact there was no concrete direction to accommodate such requirement. With a shortage of labor force and changing behavior of Thai people to refrain from hardship in working condition, this paves a new trend to import foreign workers from Myanmar, Laos PDR, and Cambodia to replace Thai workers. This situation creates a threat to Thailand's security condition more or less.

Thai's policy on migration has been in search of right direction until U.S government came to play a big role in this country in many aspects in 1972 and Thai policy in economic development was an evidence of this phenomenon. With abiding with capitalist trend in that period, Thailand shifted her policy emphasizing on agricultural dependent to industrialization and accumulation of foreign investment was a core value of the policy. During 1980 decade, Thailand realized an urgent need to deal with labor shortage problem and wanted to solve this problem seriously. Alternation imposed by authority then was to control a massive of labor movement. However, because of rapid growth of industrialization, Thailand was confronting with an inadequacy of domestic

labor supply. Due to a disparity of wage rates in Thailand and her neighboring countries, Thailand became a major destination of labors from other countries in this region.

According to economic development in Thailand, industrial growth has been flourishing to rural sector of the country in form of industrial estate or industrial zone. This happening was based on infra-structure expansion to remote areas and the government expected that by such expansion it could induce cheap labors from agricultural sector to industrial one. However, Thailand still remained facing a problem of labor shortage because a number of labor supply was less than demand. Many business firms in regional parts of the country urged Thai government to import foreign labors to fulfill a shortage of supply. In order to respond that demand, Thai government permitted foreign workers to employ in border provinces in the beginning and after pursuing for some times, a flexible policy in hiring foreign workers has been practiced in other 43 provinces.

Whatsoever, Thailand's economic competitiveness has been remained depending on cheap and unskilled labors and paid less attention in technology improvement. In such circumstance Thailand could not come across to reach a concrete policy on foreign workers but what Thailand could do most was to introduce a day by day policy. In other words, without an effective policy on immigration, Thailand has to face many problems that came after. With a help from illegal movement which got benefits from illegal immigrants, Thai policy in this case was still in vain.

Considering from the flow of illegally unskilled workers who came to Thailand, this occurrence was caused more or less by a pattern of economic development in each period. As a result of development policy in industrial section it had to position itself to a supply of labor force. When domestic labor supply was not able to respond to demand, Thai government had to alleviate its policy from time to time and inclined to support a request from industrial owners. On contrary, when Thai's economic meltdown in 1970 with an over -supply of workers, Thai government decided to suppress an influx of foreign immigrants in the country. Suppression of aliens was considered as a part of national security policy initiated by the National Security Council. Therefore, Thai policy on foreign workers has been swinging from left to right and swinging back rapidly depending upon current circumstance. On one hand, a demand in foreign workers to support industrial sector still exists but on other hand Thai authority felt there was a threat on national security if nothing would to be done to control this group of people. This was paved to a new policy

in controlling workers immigrating from abroad. Registration and legalization of foreign workers was an answer to this situation.

Summarily, an uncertainty of Thai policy on foreign workers was a result of economic growth of the country. Process of policy formulation was based on 3 pillars, namely, national security dimension, economic development dimension, and, lastly, human right dimension which was voiced by international agencies. It can be concluded that if Thailand is still persisting its pattern of development based upon labor intensive style, problem of foreign workers remains unsolved. Without a long-run and proper policy, it will cause a big gap between policy formulation agency and policy implementation actors since there is no right answer for all stakeholders concerned. Furthermore, there are some partners who want to get advantage from this situation. Thai government has no choice but has to balance between national security aspect and economic growth in order to earn an effective policy.