

Report on Participation in Field world in Thailand

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Year level: M2

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Throughout the course of field work in Thailand, I have realized that there are many implications concerning the ASEAN integration especially in terms of ASEAN economic community or AEC. Many scholars talked about migration within ASEAN and its implication on Thai Economy both in terms of economy, society, politics, and environment. As a result, throughout the field work, I have become more interested in the concept of migration, especially of unskilled labors.

First of all, in the welcoming speech from Dr. Thanet Aphornsuwan in the international seminar organized by Pridi Bhanomyong International college, Thammasat University, he mentioned about the free movement of labor within ASEAN community, and that there will be more labor migration from less developed countries to more developed countries in the region. That is, for example, from Myanmar, Cambodia to Thailand. However, due to a very intense discussion, time limitation, and the fact that there were lots of questions raised, there are points that haven't been answered. For example, from my understanding, since ASEAN countries are very diversified in terms of culture, language, economy, and etcetera, there should not be single universality, but instead, we should except the diversity and bring about the harmony among these differences. I was curious about the fact that whether "free labor movement" will also intensify the racial discrimination among people from different countries. To illustrate more, at present, from the point of view of many Thai people, I would say that they somehow feel some sense of insecurity in regards to e.g. their safety, job security, or the feeling that these migrant workers are degrading their social quality. In my opinion, I think this is because of the unfamiliarity of culture and the inability to communicate among migrant workers and the local people. As a result, when the labor from less developed countries are discriminated and treated differently from the local people, they will also develop the sense of "unfairness" toward people, society, governance in the country they migrated to. My question was that, "will the free labor movement create even more "conflicts" among ASEAN people? Will it actually be problematic? And how should (and would) ASEAN community address this problem?" Although Dr. Thanet has answered one of the similar questions during the workshop, the answer focused on the long-term strategy that concerns the rewriting of ASEAN community's universal history that are no longer biased toward each country's nationalistic policy. However, in my opinion, this strategy will not be implemented soon enough to welcome the soon to be ASEAN Economic Community because the rewriting of the history takes time to settle especially it involves so many internal political situations in each countries. If history were to be changed, there might be some struggles from the power advantageous from the existing version history. Thus, I am curious more on the immediate strategy to eliminate the conflict among local people and migrant workers.

On the ground level, the interview with Mr. Mitri Intusut, the governor of Phuket province, reveals that Thai workers are now choosing not to work in Dirty, Dangerous, and Difficult kinds of jobs. Due to the fact that Phuket is a

world-class tourist destination, it's inevitable that quite a number of workers need to fulfill these 3Ds jobs. Thus, migrant workers have to be the ones working in such 3Ds jobs exchanging for higher wages than in their home countries. According to the governor of Phuket, these migrant workers also brought about some social problems such as emerging slum areas. Consequently, without the immediate resolution to address the working conditions, living standard, and better understanding toward these migrant workers, I am afraid that these stereotype of migrant workers being work in such a harsh job and living in a slum area, exacerbated by the more migrant from ASEAN free labor movement policy, will bring about the even more racial discrimination among ASEAN region.

However, despite the fact that migrant workers replace Thai workers in 3Ds kinds of jobs, they are earning rewarding wages in Phuket. According to the Mrs. Yawapa Pibulpol, Chief of Phuket Employment office, these migrant workers are smart and have bargaining power in terms of their wages due to the fact that the demand for migrant workers is higher than its supply. Thus, these migrant workers are able to choose e.g. what kind of job they want to work, and with which employee. Due to the shortage of migrant workers and the booming tourism, real estate, services industries in Phuket which require large amount of labor, employees have to make sure these migrant workers are satisfied with the working conditions, holiday, welfare, and wages in order to keep them staying. Thus, in a way, market mechanism itself regulates and improves both the economic and social statuses of these migrant workers. Moreover, Thai government policy does not discriminate the work benefits against these migrant workers. These migrant workers' protection also covers their minimum wages and education of their children, and etcetera.

In conclusion, in my opinion, to solve first the immediate conflict among the local people and migrant workers, good and unbiased social welfares for migrant workers and their strict implementation should be prioritized in order to improve their social statuses, create better understanding and harmony between these two parties for the sustainability of the free movement of labor policy and also for the ASEAN community to pursue advanced stages of in integration and collaboration.