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Foreign Population: Guidelines for Studying Migration in Thailand

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Abstract

This article aims to explain the migration factors of the foreign population in Thailand. The migration concepts and the approach of studying the foreign population in the present Thai society found that the migration factors consisted of the need for economic security, life, good quality of life for oneself and one's own family, marriage with a foreign spouse, leisure travel, safety in life and property, seeking business opportunities, access to property and property owners, changing lifestyle, and extending savings for investment funds. As for the guidelines for studying the foreign population, there are three frameworks to consider, which include: (1) the origin, (2) the way to the destination, and (3) the destination. The origin is the study of migration decisions, factors, and objectives. The way to the destination considers the travel process, facilitating travel according to the legal system of the origin country, and labor export policies. Finally, the destination is the study of personal and official networks, relational and contact mechanisms of the community, and lifestyle of the people in the community, including the local impact of the destination country.

Keywords: foreign population, migration

Introduction

The movement of people across national borders (foreign migration) is both complex and dynamic under the context of a growing region, especially when faced with structural change in the existing population as the foreign population continues to increase. In the past, the demographic change of each country, especially Thailand, was caused by a decrease in mortality, leading to changes in the age and gender structure of the population and resulting in an increase in the population within the country. In addition, in the current situation, foreign populations arise from the migration patterns of workers, refugees, and tourists. Migration is the result of business ventures, working abroad, and having a spouse who is different in religion, race, and culture. Migration includes either traveling from the country of origin to permanently reside in the destination country or traveling for temporary residence.¹ Unlike the migration of the past, it is a journey from developing countries to developed countries for economic opportunities and for the stability of family life in order to escape issues whether caused by displacement, war, politics, or domestic unrest. In addition, migration takes place in order for the foreign population to work as general laborers or as workers with specific expertise, including investment in the business sectors of foreign countries. Therefore, this has caused the trend of foreign populations in destination countries around the world to continuously increase from 2010-2017 by an average of 2.3 percent per year (United Nations, 2017).

Migration of foreign populations involves factors on various levels, including personal, family, community, or national, in relation to differences in race, religion, way of life, culture, and well-being. This causes destination countries to be unable to avoid the waves of impact on social, cultural, and economic changes. In the past, migration studies within a country began with studies on migration plans and migration determinants, extending to the study of the impact of migration in the destination and origin. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to create knowledge and understanding about the migration factors, effects, concepts, and educational framework on the migration of many foreign populations with the objective of explaining the migration factors and

¹ These groups are called "Expatriate" or simply "Expatriate" (for foreigners). It comes from the Latin words 'ex' (out of) and 'patria' (country, fatherland) to form 'Expatria'. Castles (S., et al., 2003) further explains that an expat is a foreign worker with a positive meaning, including a skilled worker or manager who is present in a foreign area, and is a person who is in the destination country for at least six months each year.

concepts of foreign populations, leading to the creation of a conceptual framework or an additional perspective on the study of the foreign population in modern Thai society.

Migration Factors of Foreign Populations

According to data from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2017), the movement of people around the world is increasing. The number of immigrants living abroad has been increasing, e.g. about 172.6 million people in 2000, about 220 million people in 2010, and an increase of 37.7 million people in 2017 or about 257.7 million people. According to statistical data, 2 in 3 of all immigrants migrate to Asia, which is more than 60 percent or about 79.6 million people, whereas about 77.9 million people migrate to Europe (United Nations, 2017).

From statistical data, it was found that the population of foreigners in Asia since 1990 and onwards has been increasing steadily every year, especially during the 10 years between 2000-2010 at an average increase of 2.9 percent per year. While during the year 2010-2017, the proportion was slightly reduced at an average increase of 2.7 percent per year with Americans at about 49.8 million people, followed by people from Saudi Arabia, Germany, Russia, England, and the United Arab Emirates, respectively (United Nations, 2017). Private workers accounted for 40 percent of the people entering Asia, followed by spouses and children who do not work, students, and foreigners who have retired, respectively (Finaccord Expatriate BASE, 2017) (United Nations, 2017). The group Hoey (2014) explains that migration motivation arises from a desire to change lifestyle rather than from economic incentives. Benson & O'Reilly (2009) through Howard, Robert W. (2009) explain that this way of life is called "Lifestyle Migration," and Benson (2011) attributes these characteristics to the significance of this way of life and cultural imaginaries rather than to economic motivation. The nature of the said lifestyle is the migration of people from countries in the northern hemisphere or countries that are already developed traveling to countries in the southern hemisphere or countries with less economic development. This is consistent with an expat survey, where traveling to work in other countries was not just for compensation factors only, but for the desire to change lifestyle and increase the quality of life for oneself and one's own family (Christophe, 2017).

The Expat Insider reported (Zeeck, 2011) surveying an expat group of 12,500 people in 188 countries, which indicated that the key factors affecting travel to various countries were stability and good quality of life for oneself and one's own family. Of those surveyed, 26 percent stated that an important goal in the destination country was to work as employees in the manufacturing, education, service, or investment sectors (both in private sectors as well as multinational companies). The desire for a foreign spouse accounted for 12 percent. Out of those remaining in this group, 29 percent had long-term plans and 18 percent wanted to stay for longer than 5 years.

The most popular age group for migration is middle age up to retirement (age 41 years and over), representing 53 percent. The age group of 41-50 years old represented 23 percent, and older than 51 years represented 30 percent. The working age group (between the ages of 26-40 years) accounted for 42 percent. The survey found that Thailand had been selected as the 30th destination country out of 188 countries that people like to travel as a result of meeting the requirements of increasing the quality of life, whether it be for recreation, happiness, health, well-being, or safety. Because Thailand has fast and convenient flight routes (Amonrat Kritsophon, 2012), this results in a lax policy on trade and investment with facilities, reduced business process steps to increase speed, as well as being the cheapest long-term tourist destination for Europeans and having the best value for money after Iceland. Another important thing is to specify the policy of renting real estate for no more than 30 years. The Thai government has provided rights to buy and sell real estate as an ordinary individual and Thai citizen by law in accordance with the law stipulated by the government, as well as granting rights through various types of visas, such as special end-of-life visas (Powerhouse Development Co., LTD., 2018) or the SMART Visa²

² For foreigners who are highly skilled employees or high-level executives, investors, and new business starters or digital freelance entrepreneurs who operate businesses in the 10 target industries (10 S-curve) with a 4-year stay, they must apply for a work permit including their spouse and children and extend the reporting period to 1 year. There are five types of SMART Visas ("T" = Talents, "I" = Investors, "E" = Executives, "S" = Startup Entrepreneurs, and "O" = Spouse and Children for SMART Visa Holders) (Prime Ministers Delivery Unit, 2018) (Department of Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

and Long Stay Visa. As a result of these factors, more and more foreigners are traveling to Thailand, more than 6 percent each year or approximately 3.2 million people in 2017 (United Nations, 2017).

Therefore, foreigners traveling to destination countries, especially developing countries, have a variety of travel objectives. For example, they may enter the destination country to work, to live permanently because of marriage and starting a new family, or to reside in the destination country as a second home near the end of their life. Some may even open a business as the owner of places of accommodation, such as hotels, resorts, and restaurants, by using various forms of activities for the benefit of doing business, including: (1) buying property to be held by Thai people through family relationships (such as marriage with Thai people or holding by a child); (2) renting of real estate for business services or as an apartment under the Civil and Commercial Code and the Commercial and Industrial Real Estate Lease Act 1999, which states that foreigners cannot have legal ownership; (3) using of a juristic person to buy land or real estate at a higher price than the registered price; (4) establishing a Thai company with Thai shareholders holding 51% of the registered capital in order to accept land transfers by the Land Code 1954; and (5) holding real estate for hotel operations under the Investment Promotion Act B.E. 2520 (Siriporn Satchanan et al., 2019; Natthawin Asavaphuadon, 2016).

However, for foreigners who become long-term residents in the local community, they become part of the way of life in the local community, resulting in interaction between areas within the community, such as markets, educational institutions, hospitals, workplaces, local organizations (e.g. municipalities, sub-district administrative organizations, or provinces), private organizations (e.g. banks, etc.), or public transport services. This also includes internal relationships with family members that live far from their hometown community or region or country, with an old community that has been relocated, or with a new community that has moved in. As a result, local areas are more connected to the outside world than before. Any situation or event that occurs (e.g. floods, drought, economic downturn, etc.) in one area also affects or influences the situation or decisions that occur in other areas, such as changing jobs, household spending, sharing experiences, passing on information (e.g. information on job positions, etc.), and communicating with family members or people in the community (e.g. available skills and knowledge, business suggestions, etc.). This situation shows that the locality has a relationship, not only in one way. It is an exchange in various fields all the time and may have different methods depending on the context of each area in order to adjust to creating a sustainable way of life and quality of life that exists in that locality.

The study of the expatriate population or expats should not be considered modular or specific in the scope of a particular community or context because this type of connection may be normal in large local areas. Regardless of the area, it should not be overlooked or regarded as the only problem. The impact of migration in each area is related to many systems and is complex. It is not possible to say whether there will always be positive or negative results. Some areas may have little effect, while other areas may have a noticeable impact, such as the spread of infectious diseases from people of different populations which becomes more severe if they cross borders or migrate. These effects will inevitably lead to the adaptation of situations in each context. It is important to pay attention and understand the situation of migration within these groups in order to understand the differences between the old culture and the way of life in the new culture, which has more complex phenomena than just studying the economic dimensions only. This reflects other networks that play a role in the migration of these groups as well, which leads to the determination of appropriate local policy and management. Therefore, the perspective on understanding the foreign population should be significant to the concept of the theory of transboundary migration and social networks in order to help increase the perspective on understanding the effects between connected areas.

Migration Concepts

The concept of migration is seen from the neoclassical economics concept that speaks of economic equilibrium, which sees the driving factors (poverty, land scarcity, and overpopulation) and the attracting factors that encourage migration (economic opportunity of the country that serves as a market for migration to create economic balance) where migration is seen as a way of moving cheap labor to increase capital.

Miller (2009) summarized the migration process in three steps: (1) the initial step is the decision to migrate, which includes economic, political, and social factors; (2) the second step is during the migration, which is the

process of traveling and facilitating travel with regard to the immigration law system of the country of origin, encouraging citizens to migrate abroad without exclusion or having a policy to export workers; and (3) the third step is to reach the destination country and then reside in that country, which creates a personal network (people we come to know) more than the official network (government services, knowledge of rights, and the duties of citizens of the host country) in the social system. The impact of migration is the creation of an ethnic enclave, which is a community of migrants of the same ethnicity using the same language and having common traditions. Communities will create mechanisms to communicate within their groups.

This concept is an academic conceptual framework to describe a new migration model that is based on finding a better life. Concepts from previous studies included migration based on retirement, leisure, second home ownership, and seeking amenity. However, with the complexity and common point of migration trends, whether seeking a different lifestyle, a better quality of life, or things that make life meaningful, the consideration of such migration has the same phenomenon, which is to change lifestyle. Therefore, the common trait is the focus on lifestyle.

The meaning of migration to change the way of life is the migration of people from countries with more economic development to countries with less economic development or countries with lower living costs and/or cheaper land prices when compared to their home countries. Migrants seeking to change their way of life (lifestyle migrants) may migrate to a destination country for both short and long-term periods for a variety of reasons. However, the main reason why these migrants are different from other migrants is their search for a better way of life. It is quite clear that lifestyle migrants do not have an incentive based on economic poverty, asylum, job search, or pursuit of economic stability. This type of migrant is not a post-industrial migrant seeking employment in a free labor market and is not part of the flow of high-level personnel among companies, businesses, and intellectuals. Although lifestyle migrants are mostly seniors, post-retirement migration is only one part of the migration to change lifestyle because the concept of post-retirement migration cannot explain the complexities of this phenomenon.

As already mentioned, migration to change lifestyle is different from other migrations due to its motivation, and the motive to change lifestyle through migration stems from beliefs. Changing housing, aside from leading to better opportunities in life, also leads to a better lifestyle or a more complete life (Torkington, 2010). A better lifestyle may mean a simpler way of life, a slower rhythm of life, a life that can be designed according to one's freedom, finding oneself, or having a balanced life.

Migration to change lifestyle is often described as a comparison of life before and after migration or between the home country and the destination country. Life before migration is often described negatively, while life in the destination country is described in the opposite manner. Lifestyle migrants often cite the reason for migration as the desire to escape from undesirable things in their home country, such as rising crime rates, repetitive lifestyle, materialism and consumerism, or boring work life cycle, etc.

In addition, migrants may decide to migrate during important times in their lives, such as during times of an illness, birth or death of a family member, marriage or divorce, unemployment or other changes in their working life, etc. (Benson, 2009). What migrants expect in the destination country is a comfortable life, cheap cost of living, business opportunities, access to property ownership and real estate, culture, and good opportunities for their children.

Migration to change lifestyle has many similarities to tourists. Many migrants were tourists before they decided to settle in the destination country. As a result, most migrant destinations are often tourist attractions. Studies on migration to change lifestyle often refer to the migration of westerners from cold countries to sunny seaside destinations. Although not everyone, lifestyle migrants often start out as tourists. The experience of being a tourist plays an important part of the migration, including the decision to live in that country, the preference for tourism, the ability to see opportunities, and the ability to imagine a better life in the future. Many German immigrants have explained the decision to migrate from Germany in order to escape the undesirable things in their home country, and they decided to choose Pattaya as their second home because they saw the opportunity to live their life as they wished during their previous time of traveling to Pattaya. Although the concept of migration to change lifestyle is a useful concept and can explain this new phenomenon, the author agrees with

Hayes (2014) that this concept overlooks the importance of economic motivation. Past studies have described lifestyle migrants as relatively affluent individuals that were seeking better ways of living. Economic factors weren't the main reason for this group to migrate (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009).

The author has observed that lifestyle migrants often choose to move to a country with a lower cost of living. In order to take advantage of the different currencies which will make the money of migrants more valuable, Hayes' research (Hayes, 2014) showed that most migrants from North America who wanted to change their lifestyle for this reason chose to stay in Ecuador. Because they are unable to bear the high expenses and cost of living in their home country, they have to find a place with a lower cost of living in order to maintain their quality of life. This example shows that, in another perspective, migration from countries with more economic development to countries with less economic development is one way to extend savings and investments (Green, 2014), especially among the elderly or retirees who face unstable financial status.

The migration concept to change lifestyle is one of the concepts that the author is interested in order to increase the perspective of understanding people migrating during their stay in the destination country because it can explain about lifestyles. The migration process begins with:

- The decision to migrate. Migration factors or objectives include economic, political, and social motivation. Migration motivation arises from the belief of changing housing for better and more complete opportunities as desired, or factors in regard to climate change that results in migration for a short period of time. Factors for migration for a long period of time include important moments in life (e.g. illness, birth or death of a family member, marriage or divorce, unemployment or change of work, etc.).
- During the migration. Tourism experiences can lead to settlement decisions during the process of migration. The process and facilitation of travel includes the immigration law system of the country of origin, encouraging citizens to migrate abroad without discrimination or having a policy to export workers.
- The destination of migration. Arriving in the destination country and residing in that country will create a personal network (people we come to know) more than the official network (government services, knowledge of rights, and the duties of citizens of the host country) in the social system. The impact of migration is the creation of an ethnic enclave, which is a community of migrants of the same ethnicity using the same language and having common traditions. Communities will create mechanisms to communicate within their groups. What migrants expect in the destination country is a comfortable life, cheap cost of living, business opportunities, access to ownership of property and real estate, culture, and great opportunities for their children in order to maintain the quality of one's life or to extend their savings and investments.

Conclusions

In order to create a conceptual framework or perspective in studying the foreign population (expat group) from the above concepts, theories, and literature review, it should be studied and understood by dividing it into three phases, which include: (1) the origin, (2) the way to the destination, and (3) the destination.

The first phase involves traveling from the country of origin (province, district, or country of origin). There are factors, conditions, or motivations based on economic, social, and political reasons. The motivation for migration comes from the belief of changing housing for a better, complete, and more desirable opportunity. The factor of climate change results in migration for a short period of time. The factors of the immigration law system of the country of origin, encouraging the remittance of foreign citizens without discrimination or having a policy to export workers, result in migration for a longer duration. Other factors include important moments in life (e.g. illness, birth or death of a family member, marriage or divorce, unemployment or work changes, etc.), travel experiences that contribute to making settlement decisions, legal policies that facilitate travel, cultural differences, recognizing the meaning of local people before strangers, and changing the attitude from being a tourist to becoming a mover, including the role of networks involved in helping the movers successfully travel to the destination country, province, or district. Both formal and informal ways (such as government services, relatives, friends, neighbors, members of the same community, or those who have experience moving) to help

movers through social areas and to cross borders have both concrete (e.g. finances, accommodations) and abstract (e.g. information awareness, encouragement) value.

The second phase involves on the way to the destination, which is the journey or the process of traveling. It requires consideration of the conditions of travel-related factors in terms of the immigration process, transportation, and contact with government officials or staff that provide for each process, which must be passed before entering the destination country, province, or district. Other factors that need to be considered include the legal policy that facilitates the travel processes and the immigration law system of the destination country, encouraging acceptance of overseas migrants without discrimination or having a policy to export workers.

The third phase is the destination of migration. This includes arriving to the destination country and residing in that country, which leads to creating an area with a cross-border community where the mover group in the destination country interacts with people of the same race, religion, or country. This also creates strong relationships, which is an expression of solidarity and carrying out economic, political, social, and cultural activities together in order to connect people who are members within the group in the destination country, enabling them to contact each other and create a common community identity. At the same time, it may connect those activities to people staying (stayer) in the personal network (people we come to know) more than the official network (government services, knowledge of rights, and the duties of citizens of the host country) in the social system. The impact of migration is the creation of an ethnic enclave, which is a community of migrants of the same ethnicity using the same language and having common traditions. Communities will create mechanisms to communicate within their groups. What migrants expect in the destination country is a comfortable life, cheap cost of living, business opportunities, access to ownership of property and real estate, culture, and great opportunities for their children in order to maintain the quality of one's life or extending their savings and investments. Including the relationships based on the social grounds that cross the border of kinship is the relationships that an immigrant or migrant (mover) has with people in their home country (non-immigrants) linked through relationships in the form of relatives that are connected through various ways, such as sending money home and sending goods from the country of origin (or destination) to the country of destination (or origin) as an entrepreneur.

As for the network or the people in the social network of the mover, they go through all the phases (the origin, the way to the destination, and the destination) of the migration as well. In addition, the role of the social network in migration is a rotating process. That is to say, the members of the network start by receiving assistance for migration, become a migrant, and then become a member assisting other members in migration until the process becomes a migration cycle called chain migration or flow migration.

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