Becoming "the Little Ghost": the Social and Cultural Construction of Illegal Thai Migrant Workers in South Korea

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This study aims to determine the social and cultural forces that construct the experiences of illegal Thai migrant workers to be so-called, "little ghosts", working in South Korea. A multi-sited ethnography and content analysis were utilised in this study to display the complexity of the structural determinants driving the Thais from the rural villages to become illegal workers in South Korea. Those social and cultural forces include: (1) the marginalisation of the rural communities of the nation state's development; (2) the cultural meaning of the workers in abroad as the "Phor Liang Nork" — the Thai dialect term means "the overseas millionaire"; (3) the inaccessibility to the government's migrant worker employment system; and (4) normalisation of the "illegal workers". The study suggests needing to limit the myth of social representation and blaming the victims towards the illegal workers, and to providing the support for reintegration. This includes labour market information, entrepreneurial training or overseas legal employment and life advice that would allow enhancing the skills and experience of illegal migrant workers.

Keywords: *Social and cultural construction, Thai illegal migrant workers, South Korea.*

Introduction

The migration of the illegal workers is a complex and diverse social phenomenon, both in terms of the migration type, migration motivation, and social relationship network and globalisation (Lewell, 1994; Rajagopalan, 2015). It is an issue that all states, being the host countries, are aware of and they want to address the problems of these migrant groups. This is

due to there often being the presentative image of illegal migrant workers as a burden and threat to the economy and society, associated with the myth of being "criminal" (Johnson, 2004; Engbersen & Van Der Leun, 2001). Previous studies have described the migrations of illegal migrant workers from the viewpoints of economics with pull and push factors (Costantino, 2013; Schubert, 2009), political-economy (Carrasco, 2008), and anthropology that addresses the cultural difference and ethnic bias on the physical difference of migrants (Giuffre & Cingolani, 2013; Cleaveland, 2011). Furthermore, these studies attempted to propose solutions to the problem to reduce the number of illegal workers. Although the increasing number of the illegal workers is addressed, the data is inherently limited and likely to be underestimated (PICUM, 2013; IOM, 2018, 28). Delaunay and Tapinos (1998 as cited in Engbersen & Van Der Leun, 2001) noted, "relatively little is known about the size of the category of illegal immigrants and the global data cannot compare precisely" (p. 2), as ILO noted, "due to the definitional differences, the changes in methodology as well as data sources" (IOM, 2018, p. 28).

Most migrant workers in the Asia Pacific region are low-skilled temporary labourers (UN, 2015) and are more illegal than the legal workers (Low, Tong, & Binns, 2015). One of the major destination countries for illegal workers in this region is South Korea (Lee & Lee, 2015). The number of illegal Thai workers in South Korea is increasing. They are identified as the most likely to be illegal residents, and in 2019, the Thai workers ranked the highest with 112,192 people (Royal Thai Embassy, Seoul, 2019).

The illegal Thai workers in South Korea are known as the "Little Ghosts", which is the term used by the Thais and the public media to refer to the groups of people who are illegal workers, with a symbol of invisibility and that must hide while living. Previous studies have shown that the illegal workers are more vulnerable than other groups of migrants due to the fact that the immigration status relates to the working condition (Chavez, 2012), thus affecting their economic, social (Holmes, 2013; Negi, 2012), and health status (Carraco, 2008). However, previous studies on illegal migrant workers in South Korea mentioned that they must confront the harsh working conditions that are at risk of illness and death, physical and verbal abuse at work, exclusion and discrimination, being seen as a criminal and a threat, being at risk of not being paid or being paid less than the local workers in the same type of work, and being at risk of detention, induction and forced prostitution (An Amnesty International Report, 2009; Lee, Chae, Hyung yi, Im, & Hye cho, 2015; Cruz & Ocampo, 2008; Kim, 2015; Lee, McGuinness, and Kawakami, 2011), including the risk of arrest and repatriate including blacklisting, prohibiting entry into South Korea. Besides, the illegal workers are perceived to face such miseries and risks, including being stigmatised by the people in the society as a group of people who create problems and create a negative image for the Thais, in the view of the South Koreans. Most studies aim to understand the causes of illegal workers at the individual level that want a better life or the analysis of the economic

weighing and the push-pull factors between the homeland countries and the host countries (Matthews, Robertson, & Griffin, 2013). However, this study aims to understand the social and cultural forces that construct the illegal workers of Thai people working in South Korea. In other words, to address the structural and cultural forces driving the rural Thai people to work as the "Little Ghosts" in South Korea.

Methodology

Data Collection and Study Population

The researcher applied ethnography with twelve-months of field work, both in Thailand and in South Korea, to conduct the real-life environment of the Thai illegal migrants working in South Korea. Multi-sited ethnography was used in two rural villages. The first, in the Lampang Province, in the north of Thailand, where the people work abroad, including as illegal workers in South Korea. The second, in the rural village in the Gyeonggi Province, South Korea, where the illegal workers from the villages in Thailand travelled to work as daily workers in the industrial factories. Actually, the study of the communities, both in the homeland country and the host country, helped to understand the social and cultural structure that has a profound effect on the social and cultural meaning of the illegal workers during the period of November 2016 – October 2017. The data collection was conducted using in-depth interviews and participatory observations by living with the illegal workers in South Korea in order to describe the meaning of the illegal workers from the emic's point of view, observing their daily life. Narrative interviews were recorded and transcribed together with field notes for observations and interviews.

The study population included fifteen key participants, purposively selected through the following qualifications: (1) being illegal workers who have worked in South Korea for at least six months; (2) aged 18 years or more; (3) being people in the rural villages studying in Thailand; and (4) being able to tell of the experience of traveling across the country and being an illegal worker in South Korea. In addition, the study also comprised other thirty-five participants, consisting of five community leaders, ten people with working experience in foreign countries, five people who are going to work abroad, and fifteen people within the families of the illegal workers.

Data Analysis

The extracted data was interpreted and verified with the triangulation technique for data validation, while the data analysis was conducted through the content analysis. The descriptive data was stored and managed using the licensed software, Microsoft Word.

This study was certified by the Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences), Mahidol University, No. 2016/493 (B1), dated 2 November 2016.

Results

The ethnographic study provides insight into the historical, political, social and cultural contexts of the rural villages that reflect the social forces driving people into illegal work in South Korea. The two villages studied are villages where most of the people have worked abroad since 1974. Most households have family members who were foreign workers for at least two generations. Among the 463 households in the two villages, 97 per cent of the households had merely one member who had worked abroad. During the data collection, it was found that approximately 70 people in the two villages used to work as illegal workers and still work illegally in South Korea. The deep description on the social and cultural construction shaping local people in the villages to become illegal migrants in South Korea can be made through the crucial theme, including: (1) the marginalisation of the development of the nation state; (2) the cultural meaning of the workers abroad as the "Phor Liang Nork"; (3) the inaccessibility to the nation state's migrant worker employment system; and (4) the normalisation of "illegal workers" to be the simple condition.

1. Marginalisation of the development of the nation state

It is found that the illegal workers are from the marginalised communities of the nation state's development. This causes the villagers to become the cheap internal workers which reflect the unfair development process of the state, focussing on economic growth and the country's infrastructure to support the growth of the industrial sector (Ayal, 1962). The country-dweller had been ignored by the forces of capitalist industrialization. The productivity of the country-dweller improved very little. The pattern of industrialisation led to uneven development in which the differentiation between the rural and urban living conditions, particularly the remote villages, increased significantly. The development that is concentrated in the centre causes the other areas of the country to be marginalised but at the same time, the state's centralised development also requires the cheap workers from the rural areas to be an important input. As a result, the labour resources of the farmers who used to have a subsistence production are absorbed and have to migrate out of their villages.

From the ethnographic study, it is found that in the past, the villagers in the studied villages engaged in rice farming that relies on the natural and unpredictable rain with the human and animal labours. In addition, most households each have a limited amount of cultivated arable land for one-five "Rai" or about 1600–3200 square metres. Thus, the rice productions of each year tend to be used for only the household consumption. The key participants described the rapid increase in the population of the village because the villagers did not know about the

contraception. Thus, reflecting the development of the state that neglects to improve the quality of life of the people causing the people in the village to become poorer. In addition, when the natural disasters such as drought or flood occurred, the villagers were faced with poverty and starvation and had to struggle by seeking the plants in the nearby forests to sustain their life. However, they could still live because the relationships regarding the social solidarity of the community were strong. As a seventy-two-year-old female participant described the past image of the community:

"I remember that in the old days, the people were equally poor. None was superior over the others. It was difficult to say that it is difficult. There were not many things to eat like nowadays. Especially, in whichever year the drought occurred, we got little rice that could not be eaten until the end of a year. In some years, there were many months left to harvest. The rice in the barn had run out without breast feeding. We had to borrow rice to eat. I used to borrow some rice from my neighbour. They had planted rice earlier and the rice would be earlier ripen. My husband and I had to go up the hill to find the rice and carried it down. In the past, there was little rice field but the people had many children. Some families had twelve or thirteen members. We did not know where to earn our lives then, we had to live together. When eating, we sat like the circle of ten or so. When there was not enough rice, we had to borrow some again. When we harvested ours, we would pay them back. It used to have the drought for continual two or three years. Rice could not be planted. We had to walk for thirty kilometres to dig taros in the forest to eat to sustain our life."

During the period of capitalist transformation, the industrial development and manufacturing sector had been fostered by the Thai Government. This resulted in changing the way of life of the villagers to migrate to work as workers in the large state construction projects, such as the construction of roads, dams, and lignite coal power plants. These projects occurred outside the village and all the people in the village who used to rely on the agricultural crops with a low return, went out to be the workers with more wages and more development skills in construction work. They became the well-off people, causing more people in the village to struggle to work outside the village. The effects of national development and modernisation resulted in the relationship of the people who had been close to each other and kind to each other to change the value of the dignity of the people with "money" which can be sought. The successful villagers, as the workers, are praised and regarded as "Phor Liang" or "the prestigious millionaires" in the community.

2. Cultural meaning of the workers abroad as "Phor Liang Nork"

Being a migrant worker abroad means "Phor Liang Nork" or an "overseas millionaire", which is the dialect term used to call the people who are rich and powerful as a result of working abroad. It has the meaning of a good economic life. The key participant identified

that the changing way of life of the peasant villages to become worker villages in the country and later, as the foreign workers that migrate to work abroad for the villagers, began in 1974. They crowdedly travelled to work in the Middle East, also known as "The golden age of gold digging abroad". In 1976–1979, the main income of the household came from remittance which was sent by the family members working abroad. Those successful and wealthy people were called "Phor Liang Nork", and at the same time, "Phor Liang Nork" status affects the meaning and the acceptance of the people in the community. Thus, further affecting the desire of the people who want to work abroad. A key participant, a fifty-year-old male said:

"Everyone wants to go abroad, and wants to be a Phor Liang Nork. It is cool when anyone asks when you are going to fly to and which country you are going to. Especially, on the flying day, they will most fashionably and well dress up as they would have flown. Some fly for the first time and are excited, taking pictures to show off their wives at home. At that time, ones who got on planes were the people who worked abroad. We think like children and would like to get on the planes and want to go to work abroad like them. When they came back to visit their relatives, many relatives and friends came to fill the house. Slice the pork and eat it. Wherever they go, the neighbours call them, 'Phor Liang Nork'."

Having a "Phor Liang Nork" status in the community has a cultural meaning in terms of prestige and socio-economic power. The poor in the community are often undervalued by others. This value system is reflected in a metaphoric proverb regarding the ways of life of the people in the community, such as "Suffering because of hunger, no one takes a light to light the stomach. Suffering due to no money, no gold is seen that the cousin would insult". This reflects the decisions, values, and dignity through the individual's economic status, meanwhile reinforcing the collapse of the kin relationship.

3. Inaccessibility to the nation state's migrant worker employment system

Becoming illegal migrant workers is a result of the inaccessibility of the government's migrant employment system. Law enforcement for the unskilled workers is carried out through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the states. Thailand and South Korea have a state employment system called the Employment Permit System (EPS), which specifies the quota for the foreign workers in each country and the qualifications of the unskilled workers. However, although this employment system was created to help solve the migrant worker problem in South Korea, it becomes an obstacle for some Thai workers to become the unskilled and legal workers based on the inclusion criteria of the EPS. A key participant specified the conditions that prevented him from the examination selection due to having an overage in the language skill exam, and a criminal record. The participant, aged 40 and over, informed that the foreign employers often require young and healthy workers. Thus, making older workers, even though they have work experience or are the experts with

the exquisite workmanship (such as welding and agricultural work) unable to apply for the selection tests. The fifty-seven-year-old male participant reflected:

"I used to be a welder in Singapore for twelve years. Working abroad has its own time. If we are still young, working hard, a boss would like to hire us. When the age was at forty to fifty years old, the boss would not want to hire any workers anymore. Korean employers like our skills. But when I came to Korea at the age of forty-nine, even though we wanted to be legal, but the law didn't allow us."

Language skill eligibility, such as the ability to read and write the Korean language, can be a major obstacle for the key participants. Most participants think that they are unable to learn and understand Korean. Simultaneously, the key participant who has a criminal record, such as for an assault, drug abuse, and/or drug trafficking, cannot pass the selection. Thus, becoming an illegal worker is the last option for them. In addition, the participants stated that even though they passed the selection exam and took the account, due to the conditions imposed by the informal creditors that threaten to harm the family, they have to make a decision to choose to be illegal workers. Meanwhile, the female participants reflected that women who pass the language skill testing will lose the opportunity because the Korean employers will choose the men to work because they think male employees can work harder than female ones. A twenty-seven-year-old female participant said:

"Most of the time, the employers choose the men because they can work harder than women. Although you can pass the exam and get high scores, the person who chooses to work is the Korean employer. He didn't take the exam order. I want to see his country, but I must accept. They said that only six per cent of the women will be chosen and that will be difficult. Some people who pass the exam have to wait until the waiting list is expired. That is why they escape."

4. Normalisation of "illegal workers"

The normalisation of the illegal workers' status is found in this study. People within the community recognise that being a migrant worker without a legal status abroad is a way of life that faces the risk of being deceived by a job broker for working abroad, as well as being repatriated by the employers. However, the meaning of illegal workers has been normalised as going to work in a foreign country which is a form of "risk", in which this risk is normal and can occur to those who have no luck and must bear the risk themselves. Hence, although the villagers know that being a "little ghost" will be miserable and risky by seeing the examples of the number of migrant workers who died overseas and were often deported, they viewed it as a possible matter and it is a matter of the luck or fortune of a person.

In addition, the participants view that they are willing to face this risk because of the family role and the responsibility in the family. This will enable workers and workers' family to be free from poverty and lead to a good future, as long as they survive from the arrest of the immigration authorities. Therefore, having "the little ghost" status is not a problem and is a good choice for them. A key participant, a thirty-three-year-old woman, noted:

"My mother took the land to mortgage and borrowed money for Aunt Norm. If the borrowers are moneylender's relative, three per cent of the interest will be counted. My mom is worried, but exactly as coming to be with Uncle Neh, you know that you're going to go. I am a debt builder and must be a servant. No matter what risk you are going to face, you have to accept it. There is no other choice. What are we doing for a living in our home? ... Ask if staying here is difficult or risky? It's normal as we are "the little ghosts". If you are arrested, return home, and if you are still not caught, continue to stay, depending on the fortune."

Even though the state and the people in the society create the stereotyping as criminals, a danger or a threat to the security of the citizens in the country in which they live, the meaning of being a "little ghost" is interpreted by the studied participants in the sense of improving the economic status of the family, showing the responsibility to the family, creating a long-term, and secured future. Therefore, being a "little ghost" has a positive meaning and is a "risk" that a person can accept. A key male participant, aged twenty-nine years old, said:

"I came to Korea as I would like my children and wife to be comfortable. I would like them to have money and gold to wear like other wives. I must raise everyone well. I have to take care of my parents in Chiang Rai as I am the only son. If I cannot raise my parents, then I can be insulted as a strayed dog. My wife who came for illegal worker here with me has to take care of her parents too. We work in South Korea and we send the money to both homes."

Discussion

This study uses the critical medical anthropology approach to understand the illegal workers by reflecting on the power relations and structure, and social institutions through the historical, political, economic, social, and cultural contexts in the rural villages in the north and the life conditions of the illegal Thai workers in South Korea. As we can see from the aforementioned data, the transition of the way of life of the villagers, changing from being a peasant to being a migrant worker with the status of 'illegal' in a foreign country, is as a result of the inequality of the state development. That is, the marginalisation of the small rural villages in the north where the arid environment has been neglected to be faced by the villagers alone, and it has also been unfavourable for cultivation and unable to support the growing number of family members. Furthermore, the villagers are also absorbed in the cheap labour resources of the villages as part of the country's infrastructure development

process, including roads, power plants and large dams. Meanwhile, there is a need for cheap migrants in the world labour market. Thus, causing the villagers who were former migrant workers in the country to be included as part of the global capitalist system, affecting the perception and the meaning of working abroad for the villagers. It is seen as a way of life that allows the families to be free from poverty and create a well-being of the family, including the creation of a prestige social position in the community through being "Phor Liang Nork". Besides, the way of being a migrant worker depends on the local capital, which is an organised brokerage company with the networks in the Province and village. The villagers must bear the certain risks of being deceived, and the embeddedness of illegal migrant workers is a risk or fortune.

The illegal migrant workers are the result of the inaccessibility of the state's migrant employment system. In other words, the demand for foreign workers in South Korea is high because the incentives for a wage are higher than working in their own country and the demand for cheap foreign workers by Korean employers is also very high. Yet, the State of South Korea instead uses a policy to reduce the foreign workers because they want to reduce the unemployment of the local workers. The State does not consider that the local workers do not want to work in 3Ds. As a result, there is a mismatch between the employer's demand for foreign workers and the government's quota determination in the employment permit system or the EPS. Government employment has created the rules to classify the migrant workers as skilled workers or unskilled workers, legal workers or illegal workers, and create the conditions for the qualifications of the migrant workers that becomes obstacles for illegal workers. These obstacles include the age requirements, having a criminal record, the waiting period for the employers to select the foreign workers, language proficiency, and the work skills testing. Moreover, the female workers are less likely to be recruited because the employers prefer to hire male workers more than the female workers, reflecting the inequality based on the gender dimension which equates to driving people into illegal work through the criminalisation processes by the State itself. Directly speaking, bearing "the little ghost" status can be understandable through the process of the illegalisation of Thai migrant workers.

In attempting to understand the migrant phenomenon of illegal workers, it is a complex social phenomenon. The researchers could not easily understand by explaining the reason/s that this group of people had decided to migrate in a superficial way. Using the modernity theory, it believes that science and progress make life better. However, illegal migrant workers cannot be understood through the push-pull factors resulting from the effects of the global trade and the investment growth that make an economical difference between the home country and the host country, by using the indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), unemployment rate, minimum wage rate, and the equality of income distribution. Such a framework tends to focus on the motivation of the illegal workers at the individual level. That is, being able to

make the rational decisions, and concerns the problems of family debt and the desire to improve their lives to explain the reason for the transnational migration from the poor countries to the rich countries or from the agricultural countries to the industrial and service countries (Costantino, 2013). As for the political perspective, it is explained that the political conflicts or the occurrence of war in the country of origin are important factors that cause migrations (Giuffre & Cingolani, 2013). Meanwhile, the political economy theory focusses on analysing the macro-processes that affect migration in the context of the core and the periphery, based on the world systems theory or dependency theory, with the focus on the unfairness of the exports of workers between the low-wage countries and the countries with high wages (Rajagopalan, 2015; Carraso, 2008).

This study has important criticisms for the aforementioned theories. It is a concept aiming at explaining the pattern of the illegal worker migration from the poorer countries to the richer countries. It reflects the viewpoint of the educators, who only look at the phenomena occurring in the western society, and does not fully correspond to the real phenomena occurring in today's world society. This study looks at the phenomenon of the transnational migration as a complex social reality that dynamically flows. Therefore, it can be seen that the migration of the migrant workers is not only moving from the poorer countries to the richer countries. The current migration patterns are complex and diverse, in terms of the migrant patterns, the motive for migration, and the networks of social relations with migration (Lewellen, 1994; Rajagopalan, 2015; Carrasco, 2008). They are linked to the changes in transportation and communication systems in a wide world society and linked to the economic, political, social and cultural contexts at the local, state, regional, and global levels (Ratha & Shaw, 2007; Campillo-Carrete, 2013; Castles, 2010). As can be seen, since Thailand is both the host country for the illegal workers from the neighbouring countries to work in large numbers and is also the homeland country of many illegal workers who go to work in South Korea. Moreover, the critique of postmodern concepts also shows that the transnational migration of "the little ghosts" to South Korea is the result of the social force that causes the rural villagers to be marginalised in the nation state's development process and often to be absorbed as the cheap wage workers. They are reflected by the migrant workers causing the changes in people's ways of thinking and lifestyle, as well as the economic differences between the rich or "Phor Liang", and the poor with different living conditions. Thus, affecting the perception of feelings and wishes of the villagers. However, the context of the village that is arid and neglected by the state, combined with the increasing population, causes the villagers to suffer from famine and starvation and they cannot meet the needs of themselves and their families who want to live a comfortable life. Even when there is a demand for workers in the world market, the villagers are integrated into cheap migrant workers, which is a way that the poor look to be able to meet the needs of themselves and their families by struggling to sell their labour abroad.

The study also criticises that the migration of the illegal workers is not the result of the structural violence in the country of origin, as shown in the studies by Singer et al. (1992) that described the migration of the illegal workers to Puerto Rico, and in a Cleaveland (2011) study that described the migration of the illegal migrants to Mexico to work in the United States only. This study addresses that the migration of illegal migrants can also be analysed as cultural violence. This is because going to work illegally abroad has been normalised that the villagers perceive it as the way of life of people in the community. This determines the way of thinking, behaviour, and construction of the meaning of being an overseas millionaire, that affects the shared experiences of the members in the society and becomes the cultural violence. Apart from the lack of access to the State's migrant employment system, the people were exploited by local capitalist recruiters. Hence, going to work abroad is recognised by the villagers and the "little ghosts" as an investment that has the risk of being scammed by a broker, and being deceived is acknowledged as an acceptable nature which, if the villagers want to be an overseas millionaire, it means having to risk their fortune to work abroad. Although working as a "little ghost" is risky, the villagers and the ghosts seem to consider it normal and agree to taking the risk of travelling to work. Furthermore, when comparing the differences of the migrants between the Thai workers during the pioneering era of going to work in the Middle East, and to today, it can be seen that in the past, the first generation of villagers struggled to find funds for travelling. This included from the help of family members and relatives, to borrowing money from the rich in the village, and was combined with the limitations of technology and information. Thus, making travelling across the globe new and highly dependent on the recruitment companies. However, nowadays going to work overseas is easier, as some villagers would like to be supported by their own families. Besides, the information to facilitate working overseas is from multiple channels, including hearsay from the people in the village, website tracking, and employment agencies, as well as the convenience of both domestic and international transportation, making travelling across the country much faster. Therefore, emphasis should be given to the changing socio-cultural context that may shape the patterns of the migration experiences of migrants of all ages.

The field work — by means of data collection through the ethnographic study that focusses on the historic, political, economic, social, and cultural contexts — could provide the data derived from the emic's point of view, leading to a transcendent, rigid and inclusive view of the people in the society who tend to view the migrant groups as the illegal workers, the criminals which are a danger or threat to the security of the citizens in the country, in which they live. Using the words 'illegal', 'alien' or 'undocumented', affects the perception of illegal workers. The law calling itself "Little Ghost", means a person who is not allowed to work as a legitimate worker, or "V people", which is a call that having visa approval is recognised by both the State, media, and the public. However, the social awareness and the sense of the little ghosts and the community is very fluid. There is redefining, which is a form of identity negotiation against the hidden identity, causing "the little ghosts" to feel that they

are valuable and tangible (Suriya Smutkupt, 2014). Although most societies recognise that "being a little ghost" poses a risk of being marginalised and very vulnerable to economic and social exploitation, for the people in the community, being a "little ghost" is just a form of working abroad and it is normal for working abroad to be risky. Therefore, being a "little ghost" is not a problem and is a risky option for making yourself and your family a better life. Being a "Korean Phor Liang" with the income to return to the family, is the desire of the community. Such definitions and perceptions concern the family feeders.

Conclusion

The objective of this study is to understand the structural and cultural conditions that make the people in the rural communities in the Lampang Province, in the north of Thailand, to become illegal workers in South Korea. The study may not be confined to explain it at the individual level or only those factors that are the driving forces. Being an illegal worker is a complex social and cultural construction and reflects the social power that influences the collective experience of the people in the specific cultural society.

This study demonstrates a deep understanding of the social and cultural forces of being an illegal Thai worker. As a result, it requires limiting the myth of social representation and blaming the victims towards illegal workers. Our analysis suggests that the term "illegal migrant worker" reflects the division between the wanted and unwanted migrant workers. It is the result of the shift towards a restrictive employment policy from the destination county, which should be reconsidered, especially in relation to gender equity in employment.

Becoming an illegal migrant worker is not an ad hoc phenomenon. This study addresses the marginalisation of the illegal migrant workers caused by the development policy of the origin country. It needs to provide them support for reintegration, such as labour market information, entrepreneurial training or international legal employment and life advice that would allow them to enhance their skills and experience.

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