



FROM THE EXEC
-
EDITORIAL

Life in a Transnational 'No-rights' Zone: The Plight of Unskilled and Lowskilled Migrant Workers in Asia

Danièle Bélanger
Associate Professor

Introduction

In the High-level Dialogue of the United Nations Assembly on International Migration and Development that took place in 2006, the benefits of temporary work migration were strongly underscored and those of settlement migration practically ignored (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). Guest worker initiatives were presented as being a scheme in which all parties involved could win: the sending country by obtaining remittances from workers, the receiving countries by obtaining labour without having to commit to the long-term welfare of migrant workers, and the migrants themselves by having the opportunity to earn higher wages than in their country of origin. Following this logic, the guest worker scheme is a development strategy for sending

nations and a solution to labour shortages in targeted sectors for receiving nations.

In Europe, guest worker programs were popular in the aftermath of the World War II, but were discontinued in the early 1970s. The programs were considered to have failed because significant numbers of temporary migrants eventually settled and formed new ethnic minorities in countries that did not intend to 'keep' them (Castles and Miller, 2004). Despite this unintended consequence, the programs were revived in the 1990s with a new wave of initiatives aimed at admitting migrants for temporary stays in order to fill specific labour needs. Based on an analysis of recent guest worker programs in Germany and England, Castles (2006) argues that this new wave of programs fails to address the issue of providing protection for migrants and their rights, which may result in the same negative consequences as the earlier wave of guest worker schemes. The contemporary history of temporary migration schemes seems to repeat itself.

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Lucie Dubé

M.Sc candidate in Geography, Université Laval

I started my research in January 2007, focusing on ethnic minorities in Laos. Since the end of the 1980s, the Laotian government has adopted various action plan in rural development and environmental conservation. The main objectives were to stop shifting cultivation practices by ethnic minorities who live in the mountains as well as offering more services, at least on paper, to the overall population. To reach these objectives, many relocation projects have been implemented. However, to be sedentarized in the lowlands entails a process of territorial degradation and an adaptation to a new livelihood, with little or no access to forest resources during starving periods. Fieldwork for this research is plan to be realized from January 2008 in Bolikhamxay province, a territory where relocations and sedentarization projects have been implemented.

Van Ngoc Truc Phuong

MA Student in the Department of Geography, University of Waterloo

I grew up in Mekong Delta and then obtained my BA at Geography Department of University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Ho Chi Minh City - Vietnam National University) in 2001. Before coming to UW in 2005, I spent 4 years at the university where I taught GIS and Thematic Cartography. My past research focused on GIS application and atlases. Recently, I turned my research interest to agricultural land use change and its impacts on farmers' livelihood in peri-urban areas of Vietnam after I met Dr Steffanie Scott - my co-supervisor. Also, I try to make use of my spatial analysis background in conducting the thesis under the supervision of Dr. Peter Deadman. I've just finished my productive fieldwork in Vietnam in summer 2006 and hope to finish the program in by Septembre 2007.

See our CCSEAS website for more information about events announced here.

Dates	Events	Location
August 2-5, 2007	International Convention of Asian Scholars' 5th biennial conference, "Sharing a Future in Asia"	Kuala Lumpur Convention Center
September, 12-15, 2007	EuroSEAS (European Association of Southeast Asian Studies)	University of Naples
October, 19-21 2007	Conference of the Canadian Council for Southeast Asian Studies DETAILS ON PAGE 6 OF THIS NEWSLETTER	Quebec city, Laval University
January, 9-11 2008	10th International Conference on Thai Studies: « Thai societies in a Transnationalized World »; date limite: 15 avril 2007.	Bangkok, Thaïlande

NEW
STUDENTS

UPCOMING
EVENTS

Regional energy needs and Burma's political destiny

Prof. Bruce Matthews
Professeur émérite
Université Acadia
Wolfville, Nouvelle-Écosse

NEWS

It can be argued that the military dictatorship governing Burma (Myanmar) by one name or another since 1962 is secure in holding on to political power more or less indefinitely. It is able to do this in part because of a long tradition of allegiance to a military chain of command which ensures solid control from the top. Unlike neighbouring Bangladesh and Thailand, there have been no coups in Burma during this near half-century of military rule. This is not to suggest that the 400,000 strong armed forces (*Tatmadaw* or *SitTat*) is without its own internal rifts. It would be wishful thinking, however, to imagine that this large cohort of Burmese society would lightly surrender its privileged place to democracy, or that competitive generals waiting in line (Maung Aye, age 67, Thura Shwe Mann, age 59) to take over from head of state Than Shwe (the 73-year old 'Senior General') will dare to upset the established status quo by too divisive or public a struggle. Even more crucial for the longevity of the junta are Burma's recently discovered vast off-shore hydrocarbon resources. It is a dismal irony that of all nations to be blessed with such huge energy deposits, it would be to a socialist totalitarian police state infamous for its backwardness and bleak human rights record. No other country in the region has access to such energy largesse. First harnessed in the Gulf of Martaban in 1991 with the backing of the Petroleum Authority of Thailand, trillions of cubic meters of natural gas have recently been discovered in new enormous deposits off the Arakan coast. These so-called 'Shwe fields' are immediately valued at \$12 billion to the government of Burma (now bunkered down in its bizarre new capital of Naypyidaw, 450 kms north of Rangoon). But so urgent are the energy needs of Burma's neighbours that their collective foreign policies are unashamedly designed to curry favour from the junta, which in turn skillfully plays one country off against the other. China has always led in the 'influence race', and its longstanding support for Burma's authoritarian regime is now paying maximum dividends. In 1988 India became an out-

spoken supporter of opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, but this abruptly ceased in 1993, when India, alert to growing demands for electrical power to feed its accelerating industrialization, completely reversed its stance and began to repair its relationships with the Burmese generals. Thailand as well has never questioned the propriety of purchasing huge quantities of gas at US \$1 billion per year. By March, 2007, despite India's plea for a major pipeline through near-by Manipur, and the crucial investment in the project by South Korea's Daewoo International, the junta appears to favour only China as the major recipient of its newly-developed Shwe deposits, opting for a 900 km pipeline from Sittwe on the Bay of Bengal to Kunming. International attitudes towards the government in Burma are wildly at odds, but Naypyidaw appears to have enough 'allies' (including, remarkably, South Africa, which voted against possible UN-imposed sanctions on 12 January 2007) to press on indefinitely without much or any change to its polity. The economic prospects of Burma's 50 million citizens are still not bright despite the off-shore bounty. The latter will provide revenue enough to perpetuate junta rule for years to come (none of it will likely go towards education or health). And the neighbours, alas, will not likely feel much, if any, remorse.

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A new President for the Canadian Asian Studies Association (CASA)

Steve Déry

On May 15th, the Executive Board of the Canadian Asian Studies Association (CASA) held a meeting in Toronto. Since it is now CCSEAS's turn to assume presidency of the association, Yann Roche was elected as the new president for a two year mandate. Congratulations and we wish him the best of luck!

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from page 1 (Danièle Bélanger)

RESEARCH AND DEBATES

At the onset, Asia may seem to be an example of successful international labour migration from poor to rich countries. Indeed, regional work migration within Asia has dramatically increased ... over the past decade (Hugo, 2004). Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea have signed bilateral agreements with sending countries in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia. This rapidly increasing flow of work migrants in the region has increased the remittances sent back to sending nations annually. Governments of sending countries aim to increase the number of workers sent abroad to boost revenue and stimulate local socioeconomic development. The government of Vietnam, for instance, estimates that 1.6 billion US dollars were sent to Vietnam in the form of remittances in 2005 (UNFPA, 2006). Below the surface of this success story at the national and regional level, however, lie numerous problems that seriously hamper the success of work migration at the individual level for many of those enrolling to 'export their labour' (*di xuất khau lao dong* in Vietnamese) (Hugo, 2004).

A number of problems affect many countries of the region. First, the international labour migration market in Asia is competitive, and sending countries attempt to maximize their 'comparative' advantage in the market in order to win larger quotas from receiving countries (Abella, 2004). Due to this competition, sending countries may sign agreements that include particularly low wages, limited rights and few benefits. In addition, migrant workers must pay taxes both in the country of origin and the country of destination. Since the main concern is to expand markets and increase the number of workers sent abroad, protection of migrants and their rights is ignored. Very asymmetrical relations between sending (poor) countries and receiving (rich) countries have resulted in competition within the region. Second, the temporary work migration scheme is accompanied with a fear that migrant workers will run away in order to overstay the duration of their contract. To avoid runaway workers, receiving nations put in place very harsh and repressive measures, which assume that all workers have the potential to become runaways and undocumented migrants. In order to prevent settlement and long stays, the receiving countries limit migrants' rights, even when some of these measures are contrary to their national laws. Foreign temporary

workers in Taiwan, for instance, do not have the right to unionize, protest or strike - three basic labour rights granted to all Taiwanese citizens. Because guest workers are not citizens of their receiving countries and are not living on the soil of their home country of residence, they find themselves in a 'no-rights' zone. This situation is particularly advantageous to employers and receiving countries that typically offer low wages and seldom provide satisfactory working conditions. Third, high pre-departure payments and salary deductions result in lower-than-expected incomes. Work migration is managed by profit-making recruitment agencies in both sending and receiving nations; governments play a minimal role in insuring that the integrity and basic rights of migrants are respected. A lack of ethical standards in establishing an acceptable profit on the export of workers means that fees are often extremely high and the worker is put in a situation of debt-bondage to the recruitment agency (Wang and Bélanger, 2005). For the worker who must repay a large loan before even thinking about accumulating any savings from his work abroad, difficult working conditions and low wages are of secondary importance. Some have argued that migrant workers are similar to Chinese indentured labour in 19th century Southeast Asia, resulting in near-slavery in the postcolonial era. Despite problems, the export-import of migrant workers within Asia is a booming industry, in part, because the supply of workers who desire to work abroad is much larger than the demand. Of course, each flow of migrant workers has its own characteristics and features; however, the issues mentioned above are recurrent in much research on international labour migration in Asia (Piper, 2004).

Macro indicators that suggest labour contract migration is successful must be addressed in light of migrants' experiences. Enhancing the migration experience is in the best interest of all parties involved. Migrant workers should be provided with training courses on their legal rights before departure and after arrival in the receiving country. Providing quasi-citizenship rights to overseas migrant workers would reduce the likelihood of employers and brokers in host countries misusing their power. Ethical standards need to be established and the whole migration industry needs to be regulated and law enforced. The guest worker scheme of Asian labour migration needs to be examined from the workers' perspectives, not only from the governments' and intermediaries' ones.

Beyond Boundaries: Southeast Asian Studies in the 21st Century

Conference of the Canadian Council for Southeast Asian Studies

October 19 to 21, 2007

Laval University, Quebec City

-CCSEAS
2007-

DEADLINE

TEXTS

TO BE SENT
BY SEPT. 15TH

Students who will submit their paper by September 15th will enter the contest to win the prize for the best paper. A total of 400\$ will be offered by the Institut Québécois des Hautes Études Internationales (Université Laval) during the conference.

The conference and its objectives. This conference has a more methodological taste than past ones. The central objective is to take the opportunity of having various scholars from various disciplines around the same "table" to examine the links that exist, on the one hand, across disciplines boundaries, and, on the other hand, between space and time scales of analysis. *Every single research, without exception*, bears a signature which enables us to situate it in both a space and a time framework. All too often however, one stays confined in space and time. And even when one establishes comparisons across levels of analysis, one leaves aside the links between these various levels. From that, the general objective of this conference is to profit from our gathering and from the broad richness of our thematic to begin a collective reflection on this issue. The best way to realize this is to go *beyond discipline's limits*.

At the end of the conference, as a group, the following two specific objectives must have been met:

- 1) firstly, this synergetic effort would brings us to define similarities or discrepancies (at least, to explore further) in what links together geographical levels of analysis on one side (from individual to global) and historical "levels" on the other side (from short events to longer ones).
- 2) secondly, we need to show that area studies still have a role to play in improving our scientific knowledge, especially in building coherent ones. Southeast Asia may be seen as a kind of pilot-project to test this way of doing things, to see how, with a huge transdisciplinary and collective endeavour we are able to improve significantly our knowledge on Southeast Asia;

We can summarize the main idea of this conference as follows: to go beyond disciplinary boundaries will allow us to go beyond space and time limits.

Methods. Each panel will be organized while keeping in mind that we need to compare these links that are built between disciplines and between time and space levels. As such, two apparently thematically far from each other subjects may be put together in the same panel since they are related in the time space analysis. Example: Protected areas in Vietnam (geography) and Education and ethnic minorities in Vietnam (social work).

Each panel will have a discussant plus three or four papers presented, at the most. A new way of doing things during this conference: we'll have a **panel secretary** who will take notes about discussion, especially what is related to the conference objectives. All panel secretaries will meet afterwards in order to put in common what appears interesting: similarities, differences, challenges, methods to explore, things to avoid, etc. A general review of these findings will be presented during the general assembly.

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Timetable - deadlines

15 September: texts to be received by committee (they will be sent to respective discussants)
19 to 21 October: conference at Laval University, Quebec City
1st December: deadline for paper to be published in the electronic Conference Proceedings
28 February 2008: deadline for submitting a paper to be published in a peer reviewed book

DEADLINE
TEXTS
TO BE SENT
BY SEPT. 15TH

INTERNET
RESOURCES

[Southeast Asia](#) - [Brunei](#) - [Burma](#) - [Cambodia](#) - [Indonesia](#) - [East Timor](#) - [Malaysia](#) - [Laos](#) - [Singapore](#) - [Thailand](#) - [Vietnam](#) - [Canadian researchers and Institutions](#) - * This list is available from the CCSEAS website *

Notes to users: This list of electronic resources was compiled between January and April 2006. It is based in part on other lists of electronic resources already available on the web (see in particular the General resources section for Southeast Asia). We are currently updating the list of electronic resources, which is available at: <http://canadianasianstudies.concordia.ca/case/htm/cease.htm>.

Suggestions of new entries would be, of course, greatly appreciated.

THE
NEWSLETTER

The *CCSEAS Newsletter* contributes to inform Southeast Asian specialists in Canada about what concern Southeast Asia: events, debates, research, including those of graduate students. It is sent by email to Canadian Council for Southeast Asian Studies (CCSEAS) members. Actual as previous volumes are available online on the CCSEAS website (address in the Newsletter). If you prefer not to receive this publication, please send a message to the editors (CCSEAS@hotmail.com).

The *CCSEAS Newsletter* aims to help the development of a network of Canadians involved in Southeast Asian studies, as well as motivating new collaborations between them. Papers and suggestions may be submitted at any times. Send us news from your research, from your fieldworks, ideas and commentaries so we can publish them in the next Newsletter. Please, keep articles short and send both French and English version whenever it is possible.

The deadline to publish in the next Newsletter is **September 5th 2007**. The Newsletter will be published for the next CCSEAS conference in October.

Editors: Jean-Philippe Leblond, Keith Barney, Steve Déry

