



Beyond Living and Dying:

Applying a Flow Theory Perspective on Illegal Transborder Mon Labours in Thailand

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Abstract

Flow is an effective mental state in which an individual is so involved in an activity that time or space seem not to matter. This article investigates the “flow state” of illegal transborder Mon labours (ITMLs) from their home town in Mon State, Myanmar to Thailand during 2015–2017. The author employed qualitative research including interview in-depth and observations with thirty ITMLs. Then, the Boredom Proneness Checklist (BPC) were adopted to describe a negative experience of ITMLs. The flow state of optimal experience during their illegal transportations on AH1, Thailand revealed four motivational drivers of ITMLs. These were 1) cultural diffusion of passive, acceptance and boredom about their origin; 2) depression and inability to control their lives based on their own individual effort and creativity; 3) their personal skills of coverture equal required challenges; and 4) the holistic and joyful experience with total involvement during their journeys. For the ITMLs, the time of transportation was a motivating experience, especially for achieving their goal. The “flow” during transportation not only created self-satisfaction but also increased ability to 1) confront more challenging tasks; 2) learn to set clearer and higher goals for quality living; 3) control over individual actions; 4) forget about difficulties in time and space; and 5) establish a stronger sense of self-reliance.

Keywords: Flow Theory, ITMLs

Introduction

Studies of illegal transborder labours (ITLs) tend to focus on negative socio-economic impact on the country destination or sometimes viewing them as vulnerable victims forced to engage in human trafficking, thereby ignoring the power of individuals and their optimal experiences (Bosswell & Straubhaar, 2004; Bazeley & Dottridge, 2011; Chassamboulli & Peri, 2015). Another misleading conclusion is that there are two major factors related to ITLs, the push factors which are poverty, vulnerability, and war from the country origin and pull factors which are prosperity and royalty of the country's leaders (Buadaeng, 2012; Buadaeng & Siripornpaiboon, 2015). A commonsense assumption is that money and power are the universal motivation valued by most transborder labours. This assumption might partly be true as it is in the socialization process in many capitalist societies, but studies indicate that there are some cultures and conditions in which material goals do not apply (Polanyi, 1957; Csikszentmihalyi, 2013; Kiili, Lainema, de Freitas, & Arnab 2014).

Most motivation theories often assume that human behaviors are simply a set of innate and learned responses directed toward satisfying basic needs (Maslow, 1965; Burton, 1990; Lederer, Galtung, & Antal 1980). All behavioral theories whether they are held by economists or behavioral scientists, thus come to the similar conclusion that the individual needs can never ever be fully satisfied (Rubenstein & Crocker, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). This article intends to challenge the above assumptions. It also disagrees with the push and pull theory. To bridge the theoretical gap, this article offers innovative and crucial implications by suggesting that individuals can also derive maximum enjoyment even with a limited number of material objects or scarce resources. And that wealth, power, and social status are relevant to happiness, but they are symbols of happiness not the life goal to achieve. Studies show that any objects or any experiences are potentially enjoyable (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013;



2014). Therefore, the crucial task of psycho social scientists is to discover how this human potential can be transformed into positive actuality.

This article intends to prove that enjoyment does not depend on plentiful resources, but that it is inner experiences that play a crucial part for happiness of an individual person. By looking at behavioral activities of ITMLs during travelling from their hometown in Myanmar to Thailand, the author reveals the new set of truisms. One is that, it is not so much that individuals do but how they perceive and interpret them that makes the risky activities become enjoyable and challenging. Although some activities might lead to the loss of life or injury, but achieving their goal becomes a more attractive motivation. Using the “flow perspective”, the author offers the lesson learned to support this truth.

In terms of development, no individuals are victims nor marginalized (Appiah, 2006; Cockerham & Cockerham, 2010). Challenging the traditional perspective on ITLs, the author does not view them as the human trafficking’s victims nor socio-economic threats. Instead, she views them as the active development actors, which should not be fully blamed for the state’s lack of long-term labor planning nor their limited opportunity to enjoy the impact of positive development. These ITLs are not aliens who are lazy, unhealthy, stupid, dirty, or criminal persons but potential persons who are searching for a better living and enjoyment. They are willing to legally enter Thailand if the system is available. Unfortunately, corrupted officials on both sides of the border helped facilitate the smugglings by allowing undocumented ITLs to cross the border. Some of these ITLs were repetitively charged as criminals by Thai laws. They were sent home and regularly returning days after. To search for a happiness, these ITLs were concealed themselves. Fear of being arrested and deportation to their country origin, they have kept themselves secretly travelling and working in Thailand (Foreign Workers Administration Office, 2016; Hodal, 2016).

None of studies applied the “flow perspective” to enlarge knowledge about the ITLs. Their potential to choose or to enjoy living are ignored. Their successful cases are unheard. Their diversity and complexity are blurred. This gap of knowledge not only allows the life of the ITLs to be unexplored, but also establishes stigmatization for ITLs. By turning them into aliens who are solely living and dying in the “grey area”, benefits go to corrupted state officers and human trafficking chain. To support this assumption, the author adopts the “flow theory” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) for studying the state of optimal experiences and enjoyment occurred among ITLs during a so called “life’s threatening condition” while travelling from their homeland to Thailand.

“Grey area” refers to unclear space or a situation with mixed characteristics when rules are blurred, uncertain, and debatable which includes a disorder zone when solutions or results are not conclusive. The “grey area” can be both visible and invisible. It could be a physical space as well as socio-cultural zone. According to Greenspan and Shanker (2005), the “grey area” can be a social space where individual ability operates and negotiates in social hierarchies to create the foundations for participating in the larger social reality. In this article, the author investigates the loophole of Thai law and the state officer corrupted system.

Under the Thai’s 2017 human trafficking Act no. 52 (3rd section), punishment will be given to human traffickers only when the trafficking process has been completed. This means that all kinds of transportation carried on with new arrival transborder labours are not considered human trafficking until they have reached the destination, being sold and exploited. The punishments include 4–12 years in jail and adjusted fee from 400,000 to 1,200,000 baht. If the trafficking is conducted with victims whose age is between 15–18-year-old, the punishment might reach 6–15 years in jail and adjusted fee increases from 600,000 to 1,500,000 baht. The



highest punishment will be given to traffickers who violate disability persons, which might reach 8–20 years in jail, and adjust fee from 800,000 to 2 million baht. However, the Thai's traffic Act no. 20 provides different degrees of punishment. Persons driving dangerous goods will pay merely 400 baths adjusted fee. The dangerous human transportation leads to injuries; death or psychological damages and is under Thai's criminal law not the Thai's 2017 human trafficking Act no. 52. All kinds of life exploitation, physical and physiological abuse, as well as dehumanization during human transportations can be considered merely a dangerous transport. Under the criminal law section 390 (edited 22nd issue 2015), the punishment for negligent behavior causing harmful physical or mental impact to a person might be less than one month in jail (Buadaeng, 2012; Buadaeng & Siripornpaiboon, 2015). The gap in Thai laws accompanies the state corrupted system and values of discrimination in Thai society create the "grey area" as well as contributes to these ITLs to be regarded as "the otherness" or "aliens". As a result, numerous illegal power centres have been established within the "grey area" and result in the area becoming more complex and too dynamic to manage. This situation strengthens the wall of the "grey area" where the ITLs' struggles over exploitations are unheard.

Literature Review

Human migrations in searching for new land, material objects and a better living have occurred throughout the history of humankind. The illegal transborder labours (ITLs), for instance, have long been recognized as a global socio-economic phenomenon. There has been a resurgence of archaic forms of labor in certain industries since the 1970s. The old capitalist strategy of employing multiethnic workforces has emerged as the cheapest capitalist investment in developing countries for centuries. In 21st century, the modern slavery institution extends to countries within different socio-economic and political levels. In Southeast Asian, the preference for cheap or free migrant labours has been strengthened when the use of ITLs produces cost benefits. In 2016, Thailand, the world's third-largest seafood exporter, received warnings and extensive boycotts from the European Union because for using ITLs extensively. During the international investigation, the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) reported problems of human trafficking; modern slavery, murder and corruption at all levels of Thai government. The latest reports revealed corruption of state officers on both sides of the border. It was estimated that there were from two to three million ITLs in Thailand most of whom were multiethnic groups from Myanmar. These ITLs have worked in commercial fishing, fishing-related industry, sex trade, low-end garment production, factories, beggars and domestic servants for decades (Hodal, 2016).

Thailand's foreign workers administration office formally announced the number of domestic transborder labours (TLs) at 1,394,446. This number included 398,777 legal transborder labours (LTLs) and 995,669 ITLs. Most of ITLs were from Myanmar (1,047,643) of which 325,191 had legal entry and 722,452 were illegal migrants. This means that 60%–70% of ITLs in Thailand are from Myanmar. Most of them illegally entered the country and continued working and living in the "grey area" (Foreign Workers Administration Office, 2016). In 2017, there were about three million transborder labours (TLs) both legally and illegally working in a so-called three D's jobs (Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning) in Thailand. These jobs most Thai labors are not willing to take and consider them as lowest class living in the three D's jobs available for men, women, and children of ITLs (U.S. Department of State, Diplomacy in Action, 2017). Among all ethnics in Myanmar, Mon is one of the biggest ethnic group to resettle in Thailand (Halliday, 1917; 2000). Their first migration began in the ancient Ayutthaya era. The connection between ethnic Mons and indigenous people has long historical been established



starting from the monarchy to the local level. Currently, there are between four million and eight million ethnic Mons living in the Mon state in Myanmar and many of them are scattered living and working in many areas of Thailand. Thus, Thailand has second largest group of living ethnic Mons after those living in Mawlamyine, Myanmar (Britannica Encyclopedia, 2016; Foster, 1972).

What is the “Flow Theory”?

“Flow” is the concept used among social psychologists who study happiness, intrinsic motivation, life satisfaction and transformative learning. It is the state of optimal experiences occurring when an individual develops feelings of intense concentration with deep enjoyment during the absorption of one activity. During the “flow”, no attention is paid to other problems or anything else. By balancing skills and opportunities, individuals are struggling to overcome challenges. The periods of struggling allow everyone to enjoy times and maintain his or her happiness. Under the “flow”, individuals lose their sense of time and space. They do not become concerned about all difficulties nor emotional frustrations. During the emergence of “flow”, they receive the pleasurable moment from the new and challenging experiences. By focusing on their goal and achievement, this psycho-social condition results in psychic energy, positive attitude, and enjoyment and thereby increases the individuals’ skills and efforts. According to flow theorists, the moment of “flow” creates opportunities for individuals to learn and to develop positive characteristics such as feeling strong, alert, self-reliant, effortless controlling, unselfconsciousness, and ability to reach the peak of their potentials even with the very limited resources. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013; 2014).

Applying the “flow theory” to the conditions of optimal experiences during ITLs transportation to Thailand provides a crystal picture of the root cause of becoming an ITLs. This elusive social phenomenon offers new perspective on how intrinsic motivation has been established and that happiness is not merely the result of good fortune or something that money can buy, but the way individuals perceive and interpret themselves.

Methods

This article employed two major objectives: 1) to provide an overview of existing illegal transborder labours (ITLs) in lower northern Thailand; and 2) to investigate the optimal experiences of the illegal transborder Mon labours (ITMLs) during their travelling from their country of origin to Thailand. The author applied documentary study to synthesise information from her five years research experiences involving ITLs in lower northern Thailand and other related academic studies. Then, she adopted qualitative methods to investigate thirty ITMLs both male and female who have direct experiences of illegal transportation on Asia Highway Route 1 (AH1), the most popular illegal route to their destination in Thailand during 2015–2017.

Data Collection

The author investigated dual sources of information including relevant literature, involving ITLs in lower northern Thailand during 2013–2017 and information from research fieldwork during 2015–2017. To identify types and root causes of ITLs in lower northern Thailand, the author adopted documentary research. Then, applied observation check list, in-depth interviews, using semi-structured interview guidelines, and the Boredom Proneness Checklist (BPC), developed from Farmer & Sundberg (1986) and Vodanovich et al. (2005). The fieldwork took place in two target Mon related communities during 2015–2017; the Kaw Panaw in Myanmar and Bang Kradi in Bangkok, Thailand. Both communities had a century of strong social network and cultural connectivity. Names of voluntary participants came from the identification of a village leader and the owner of local museum in Bang Kradi in Bangkok, Thailand. The key participants included males and females who were



originally born in the two target communities, ages between 18 and 40 years old and willing to take part in the study till the end of the project.

Data Analysis

The author applied two data analysis techniques. The content analysis for an overview of ITLs in lower northern Thailand, and narratives of thirty ITMLs for the “flow perspective”. The triangulation method was adopted to process the data under four objectives: 1) to ascertain validity; 2) to reduce bias; 3) to confirm the data and; 4) to elaborate the data findings.

The Research Sites

There are two research sites. First, it is Kaw Panaw, a tiny Mon village located in Kyaikmaraw Township, which covers the area of 7,197 square kilometers. The village is located between Ataran River and Gyaing River in Mawlamyine, Myanmar, and ages around 150 years old. Most villagers are farmers, anglers, and labors; have related through kin ties and have shared communal resources. All villagers are Buddhism, worshiping ghosts and their major social activity is to participate in cultural and religious practices. They have a strong socio-cultural Mon identity. In 2017, the village comprised of approximately eighty households with population around four hundred, the current residents are mostly elderly, females and children. The village had a very limited infrastructure, dusty roads, no tap water, no internet connection nor public transportation. Most households have engaged in small rice plantation. Second site is Bang Kadee, a Thai-Mon community located in Bangkok, Thailand. The history of this community has its dates to the King Rama IV, Rattanakosin era. Most residents here also relate through kin ties and ghost clans. They did not directly migrate from Mawlamyine, Myanmar but they are the second-generation migrants moving from other Thai-Mon communities in Thonburi, Pathum Thani, and surrounding areas.

Results and Discussion

Overview: the situation of illegal transborder labours (ITLs) in lower northern Thailand. Considering the methods of crossing the border, the author divided ITLs into three major groups. The first group is Persons Displaced from Fighting (PDF). There are approximately 90,000 PDFs from Myanmar living in three temporary shelters in Thailand (UNHCR-The UN Refugee Agency, n.d.). These PDFs have entered the country illegally through Mae Sot border in Tak province. They were later formally registered and appointed to resettle in three temporary shelters: 1) “Mae la” in Tha Song Yang district; 2) “Nupo” in Umphang district; and 3) “Umpium” in Phop Phra district. The residents of Mae la are mostly Christian Karen who fled an armed conflict from Myanmar. The Umpium temporary shelter comprised of diverse ethnics and cultural backgrounds such as Karen, Muslim, and Mon. Although they have ethnic diversity, the PDFs living in these temporary shelters have three common desires. First, they desire to be transferred to a better society or to a developed western country. Second, they desire to be happy and have socio-economic self-reliance. Being unable to receive Thai nationality nor transferring to the third nation, they try to shorten their PDF’s status by illegally escaped from the shelters. After their spending a few months inside the shelters, they start looking for 3D jobs in the surrounding communities. Lastly a similarity of the PDFs is their searching for freedom and a more challenging life. Many PDFs took risky transportation methods to reach their destination in Tak, Bangkok, Samut Sakorn, Samut Songkram, Ranong, Chon Buri, Phetchaburi and Phuket provinces. The transportations happened on two main public routes, the route 105 (Mae Sot-Tak) spanning 87 kilometers, and route 1175 (Mae Ra Mard-Tak) spanning 116 kilometers. Both routes started from the border area of Mae Sot district in Tak province.



The second group of TLs are varied by ethnicity; however, the inner forces still play the crucial role. Feeling of becoming a “nobody” and useless give them pains. All new information receiving from televisions and family members who have experienced illegal travelling to Thailand reformulate their way of controlling life. This inner motivation accompanies their inability to maintain their traditional male breadwinner ideals has developed the new hierarchy of goals. Traditionally, the cultural ideal of breadwinners focuses on the ability of males to provide resources for the survival of their family. Unable to fulfill this hegemonic masculinity aspect, young males might lose their reputation and social standing. To fulfill their consciousness, they must balance between the inside and outside forces. To establish the function of their consciousness, they choose the most challenging method of establish their masculinity which may be by illegally crossing the border. In searching for a happy living, they look for a personal connection with mediators or local transporters for helping them travel to inner areas. Some ITLs have spent 2–3 days walking in the forest, and many have chosen risky transportations.

Lastly, the ITMLs have the strongest social network and connectivity. They have lots of successful pioneer relatives and friends who are living and working in Thailand. They use their predecessor’s long experiences in resettlement and transportation as a tool. The successful information has been forwarded from one generation to another in the form of storytelling. Life biography and successful stories of their predecessors become the most valuable practical narrative for new coming ITMLs. Cultural diffusion of passive, receptive and boredom of young Mon villagers in their home origin as well as depress or unable to control their life based on their own individual efforts and creativity are the reasons mentioned by many new arrivals. As one ITML stated: “Living a life in Kaw Panaw has no meaning. Everyday are the same. We have no future there”.

Root Cause of ITMLs

Surprisingly, the root causes of becoming ITMLs change significantly differed from the previous studies. The ITMLs expressed similar feeling of boredom, depress, a fear of being, and a feeling of no meaning to life while living in their home town. For ITMLs, the living condition in Kaw Panaw was not too difficult nor desperate. Therefore, there is no such things called external “push factors” as mentioned earlier among conventional studies such as the works of Buadaeng (2012); Buadaeng and Siripornpaiboon (2015). Although sometimes they might confront some hardships such as drought or flooded, but the most unbearable was their unable to control their own life based on their own individual inspiration, efforts and creativity. Some PDFs long trapped inside the temporary shelters could not imagine how their life, nor their children will get better by living inside the shelters. The reasons for their leaving the shelters were not insufficient food nor money. Instead, many of them felt boredom, depression feeling trapped by socio-geographical restriction. Living without challenges, they gradually developed negative feeling in life, of low self-esteem and worthlessness. Looking for a more challenging in life, many of these PDFs travelled from their shelters to the inner areas of Thailand. Nonetheless, those who had escaped from the temporally shelters confronted the most difficulty. Travelling on Asia Highway route 1 (AH1), they experienced the greatest exploitation from the human trafficking network. The hardships included long hours marching in the thick forest, dyspnea inside the tiny vans, being hidden and injured in car accidents, trapped inside the buses, or died in faulty air-conditioned trucks. Many of them were physically abused or their life threatened. Some died, and many were injured. Only few could reach their destination but by sinking in the 3D jobs. Nonetheless, the PDFs continued their journeys. Living or dying is not a matter anymore. Each year numbers of PDFs becoming the ITLs increase as do as the cold cases of severe accidents causing anonymous death of them. However, the ITMLs seem to gain the most achievement via their strong social network and cultural linkage. The more they join this dangerous route



the stronger their social network expands. As one ITML stated: “every stage of our travelling to the inner area of Thailand, we deal with a very straightforward, new and unexpected challenges always occur and they remain in our mind. We become a better person from our everyday achievement”.

Optimal Experiences of ITMLs

“Optimal experience” is the collection of best moments which usually happens when the physical body and mind of individual person is stretched to their limits in a voluntary effort to achieve a difficult goal and worthwhile. It is a harmonious human effort which is unpleasant in the beginning but creates a sense of mastery in determining the content of life in the long run (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In this article, the author reveals how the “optimal experience” operates and how the ITMLs felt and acted during their transportation on AH1 in Thailand. This article highlights that the ITMLs seemed to be more successful within their long and challenging journeys. They are willing to transport and to be immersed into the so called the “enjoyable experiences”. To control their own life, these ITMLs are so deeply attached to their goals as to forget about dangerous and other risks which might happen to their life. They travel from their hometown, crossing the border, and heading to Kamphamphet and inner areas. Many briefly visit their relatives or friends who have been living a long time in Thai–Mon communities before illegally beginning working and permanently living in the geographical boundary of Thailand. By using their traditional Mon culture as A human shield, they develop the greatest strength of social support in control of their lives. For ITMLs, the easiest way to find challenges is to enter the “grey area”. The more they cross the border and achieve their goal, they earn more skills and experiences. Many ITMLs turn themselves to be a successful mediator or illegal transporters. Every time these ITMLs reach their destination they experience enjoyable which later tends to disappear. This is how the illegal transborder process starts again and again.

Autonomy and Paths of Liberation

To gain control over consciousness, the ITMLs cannot simply develop a cognitive skill. They must consistently contribute all the commitment of emotions and will during their illegal transportations. In practicing and developing new skills and methods to avoid getting caught by the state officers or human trafficking mediators, simultaneously, they gain new knowledge of how to control their consciousness every time the situation has changed. At the end of the day, changes in conditions or context of the “grey area” become routinized and thus non–threatening. In so doing, the ITMLs learn how to rethink, reformulate, and reestablish a new form of autonomy in their consciousness and become free from the external controls of society. As a result, they can achieve the mastery over their own lives. New illegal transportation becomes more enjoyable, a richer life, with more challenges and adds meaning in life.

This article reveals that human consciousness is not totally controlled by biological factors, but it is self–directed. To achieve mastery over one’s life, the ITMLs learn to develop the ability to override their generic programs and to set their liberal course of action. By balancing the function of consciousness between inside and outside forces during their illegal transportation, the ITMLs evaluate and act upon by their body. In this sense, they emancipate their previous passive feeling and establish a strong sense of self–reliance and mind mastery. Later, they apply this ability to actual practice in everyday life. According to the phenomenological model of consciousness based on information theoretical frameworks, these ITMLs are finally able to understand and use the dynamics of attention and memory. By this, illegal transportations become a common social activity that consistently produce “flow” and their sensory data are processed, stored and used and the dynamics of attention and memory are established. These set of conditions can arise in consciousness whenever they illegally cross the border and are transported on AH1 to the inner areas of Thailand.



However, the consciousness has its limits based on biological or socio-cultural instructions. Information enters consciousness of these ITMLs because they have focused attention on it. In general, the visual information is related to information which has been stored in their memory. The ITMLs usually determine a category that fits the present situation, time and context. When the situation is matched to the existing class of events, it can be identified, evaluated, decided and acted upon. All these complex stages were completed in a few seconds when a process called 'attention' emerged. To achieve the higher goals, they select and retrieve the proper related information from their memories, evaluates, and shows the appropriate action. Regularly crossing the border and becoming the professional ITMLs, they became experts in control of consciousness. Their abilities to focus attention at will are increased. During the illegal transportation, they have developed a long period of concentration no matter if living or dying is at stake until they achieve their goals. Later, they have applied this ability for their work and living.

In summary, every attention determines the mastery of ITMLs consciousness and later becomes the source of psychic energy which encourages considering the most crucial tool to improve the quality of their experiences. This psychic energy is crucial because it generates the strong self of ITMLs and the self represents the hierarchy of goals that these ITMLs gradually developed over the years. The more experiences they have, the higher goals and bigger challenges they can accomplish in the following years. Some of these ITMLs start small business, get married with Thai, many find the way to gain their legal status.

Discussion

This article offers a new knowledge concerning root causes of becoming ITLs in lower northern Thailand. It shows that lack of material possessions or poverty are not the most crucial factor of their vulnerability. However, the author is not stating that money, well-being or fame are irrelevant to ITLs' happiness. But rather she highlights that if one cannot afford those goals, one might choose the other new and unusual but affordable which might be more challenge or even life threatening to get enjoyment. Indeed, the feeling of boredom, depression, a fear of being, and a feeling of no meaning to life, as well as depression and feeling trapped by some socio-geographical restrictions are the significant factors of unhappiness. Without being aware of these psycho-social factors, it is difficult to prevent new coming ITLs. This truism is supported by the evidence found from the three groups of ITL. This finding is supported by studies around the world (Csikszentmihalyi & Graef, 1979).

During the illegal transportation, the "flow" increases the sense of seemingly effortless movement among the ITMLs. The purpose of the "flow" is to keep on flowing. It requires strenuous physical exertion or highly disciplined mental activity, and skilled performance. By increasing skills and reaching toward higher challenges, these ITMLs become increasingly extraordinary persons. They realize that only short lapses of concentration during long marching in the forest or travelling by dangerous methods mean living or dying. The extraordinary changes in the fundamental constitution of their modes of thought during certain transportations require different tasks and time to accomplish. To compete their goal, every step, action or minute, the ITMLs gradually realize the power of the self. While they have received immediate feedback and information from surrounding actors they realize that their goals are becoming clearer, their achievement is closer. Once, dangerous and challenging illegal transportation become the kind of valuable experience that can make their life better, enjoyment is characteristic. Sometimes they must negotiate with the state officers at location the dangerous spot which consider one of the "grey areas". These activities help them to develop new social skills and effective strategies which in the end produce



the desirable result. As a result, too easy goals that are too easy do seem not enjoyable anymore. Instead of crossing the border and illegal working, they have developed strong social network to help new ITMLs from their home origin in Kaw Panaw. This finding is supported by several studies (Csikszentmihalyi, 1969; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Damon & Hart, 1982; McAdams, 1985).

Currently, these ITMLs have managed to develop the complexity and the growth of self from two psychological processes during their illegal transportations to Thailand: differentiation and integration. The first implies their movement toward separating themselves from others, and toward uniqueness. The later refers to a union with other ITMLs, with ideas and entities beyond the self. Therefore, each episode of “flow” increases the self of an individual ITML by making them become more unique, less predictable and possess rarer skills.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The author has identified three groups of ITLs in lower northern Thailand. First, are the PDFs who illegally crossed the Thai–Myanmar border and have lived in three temporary shelters in Tak, Thailand for decades. Second, are ITLs who individually crossed the border and travelled on AH1 in searching for jobs. Third, are ITMLs who have strong social and cultural Mon networks in Thailand. However, all three groups of ITLs have similar four motivational drivers. These were 1) cultural diffusion of passive, acceptance and boredom about their origin; 2) depression and inability to control their lives based on their own individual effort and creativity; 3) their personal skills of coverture equal required challenges; and 4) the holistic and joyful experience with total involvement during their journeys.

In summary, there are ten major components of phenomenology of enjoyment among the ITMLs during their illegal transportation. The “flow state” include 1) opportunity to confront tasks that have a chance of success; 2) strong concentration on the task; 3) high likelihood to achieve goals; 4) clear goals with immediate feedback; 5) chances for removing themselves from routine frustrations and boredom in daily living; 6) having a strong sense of control over their actions; 7) emerging of the self; 8) losing sense of time and space; 9) ability to balance experiences and skills; and 10) deep understanding of the socio–political context, system and culture of engaged for learning. For ITMLs, the “flow” not only created self–satisfaction but also increased their ability to 1) set clearer and higher goals for a better–quality living; 2) control over their actions; 3) forget about difficulties in time and space; 4) establish a stronger sense of self–reliance; and 5) strengthening and expanding their strong socio–cultural network for supporting new coming ITMLs.

To solve the problems of the ITLs, the author suggests that more attention needs to be paid on the ten major components of phenomenology of enjoyment. To break down the ITLs’ social network, three main solutions are suggested beginning from the policy level to the national implementations and individual empowerment. First, the effective international collaborative policy of the ASEAN community needs to be highlighted, especially the issues concerning too long living in temporary shelters of the PDFs. Second, laws and regulations related to illegal human transportations need to be improved as well as the strong punishment for corrupted state officers who involved in human trafficking in the “grey area”. Last, lessons learned from experiences and skills of the ITMLs need to be systematically analyzed. Information and knowledge involving the “flow” and the development of their optimal experiences should be adopted for teaching and learning process among children and youth. The essential connection between happiness, enjoyment and virtue, on one hand, and intrinsic or autotelic rewards on the other needs to be highlights in all levels of schooling.



Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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