

Cross-Cultural Learning of Burmese in Lampang, Thailand

Silawat Chaiwong

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Lampang Buddhist College, Thailand

E-mail: intiyod@hotmail.co.th

Phrakru Sangkaraksuphanut Phuriwattano

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Lampang Buddhist College, Thailand

E-mail: journal_mcu_lp@hotmail.com

Lampong Klomkul

ASEAN Studies Center, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand

E-mail: lkomkul@yahoo.com

Abstract

The objectives of this research are 1. to study the way of life and motives that makes Burmese decision to live in Lampang Province, 2. to study cross-cultural learning of Burmese people in Lampang, and 3. to analyze the adaptation process for living altogether equally under the cultural differences. This research is the qualitative research by interviewing the community leaders, the Burmese, living in Tha Ma O community, Muang District, Lampang Province, and members of Tha Ma community. The research results reveal that living in Lampang Province is more prosperous in the socio-economic and quality of life than in their own country. This is the factor attracting the Burmese to decide to emigrate to live and work in Lampang Province because their country is underdeveloped with economic downturn and lack of quality of life. They need to immigrate to find work opportunities. In immigrating to find works of the Burmese, they also bring the culture and beliefs in their country into practice in Lampang. The cultural characteristics of the Burmese in Lampang are similar to people in Lampang such as Buddhism, worshipping the Buddha images, and going to the temple to make merit. Therefore, those groups can adjust and learn about the culture of the local areas quickly as well as analyzing the adaptation processes for equally living under cultural differences. The Burmese can adapt their thoughts and behaviors to the environment, economic, and social changes from their own country in order to survive and to be able to live happily.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Learning, Burmese, Lampang

Introduction

Economic, social, political, environmental, and technological changes influence the change of the world resulting in the linkage of population of each nation in this world altogether. Culture is another important dimension that influences change as culture is complicated and applies knowledge, beliefs, art, ethics, morals, laws, traditions, other abilities and habits which human gained from learning as the members of society (Satsanguan, 2000: 21). When people encounter one another, their cultural differences will be varied due to what they have been familiar with and learned. Therefore, human have to learn to understand this difference in order to be able to handle and respond to the occurring changes effectively. Thinking to human is the result of learning from other humans and the human ability comes from the past human behaviors. While the learning process progresses, some forms of behaviors may

change causing the individuals to change as well. These behaviors are transmitted to later generations and will change following human experience. Therefore, human behaviors are the results of learning.

The current societies often differ in the population of the societies. In each society, the population is often divided into different groups or the members in the societies may be divided into several types making some stereotypes may be different following various situations. Some people or some groups may participate in some social behavior patterns more than the others or other groups of people such as Lampang Province which is the area where the Burmese community live. This is why the Burmese art and Burmese culture are remarkable. Thus, the behavioral patterns may be more or less common. For example, if it is the culture of the minority, there will be less participants. But if the culture is related to Buddhism, there will be many Thai Lanna participants. Back in 1829, the social conditions in Lampang began to develop in the trade and have trade contacts. The Burmese came to Lampang to settle in Tha Ma O and Tha Nang Loi in the past (Aworn, 2004: 38).

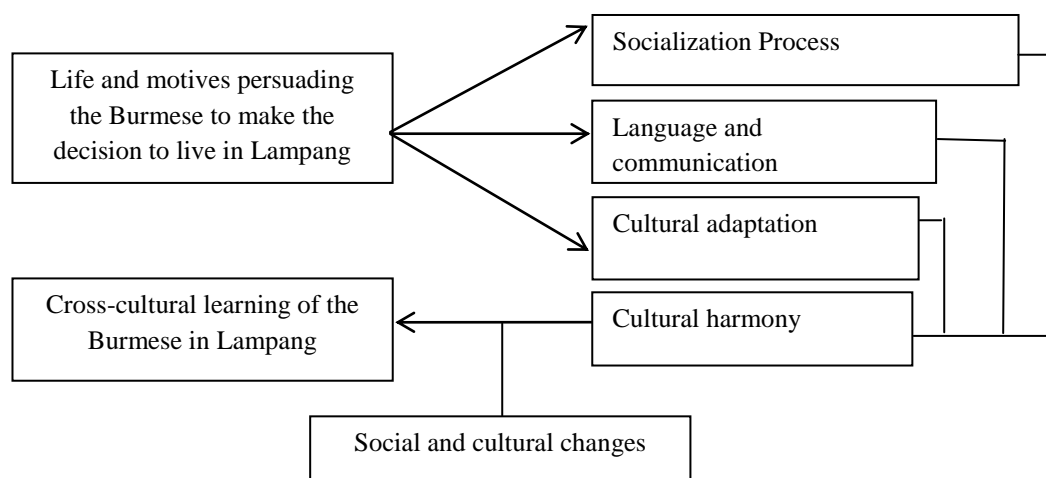
Nowadays, the population living in Lampang is not only Lampang people, there are also foreigners to temporarily stay for doing something. One phenomenon found in Lampang from generations to generations is that some people have families in Lampang, some come to work to collect money for sending to their families in Myanmar. The Burmese people are considered important labor in Lampang to work for the labor work and business operation in Lampang. They live in the former community of Burmese in the past having the Burmese art temple as the symbol. On the religious important days, the Burmese will present themselves as Buddhists living together with Thai Lanna harmoniously.

From the above statements, the researcher is interested to study the life and motivations that make the Burmese decide to live in Lampang and study the cross-cultural learning harmoniously. The Burmese in Lampang Province learn the culture of Thai Lanna in Lampang quickly whether the daily living, language, communication, adaptation to society, and socialization. The findings of this study show the phenomenon of the population of neighboring country in Lampang and in the future it is likely to have more people from this neighboring country to work and live in Lampang province. This directly and indirectly affects both positive and negative to cross-cultural learning. This study is very worthwhile studying and it can also be used as the basis for the overall social development plan of Lampang.

Research Objective

1. To study the way of life and motivations inspiring the Burmese to decide to live in Lampang.
2. To study cross-cultural learning on the harmony of the Burmese in Lampang.
3. To analyze the adaptation processes for living altogether under cultural differences.

Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

The research on cross-cultural learning of the Burmese in Lampang is the qualitative research using the purposive sampling and the in-depth interview on 15 persons. The research area is Tha Ma O Community, Muang District, Lampang Province. The researcher selects the group voluntary to be interviewed. The research methodology is as follows.

Group of key informants

1. 2 community leaders of the community where the Burmese live in. They look after the community members and are aware of the problems in the community as well as being the contact persons with the government agency.
2. 8 Burmese persons living in Tha Ma O Community, Muang District, Lampang Province.
3. 5 persons living in the community or in the community area where the Burmese live. They are the persons close to the Burmese living in the community for working.

Research tool

The researchers have reviewed the literatures on social system theory, socialization theory, cultural concepts as the approaches in creating the tools leading to an interview of motives making the Burmese people decide to come to Lampang until having the cross-cultural learning resulting in the cultural changes. For such information obtained from the research, the researchers have inspected the integrity of the data along with consulting with the research advisor in order to receive the instructions to clarify the full and objective information of the research.

Data Collection

The data and resources of data used in the research can be divided into 2 types as below:

Primary data is the data collected directly from the data source. The data collection method is divided into 2 types:

1. Survey the area to study by traveling to explore the target audience in the area for observing general information to be used as the guideline for creating data collection tools.
2. Interviews with related persons using the interview frame

Secondary data is to study and collect the data from books, articles, textbooks, documents, and research related to Burmese cross-cultural learning in Lampang.

Data Analysis

For the data Analysis, the researchers use the content analysis by separating the found issues. This will be done simultaneously with the data collection.

Research Result

According to the study of cross-cultural learning of the Burmese people in Lampang, the results of the study can be summarized as follows:

The Burmese people are a part of the labor force that has contributed to the country's economy. The pattern of distribution and characteristics of the Burmese migrant workers varies widely in the different area. It varies based on the economic development, settlements, and occupation of the Burmese people. A lot of alien workers are in the manufacturing sector. Most of them are young people who are in the early stages of reproductive age. Many Burmese people live with their spouses while some are still single. These people came to work at an early age. They often work as unskilled laborers. Therefore, it is found that these Burmese workers are relatively low-educated. This group of labors also faces obstacles and limitations in the use of Thai language. The average income of the Burmese people is relatively low. Most workers are satisfied with their income. The average time in Thailand is for 4-5 years. Most Burmese people have experiences in transferring the workplace and more importantly, most alien labors have the network in Lampang and nearby provinces facilitating the migration. However, most Burmese people want to stay in the area forever with the following factors:

1. Lifestyle and motivation persuading the Burmese people to decide to live in Lampang is from the current situation resulting in the migration of the Burmese to neighboring countries. Thailand is one of those countries. Particularly in Lampang, it is one of the countries where a lot of Burmese live in. The Burmese people are concerned about the future. They want to live a better life from the original. They do not want their family to be in trouble (Yunwadee, 2017). However, for whatever reason the Burmese people deciding to emigrate to work in Lampang, it is because they want to find a better opportunity to work rather than in their own country and they also want to make their family have a better quality of life. The causes for this migration are the result of a number of factors such as the need for lower-level Burmese laborers to work in the hard-working and low-wage sectors. The problems of conflicts and domestic difficulties in Myanmar are the factor that attracts and drives these workers to move into Lampang to work both legally and illegally. The policy of the Burmese government cannot make the country be peaceful. It causes poverty in the country forcing the Burmese people to seek new places to improve their lives and their families. This includes the fact that the Burmese workers have a clear legal status. This gives people access to basic rights in the management of foreign workers database which is one of the factors that makes many foreign workers decide to work in Lampang. Moreover, Lampang (Sombat, 2017) is located not far from the province with the Thai-Myanmar border such as Mae Sai district, Chiang Rai province and Mae Sot District, Tak Province. This make the migrants work in Lampang Province and permanently settle there (Phayolin, 2017).

2. Cross-cultural learning on the harmony of the Burmese people from the way of life of the Burmese people living in Lampang as the laborers has changed the way of life very much. This is because of the need to adapt themselves to the environment, new rules and regulations such as living environment, language use, communication, working conditions, and law. In addition, new cultures have molded their identities as time went by. The changes in the way of life, housing, food, eating, dressing and culture are all the result of the changing world of globalization (Laiwata, 2017). With the social conditions, the Burmese people have arranged their houses in the community fairly organized with good hygiene around the community.

There is the advancement as the community center with houses and facilities such as schools, temples, convenience stores, restaurants, and temples which are the center of links between two cultures (Phrakru Charan, 2017). For example, in the economy, the Burmese live conventionally with their family members altogether in the rental room to save money. The housing characteristics are various such as renting houses, renting rooms, and staying in the places provided by the employers. The living conditions of the Burmese people are simple, economical and saved. The Burmese people are not affected by any problem or impact (Somothun, 2017). For social and cultural aspects, the surrounding area of the community has been neatly arranged with the good sanitary. The community is progressed. The migrant workers live comfortably. In cultural aspects, the Burmese have brought their culture and beliefs into practice in Lampang. However, there is no problem because the cultural characteristics of the Burmese people and Thai people are similar such as Buddhism, worshipping the Buddha image, and making merit, etc. This includes the quality of life. The Burmese people have low quality of life. They choose to stay save, work hard and do not care about their health. They neither respond to their own needs nor reward themselves such as leisure, tourism, having useful meals, traveling in the community. The Burmese people go on foot. If they want to go to the temples to make merit, they will go by bus. In traveling outside the community such as visiting relatives in the provinces or returning to their home country, they will rent the van for travel in the long distance.

People living in Lampang province view the Burmese people as hard working people, tolerated and unlike people in the area who choose only the desirable works, do not work dirty, hard, or risky works (Sai, 2017). The people in Lampang have compassion for the Burmese people who have to leave their home to find works in different places. People in Lampang Province will be happy to help when the Burmese people have problems and the Burmese people are an important part of the economy in the community because of the consumption of consumer goods. The merchants have benefited including the use of services in the community. Regarding the characteristics of the Burmese people, if it was 4-5 years ago at the earlier stage of immigration of Burmese workers into the new community, people in Lampang Province or in the community could not endure the changes. They became frightened and felt unsafe in life and properties (Momoe, 2017). This included the environment in the community which had changed in negatively such as being crowded in the areas of Lampang and Burmese. Moreover, the Burmese people had some behaviors which were not acceptable among Lampang people. The Burmese were not clean. However, nowadays the Burmese have adapted themselves to the environment and complied with the rules of society. The problems have been reduced.

3. In analyzing the adaptation processes for equally living under cultural differences, the cultural adaptation is the process by which people who encounter different cultures begin to adapt to the simpler life in order to understand and be comfortable. That the Burmese people have to live in the community that they feel strangers with the difference in terms of races, languages, religions and cultures make them feel alienated and be watched by people in the area. Therefore, the life of the Burmese people in Lampang is rarely revealed. After finishing work in each day, the Burmese people will buy ingredients for cooking and will return to the residence as they think living in the residence is safe and comfortable. For the economic adaptation, the Burmese people often have no problems as their previous living in their country before immigrating to Lampang was much more difficult. The things were expensive while the money value was low. From the information given by most Burmese people, they agree that it is more convenient to live in Lampang than to live in their difficult home country. Besides, as the Burmese are economic, there is no problem in their economic living. Regarding social and cultural adaptation, the Burmese people who came to live in Lampang

Province firstly begin to have problems with language and communications causing living and work in Thailand is difficult. They have to learn and practice speaking Thai language by learning from the Burmese people and people in Lampang province who work altogether and teach Thai language to facilitate the workflow. The adaptation is required in the traditional, cultural, and environmental aspects of the community. They have to learn what not to do. The Burmese people have to adapt themselves to be able to live with people in the community. Most Burmese people have no problem with Thai workers because of the habits of Thai people that are kind, generous, and like helping the others. The majority of migrants' opinions are in the same way that Thai people do not show disdain but help in everything even the persons who have never been known. When the Burmese people have problems and ask for the assistance from people in the community, they will be fully assisted. The Burmese people feel comfortable and want to continue working in Lampang Province.

Discussion and Conclusion

From studying the data, the researchers find that the lifestyle and existence of the Burmese people in Lampang reflect the life of persons who have to leave their country and their beloved family to seek better opportunities and future rather than living in their own country. The migrant Burmese have to adapt to the unfamiliar surroundings of people and societies as well as language, culture, and people with differences in races, feelings, attitudes, and abilities. In order to be able to live in a changing social context, the adaptation, adjustment of thoughts and behaviors are required to be able to live in the changing society.

The lifestyle and motives that make the Burmese people decide to live in Lampang and Thailand is that the domestic economy is progressing, people have better education and quality of life. These are the factors that attract Burmese migrants to live and work in Lampang because their country is underdeveloped, the economic is down and people lack of quality of life. Thus, they have to immigrate to Lampang to find work opportunities. They hope that themselves and their family will live not hard as it was before. The study of the factors that make the Burmese people decide to migrate to Lampang and Thailand is correspondent with the results of study of Tripol Tangmankong (Tangmankong, 2009: 80-82) studying the Burmese migrant workers: guidelines for harmonious living of the border people in Samut Sakhon Province. The study reveals that in the background of Burmese migrant workers in Samut Sakhon province, no evidence is found proving when the Burmese migrant workers came to Samut Sakhon. However, the number of Burmese migrants has increased by more than 30,000 persons in the last three decades. The major factors driving Burmese migrant workers into the city and becoming the alien workers in Samut Sakhon and neighboring provinces include the insecurity in life and properties because of the fighting in Burma, unemployment and poverty. Smuggling into Thailand is subject to being exploited by the recruiters, bad working conditions, being assaulted and sexual harassment, violence from the officials, ethnic bias, and the surrounding risks during smuggling into Thailand.

Nowadays, the Burmese migrants have changed their way of life in the family, economic and social aspects in harmony with the local community. The main problem in living is the difficulties in travelling to Thailand, being exploited by the recruiters, bad working conditions, wages lower than the legal minimum wages. They have to work hard beyond the time protected by law. They are also not fully paid, lack of stability in life and properties, being persecuted by the authorities. This includes the ethnic prejudices. Likewise, Samut Sakhon people are concerned about illegal immigration of Burmese migrants, non-safety, and the fact that the laborers may be the smugglers of drugs and diseases into the country. For the way to live in harmony of Burmese migrant workers in Samut Sakhon province, it is found to be harmonious. The workers recognize that they are alien workers who have to work for

earning the income to live in harmony with society and the community as a member of society, to be fairly treated on the basis of human rights, to adhere to the honest work, to receive basic welfare from the community and society as the good members of the society. In summary, despite many problems among Burmese migrant workers and Thai people, because of the need of Thailand for labor force and the need of Burmese workers for the income, it is necessary to find a way to live altogether harmoniously for the peace in the society.

2. For cross-cultural learning on the harmony of the Burmese people, most Burmese people live altogether in the rented houses for several persons to save money. Some live as family or brothers. They choose the accommodation that is close to the place where they work for the convenience and cost-savings. The Burmese people live a simple life, saving, no extravagance in the economic way of life. Therefore, the Burmese people neither suffer any problems nor being affected. In culture, the Burmese people have brought their culture and beliefs into practice in Lampang without problem at all. This is because the cultural characteristics of the Burmese people are similar to Thai people who live in Lampang such as Buddhism, worshipping the Buddha image, and going to the temples to make merit. The results of study are correspondent with Jansson, Johanson, & Ramström (2007: 955-967) discussing the process of learning culture for adaptation. There are 3 big steps. The first step is to realize and start to adapt to the strange and different persons when having to meet or live in a different culture. Normally, when humans come across something different or unfamiliar, humans begin the process of initial learning: second-hand knowledge such as learning from reading, searching for the information from books or the internet. This learning step will make us know the distinction between cultures. Then, the initial cultural adaptation occurs as the process of recognizing that the culture encountered in the behaviors of colleagues or those who interact with. It is the stage of perception without change in their behaviors to respond to different cultures. The second step is exploration phase: adaptation to acquaintance. It is the process to look for the cultural differences by their own experiences. There are 3 sub-steps as follows:

- The experiential cultural learning: It is the step to learn and try in the new culture by themselves such as touring, surveying, observing, trying eating, and trying using new things which are not found in their own culture.
- The open communication at personal level: It is the step to start talking and making friends with people from different culture. It is the step of exchanging the cultural thought.
- The experiential cultural adaptation: It is the step after meeting with people of different cultures. It starts to feel that there is something that both sides are different. And in the process of building relationships, the adaptation is needed such as finding that foreign friends use hand shake to greet us while say hello.

The third step is the expansion phase: It is the step after meeting with people of different cultures. It starts to feel that there is something that both sides are different. And in the process of building relationships, the adaptation is needed such as we use hand shake to greet foreign friend instead of saying hello. There are sub-steps as follows:

- The experiential cultural learning: After having built the relationship with people of different cultures, such learners will have the experiences in learning the culture from friends. They will know how to do. It can be said to create the development to make people have competence in understanding and learning cultures more.
- The experiential cultural adaptation: It is the last step making people living in other cultures to have competences in cross-cultural adaptation. They will understand the harmony and can adapt themselves smoothly. This is considered having the experiences in cross-cultural adaptation.

3. Analyzing the adaptation processes for equally living altogether under cultural differences is the cultural adaptation. It is the process by which people who encounter different cultures begin to adapt to a simpler life, understand, and have the peace of mind. In immigrating to live and work in Thailand of the Burmese people, the adaptation is requested in thinking and behaviors to be compatible with the environmental, economic and social change from their own country in order to survive and to be able to live a normal life. In the economic adaptation, the Burmese people may not have much trouble because the condition of life in the country they used to live was much more difficult than living in Thailand. The things were expensive while the money value was low. People in the country had so low education that they could not find the jobs. However, living in Thailand, life is more comfortable. They earn enough income to cover expenses. Because the Burmese migrants immigrate to work to earn money, they have the habit of saving. They spend just enough to live each day. They make more money than working in their own country. For social adaptation, the Burmese people immigrating to Lampang at earlier stage had to be quite adaptable in the tradition, culture, and rules in the community that everyone practices. And they had to practice to use Thai language both in listening and speaking. These adaptations are for being able to live with Thai people and make Thai people accept the migrant workers. This is consistent with Black and Gregersen (1991: 497-515) discussing that Cross-cultural adjustment is a multidimensional study of adaptation in such country. It can be divided into two major aspects: job-related adaptation and other adaptations apart from work. This will cover the following three adaptations.

1. General Adjustment is the psychological level of persons who feel relaxed, comfortable with the climate and food in foreign countries.

Work Adjustment is the level of convenience of operation in the work environment differently from previously such as standard of operation, corporate culture.

3. Interact with Host Nationals Adjustment is the psychological level with relaxation on the communication and interaction among persons with differences.

From the data collection, it is found that the cross-cultural learning of the Burmese people in Lampang province can adapt and have rapid learning process to understand the Culture of People in Lampang Province including the process of culture such as understanding the cultural process, for example, Lampang has Loy Krathong Day but the Burmese do not have this tradition. However, most Burmese people understand and become part of Thai tradition every year. This group of people shows their knowledge on the learning process to cultural adaptation stably without difficulty on the adaptation to Thai culture.

Recommendation

From cross-cultural learning of the Burmese people in Lampang, the researchers would like to recommend as follows:

General Recommendation

1. The results will help to understand the cultural adaptation to live altogether of foreign workers in order to benefit from living together as part of society.
2. This research should build cultural networks variedly across the community, government and private sectors to participate in various activities.
3. This research is the study in cross-cultural learning about the way of life and the adaptation of the Burmese people. The data is possibly not sufficient. Therefore, the research should be conducted on the policies or formats of migrant workers at the community and public levels how the policies and solutions can be managed for solving the migrant worker problems.

Recommendation for Next Researches

1. Study the policies that affect migrant workers.

2. Study cross-cultural comparison with the sample groups of other countries working in Thailand
3. Study the mechanism in immigrating to work of illegal migrant workers including the guidelines on the management of illegal labor groups.

Reference

- Aworn, C. 2004. **Minkalaba...Lampang**. Lampang: Aworn.
- Black, S. & Gregersen, H. 1991. "Antecedents to Cross Cultural Adjustment for Expatriates in Pacific Rim Assignments." **Human Relations** 44: 497-515.
- Jansson, H., Johanson, M., & Ramström, J. 2007. "Institutions and networks: Business networks in the Chinese, Russian, and West-European institutional contexts." **Journal of Industrial Marketing Management** 36 (7): 955-967.
- Laiwata. 2017. Contractor. **Interview**, 5 November 2017.
- Momoe. 2017. Farm Guard. **Interview**, 5 November 2017.
- Phayolin. 2017. Contractor. **Interview**, 16 September 2017
- Phrakru Charan. 2017. Monk. **Interview**, 5 September 2017.
- Sai. 2017. Vendor. **Interview**, 5 September 2017.
- Satsanguan, N. 2000. **Principles of Cultural Humanities**. 4th ed. Bangkok: Rama Publishing Co., Ltd.
- Sombat. 2017. Community leader. **Interview**, 5 September 2017.
- Somothun. 2017. Farm Guard. **Interview**, 5 November 2017.
- Tangmankong, T. 2009. **Burmese migrant workers: Guidelines for harmonious living of the border people in Samut Sakhon Province**. Master of Cultural Study Thesis, Mahasarakham University.
- Yunwadee. 2017. Housemaid. **Interview**, 8 September 2017.