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Introduction

Jirayudh Sinthuphan

This collection of articles in this edition of the Asian Review examines key socio-economic, political, and cultural dimensions across diverse regional and historical contexts. Each contribution sheds light on critical issues that influence human security, social policy, international relations, and cross-cultural business practices. Together, they provide valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners interested in understanding the complexities of these domains.

The first article, Evaluating the Impact of COVID-19 on the Human Security of Low-Income Migrant Workers in Singapore by Mukda PRATHEEPWATANAWONG, explores the pandemic's profound effects on a vulnerable segment of society. Drawing from stakeholder perspectives, the research highlights both progress, and persistent challenges, in securing the well-being of migrant workers who are integral to Singapore's growth.

In Social Protection System: Insights from Families Left Behind in Ban Sandin, Lao PDR, Kritsada THEERA-KOSONPHONG shifts the focus to the social protection mechanisms in Laos and their interplay with migration. This analysis underscores the gaps in policy implementation while advocating for regional collaboration and gender-sensitive approaches to foster sustainable development.

In French Appeasement Policy Toward Siam (1937-1939), Alexandre BARTHEL delves into the geopolitical landscape of Southeast Asia during a turbulent era. It critically examines French colonial strategies in Indochina and their implications for relations with Siam, offering historical insights into the broader context of global appeasement policies.

Lastly, the review of Ming-jer Chen's book, Inside Chinese Business: A Guide for Managers Worldwide, presents a comprehensive exploration of the cultural underpinnings that shape Chinese business practices. The work offers practical guidance for navigating the intricate web of relationships, trust, and traditions essential for successful engagement in Chinese markets.

Collectively, these articles contribute to a nuanced understanding of regional and cultural dynamics, emphasizing the interconnectedness of historical, social, and economic factors in shaping contemporary challenges and opportunities.

Jirayudh Sinthuphan

Evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on the human security of low-income migrant workers in Singapore: Perspectives among policymakers, community stakeholders, and academic experts

Mukda Pratheepwatanawong[1] Rayner Kay Jin Tan[2] and Waranya Jitpong[3]

Abstract—: This research examines human security issues of low-income migrant workers in Singapore as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We conducted stakeholder interviews and a review of secondary data, which were deductively analysed using themes adopted from a United Nations Development Programme human security framework. This research found that while several efforts by civil society and the government have been assessed to make a lasting, positive impact on human security, other areas may still have fallen short. We suggest that despite efforts to address the immediate needs of migrant workers, structural changes are needed to create a lasting impact on these workers who are instrumental to the nation's growth.

Keywords : low-income migrant workers, human security, COVID-19, Singapore

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Introduction

Being a labour-deficient country, Singapore has been importing low-income migrant workers from developing countries in Asia to work in sectors such as maritime industry and construction. The import of such low-income migrant workers has been economically viable for the government, as such labour is cheap and labour policies in Singapore have allowed for easier control of the migrant worker population (Kaur 2007). Currently, foreign workers represent a third of the country's workforce (Powers 2019, 70). As Singaporeans become increasingly educated, Singapore faces labour shortages in low-skilled occupations. While the importation of low-income migrant workers to do construction work like Housing and Development Board (HDB) flats contributes to the well-being and comfort of Singaporeans' living conditions, the living conditions of low-income dormitory-dwelling migrant workers were a controversial issue during the COVID-19 outbreak in Singapore. There were concerns and ongoing debates over human security issues about the management of COVID-19 clusters in low-income migrant workers' dormitories, provided a focus for this research to examine these issues.

Singapore's management of the COVID-19 pandemic won praise in the early days of the pandemic. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's remarks on the COVID-19 situation in Singapore, delivered on 10 April 2020, three days after Singapore's initiation of its lockdown (the 'circuit breaker') to control the spread of COVID-19, included the Singapore government's commitment to paying attention to low-income migrant workers' health and socioeconomic issues (Prime Minister's Office Singapore 2020). However, according to Woo (2020), one critical deficiency in Singapore's political capacity in responding to COVID-19 was insufficient communication between the State and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), particularly CSOs that deal with migrant workers' welfare.

The human security of low-income migrant workers in Singapore was particularly a critical and controversial issue during the COVID-19 outbreak in migrant workers' dormitories.

This had shown policymakers the 'cramped and unsanitary living conditions' that many migrant workers were made to live in by their employers (Woo 2020, 354-5). In a critical assessment of Singapore's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, Huat and Wong explain that calls from CSOs like Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) for better work and living conditions for foreign workers has always been ignored due to 'the wider political system and the secure position of the ruling party: it has never felt the need to succumb to pressure from the odd civil society group' (Abdullah and Kim 2020). Moreover, Chua et al. (2020) highlighted that one of the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 outbreak in Singapore is that more attention should be given to vulnerable groups in the country including migrant workers living in dormitories, and improvement in living conditions is needed to prevent a similar outbreak. Yuen et al. (2021) concluded that a state-led response model like Singapore's had brought early success, but failed to prevent the COVID-19 outbreak among the migrant workers' population.

In fact, the living conditions of low-income migrant workers' dormitories have always been a significant issue that civil society organisations (CSOs) in Singapore have been anxious about. CSOs have been advocating for better living conditions for migrant workers. However, there is limited ability for CSOs in Singapore to influence the government on its policy position regarding foreign labour, or participate in the policy process (Marti 2019). In other words, due to the restrictions on expression, assembly, and association, spaces for CSO action in Singapore are constrained and there is little chance for 'governance from below' (Marti 2019, 1354). Moreover, there have been negative portrayals and misconceptions of low-income migrant workers in Singapore, Bal (2017) analysed that such issues have been perpetuated by state authorities and by society in general. These misconceptions include, that (i) migrant workers will be rich when they leave Singapore for their home country (ii) migrant workers are victims of 'errant employers', and (iii) migrant workers are a threat to Singapore society. Consequently, with such misconceptions in mind, there is limited understanding of the need to improve migrant workers'

working and living conditions in Singapore.

COVID-19 has impacted the livelihoods of many in ASEAN countries (The ASEAN Secretariat 2020). In exploring the vulnerabilities, challenges and opportunities in the context of labour migration in Asia during COVID-19 outbreak, Suhardiman et al. (2021) concluded that documented low-income migrant workers in Singapore were better placed during the outbreak as Singapore in comparison to migrant workers in other Asian countries. This was due to the government implementing the policy of paying migrant workers basic salaries and providing food, accommodation, and timely medical care.

At the time of researching and writing this paper, much has been written about the management of the COVID-19 situation in Singapore. Still, limited attention has been given to the human security issues of low-income migrant workers in Singapore as a result of the pandemic, which is a significant area of concern to gain an in-depth understanding on the way in which the COVID-19 outbreak and the management of the outbreak brought fundamental impact to the different aspects low-income migrant workers living in Singapore. According to the United Nations Development Programme (1994), there are two main aspects of human security. 1. Safety from chronic threats such as physical or mental illness 2. Protection from sudden and hurtful disruption such as homes, jobs or communities. The seven possible types of human security threats that Human Security Unit United Nations (2009) proposed are 1. economic security (e.g. persistent poverty, unemployment) 2. food security (e.g. hunger, famine) 3. health security (e.g. deadly infectious disease, unsafe food, malnutrition, lack of access to basic health care) 4. environmental security (environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters, pollution) 5. personal security (e.g. physical violence, crime, terrorism, domestic violence, child labour) 6. community security (inter-ethnic, religious and other identity-based tensions) 7. political security (e.g. political repression, human rights abuses). Thus, a human security perspective is useful to guide future interventions that hope to address human security issues that have

worsened as a result of the pandemic, as well as those that have existed even before the pandemic.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the human security issues that low-income migrant workers in Singapore have faced as a result of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated control measures, and to review the response from the government and CSOs towards the changes in human security issues that resulted during this time. This study complements other studies adopting primary research among low-income migrant workers in Singapore through a combination of stakeholder interviews (policymakers, researchers, and civil service representatives) and secondary research. The findings in this research highlight the need continuously to develop policies to support the roles of civil society and the government in dealing with low-income migrant workers' human security by cooperating and collaborating with different sectors to effect long-lasting, sustainable improvements to low-income migrant workers' human security, in order to safeguard Singapore economic security and national security.

Situating low-income migrant workers in Singapore

As of mid-2020, Singapore's total population was estimated to be at 5.69 million people, including a non-resident population of 1.64 million (29%) individuals who comprise foreign nationals residing and working in Singapore on long-term work or visit passes (Singapore Department of Statistics 2021). Among the 1,231,500 migrant workers in Singapore as of December 2020, 247,400 were low-income migrant domestic workers and 311,000 workers in the construction, marine shipyard and process sectors (Ministry of Manpower 2021a). Immigration and foreign worker policies have been developed intentionally and carefully to address key economic and demographic concerns in Singapore.

Migrant worker policies in Singapore and the city-state's approach towards the importation of migrant labour has been described as being aligned with these neoliberal principles, which

have helped Singapore achieve economic prosperity today. Specifically, scholars have argued that neoliberal capitalist principles have engendered a system that prioritises the pursuit of profit, and undermines access to fundamental labour rights for migrant workers (Dutta 2021). Singapore's foreign workers can be divided into 'foreign workers' and 'foreign talent', the former comprising unskilled labour, and the latter, semi-skilled and skilled workers. In terms of the treatment of such workers, scholars have pointed out that the tiered system of work passes and legislation in Singapore ascribes varying levels of workers' rights depending on how economically desirable a migrant worker is. For example, unskilled and low-income migrant workers on the 'lowest-tiered' work permits are not able to sponsor a spouse or dependent and apply to become Singapore permanent residents, whereas those on the 'highest-tiered' employment pass comprising skilled labour, may do so (Poh 2020). In terms of socioeconomic standing, semi-skilled and skilled workers are also paid a higher salary as mandated by minimum salary levels that are associated with varying work pass types (Seow 2020). For example, as of 2021, the minimum salary for 'S-pass' and Employment Pass holders were Singapore Dollars SGD 2,500 and SGD 4,500, respectively.

Such differentiated treatment of migrant workers has led to key issues around inequities that low-income migrant workers face, such as having low income and not being able to cover their costs working in Singapore, lack of universal health coverage schemes and cramped living conditions. Firstly, the low wages of low-income migrant workers have been cited as reflecting global inequalities, where high-income nations can exploit depressed wages of 'guest workers' from low-to-middle-income countries through 'revolving door' policies (Poh 2020). Furthermore, many low-income migrant workers begin their work in Singapore in debt, having spent an average of SGD 5,000 to SGD 15,000 (approximately United States Dollars [USD] 3,500 to 11,000) in recruitment and training fees, and earning an average of SGD 400 to SGD 800 (approximately USD 300 to 600) per month (Fillinger et al. 2017). Second, while migrant workers are legally entitled to healthcare benefits provided by their employers, they

are not covered by universal health coverage schemes that are extended to the resident population in Singapore, thus raising issues of equity and fairness in the health of migrant workers (Rajaraman et al. 2020). Issues of gatekeeping of healthcare benefits and the vulnerability of workers to repatriation further exacerbate such inequities.

Thirdly, one key issue especially pertinent to the COVID-19 pandemic, are the living conditions of migrant workers in Singapore. Low-income migrant workers in Singapore are currently housed in three types of housing; these include purpose-built dormitories (PBDs), factory-converted dormitories (FCDs), as well as those living or renting out spaces from the private housing market (Ministry of Manpower 2021b). In spite of legislation enacted in 2016 through the Foreign Employee Dormitories Act (FEDA) which govern PBDs and imposition of new requirements for FCDs, housing conditions have been reported to be suboptimal, and have been attributed as the key factor leading to the spike in cases within the migrant worker dormitories. Some reports highlighted how up to 35 men could share a single room, or how 80 men could share a single toilet (Poh and Sim 2020; Yea 2020).

Methods

Study design

Data collection in this research consists of secondary and primary sources of information. The former includes press releases, officially published reports and newspapers, while the latter includes conducting interviews with key informants who have expertise on Singapore society and low-income migrant workers.

Participants

Key informants were contacted through purposive sampling based on their expertise in each of the sectors, from June to August 2021. By having both Singaporean and non-Singaporean people as key informants who have expertise and knowledge of Singapore, migrant workers' human security issues in Singapore were critically assessed from both an insider and outsider point of view.

Interviews were conducted with key informants and policy experts from five sectors: public health, education, media, civil society and economy, to discuss the prevailing human security conditions for low-income migrant workers before the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a result of COVID-19 and its concomitant lockdown measures. A total of ten key informants were identified in these areas, and sampling was guided by the principle of information power (Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora 2016), where participants who had relevant and rich insight (e.g., direct policymakers or individuals directly involved in the provision of community-based services) were sought, and quality of such information was privileged over the quantity of participants.

Data generation

The interviews were semi-structured to assess the public health management in Singapore during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of COVID-19 on human security issues in vulnerable groups, with a particular focus on low-income migrant workers' livelihood and living conditions. Conducting semi-structured interviews considers flexibility in response and is more suitable for issues that require exploration to obtain adequate information (Walliman 2018). In order to meet the COVID-19 measures and reduce the risk of researchers and key informants being infected by COVID-19, all the interviews were conducted through online platforms or telephone calls.

Data analysis

Our data was analysed through framework analysis (Gale et al. 2013). We adopted the human security framework developed by the Human Security Unit United Nations and United Nations Development Programme deductively to record how COVID-19 had impacted various types of human security (economic, food, health, environment, personal, community, political) among low-income migrant workers in Singapore. The original human security framework was conceived in 1994 with the domains of economic, health, community, political, food, personal, and environmental security. Since its conception, this broad framework

has been utilised as a tool for examining the varying constructs of human security.

We compared the changes in human security issues prior to and as a result of COVID-19 outbreak in Singapore. We also analysed, through recording of secondary data sources, the changes in human security issues before the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Singapore (23 January 2020), and compared the human security issues that low-income migrant workers faced as a result of the 'circuit breaker' from 7 April – 1 June 2020.

Results

Comparing human security before and as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak

With reference to Human Security Unit United Nations (2009) and United Nations Development Programme (1994), we adapted these to summarise how COVID-19 impacted the various types of human security among low-income migrant workers in Singapore. This is summarised in Table 1 (Appendix 1 at the end of this article). The results in Table 1 are based on our analyses of both secondary data, as well as our key informant interviews. In this section, we draw on our literature review and interview data to discuss the prevailing security conditions for low-income migrant workers before the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a result of COVID-19 and its concomitant lockdown measures.

Table 1. Evaluating types of human security among low-income migrant workers before and as a result of COVID-19 and lockdown in Singapore (Types of human security adapted from Human Security Unit United Nations [2009] and United Nations Development Programme [1994])

Type of Human Security	Before COVID-19	As a result of COVID-19 and lockdown in Singapore
Economic	Poor economic security as low-income migrant workers typically arrive in Singapore with debt and with low wages	Low-income migrant workers are now worse off due to lack of work. Many have been infected with COVID-19 and potential long-term symptoms of COVID-19 may affect their productivity in the long term
Food	Poor quality and insufficiency of food for low-income migrant workers	Exacerbation of food insecurities due to lock-up within dormitories, and lack of choice for food options
Health	Limited health insurance, lack of access to universal health coverage, employers gatekeeping health services	Worse off due to COVID-19 infection; long-term impact of COVID-19

Environment	Cramped living conditions within foreign worker dormitories	Lockdown under tight spaces and lack of mobility
Personal	Mental health of low-income migrant workers suffer as a result of debt, lack of autonomy and agency, poor access to healthcare	Worsening of mental health due to lockdown situations as well as situations back home. Lack of privacy and contact tracing
Community	Prevailing stigma towards low-income migrant workers	COVID-19 motivated xenophobia, stigma and discrimination towards low-income migrant workers
Political	Neoliberal principles and lack of workers' rights have led to a curtailment of rights for lowest-skilled and low-income migrant workers	Inability to travel back to source countries due to lockdown measures that have impacted many low-income migrant workers in Singapore

Economic Security

With regard to economic insecurities, it has been reported that low-income migrant workers are laden with debt from their point of arrival in Singapore, even before they start work. Some pay up to SGD 10,000 (approximately USD 7,500) in agent and training fees just to get to Singapore, and many accumulate debt through interest rates if they borrow money from moneylenders or pawnbrokers to be able to pay off these fees. Given that the average worker earns about SGD1,000 a month (inclusive of overtime), workers are placed in a precarious situation where there is little economic freedom, and that they must, regardless of any injuries, accidents, or illness, be able to fulfill their work requirements up until they are able to pay off their debts, before they can start saving for themselves and their families. The pandemic has exacerbated this precarity through layoffs in certain industries, delayed pay days (Transient Workers Count Too 2020a), as well as bureaucratic barriers to switching jobs within Singapore (Transient Workers Count Too 2021).

Stakeholders interviewed also highlighted how the pandemic meant that many were not able to either come to Singapore or return to Singapore to work, and that those in Singapore were quarantined to the extent that they were not able to work and earn their full salary. One stakeholder shared:

'Some migrant workers went back home last year and they cannot come back to Singapore to work. As for migrant workers who were quarantined in their dormitories, they were not allowed to come out, while food and water were sent to them. There was lots of criticism on this issue'

This was an important aspect for most low-income migrant workers in Singapore, especially when many have paid high agent fees to arrive and are only able to repay their debts to such agents, and remit money back to their families after several years. One

stakeholder recounted what a migrant worker shared during case work:

'We were questioning, is it unusual for a migrant worker to feel down, sad, and hopeless when his salary is not paid on time. He lost his job, he couldn't change his job, he got a huge debt back home. He has been unable to send money back home.'

Health Security

With respect to health, past research has shown that low-income migrant workers faced considerable barriers to accessing universal health coverage (UHC). While employers are mandated to provide health insurance for low-income migrant workers through private insurance providers, the coverage is limited. Furthermore, such coverage exists outside the national UHC system, and there are multiple barriers to accessing such healthcare among low-income migrant workers. These barriers include the high costs of healthcare, employers being gatekeepers to healthcare and medical access, as well as migrant workers' vulnerability to repatriation (Rajaraman et al. 2020).

Key informant interviews and secondary data also show that migrant workers are definitely worse off with respect to health as a result of the pandemic, owing to a disproportionate number of cases among migrant workers at the start of the pandemic, and potentially due to the long-term health implications of COVID-19 infection (Aiyegbusi et al. 2021). Mental health issues were also a concern, with reports of attempts to escape the dorms, or suicide-related behaviors reported among migrant workers:

'Workers are feeling the strain now and I don't think any of us outside can appreciate how serious and terrible the situation is

being stuck in the dorm, being periodically locked down. Workers in the dorm technically are given a few hours off where they can go to the recreation center. […] For migrant workers who are calling us, we are seeing mental health problems coming up, we are seeing distress, emotionally and mentally. And don't forget we talk about long COVID-19'

'Not to mention, this time, there have been conflicts about people living in the same dorm that were not reported and there was quite a lot of attempted suicide. […] There was a lot of attempted suicide that was not reported. There were many attempts to escape the dorms that were not reported.'

Food Security

It has also been reported that low-income migrant workers faced food insecurity prior to the pandemic. A previous study among Bangladeshi migrant workers found that they faced challenges in acquiring food that would meet their health needs (Dutta 2015). Specifically, 86.2% and 80.6% of workers surveyed (n=500) highlighted that the food they receive from caterers 'makes them sick' or is of poor quality. 93.4% of workers in the study also mentioned that the food that they had got from the caterers was unclean. Alarmingly, 71.8% of workers also cited that the quantity of the food they received was not sufficient (Dutta 2015). Such workers are also unable to cook food that they enjoy due to the lack of adequate cooking facilities in the dormitories where they reside. While no secondary data has been published on the impact of COVID-19 on food security for migrant workers, we hypothesise that the lockdown measures may have cut off alternative sources of food that were available in the community, and thus exacerbated food insecurity among migrant workers.

One stakeholder shared how migrant workers were potentially deprived of food in the early days of the pandemic, especially when they were fearful of either being infected by COVID-19,

or were afraid of being taken to quarantine centers:

'And we know who the people are who have not stepped out for a few days and are running out of food. Because workers in the early days were terrified. Those in the community were terrified of stepping out because they were afraid of people being arrested by the police and brought to [the quarantine center] so those were pretty dark times.'

Stakeholders also shared how migrant workers were relatively worse off when it came to food options. While migrant workers were given meals during lockdown, one stakeholder shared how there was a stark contrast in the treatment of Singapore residents and low-income migrant workers, leading to a deprivation of food choices among such workers:

'I think it is easy for residents with homes to lock down. I mean you have space and you have food accessible. You could still go out to the park. But for migrant workers, it was a complete lockdown.'

Environmental Security

In terms of environmental security, the cramped and suboptimal living conditions of migrant workers has led to overcrowding in dormitories. The migrant worker dormitories have been under strict movement control measures since April 2020, and have largely been under lockdown, with the exception of leaving their dormitories to work for their employers (Transient Workers Count Too 2020b). While migrant workers have periodically been allowed to apply for approvals to leave their dormitories for several hours to visit recreation centers which contain amenities and services such as food and beverage outlets, minimarts, barbers and remittance services (Ministry of Manpower 2020), numbers by the government and community-based organisations

estimate that less than 10% of migrant workers have benefitted from the scheme (Transient Workers Count Too 2020b). Within the micro-system of the dormitories, stakeholders also highlight how environmental securities can be viewed through the lens of infection risks for COVID-19, which was heightened for migrant workers. For example, one stakeholder pointed how there was a lack of personal protective equipment even in medical facilities during the early days of COVID-19, and highlighted how residents in dormitories were then left with few options to protect themselves in spite of their heightened risks of acquiring COVID-19:

'And that in a crisis, if hospitals don't have enough masks, how would you expect dormitory operators to gain access to PPE [personal protective equipment] or even know how to use it properly?'

Another issue highlighted was how collaborations between policymakers, employers, and workers led to inefficiencies in implementation of safeguards in a crisis. One stakeholder highlighted how the government creates legislation and policy directions for employers, but ultimately employers are left with the task of enforcing these policies and laws for their workers. In the case of COVID-19, such inefficiencies were coupled with the lack of resources and time, which led to an accumulation of disadvantages for workers in the context of COVID-19 infection risks:

'[The ministry] a policy unit knows that it does not have the manpower to ensure compliance with what the dormitory operators and the employers were doing. But it is inconceivable that [the ministry] had no clues of how ill-equipped the dorm operators and the employers were actually to fulfil the requirement set out in the various directives. So, the way that I see it, and I am glad to be proven wrong, but my hypothesis is that [the ministry] essentially said we are a policy unit, our job is to issue policy and directives, the employers, the dorm operators are private entities, it is not our job to help them. It is our

job to tell them what to do. And if they don't do it then we will punish them, which is a usual attitude we take towards regulated entities.'

Community Security

With regard to community-based security, Singaporeans have held negative attitudes towards migrant workers in Singapore (Jakkula 2020) and this has been expected to have become worse due to heightened xenophobic and racist sentiment that has arisen from the pandemic (Abdullah 2021).

One stakeholder reflected how the Prime Minister of Singapore thanked migrant workers for their contributions to society, and how powerful this was, given prevailing stigma towards these workers. But the stakeholder nevertheless reflected how such attitudes still prevail among the general public in Singapore:

'At the national level, the Prime Minister did a great job. […] He said we will look after you, to all your family in India, Bangladesh, we will look after your sons. Thank you for letting them come to Singapore to help us build the country. […] So that was very powerful. But remember that on the ground, the workers have always been treated very badly by the officials, Singaporeans by and large treat them as second-class or really invisible parts of the community. And many of them come from a very challenging home environment in their community, where minorities and those who stand out can be treated very roughly. So, if that is your mental model coming into Singapore, and you sense that everyone is looking at you and whispering about you. Then it is a deadly situation that you want to avoid.'

Personal Security

While low-income migrant workers were not exposed to greater levels of physical violence, the lockdowns imposed a form of structural violence that led to greater harms in other aspects of

human security. At the personal level, existing stressful situations that may have impacted the mental health of migrant workers prior to the pandemic are definitely exacerbated by the multiple insecurities that the pandemic has brought about. Correspondingly, we have seen a spate of attempted suicides and deaths by suicide among migrant workers since the onset of the pandemic (Bloomberg 2021). This has also been verified by key informants that were interviewed throughout the course of this study, and is reflected in previous sections.

Political Security

At the political level, the rights of low-income migrant workers as guest workers to the economy have been curtailed relative to other skilled workers, and they are now facing greater insecurities around their political situation, given additional barriers and travel restrictions that prevent travel out of the country. Their status as guest workers and not a meaningful and enduring part of Singapore's social fabric remains stagnant even throughout, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. One stakeholder also reflected how this false separation of imaginaries around the migrant worker narrative or story with Singapore's story of progress has not worked out. They suggested that we have tried to do so, such as through the built environment that separates low-income migrant workers in dormitories. But COVID-19 has revealed how we cannot sustain such a false separation of such narratives:

'Migrant workers are a global phenomenon. It's happening everywhere. And in Singapore, particularly, migrant workers are an integral part of our Singapore story. You can't separate them. We had tried to separate them. They are in the dorms. Even throughout COVID-19. Even the language used as far as infections are concerned has kept migrant workers very apart. You have community infections, and dorm infections [referring to how the government separated the counting of infections within the dorms and within the community]. So, we kept it very separate. I think this kind of separation belies the reality of how integral and part of our lives [migrant workers] are.'

Discussion and conclusion

Our study highlighted the changes to human security that low-income migrant workers have faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the response by the government and civil society to the situation of these workers. Overall, we believe that low-income migrant workers have faced greater insecurity across all dimensions of human security, including economic, food, health, environment, personal, community, and political forms of security. Our findings also indicate that several efforts are being made to address stigma towards migrant workers in the community, the living conditions of migrant workers, as well as the mental health of migrant workers, in direct response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The most tangible and structural change that has taken place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on migrant workers, is the building of new dormitories to alleviate space constraints and overcrowding in dormitories. There has also been a commitment by the government to review and improve the specifications for such dormitories, to improve the living conditions of low-income migrant workers (Phua 2020). The government has also indicated that these dormitories will be located closer to residential areas and have therefore urged Singaporeans to appreciate the presence of such migrant workers. These changes are promising, but may be limited in its impact on overall security for low-income migrant workers, if not paired with other interventions. Specifically, such structural changes should also consider how food, health, and personal securities can be improved through the use of space and the built environment, and how interactions between migrant workers and the surrounding resident communities can be fostered to reduce stigma and discrimination towards low-income migrant workers.

While civil society and the government have responded to address the mental health of low-income migrant workers, these efforts have largely been targeted at alleviating the added distress

and mental health burden that the pandemic has brought about; including the impact of being locked-in and the lack of opportunities to engage in recreational or social activities beyond the walls of the dormitories. These efforts, while necessary, may only address the symptoms of an inequitable system, rather than the root of such systemic issues. Specifically, addressing how other forms of insecurities trickle down towards distressing situations for low-income migrant workers would need to be formulated, and a partnership between CSOs and the government would be fundamental for such sustainable, long-term changes to take effect.

Efforts to address stigma towards low-income migrant workers have also been made by government officials. Given Singapore's reliance on low-income migrant workers for economic growth, and the need to better integrate migrant workers into Singaporean society, this research suggests that a sustained effort to destigmatise and integrate such workers is needed and public education campaigns for school-going children, as well as the general public are essential in achieving such goals in the long-run.

A key strength of our study is the use of key informant interviews who are policy experts in the areas of education, civil society, health, economics and media. These individuals were able to discuss policy issues, and assess how migrant workers in general have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore. On the flipside, the lack of perspectives directly from migrant workers may be a limitation for the study, given that primary data on the experiences of low-income migrant workers may better situate and contextualise how the pandemic has impacted their human security;future research can consider to explore further into this issue.

To conclude, the pandemic and its control measures have negatively impacted all dimensions of human security of low-income migrant workers in Singapore, where gaps were present prior to the pandemic. While some efforts and responses by civil society and the government have been assessed to make a lasting, positive impact on human security, other areas may still fall short. While civil society has stepped up to address the immediate needs

of migrant workers, long-lasting efforts and structural changes by the government are needed to create a lasting, positive impact on these workers who are instrumental to the growth of the nation.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The research was approved by The Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects: The Second Allied Academic Group in Social Sciences, Humanities and Fine and Applied Arts at Chulalongkorn University, based on Declaration of Helsinki, the Belmont report, CIOMS guidelines and the Principle of the international conference on harmonization – Good clinical practices (ICH-GCP) (Protocol No. 058/64 and COA No. 103/2564) and the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health Departmental Ethics Review Committee, National University of Singapore (REF:SSHSPH-134).

All interviews were performed in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations. There was approval of the study and informed consent of the participants. This study had considered all research ethics issues to ensure that the interviews with participants were conducted ethically and no one was harmed or at risk of being harmed in providing any information to the researcher. Participants were given relevant information about this study in order to take into consideration the issues raised by their participation in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting the interviews and submitting this manuscript for publication. All participants remain anonymous in the publication of this study. No minor or uneducated/illiterate persons were involved in this study.

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Social Protection System: Insights from Families Left Behind in Ban Sandin, Lao PDR

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Abstract—: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection serves as a policy framework guiding the international agenda of ASEAN member countries. This emphasis on social protection within the regional bloc is aligned with the United Nation's global agenda, particularly, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This presentation analyzes the social protection system in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), exploring traditional and innovative coping mechanisms and how they reflect community social dynamics. Drawing on case studies of families left behind and insights from fifteen additional informants in Ban Sandin, Lao PDR, this article synthesizes scholarly literature to explain the impact of migration on these families. The findings highlight existing gaps in the social protection system and policy implementation, especially in addressing needs of individuals and families left behind.

The study also underscores the importance of gender equality in facilitating occupational support for returning migrants and enhancing disaster risk management. Therefore, social protection should be promoted as a national framework across ASEAN member countries and collaboration with the governments of Thailand and Lao PDR to extend social protection coverage. In addition, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations should be strengthened to

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promote sustainable community poverty alleviation practices. In designing social protection frameworks, the complex issue of migration should be considered in its positive and negative implications.

Keywords : Social protection, Migration, Families left behind, Lao PDR, Thailand

Introduction

The term 'social protection' has played a pivotal role in shaping global development policy, leading to collaboration between the World Bank and the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2016, due to its integration with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the article highlights deficits in local field development and discrepancies in coverage relative to the development agendas of United Nations agencies. These international organizations often prioritize technical cooperation programs facilitated through governments and non-profit organizations. In Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), efforts have been underway to implement the ILO's Global Flagship Programme aimed at establishing social protection floors (SPF) for all, with a target of achieving 90 percent coverage of social health protection for the population. This initiative particularly emphasizes the expansion of equal and effective access to quality health services (ILO, 2021).

The Lao PDR government has endeavored to drive social protection policies and programs in line with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection,2013. However, according to the report 'Social Protection in ASEAN: A Strategy Guide for Employers,' Lao PDR falls below the regional average in terms of social protection expenditure, accounting for only 8 to 10 percent of GDP in 2020. This report emphasizes the importance of expanding social protection

to the informal sector and underscores the need to consider instruments of social assistance coverage for the poor and marginalized people (ILO, 2023). In this article, we focus on the families left behind by Lao migrants because a significant number of both documented and undocumented immigrant workers migrate to countries like Thailand in search of higher economic development levels, aiming to secure better opportunities for themselves and their families through remittances.

In this article, two primary objectives are addressed. Firstly, there is an examination of the lack of social protection coverage for both left-behind individuals and vulnerable groups. Secondly, the article aims to explore the broader implications of international migration, which encompasses expenses, remittances, and potential future benefits. Migration can enhance employment opportunities and quality of life, as migrants often provide financial support to relatives who remain in their home countries. The article is structured into four sections. Part I examines international and national social policies related to social protection. Part II presents the findings obtained from families left behind in the village regarding the shortcomings in social protection, and discusses the deficiencies in the SPS in Lao PDR. Finally, Part III provides recommendations for the advancement of social protection in Lao PDR.

This article highlights the significance of the challenges and advancements in social protection within both global and regional contexts, focusing particularly on ASEAN countries. In the case of Lao PDR, we examine the social protection system (SPS) through three distinct implementations: (1) targeting vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and those left behind; (2) exploring informal social protection mechanisms utilized by families, communities, and donor organizations to manage shocks, particularly in response to flood disasters within domestic contexts; and (3) addressing coping mechanisms in response to the shocks responded by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we draw upon data findings from our research, which collected information from family members of migrants and key informants in Ban Sandin,

to provide comprehensive explanations of the overall situation rather than exclusive case studies.

Understanding the Development of Social Protection in Lao PDR

The historical context of Lao PDR includes experiences of colonization and geopolitical insecurity during the Cold War era. In the post-Cold War period, Lao PDR transitioned from a focus on traditional security to prioritizing human security within the framework of international governance and human development agendas (Howe, 2023). In addition, Lao PDR has attempted to integrate into global neoliberal economic systems by combining with East Asian nations like China, Japan, and South Korea. Lao PDR has established interactions with international organizations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) alongside regional organizations like the ASEAN and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as a result of this cooperation. Moreover, this dependence has resulted in the effects of Chinese engagement with major development initiatives and its hegemony in Lao PDR's agricultural supply chains (Howe & Park, 2015).

The government of Lao PDR operates as a single-party authoritarian state, collaborating with UN agencies. However, there is an argument that global development policies often overlook specific issues within local communities. Social protection, which encompasses both social assistance and social insurance, is primarily advanced by the government through technical assistance programs provided by UN agencies to address both normal and crisis situations (United Nations in Lao PDR, 2021). Nonetheless, these initiatives frequently fail to align with the national agenda of the people, resulting in limited access to social services and infrastructure in underdeveloped areas of the country. For example, the ILO advocates for the Assessment-Based National Dialogue on Social Protection and the development of the National Social Protection Strategy. The Lao Government is obliged to adhere to the pathway outlined in ILO Recommendation No. 202 and cannot disregard these global development agendas (ILO, 2017b).

According to the international development framework after 2016, the globally accepted development master plan is the SDGs. The SDGs highlight social protection as a crucial aspect of global social governance, aiming not only to coordinate synergies among social policies but also to centralize international organizations within the United Nations to collaborate in implementing this master plan (Deacon, 2013; 2016). The key components of this master plan include: (1) Target 1.3, aiming to implement suitable SPSs and measures to achieve sustainable coverage for the poor and the vulnerable; (2) Target 3.8, focusing on achieving universal health coverage, which encompasses financial risk protection and access to safe, effective, and affordable quality essential health care services; (3) Target 5.4, aiming to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, and promoting shared responsibilities within families and households; (4) Target 8.b, which calls for the development and implementation of a global strategy for youth employment and the execution of the Global Jobs Pact by the ILO; and (5) Target 10.4, which emphasizes the adoption of fiscal, wage, and social protection policies to achieve greater equality (United Nations, 2015).

The SDGs serve as a comprehensive development framework implemented by United Nations member states, providing direction for the creation of national and regional strategies, programs, and plans. Subsequent discussions will explore global and ASEAN regional cooperation, along with overarching data from case studies in Lao PDR. Notably, Lao PDR is one of only 10 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, or 1 in 50 worldwide, to receive support from the ILO Global Flagship Programme's second phase of technical cooperation. Consequently, social protection holds top priority in the Lao PDR's national development strategy, with plans and initiatives aimed at improving the population's access to legitimate and efficient coverage. Nonetheless, there is still a deficiency in the literature about the governance and policy of national social protection, which deviates from the insight gathered from field research.

United Nations Collaboration on Social Protection

Global social protection cooperation can be approached in two ways. The first approach utilizes the SDGs, particularly Target 1.3, as a framework for designing 'Universal Social Protection' by entities such as the World Bank and the ILO. This approach aims to integrate SPFs in the form of universal coverage under a human-centered agenda. The prevailing trend in social protection policies and measures is the rights-based approach, which emphasizes universal welfare based on minimum standards, to foster sustainable economic and social development for individuals, communities, societies, and countries. This approach seeks to encourage each country to develop universal social protection schemes, such as old-age pensions and child support grants (ILO and World Bank, 2016; ILO, 2017; 2019a; ILO, 2019b; Zelenev, 2015).

The proposal for universal social protection underscores the need to implement the SPF framework, outlined by the ILO, which emphasizes the expansion of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. The SPF comprises three main components: social assistance, social insurance, and voluntary insurance (ILO, 2011). However, in the majority of developing countries, including Lao PDR, social assistance takes precedence. For instance, during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, social protection measures in Lao PDR primarily focused on social assistance rather than social insurance and labor market programmes. Emergency cash transfers were provided to target groups affected by disruptions in the tourism and manufacturing sectors, including the impoverished, newly poor families, and approximately 1,500,000 informal workers, constituting 21 percent of the population (Gentilini et al., 2020, 2022). Lao PDR lacked preventive measures and disaster risk management strategies during crisis situations such as COVID-19. This highlighted the vulnerabilities of migrant worker families left behind, who lacked access to voluntary insurance coverage.

The second approach is the framework of 'social risk management' (SRM) introduced by Robert Holzmann in the 1990s. He proposed three categories of social risk management aimed

at addressing insecurities and shocks, as well as mitigating financial crises, unemployment, natural disasters, epidemics, food shortages, and similar challenges. These three categories include prevention, mitigation, and coping strategies. In terms of social protection provision, the World Bank did not explicitly stipulate it as the government's sole responsibility, but rather emphasized the importance of establishing and developing informal social protection mechanisms. These mechanisms could be managed at the village or community level, or through the reinforcement of knowledge, grants, or equipment received from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These approaches could be termed as 'risk sharing' and 'risk transfer'. Consequently, cooperation occurred among individuals and communities without formal institutional interventions or welfare schemes officially prepared by governments (Holzmann, 2001; 2003; Holzmann & Jorgensen, 1999; Jorgensen & Siegel, 2019).

Since the 1990s, both universal social protection and SRM have been developed using the abovementioned approach. The World Bank has supported the implementation of social safety nets to improve the lives of vulnerable families, and individuals experiencing poverty. The majority of these measures employed means testing to determine eligibility for assistance, aligning with the objectives of social assistance. Assistance often took the form of conditional cash transfers. In the 2010s, the World Bank expanded the scope of social protection to include labor protection. Given that the working-age population represents the longest phase in the human life cycle and faces the highest risks, it is crucial to not only promote access to education, healthcare, food, and housing for individuals in this age range but also prioritize human capital development and employment promotion. Some measures of social assistance concerning labor market programmes, such as public works, are not considered traditional social assistance but rather initiatives aimed at employment promotion if they incorporate training, job-seeking processes, and career counseling (World Bank, 2012; 2018; 2019).

ASEAN Regional Cooperation on Social Protection

ASEAN initiated the development of the SPS in 2006, receiving academic support from the European Union (EU) to strengthen social protection measures for vulnerable groups. In addition to social assistance, social insurance, and labor market programmes, this support includes categorizing welfare based on geographical areas, and child protection. In 2006, Lao PDR assessed that the sole existing labor market programmes consisted of training and labor standards (Cuddy, Suharto, Thamrin & Moran, 2006).

The success of establishing the ASEAN Social Protection Framework can be attributed to collaborative efforts involving ASEAN Regional Cooperation on Social Protection, international organizations under the United Nations, civil society, private sectors, and other development partners. The ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection serves as a practical guideline for designing policies and action plans among member countries. Its objectives are to enhance the well-being and livelihoods of ASEAN people by providing access to opportunities for human development, social welfare, and justice. The principles of the Declaration are grounded in human rights and address the basic needs of the poor, at-risk individuals, people with disabilities, elderly individuals, out-of-school youth, children, migrant workers, and other vulnerable groups (ASEAN, 2018).

According to the ASEAN vision, social protection is deemed a vital welfare mechanism aimed at reducing poverty and establishing social safety nets to mitigate the consequences of globalization, including ensuring access to food security, healthcare services, disease prevention, drug control, and disaster risk management plans. Moreover, ASEAN advocates for the necessity of social protection for migrant workers in destination countries, as they often lack access to benefits available to other workers, such as compensation for disability, disasters, and old-age pensions (Asher & Zen, 2015; Hall, 2012; Olivier, 2018).

The declaration not only underscores the role of the public sector but also encourages families and communities to play a pivotal role in supporting the SPS to deliver social services, representing an informal type of social protection. Given the dependence of social services on geographical factors, management cannot rely on a one-size-fits-all solution. However, ASEAN social protection initiatives are predominantly focused on social welfare and the development of social insurance, social assistance, and social services. Therefore, there is debate surrounding the adequacy of the Declaration's consideration of social policy vision and management mechanisms, particularly its failure to encompass labor market policy and planning measures, hindering progress toward human capital development (ASEAN, 2018).

Lao PDR's National Social Protection Strategy and Policy

Currently, social protection in Lao PDR serves critical roles in poverty reduction, promoting equality, driving socioeconomic development, and fostering social cohesion. This demonstrates how important it is for the Lao PDR government to work together across public sectors in order to develop national social protection programs and policies. Despite these efforts, social welfare in Lao PDR remains inadequate and insufficiently covered. Historically, the social welfare administration has largely fallen on families and communities, contributing to an informal SPS (Department of Planning and Cooperation, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, 2020). This section will examine the evolution of social protection in Lao PDR.

Three domestic contexts in Lao PDR necessitate international and regional cooperation: (1) the geographic vulnerability disparity between urban and rural areas; (2) ethnic conflicts leading to racial segregation; and (3) inherent vulnerability stemming from gender inequality and limited opportunities for women to access resources (Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihood, 2015). Furthermore, international organizations, NGOs, and ASEAN support regional cooperation on social protection, recognizing

it as integral to international development policies. Transition countries in ASEAN, including Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Lao PDR, prioritize human capital advancement through education and infrastructure improvements for national economic development (Cuddy, Suharto, Thamrin & Moran, 2006).

In 2019, the Lao PDR government endorsed the SPS following the SDGs framework. The progress report of the partnership for sustainable development (2017–2021) highlighted two social protection indicators: (1) the number of formal employments covered by the social security system; and (2) the ratio of impoverished individuals benefiting from the social protection scheme (United Nations in Lao PDR, 2019, p. 5). In addition, support was provided for the UN Joint Programme on Establishing SPFs in Lao PDR between 2020–2021. This initiative aimed to advance various SDG targets, including Target 1.3 (social protection systems for all), Target 2.2 (eliminating all forms of malnutrition), Target 16.9 (strengthening social cohesion), and Target 17.3 (mobilizing financial resources for developing countries). These endeavors continuously influenced the design of the SPS in Lao PDR across four key areas: (1) poverty reduction in rural and ethnically diverse regions; (2) provision of school meals to ensure adequate nutrition for children; (3) enhancing access to education, particularly for girls with low literacy levels; and (4) acknowledging that poverty and vulnerability stem from economic crises and natural disasters (UN Joint Programme, ILO and UN Agencies, 2020).

Recently, the Lao PDR government prioritized two principles in the development of the SPS to stimulate economic growth while simultaneously reducing poverty and inequality, thereby addressing the gap between urban and rural populations.

Firstly, a significant emphasis was placed on healthcare system reform, particularly under the National Health Insurance Strategies (2017-2021), which integrated the system into the administration of the Ministry of Health. Formal economy workers were required to contribute to the social security fund, whereas those in the informal economy accessed medical care through the national tax budget. However, shortcomings were observed in the

integration of public offices both in policy and administration levels, leading to limited access to health services for rural residents and vulnerable groups. Furthermore, adjustments in benefits and budget planning were deemed essential (ILO, 2020).

Secondly, the World Bank's framework was employed to address disaster risk management, given the substantial losses and damages caused by such occurrences. Under the SPS, the Lao PDR government developed directives and oversaw their implementation. Despite recurring annual challenges in rural areas, no government-led initiatives have been introduced to mitigate these issues. Consequently, social protection strategies aimed to transform policies into program planning, establishing a clear framework encompassing target groups, welfare categories, management schemes, and implementing agencies (See Table 1) (Department of Planning and Cooperation, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, 2020; Khan & Marzi, 2019a).

Table 1 Social Protection Schemes in Lao PDR

Schemes	Categories	Target groups	Implementing agencies
Contributory schemes			
National health insurance (2020)	Health	Civil servants and formal economy workers	National Social Security Office, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare

Schemes	Categories	Target groups	Implementing agencies
Social security: unemployment benefit; sickness benefit; work injury; occupational disease and nonwork-related disability benefit; maternity benefit; childbirth grant; survivor's benefit child and family; death grant	Employment Health Social security	Formal economy workers from both the public and private sectors, self-employed (voluntary); informal economy workers (voluntary)	National Social Security Office, Ministry of Labor and Welfare
Old age pensions	Social security	Compulsory coverage of formal public and private workers; self-employed and informal workers (voluntary)	National Social Security Office, Ministry of Labor and Welfare
Non-contributory schemes			
Free schooling	Education	Students across all educational levels	Ministry of Education and Sports
Grants/scholarships for secondary education	Education	Students from poor families	Ministry of Education and Sports

Schemes	Categories	Target groups	Implementing agencies
National school meal programme	Education Nutrition	Primary and secondary students in disadvantaged districts	Ministry of Education and Sports, World Food Programme (WFP), Catholic Relief Service (CRS), Education for Development Fund
Secondary school stipend programme	Education	Lower or upper secondary school students from poor families	Asian Development Bank (ADB)
Technical and vocational education and training scholarships	Education Employment	Students from poor families	Ministry of Education and Sports, Asian development Bank (ADB), German International Cooperation (GIZ)
Livelihood support and essential social	Employment	Community in targeted poor	Poverty-Reduction Fund
services through community asset creation		districts	(PRF)

Schemes	Categories	Target groups	Implementing agencies
Other benefits (food, vouchers, and other in-kind transfers)	Health Nutrition	Pregnant women and children	Ministry of Labor and Welfare and others
Natural and man-made disasters	Livelihoods	Victims of disasters	Ministry of Labor and Welfare
Mixed systems			
National health insurance (2020)	Health	Poor informal workers and Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health programme (MNCH)	National Health Insurance Bureau (Ministry of Health)
National health insurance (2025)	Health	Civil servants, formal workers, poor, informal workers, Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health programme (MNCH)	National Health Insurance Bureau (Ministry of Health)

Schemes	Categories	Target groups	Implementing agencies
Legal system			
Severance pays : Paid sick leave : Paid maternity leave	Health Social security	Formal economy workers	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare
Special protection (exploitation, sexual abuse, human trafficking, and others)	Health Education Employment	Vulnerable populations	n/a

Source: Adapted from Khan and Marzi (2019a, pp. 28-29) and Department of Planning and Cooperation, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (2020)

The Lao PDR National Social Protection Strategy is dedicated to advancing social policies and fostering economic growth. To this end, the Lao PDR government committed to formulating the National Social Protection Strategy by 2020, initiating the process with national consultations on social protection in 2013. This endeavor involved collaboration with various development partners, including the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, trade unions, and other relevant actors (Khan & Marzi, 2019a; Department of Planning and Cooperation, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, 2020; Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods, 2015, p. 16).

The strategy encompasses three primary objectives:

Firstly, ensuring universal access to effective social protection by extending social insurance coverage to all, establishing

minimum standards, and delivering quality services across the spectrum of promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation.

Secondly, expanding welfare services to vulnerable groups by broadening social protection coverage to include non-standard employment workers, formalizing the inclusion of informal workers in social insurance, and enhancing benefits within social insurance schemes for this segment. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry is actively involved in the evolution of the social security system.

Thirdly, fostering the development of social welfare programs tailored to vulnerable groups and extending program reach to cater to diverse demographics, including pregnant women, children, the disabled, the elderly, and disaster victims. The Lao PDR government prioritizes educational opportunities and skills training for marginalized and working-age populations to ensure future employment prospects and decent work. Additionally, free school meals are provided to students residing in disadvantaged rural areas.

In terms of the social protection scheme, two main components were identified: Firstly, social security was characterized as 'narrow,' implying its limitation to social insurance. Funding for this segment derived from contributions made by employers, employees, and the government, with an emphasis on providing welfare coverage for vulnerable people across various life stages. Secondly, social welfare constituted a program offering old-age pensions, child support grants, public work opportunities, and unemployment benefits (Department of Planning and Cooperation, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, 2020).

However, gaps were observed in policy development and the social protection scheme, particularly regarding the availability of both cash and in-kind social welfare programs. This discrepancy arose because initiatives and actions for social protection development primarily originated from donors rather than the Lao PDR government. For example, the ILO funded three projects aimed at providing technical assistance and developing social protection. The first project focused on enhancing social protec-

tion and employment benefits in the tea and coffee industries in Lao PDR, while the other two projects aimed to develop the SPS in Lao PDR and other countries in the Asia-Pacific Region (ILO, 2022). In addition, there was a lack of coping mechanisms for disadvantaged families and villages in different geographical areas to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters, despite the Lao PDR government's recognition of the need for such mechanisms (See Table 2). This represents another gap in the SPS (Khan & Marzi, 2019a).

ASEAN countries implement social protection measures to alleviate the risks brought about by disasters. In the context of Lao PDR, seasonal occurrences such as storms, floods, and droughts usually have short durations, although droughts may persist for medium to long terms. Nevertheless, Lao PDR ranks among the ASEAN region's countries with the lowest level of shocks and hazards. The disaster risk management system in Lao PDR relies on specialized national institutions, setting it apart from many ASEAN nations that possess dedicated legislation governing risk governance (Khan & Marzi, 2019b).

Table 2 Traditional and new coping strategies of Lao PDR

Social protection in emergency or crisis situations	
Traditional coping strategies	Disaster risk management is based on experience in predicting risks such as droughts, storms, and other natural disasters, as well as emerging risks like climate change and forest encroachment. Coping strategies for disasters often involve short-term measures, such as borrowing rice grains from relatives.

New coping strategies	Planning for disaster risk management means farmers selling their products in advance to have cash for seed and fertilizer for the next harvest. Some families choose to hire out labor, while others may turn to outmigration or borrow money from village development funds. It is essential to address gender inequalities and prioritize support for individuals and groups at risk of social exclusion.

Source: Summarized from Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihods, 2015

The SPS development has transitioned from an abstract framThe SPS development has transitioned from an abstract framework to an actively managed system that plays a crucial role in shaping policy and implementing various schemes. As articulated by the Minister of Labor and Social Welfare, social protection is grounded in the principles of human rights, labor, economic empowerment, and sustainable development. Its overarching goal is to alleviate poverty, enhance labor skills, improve the quality of life for the poor and vulnerable, and ensure that no one is left behind. To this end, the government has endorsed and supported three key social welfare programs focusing on education, nutrition, and social services. Moreover, the government emphasizes the significance of the ASEAN Social Protection Declaration and Framework in empowering local communities to foster environmental sustainability and ensure inclusivity (Saysompheng, 2020, pp. 6-7). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a testament to the operational efficacy of the SPS during crises and emergencies, but Lao PDR government face with the return of migrant workers and limited management in public health care because various causes, such as fragmentation of the system, lack of social protection in the informal economy, finance administration of non-contributory schemes, and so on (United Nations in

Lao PDR, 2021).

The SPS development has evolved from a conceptual framework to a dynamically managed system, playing a crucial role in shaping policy and implementing various schemes. As articulated by the Minister of Labor and Social Welfare, social protection is grounded in principles encompassing human rights, labor, economic empowerment, and sustainable development. Its overarching objective is to alleviate poverty, enhance labor skills, improve the quality of life for the poor and vulnerable, and ensure inclusivity. In pursuit of these objectives, the government has endorsed and supported three key social welfare programs focusing on education, nutrition, and social services. Furthermore, the government underscores the significance of the ASEAN Social Protection Declaration and Framework in empowering local communities to promote environmental sustainability and inclusivity (Saysompheng, 2020, pp. 6-7). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the operational effectiveness of the SPS during crises and emergencies. Nonetheless, the Lao PDR government faces challenges associated with the return of migrant workers and inadequate management in public health due to various factors such as system fragmentation, lack of social protection in the informal economy, and administrative issues in non-contributory schemes (United Nations in Lao PDR, 2021).

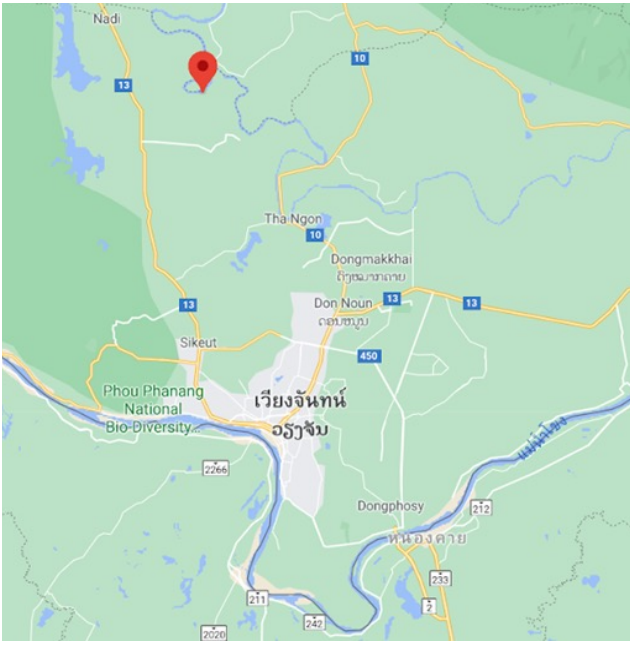
Social Protection and Families Left Behind: Insights from the Village

The following findings were from data collected in Ban Sandin village in April 2018. Located in the Nasaithong District, the village is around thirty to forty kilometers away from Vientiane (See Figure 1). Data was collected from six case studies and fifteen additional data informants. The method of purposive sampling was employed to select case studies based on characteristics such as gender, family composition, household income, duration of migration, and educational attainment. Additional data sources were selected based on diverse characteristics, including a local

pharmacist, a recruitment agency representative, experienced migrants, a Buddhist monk, a teacher, and a neighbor. Subsequent interviews proceeded smoothly as families left behind were proficient in both Thai and Lao languages. The semi-structured interview encompassed a broad spectrum of topics, including family background, living conditions, migration patterns and remittances, and the SPS.

One of the defining features of Ban Sandin village is its year-round productive agriculture, which serves both household consumption and distribution beyond the community. Laos migrants to Thailand are drawn to the country due to its geography, language, and cultural similarities. Migration is facilitated by scarce resources and community support, enabling social mobility, debt repayment, and remittance sending. Furthermore, diverse perspectives on the motivations of Lao migrant workers are explained by various case study informants and other sources. Three factors contribute to Thai enterprises' reluctance to hire Lao workers: Firstly, unlike migrants from Myanmar and Cambodia, male Lao workers are often unable to send remittances back home or save money upon returning, limiting their investment potential in local occupations. Secondly, Lao migrants typically favor employment in the service sector, particularly in restaurants, with fewer opting for factory jobs, often seeking temporary employment during agricultural off-seasons. Thirdly, gender-related challenges emerge from the possibility of individuals marrying Thai partners and divorcing Lao spouses, with divorce often attributed to perceived laziness among Lao men, especially when earning low wages.

Figure 1: Bansandin, Nasaithong District, Vientiane, the capital of Lao PDR



The examination of the Ban Sandin context and the conditions of families left behind revealed six issues pertaining to social protection in the village. The ensuing consequences that unfolded across the life cycle were scrutinized utilizing the social protection framework in the study's findings.

Food Security

Ban Sandin is in an area rich in soil and water resources, conducive to year-round seasonal crop rotation and livestock farming for both consumption and commercial purposes. Food security in the village is primarily managed by the community rather than the state, with no reported shortages. Some families

choose to migrate for work opportunities, while others opt to hire labor locally to avoid separation from their families. For instance, both internal and external neighbors have been observed stealing hens and ducks from community members, often resorting to dissection to conceal evidence. When perpetrators are identified within the village, the village leader imposes compensatory fines on behalf of the victims. This case illustrates the utilization of informal social protection mechanisms to address issues of food insecurity and hunger within the community.

Medical Care

Unlike neighboring villages, Ban Sandin lacks a dedicated health center. In cases of mild illness, villagers typically seek first-aid treatment at the local pharmacy, especially for common elderly ailments such as high blood pressure, bone pain, and diabetes. The pharmacist, functioning as medical personnel, operates the village drugstore. While some villagers still prefer traditional medicine or herbal remedies, modern medical treatment has gained popularity among the more affluent residents. Due to limited information, no villages have opted to participate in voluntary social insurance schemes; however, some wealthier villagers have invested in private health insurance. Therefore, the necessity of universal health coverage is evident, which should entail the establishment of health care facilities at the village or district level. In addition, the government should play a proactive role in disseminating information about modern healthcare, enhancing access to services, and streamlining bureaucratic processes involved in client transfers.

Education

The government provides subsidies to schools to ensure compulsory education for children. Schooling is not entirely free, as students are expected to cover additional expenses such as learning materials, special fees, uniforms, transportation, and meals. Unfortunately, free meals are unavailable for children from

economically disadvantaged families. Despite this, teachers act as proxies for means testing by observing and conducting interviews with family members to assess eligibility, except for educational fees and assistance materials. International organizations like UNICEF provide support materials, and the Red Cross of Lao PDR and South Korea offer one meal a day, though this does not address the underlying issue. These financial constraints contribute to school dropouts, with some students compelled to migrate with their families. According to teachers, there is a lack of community support, as they focus solely on their responsibilities within the school and exclusively monitor the socio-economic status of poor households.

Employment Status and Income

The study revealed a lack of employment promotion initiatives within the village, with no government measures aimed at fostering skill development and job creation. The majority of villagers were involved in the informal economy, primarily through farming or self-employment. Surprisingly, despite this, the village faced a labor shortage due to low education levels and a lack of skills among its residents. Migration emerged as one of the coping strategies adopted by villagers. In fact, the study highlighted that some married women migrated to Thailand and established new families, leaving their spouses behind. On the other hand, those in the community who experience disasters deal with uncertainty and employment insecurity. The challenges encountered by those unable to plan ahead and secure stable employment over the long term are exacerbated by the government's lack of assistance for local residents. The government's apparent oversight of the impact of these natural disasters on social protection measures, particularly in disaster management, is noteworthy.

Migration

The settlement not only shares linguistic and cultural similarities with Thai communities but also boasts networks that facilitate migration to Thailand. Additionally, an informal channel for financial transactions between Thailand and the Lao PDR operates within the village, offering a crucial solution given the absence of bank accounts among villagers and their geographical distance from banking services. Temporary migration predominantly assumes a seasonal nature.

Migration, coupled with gender dynamics, emerges as a significant issue. Male migrant workers exhibit lower levels of accomplishment compared to their female counterparts, rendering them unable consistently to remit funds to their families back home. Conversely, Lao female migrant workers often encounter opportunities to form new marital bonds. Moreover, villagers perceive labor migration as influenced by prevailing living standards, overlooking the potential negative consequences, such as familial challenges related to the behavior of children and adolescents. Notably, the populace remains unaware of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) pertaining to migration established by the governments of Thailand and Laos. Consequently, despite the potential for migration to transmit generational behaviors to younger cohorts who may migrate at an early age and seek employment in accordance with host country regulations, no mechanisms are in place to address these ramifications.

Family and Community relationships

The village leader and the Buddhist monk shared their perspectives, stating that during the last one to two decades, several issues had changed the community. These encompass the circumstance wherein abandoned children are nurtured by their grandparents until they attain working age and pursue employment opportunities elsewhere; the escalating estrangement among community members, with numerous individuals only returning

for festival holidays; and the persistent challenge of maintaining communal solidarity. These two major issues were discovered. First, women migrated as a result of a patriarchal system that prevented gender equality. Potentially powerful women made the decision to relocate to Thailand in hopes of finding better opportunities. Interestingly, when the female refugees got married to Thai males, they received insults. Second, the decline of family institutions, notwithstanding their capacity to transfer money to their families back home. Grandparents without welfare coverage were left to care for their grandchildren to encourage social aspects of migration as well as the welfare of the elderly. Without sufficient welfare coverage to handle the societal consequences of migration and the welfare of the elderly, children are left in the care of their grandparents. Children also must deal with their parents' separation, as divorce is becoming more common. Teachers also point out that the absence of social services provided by the government, notably child development centers, exacerbates the negative effects of parental divorce on children's development.

The findings in Ban Sandin shed light on the deficiencies in SPS and the challenges associated with government policy implementation. The SPS framework aims to delineate the roles of both the public sector and the community in social protection endeavors. Specifically, it encompasses various forms of informal social protection, which are prevalent in developing countries, including Lao PDR.

Firstly, addressing gender discrimination is imperative in the design of social protection policies. As highlighted by Cámbara (2022), women in Lao PDR often face violence, harassment, discrimination, and stigmatization, which significantly influence their decisions to stay or migrate. Women constitute a particularly vulnerable group in Lao society. Hence, promoting gender equality through initiatives such as enhancing educational opportunities for girls, fostering skills development, and creating employment opportunities for women is paramount. Furthermore, the government should extend support to mechanisms such as the Lao Women's Union, which empowers women in rural villages, ensur-

ing their active engagement and protection of their rights while preserving their autonomy from central government oversight.

Secondly, the exploration of co-identity, a topic of interest within cultural studies and anthropology, remains relatively scarce in scholarly literature. This scarcity can be attributed to specific linguistic and cultural elements shared with Thai culture, which exert influence on individual behaviors. A notable finding from the study indicates that most male workers returning from overseas destinations seldom possess savings. Despite their formal training, such as in furniture assembly and repair, the government's lack of support for job creation through employment programs is apparent. Therefore, initiatives aimed at job creation would be advantageous for wage employment, while low-interest loans could prove beneficial for those in self-employment. Job creation initiatives are particularly crucial for individuals engaged in the agricultural sector, especially those originating from poor families who lack the means to migrate.

Thirdly, regarding disaster management, the annual occurrence of flooding in the village has endowed residents with significant experience and knowledge in coping with such events. They have developed informal mechanisms for dealing with these challenges, often in collaboration with community-based organizations and NGOs. Despite this local expertise, the government's ability effectively to manage such shocks remains limited, as evidenced by shortcomings in the National Social Protection Strategy and the direction of technical cooperation provided by entities such as the World Bank (Social Protection and Sustainable Livelihoods, 2015; Khan & Marzi, 2019a; Department of Planning and Cooperation, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, 2020). Meanwhile, neighboring communities perceive this recurring issue as an inevitable facet of everyday life, managing it autonomously on an annual basis. Nevertheless, despite being recognized as a national priority by the Lao PDR government and international organizations, the practical response to these risks often relies heavily on the informal coping mechanisms of villagers. Furthermore, the absence of a warning system and the lack

of government assistance during crises exacerbate the challenges faced by the community. While organizations like the Lao Red Cross play a significant role, their capacity effectively to manage these risks is often limited. Consequently, it is evident that gaps exist in social protection mechanisms during times of crisis, which include additional risks such as epidemics and climate change.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic highlights significant gaps in Lao PDR's SPS. The absence of risk management measures during shocks and emergencies disproportionately impacts informal economy workers. A vital aspect of social protection in such situations is universal access to medical care, ensuring inclusivity across all sectors of society. However, the emergency response of the SPS during the COVID-19 pandemic faced several challenges, particularly regarding the instability of coverage for informal sector workers, who constitute much of the labor force. This situation contradicts the principles of sustainable development and "leaving no one behind," as advocated by the Lao PDR government (United Nations in Lao PDR, 2020). Despite existing social protection strategies, practical frameworks at both policy and implementation levels are lacking. There is also a notable lack of coordination among implementing agencies, particularly evident during times of crisis. Hence, Lao PDR has endeavored to drive social protection coverage in alignment with the SDGs, with initiatives including the establishment of semi-autonomous agencies for national healthcare, sustainable budget allocation, and the extension of coverage to the formal economy. However, these efforts stand in stark contrast to the practical challenges faced within local communities (United Nations in Lao PDR, 2023).

Recommendations for Advancing Social Protection in Lao PDR

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the SPS for families left behind cannot solely rely on familial and communal support, as this may lead to fragmented social welfare measures, especially in the context of non-democratic regimes prevalent in

implementation, largely due to the community's self-reliance in disaster management, which may not align with the government's priorities.

Secondly, social protection initiatives must address the challenges associated with labor migration, which often leaves behind vulnerable populations, such as children and the elderly. Facilitating migration by streamlining the processes and reducing associated costs is crucial for both the country of origin and the destination. Furthermore, formal systems for financial remittances, including international cash transfers, should be established to safeguard individuals from fraudulent practices.

Thirdly, there exist significant gaps in social protection that fail to address pressing social issues. These include the stigmatization of women, perpetuating gender inequality despite being acknowledged in National Social Protection Strategies since 2020, and the lack of concrete implementation in national disaster management, relying instead on informal coping mechanisms. To address these shortcomings, it is imperative that SPSs be tailored to the specific needs of communities to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Fourthly, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare-related social protection measures need to be adapted for greater flexibility. The absence of universal healthcare and the lack of medical facilities in some villages highlight the inadequacies of the current system. While efforts to develop the health insurance system are underway, limitations remain, such as focusing solely on the vulnerable while pandemic risks affect all. Therefore, measures such as universal health prevention coverage, the provision of low-cost meals, and co-payments for essential commodities should be considered.

Finally, ASEAN countries should prioritize social protection for migrant workers and their families left behind as part of the regional agenda. This could involve commemorating the Decade of ASEAN Migrant Workers and establishing clear and concrete action plans at various levels. Collaborative efforts should include preparing social protection schemes for migrant workers and their

families in the country of origin, establishing migrant worker databases, and creating social maps to identify vulnerable families and determine their eligibility for welfare assistance.

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French Appeasement Policy Toward Siam (1937-1939)

Alexandre Barthe[1]

Abstract—: This article deals with the issue of the preparation of French Indochina for the possibility of an armed conflict with Thailand in the late 1930s. It examines the reasons that led the colony to find itself so ill-prepared for the eventuality of war. In this perspective, the article shows that, although aware of its pro-Japanese evolution and the territorial claims of Siam, the French authorities hastened to undertake nothing, an attitude which was in line with the Munich policy that marked French policy in the last month before the outbreak of war in Europe. The article also shows that reasons related to the maintenance of the social status quo in Indochina influenced the policy of equipment – and defence – of the colony.

Keywords : France, Indochina, Siam, Thailand, Japan, Appeasement

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Introduction

The issue of the policy of appeasement followed by Great Britain and France towards Germany during the period between the two World Wars has been the subject of numerous studies. For the most part, they focused on the situation in Europe, less often in other regions of the world such as Africa or Asia. In any case, the implementation of the policy of appeasement was dictated primarily by the European context and, before studying France's policy of appeasement toward Siam, it might be of some interest to recall the European causes of this policy.

Studies tend to explain that the appeasement policy was essentially motivated by the trauma of the First World War, the inability to grasp the particularity of Nazism, the demographic and military weakness of France, the disagreement between London and Paris, and the impossibility of trusting Stalin. According to several authors, like Jeffrey Record, the policy of appeasement followed by Great Britain and France stemmed above all from the memory left by the First World War. Record considers that the British and French leaders would have been concerned about public opinion within their respective countries and determined not to see the horrors of the Great War repeated. Added to this was the fact that the British and French leaders would have been unable to understand the specificity of the Nazi threat. Most importantly, Great Britain and France would have been militarily incapable of undertaking anything against Germany, especially since London and Paris had refused to revive the "rear alliance" with the USSR (Record 2011, 223-237). Dealing with this last point, historian Robert Young underlined that, on the Franco-British side, there was "distrust" for ideological reasons and because of "some ugly realities" of the Soviet domestic policy. Besides this, the author emphasized the inability of the British and French governments to understand each other's security requirements, a situation that favored the pursuit of a policy of appeasement towards Berlin. Young, however, noted a change in attitude on the French side following the invasion of what remained of Czechoslovakia in 1939: Daladier, the head of government, would have become "sick of

appeasement in any language" and rearmament continued "at full speed" (Young 2011, 238-261). According to historian Georges-Henri Soutou, the causes of the policy of appeasement carried out by the French governments, at the time of the "Anschluss" and of Munich, were a "growing fear of communism", France's demographic and military weakness compared to Germany, as well as the absence of British and American support. The author also mentions, after Munich, the implementation by the government of Edouard Daladier of a policy of economic recovery and increasing arms production. According to Soutou, in the months following Munich, France followed a policy of preparation for war, of deterrence and, at the same time, of concessions. As for the question of the rear alliance, the historian reports that France started military discussions again with the USSR in 1939 but this attempt would not have succeeded due to the difficulties that Moscow would have created (Soutou 2007, 338-344). In reality, as historian Michael Carley has shown, the efforts at economic rapprochement led by the Soviets towards France throughout the interwar period constantly encountered refusals from the Bank of France and the Ministry of Finance. Anti-communism prevented the development of normal Franco-Soviet relations and, at the same time, contributed to the policy of appeasement to the point of threatening French security (Carley 1992, 23-57).

In order to study the case of the French policy of appeasement toward Siam, the article takes up the point of view of historian Arno Mayer who underlined the need, when it comes to studying the reasons which push country leaders to take the decision to enter war, to look at both the state of international relations in the given period and the domestic situation of the countries concerned. As Mayer pointed out, the decision-making process that leads to war is intrinsically linked to the domestic conditions of a given country. Decision-makers are led to calculate how war can be a means to "establish, maintain, advance, or undermine" the positions of elites inside and outside their countries (Mayer 1969, 291-303). The case presented in the article is that of elites undermining their own territorial security, by going to war without the will to really prepare for it, in order better to preserve

the social order.

It is by bringing together France's foreign policy in East Asia and Indochinese domestic policy that this article proposes to study the policy of appeasement followed by Paris with regard to Siam. This article intends to show what were the characteristics of French appeasement towards Siam and to suggest how the social situation of Indochina favored or motivated French diplomacy and defense policy in South-East Asia. The issue of the French appeasement policy toward Siam is all the more important that the fall of France in 1940 was followed in South-East Asia by the Franco-Thai war (1940-41). The conflict won by Thailand led to the loss, for Indochina, of several western territories, among them: Xaiyaburi, Siam Reap and Battambang.

The study of these issues is based on documents from the archives of the French ministry of Foreign Affairs. These documents include dispatches and telegrams from the minister of France in Siam sent to the minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris and to the governor general of Indochina in Hanoi, notes produced by the military attaché of the legation in Siam, as well as notes and letters produced by officials of the ministry of Foreign Affairs or by the governor general of Indochina (who depended on the ministry of the Colonies). Based on this material, the article addresses, in the first part, the question of the political evolution of Siam between 1937 and 1939 and the perception that the French authorities had of it. The second part concerns the defence policy pursued by Paris in the event of a conflict with Siam. In the last part, the article deals with the issue of the industrialisation of the French colony and the obstacles such a project faced.

1. French Perception of Siam: Rerations with Japan and Irredentism

The Sino-Japanese War had direct consequences on the political situation of Siam. As Japan descended into a war of aggression against China, Chinese nationalists and communists in Siam organised themselves in support of their country of origin.

They were then the object of repression on the part of the Thai authorities, a policy which constituted the most obvious evidence of the rapprochement between Bangkok and Tokyo carried out during this decade. Parallel to this, while Siam refused to renew diplomatic relations with China, the Thai government developed against French Indochina an irredentist campaign directed in particular towards Laos and Cambodia. The general policy pursued by Siam in the 1930s, particularly in the second half of the decade, is perceived differently according to the authors. As Benjamin Batson showed, there are two main approaches, one which argues that Siam had unwillingly moved closer to Japan, due to the lack of support from Britain and the United States, another which reports a more voluntary rapprochement between Siam and Japan on the part of Bangkok (Batson and Hajime 1990, 1-4). It is not the point in this part to discuss which of the approaches is the closest to the reality. The aim is to describe the implementation of a policy which was de facto pro-Japanese and that it was perceived as such by the French authorities.

As Charnvit Kasetsiri wrote, during the 1930s the Thai governments "were anxious to keep on good terms with the Japanese since it was obvious that they were a major contender for dominance in East Asia". He added that, "[a]ccordingly, secret societies and political organisations formed among the local Chinese, strongly anti-Japanese in outlook, became a major concern of the Siamese government". The outbreak of war in 1937 resulted in an intensification of anti-Japanese activities (Kasetsiri 2015, 289-290).

With the start of the war, the Guomindang launched a call for union addressed "to the main Chinese traders" in Siam. The local branch of the party, aided by the secret societies and "the Chinese Provincial Political Associations established here and acting under the directives of their respective metropolitan centres", issued instructions for the implementation of a boycott campaign against Japanese products. Those who did not respect the boycott order were "subject to reprisals and death threats".[2]

2 FMFAA(C)/44 CPCOM 72. The French Minister in Siam, Paul Lépissier, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris,

The coercive measures against the offenders resulted in the execution of sixty-one people (Baker and Phongpaichit 2014, 128). The boycott was "extremely effective" and the value of Japan's trade with Siam fell from 6,300,000 yen in September 1937 to 2,700,000 in April 1938 (Skinner 1962, 244). In 1938, anti-Japanese activities covered, in addition to propaganda, supported "if necessary, by threat", "voluntary contributions, exceptional levies on commercial profits", and "subscriptions to war loans". A "Special Committee" organized the recruitment and dispatch of "several convoys of young men and young women" to China. Liaison was made with anti-Japanese associations outside Siam. The "Local Federation" thus participated in the "National Salvation Congress" organized in October in Singapore.[3] According to the minister of France in Siam, Paul Lépissier, the "remarkable activity of all these anti-Japanese organisations could have not, however, developed in Bangkok without the support of the Siamese Communist Party". By 1938, the Communists formed a key element of the 'Anti-Japanese National Salvation Federation'.[4]

3 FMFAA(C)/44CPCOM. 72. The French Minister in Siam, Paul Lépissier, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris, 7 Nov. 1938. "Les Chinois au Siam."

4 The Communists' anti-Japanese action had begun before the war. According to Lépissier, "[f]rom the first months of 1937 an 'Anti-Japanese National Rescue Association' [had been] created in Bangkok, placed under the control of the 'Anti-Imperialist League' and which was joined by the majority of the members of the 'Communist Youth Federation' and the 'Proletarian Art League'". The French minister added that "[t]his Association had soon launched, in the form of leaflets, an appeal to the Chinese emigrants to induce all the elements of the [Guomindang] in Siam to adhere to a common anti-imperialist front". A few months later, with the start of the Sino-Japanese conflict, the Central Committee of the Siamese Communist Party transformed "all its subsidiary organisations into Anti-Japanese Associations in order to assimilate them to the groups of the same name created here by the [Guomindang]". In October 1937 a split took place within the Guomindang which saw the creation of the Youth Party. This split was the result of the left wing of the Guomindang, mostly composed of "young people", "small businessmen" and "small employees", who blamed the right wing of the party, composed of "big businessmen obvi-

The boycott directed against the Japanese products made the Thai government, fearful of being drawn into the Sino-Japanese war as an enemy of Japan, increase the repression of secret societies, businessmen and political activists involved in the implementation of the boycott and fundraising (Baker and Phongpaichit 2014, 129). Even before Phibun Songkhram took over as prime minister, in December 1938, a French report dealing with the suppression of the Communist activities in Siam would describe the attitude of the Thai government as "clearly hostile to the Chinese minority".[5]

The anti-Chinese policy carried out by the Thai government consisted of "a considerable number of laws attempting to force the Chinese out of business, by discrimination against them in such traditional areas of Chinese business as rice-milling, salt production, fishing, and the retail trade" and "[m]any professions were reserved for Siamese citizens". Chinese were also "prohibited to buy land and reside in areas which the government regarded as strategic". Alongside these measures, "Chinese schools and newspapers were put under restriction and many of them were finally closed down" (Kasetsiri 2015, 290). Against fundraising, the government relied on a law, enacted in 1937, which banned

ously concerned to manage the future of their interests in Siam", to "not react sufficiently against the attitude of the Siamese Government deemed too favorable to the Japanese cause". The Communist Party managed to place two of its agents in the new party's management committee. The Communist Party leaders then used their influence on the Youth Party to create the "Central Executive Committee" of the "Anti-Japanese National Salvation Associations". Then, "[a]s a precaution, and in order not to upset the moderate elements of the [Guomindang], reconciled with the 'Youth Party' on the intervention of a delegate specially come from [Hankou], the vast association of communist inspiration came into being as the 'Anti-Japanese National Salvation Federation'". See: FMFAA(C)/44 CPCOM 72. The French Minister in Siam, Paul Lépissier, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris, 7 Nov. 1938. "Les Chinois au Siam."

5 FMFAA(C)/44CPCOM. 72. Document addressed to the Director of Political Affairs and General Security in Hanoi, 28 Feb. 1938. "Les récentes répressions communistes à Bangkok."

those for military purposes.[6] The occurrence of police actions directed against the Chinese increased. On September 10, 1938, the Thai government "carried out a large police raid on the opium dens and the meeting places of several Associations and Secret Societies". Before the end of the year, this operation was repeated several times and had resulted in the expulsion of about 5,000 Chinese and deprived "a number of their Associations of their most influential members". "The close and constant surveillance which is currently exercised on all the suspects", wrote Lépissier, "in the end, considerably hinders the activity of the militants and that of the Societies which are still intact".[7] Arrests of Chinese political leaders and activists increased in early January 1939. While the Chinese community was preparing for the lunar new year celebrations, the police carried out a series of operations against the headquarters of illicit Chinese organisations. The Chinese nonetheless continued to send funds to China to support the war effort, but with less effectiveness due to repression. The culmination of the "containment" policy undertaken against the Chinese was reached in the third week of July 1939 with a series of police operations which continued until August. Searches took place in schools, printing houses, press offices and association headquarters. Several hundred arrests took place (Skinner 1962, 265-267).

On November 23, 1939, Yi Guangyan[8] (蟻光炎), the director of the Chamber of Commerce and treasurer of the Teochio Association of Bangkok was assassinated shortly after his return

6 The funds raised in Siam, amounting to $ 600,000, were much lower than in Malaysia (6,000,000), the Philippines (3,600,000) or the Dutch East Indies (1,200,000). By mid-1938, several Chinese leaders had been jailed for participating in fundraising for China (Skinner 1962, 244).

7 FMFAA(C)/44CPCPOM. 72. The French Minister in Siam, Paul Lépissier, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris, 7 Nov. 1938. "Les Chinois au Siam."

8 Also spelled Yi Kueng-yen, Hia Kwang Iam, and Hia Kuang Iam according to the Thai transcription system: เหียกวงเอียม) or Iam Suri (เอียมสุรีย์).

from China, where he had been congratulated by Chiang Kai-shek for his action. As Leader of the left wing of the Guomindang in Thailand, he had an important role in anti-Japanese activities, especially in sending volunteers to China. According to French intelligence, he had been "killed with a revolver (of Japanese manufacture) by a professional assassin hired by the [Formosan "Wang Ching Chiu"], a known agent of the Japanese". The latter worked for the Nippon-Siam Trade Bureau. Evidence of their complacency, at least, toward the Japanese, the Thai authorities seem to have been warned of the preparations for the crime but "were unable to prevent it". "In the trial of the assassin, they did not dare to push hard the investigation either for fear of discovering the real instigators of this crime".[9]

Besides these measures, known by the French, that showed the pro-Japanese orientation of the Thai government, the latter also developed an irredentist campaign directed against its direct neighbours.

Increasingly insistent as international tensions were escalating, the campaign targeted border territories that Siam had to recognize to have been under the control of England and France in the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1935-1936 the Ministry of Defence published a series of maps which indicated the lost territories from the end of the 18th century to 1909 and the government circulated irredentist maps in schools. The campaign also extended to the press (Baker and Phongpaichit 2014, 130-131). The director of the Department of Fine Arts, Wichit Wathakan, the most prominent intellectual of the new regime, known for his anti-Chinese discourse, participated through his plays in this campaign for a "greater Thailand". In the one entitled Ratchamanu, from 1937, he made one of his characters say "that the Khmer were 'Thais like us' but had somehow become separated; 'All of us on the Golden Peninsula are the same. . . [but] the Siamese Thais are the elder brothers'" (Baker and Phongpaichit 2014, 127-128). Likewise, Chris Baker and Phasuk Phongpaichit

9 FMFAA(N)/Bangkok 66PO.1.69. "Propagande et préparatifs japonais au Siam en 1937-1941. A4". Bangkok, 29 Apr. 1940.

reported Wichit's reaction to the sight of a map presented to him by the École Française d'Extrême-Orient which mentioned all of the Thai-speaking populations in Southeast Asia. Wichit exclaimed: "If we could recover the lost territories, we would be a great power… Before long we could be a country of about 9 million square kilometers with a population of not less than 40 million" (Baker and Phongpaichit 2014, 131). This attitude hardly offended either the Indochinese authorities or the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, which made Wichit Wathakan an honorary member of this institution on the occasion of his visit to Indochina in April 1939.[10]

The French authorities in Indochina and the representatives of France in Siam had noticed anti-Chinese and anti-French tendencies well before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese conflict in 1937.

On 3 October 1936, the French minister in Siam, Marcel Ray, reported that "Siamese newspapers almost daily published articles which recalled the French occupation of 1893 and the loss of the Cambodian provinces". The Campaign was developing while the Assembly had voted a credit of 30 million baht over five years for a program of new roads which "had a mainly strategic character, in the direction, or as ring road, of our Indochina border".[11] At the beginning of June 1937, the department of Asia of the Quai d'Orsay, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote a note to the minister stating that the Ministry of Colonies and the government of Indochina had "constantly remained awake as to the possible consequences of the disposition, if not aggressive at least ostentatious, shown by Siam". According to the department, although

10 FMFAA(C)/38 CPCOM 36. Telegram from Lépissier to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, April 13, 1939. No. 62; Minister of France in Siam to Governor General of Indochina, Bangkok, 20 May 1939. « A.s. voyage de Luang Vichitr en Indochine. »

11 FMFAA(C)/44 CPCOM 76. The Minister of France in Siam, Marcel Ray, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris, Bangkok, 3 Oct. 1936. "Nouveaux projets d'armements siamois."

there was no "precise threat" yet, and despite the fact that Siam only appeared "dangerous because of a possible conjunction with Japan," it was, however, not "forbidden to envisage right now the possible repercussions of [Thai leaders] state of mind in the event of a European conflict". The department also suggested asking the Ministry of the Colonies to "concretise in a theoretical presentation the protective measures" which could "seem appropriate to counter such a threat against our colony of Indochina".[12] As for the governor general of Indochina, Jules Brévié, it seemed to him, towards the middle of June, that the Thai leaders admitted "the imminence of a Franco-German conflict" which was to be "the beginning or the continuation of a general conflagration opposing on one side Germany, Italy and Japan, to France, England and Russia on the other side". In this hypothesis, it seemed to him "indisputable" that "Siam would be with Japan and that this eventuality [could] have consequences for Indochina such as to lead us to consider a profound modification of our military policy in this country".[13] According to the American ambassador Bullit, as the president of the Council, Léon Blum, mentioned to him the prospect of a Japanese attack on French Indo-China, he "also referred to the possibility that Siam might cooperate with Japan" (FRUS 1954, 636).[14] A year later, after several months of war in China, the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Georges Bonnet, writing to his colleague of the Colonies, considered that the "attitude adopted by Siam since the start of the Sino-Japanese conflict has not helped to alleviate these concerns" and that the "Siamese military effort deserv[ed] very serious attention". He added that according to the representative of France in Bangkok, while the Thai government did not "intend to change its attitude towards China", that is to say to serve as a Japanese military base against it,

12 FMFAA(C)/44 CPCOM 76. Note from the Deputy Director of Asia for the Minister, given to Secretary General Alexis Léger on 4 June 1937. « Situation politique au Siam. »

13 FMFAA(C)/44 CPCOM 82. The Governor General of Indochina, Jules Brévié, to the Minister of the Colonies, Dalat, 16 June 1937.

14 The ambassador in France (Bullitt) to the Secretary of State, "Paris, 23 Oct. 1937 – 1 p. m.

"the pressure from Japan remained […] constant and dangerous". According to the minister of Foreign Affairs, the government of Indochina should be "able to take in good time the protective measures that would be required by a possible modification of the policy of Siam under Japanese influence".[15]

The British and French knew what the situation was in their neighbouring country. However, as Bruce Reynolds wrote about the British, they "evidently lacked the will and power to stand up to the Japanese in Asia", illustrated by the attitude of London while facing the Japanese blockade of its concession in Tianjin. The advisor to the Thai Foreign Ministry, Prince Wan Waithayakon, warned the British minister in Bangkok, Josiah Crosby, that "because Britain 'seemed to lack the power and the will to safeguard her own interests in Eastern Asia', Thailand could not rely on British protection". He also "emphasized that while his government had no desire to take sides, a choice might have to be made if war came" (Reynolds 1994, 29-30).

2. French Defence Policy and Diplomacy Towards Siam

From 1937 to 1939, French authorities in Hanoi as well as the French legation in Siam stressed the fact that, in combination with the Japanese southward movement, Siam could become a serious threat to the security of Indochina. In February 1939, the danger became more precise with the landing of Japanese troops on the island of Hainan. Faced with this situation, the French government did not take any real measure to ensure the defence of Indochina in the event of a Japanese or a Thai offensive. The attitude of the minister of Foreign Affairs, Georges Bonnet, a supporter of the Munich Agreements, illustrates the policy of appeasement followed by France with regard to Siam until the outbreak of war in Europe.

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15 FMFAA(C)/44 CPCOM 76. The Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of the Colonies, 24 June 1938. "Attitude du Siam à l'égard du conflit en Extrême-Orient."

Concerning the defence of the western border of Indochina, the military balance of power between Siam and Indochina was, in 1939, in favour of the former. According to Roger Lévy, France had, at the end of the 1930s, less than 30,000 soldiers in Indochina, with 10,000 "Europeans", divided into 10 colonial infantry battalions, 4 foreign legion battalions, 7 artillery groups, tanks, machine-gun car and 2 engineering companies, and 17,000 "Asians," mainly Vietnamese, divided into 2 divisions and a brigade, i.e. one division in Tonkin, another for Cochinchina and Cambodia and a brigade for Annam. Lévy added that France also had a war air formation, but without specifying its composition. As for the maritime border, Indochina only had the point of support of Saigon – Cap-Saint-Jacques. In conclusion, Lévy felt that France should completely reconsider the problem of the defence of Indochina, its maritime and air defence in particular (1939, 112-115). Dealing with the Thai Air Force, a French military mission had been, in the beginning of 1939, struck by the "ease" and the "precision" the Thai pilots displayed during a demonstration while they were visiting military installations and troops in the Khorat area.[16] Regarding Siam, Lévy indicated that his army, "on a footing of peace," numbered 65,000 men, a force which could rise, in the event of mobilization, to 250,000 men. Siam would have had an aviation of 150 to 200 aircraft and a navy which had 4 submarines bought in Japan (Lévy 1939, 116). Pierre Renouvin, without providing details concerning the composition of the respective armies, gave similar figures to those of Roger Lévy. That is, a "garrison which did not [exceed] 30,000 men" for Indochina and 60,000 for Siam in peacetime (Renouvin 1946, 400-401). After the war finally broke out in Europe, Indochina succeeded in mobilising some 90,000 men. However, "[t]his mass [created] an illusion and [hide] badly the weakness of the troop supervision". According to Hesse d'Alzon, when, following the defeat of France in Europe, war broke out between the two banks of the Mekong,

16 FMFAA(C)/38 CPCOM 36. Colonel Pichon, military attaché to the French legation in Bangkok, to the ministers of National Defence and War, Navy and Air, 27 Apr. 1939. "Échange de visites militaires entre l'Indochine et le Siam et Voyage de l'Attaché Militaire au Laos siamois."

Siam was able to field 29 battalions, including 15 in reserve, as for Indochina, it could only field 22 battalions, including 4 in reserve (Isoart 1982, 78-94).

As an illustration of the appeasement policy followed toward Siam, an exchange of military missions took place between Siam and Indochina during the first months of 1939, with the objective, on the French side, of bringing the two countries closer together. However, the situation did not improve.

On 7 April 1939, the minister of France in Bangkok, Lépissier, reported to Paris the return to Siam of the Thai military mission which had gone to visit Indochina for almost a month. According to him, the mission had been "very impressed by what it [had] seen and by the delicate attentions with which it [had] been showered". The minister considered this trip "as a very brilliant success" for France and that it confirmed "a withdrawal of the centrals [i.e. Germany and Italy] and the Japanese in Siam".[17] However, on 22 March 1939, the legation had noticed that the newspaper "Sara Siam" had announced an "increase of military forces" in the North-Eastern provinces of Siam. The news had been officially denied the next day but, on 21 April, the French minister reported a "significant reinforcement" of troops in the Udon region, as already mentioned, and the "abnormal circulation of Japanese emissaries" in the North-East of Siam which, according to Lépissier, justified "a certain caution".[18] On 12 May 1939, the French military attaché mentioned to the head of the legation the military preparations that were taking place in Indochina, which he had learned about in the Thai press. According to him, the measures taken in Indochina were justified because the "Japanese influence" in Siam remained "formidable" and the French forces in western Indochina were much weaker than the Thai forces standing opposite to them. The military attaché added that "Siam would be wrong to blame us for our garrisons

17 FMFAA(C)/38 CPCOM 36. Telegram from Lépissier, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, 7 Apr. 1939.

18 FMFAA(C)/38 CPCOM 36. Telegram from Lépissier to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, 21 Apr. 1939.

in Laos and Cambodia, while in its [corresponding] border areas, Khorat and Prachinburi, it maintains a much larger force than ours […]".[19] He estimated the difference in forces on both sides of the border at four to one in favour of Siam. A difference that was "all the more accentuated by the fact that we only [had] a battery of artillery, no aviation, no engineering, no transmissions".[20] On 19 May 1939, the military attaché reported the sending of antiaircraft material to the Udon garrison.[21]

During the following weeks, the French minister in Bangkok repeatedly alerted his superiors to the increase in Japanese activities in Siam. The minister of Foreign Affairs' reaction remained in the tradition of the appeasement policy. He asked Lépissier if a visit by the governor general of Indochina, Brévié, to Bangkok "would not usefully affirm our presence today". The minister of Foreign Affairs rejected the idea of an ultimatum, "which the present situation could not in any case entail" and suggested a concerted approach by the French and British ministers to

19 Regarding the Siamese forces he gave the following figures: 7 infantry battalions, 4 artillery groups, 3 battalions and 1 cavalry detachment, 1 engineering battalion, 2 companies of transmissions, 2 aviation squadrons. To these was added, "in the immediate vicinity of the border": 1 infantry battalion in Udon, 1 detachment, "probably 1 squadron," of cavalry in Roi-Et, 1 cavalry battalion in Ubon, and 1 cavalry battalion in Chantabun. Finally, another infantry battalion was planned in Nakhon Phanom. Regarding the French forces in Cambodia and Laos, the military attaché reported: 3 battalions and a half of infantry, 1 artillery battery including 2 companies in Tran Ninh, "maybe" 1 company in Phalane, 1 company in Pakse, "maybe" a company in Stung-Treng, 1 company in Sisophon, 1 company in Battambang, 1 battalion, 3 companies and 1 battery in Phnom Penh.

20 FMFAA(C)/38 CPCOM 36. Colonel Pichon, military attaché, to the Minister of France in Siam, 12 May 1939. "Au sujet de l'installation de nouvelles garnisons françaises à proximité de la frontière franco-siamoise."

21 FMFAA(C)/38 CPCOM 36. Colonel Pichon, military attaché, to the general commanding the Indochina's armies in Hanoi, 16 May 1939. "A. s. de la garnison d'Udon."

the Thai government to "draw [its] attention [...] on Japanese activities".[22] In his response, Lépissier indicated that he had "not found in political circles favourable echoes of Mr. Brévié's visit to Bangkok". He added that the leaders said they "wanted to avoid demonstrations likely to aggravate Japanese reactions", pointing out that "[d]espite a very marked improvement, Siam's relations with Indochina [remained] rather precarious and it would be imprudent to insist". As for the concerted approach, he considered that it could "produce an effect, very limited however, because of the massive loss of English prestige following the isolation of Hong Kong and the blockade of [Tianjin]".[23]

From the end of July to the end of August 1939, the minister of Foreign Affairs, Georges Bonnet, endeavoured to minimize the reports he received from Bangkok and proposed no real action with regard to Siam.

Faced with the political and military situation in Siam, and the "accentuated nature of Japanese propaganda", the French minister in Siam suggested to the minister of Foreign Affairs five possible reactions:

"1 ° - The study of the means by which the Franco-British forces could assist the Siamese Government in the event of a coup d'état or a Japanese landing;

"2 ° - The preparation of the text of a Franco-British ultimatum intended possibly to counterbalance the effects of a Japanese ultimatum.

"3 ° - The strengthening of our aid works.

"4 ° - Completion of the Bangkok [Phnom Penh] rail link by building the [Aranyaprathet – Monkol Borey] section,

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22 FMFAA(C)/38 CPCOM 36. Telegram from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signed by Alexis Léger, to the Minister of France in Bangkok, Paris, 26 June 1939. "Propagande japonaise au Siam."

23 FMFAA(C)/38 CPCOM 36. Telegram from Lépissier to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, 13 July 1939.

"5 ° - The appointment of a commercial agent in Siam."[24]

In keeping with the appeasement policy, the minister only gave his approval to the third and fourth points. Relying on the point of view of English diplomacy, he considered that the only way to "maintain Siam in benevolent neutrality", even though there was nothing "benevolent" in Siam's "neutrality" in view of the constant irredentist campaign which the kingdom was waging, was to "give the impression that France and England [constituted] for its land borders a more serious danger than Japan for its maritime border and [were] able to bar the gulf to Japanese naval forces". According to the minister, therefore, it was enough to "give the impression". France and England were to engage into a "deep action to bring Siamese opinion to a better estimate of Franco-British forces."[25] The minister did not specify how.

On 31 July 1939, the president of the Council, minister of Defence and War, asked the ministry of Foreign Affairs for its "opinion on the value" of the "various information" which he had received from the minister for the Colonies and which gave evidence of a "renewal" of Japanese activity in Siam and the conclusion of a secret agreement between this country and Japan.[26] In its response to 9 August on the subject of the activity of Japanese agents in Siam and the supposed negotiation of an agreement between Tokyo and Bangkok, the minister of Foreign Affairs affirmed, in the light of the reports of the minister and the military attaché in Bangkok, that he found "no confirmation". The minister of Foreign Affairs affirmed to have received from the French representative in Bangkok "various indications on the instability of the governmental situation of Thailand, the Japanese propaganda in opposition circles and the danger, in the event of a new coup d'état, to see pro-Japanese elements come to

24 FMFAA(C)/44 CPCOM 79. Note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 July 1939, "situation au Siam."

25 Ibid.

26 FMFAA(C)/44 CPCOM 79. The President of the Council, Minister of the National Defence and War, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 31 July 1939. "Accord Nippo-Siamois."

power". But he did not mention for a moment the activities of the military missions mentioned in Lépissier's reports since the end of June 1939.[27]

On 9 August, the colonial chief of staff, general Bührer, addressed the minister of Foreign Affairs on the basis of information coming to him from Siam which he felt should "attract very serious attention". It appeared to Bührer that "more and more the Siamese Government not only did not [oppose] Japanese pressure but rather [seemed] to favour it". The military ended his message by asking the minister of Foreign Affairs what reaction he envisaged in the face of this situation.[28] The ministry of Foreign Affairs replied on 24 August and said he was also aware of some of the information that Bührer had passed on to him. He added that he had received from Lépissier on 20 August, "in addition to the announcement of movements of Japanese officers [...], the news of a Japanese offer of a trade agreement, involving the exchange of Siamese raw materials for Japanese manufactured products". The ministry hid behind the attitude of the British Foreign Office "less worried than we are". He considered that they should probably not "take as equally valid all the information which, from various sources reaches our [s]ervices". The minister believed that "the favour [then] reserved for Japanese activities" was due to the fact that Thailand feared Japan more than France and England. He added that "no properly diplomatic approach" could "prevail against an assessment of this nature". According to the minister, representations to Thailand could only demonstrate the nervousness of France and England.

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27 FMFAA(C)/44 CPCOM 79. Minister of Foreign Affairs to President of Council, 9 Aug. 1939, "conclusion supposée d'un accord entre le Japon et la Thaïlande."

28 FMFAA(C)/44 CPCOM 79. General Bührer, Colonial Chief of Staff, for the Minister of the Colonies, to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 9 Aug. 1939.

The efforts of the French and English legations had therefore to "tend to convince Siam of the effectiveness of the means" these two countries were in possession.[29]

Roger Lévy wrote in 1939 that: "The new situation created by the existence in Siam of a modern army commanded by leaders ill-kept in check by the civil power has been considered with attention by the French government and its representative in Indochina". With optimism, he added: "Appropriate measures such as reinforcing the troops stationed in Cambodia have been taken". Even if it is true that the government had "considered with attention" the evolution of the military situation in Siam, it is however doubtful that "appropriate measures" had been taken (Lévy 1939, 117). This is what Philippe Grandjean observed, who blamed it exclusively on the Ministry of the Colonies: "Before 1939, Georges Mandel, minister of the Colonies and his director of the colonial armies, general Bührer, did not reinforce this device." Grandjean also mentioned the policy aimed at making Indochina autonomous for the production of warplanes: "They had concentrated their financial effort on the creation of a Breguet aviation factory in Tong, for an amount of 600 million francs of 1938. As the program was 'frozen' by events, the expense was wasted" (Grandjean 2004, 11).

The construction program of an aircraft factory had been announced in the press at the end of February 1939.[30] Several months later, nothing had been done. In a message addressed to the minister of Foreign Affairs, Georges Bonnet, on 27 June 1938, Georges Mandel indicated that he had increased the number of Indochinese troops by 20,000 men, – a number that was still not

29 FMFAA(C)/44 CPCOM 79. The Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of the Colonies, 24 Aug. 1939.

30 "Le Temps", 28 Feb. 1939, p. 8.

enough to match the number of the Siamese troops, – and made a loan of 400 million to provide for the defence of the colony. He also reported to have informed the Ministry of Air of the superiority of the Siamese aviation: "We have a derisory number of planes in Indochina, while, from information from our Military Attaché, it appears that Siam has 200 devices, including a hundred ultra-modern". But the ministry of Air reportedly "simply replied that the matter was under consideration." Mandel added: "It would be unacceptable if, now that we have the financial means, one could not, for lack of material, ensure the defence of Indochina".[31] His intervention with the minister of Foreign Affairs was not followed up. On 29 June, the minister of the Colonies made a report to the president of the Republic in which he mentioned that the decision had been made to build rapidly a factory capable of producing aircraft and added that every step has been taken to establish a war industry in Indochina,[32] but, on 17 July, after receiving information from Indochina indicating suspect movements of troops on the border with Siam, Mandel had to insist again to his colleague of the Foreign Affairs the fact that, facing Siam, Indochina had only about fifty planes "which, for the most part, date back to a dozen years". Once again Mandel asked Bonnet "to join [his] pleas […] to put an end to such a serious disproportion of forces".[33] When on 16 July 1939 Georges Mandel proposed to general Catroux to take the head of the general government of Indochina, he underlined that, in view of the threatening nature of the international situation, the building of the defences of the colony was to be "vigorously accelerated". He added: "In particular, we must get off the ground and produce as soon as possible an aircraft manufacturing plant which I have ordered to

31 FMFAA(C)/38 CPCOM 34. The Minister of the Colonies, Georges Mandel, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 27 June 1938. "Effort militaire du Siam."

32 "Le Journal Officiel de la République française", 3 July 1939. "Le ministère des Colonies. Rapport au Président de la république française", pp. 8500-1.

33 FMFAA(C)/38 CPCOM 34. The Minister of the Colonies, Georges Mandel, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 17 July 1938.

be created" (Catroux 1959, 5-6). This situation did not prevent the unofficial newspaper "Le Temps", voice of the Quai d'Orsay, from showing, on 11 August 1939, its satisfaction with the state of the defence of Indochina and the air forces of the empire: "the air force has also been greatly increased everywhere, and equipped – or in the process of being equipped – with powerful and modern devices".[34] Eventually, as indicated by Hesse d'Alzon, construction work began, only to be abandoned thereafter (Isoart 1982, 83).

3. The Refusal to Industrialise Indochina

As underlined in the report of the minister of the Colonies to the president of the Republic dated 29 June 1939, the military defence of Indochina, which faced the threat of a confrontation with both Japan and Siam, imposed a certain degree of autonomy for the colony in terms of production of war material. This question was related to the state of the industrial infrastructure of the territory and, from the perspective of the French authorities, raised the issue of the social status quo in Indochina insofar as it implied a numerical increase in the working-class population. In addition to the attitude of the minister of Foreign Affairs, it is worth mentioning as a factor explaining the policy of appeasement pursued vis-à-vis Siam, which was a corollary to that followed toward Germany and Japan, the fears of the colonisers with regard to the question of industrialisation.

On the eve of the Second World War, modern Indochinese industrial activity, entirely in the hands of French capital favoured by the customs policy of the metropolis, was concentrated in the mining and processing industries. In 1937, the Indochinese mines employed 271 Europeans, "managers, engineers and other technical agents", and 49,200 Asian workers. More than half, 25,000, were employed by the Société des Charbonnages du Tonkin. The vast majority, 90%, of the mine workforce was Vietnamese from the Tonkin delta or North Annam (Robequain 1939, 297-298).

34 "Le Temps", 11 Aug. 1939, "Questions militaires. L'empire Français. II. – La défense impériale".

According to the book intitled Aux heures tragiques de l'empire (In the tragic hours of the Empire), the chief of the colonial armies, general Bührer, was aware of the poor organisation of the defence in the colonies. He anticipated that in the event of a break of the maritime communications with France, Indochina would soon be without means to support a war against a modern foreign military power. The mineral wealth of Indochina would have allowed the colony to develop a war industry. According to Bührer the issue of the industrial development of Indochina was "particularly serious". He considered that the situation "demanded an entirely new industrial policy in an agricultural country where French capital had sought its interests in the sole development of plantations of rubber, rice, tea, etc." (Général X 1947, 31)

Throughout the 1930s, the issue of the industrialisation of Indochina had been, according to Charles Robequain, "a very fashionable problem" (1939, 317). Following the global economic crisis, was a debate on the evolution to be given to economic policy in Indochina.

On the one hand, there were supporters of the status quo and on the other, supporters of an industrialisation project. Among them were senior civil servants such as Henri Brenier, director of the Bulletin économique de l'Indochine, Louis Mérat, director of economic affairs at the French overseas ministry in 1936, Blanchard de la Brosse, former governor of Cochinchina, Alexandre Varenne, former governor general of Indochina, and Indochinese businessmen such as Paul Bernard, polytechnician and administrator of the Société financière et coloniale (SFFC) and Edmond Giscard d'Estaing, president of the SFFC in 1937. For the supporters of industrialisation, the objective was to make Indochina a second Japan, a financial and industrial relay of French capitalism in the Far East, a "platform" of exports to Asia, China's equipment supplier (according to Varenne). They intended to expand the domestic market and fight against the impoverishment of the Vietnamese peasantry. These perspectives were not retained by the "metropolitan political circles" (Brocheux and Hémery 1994, 311-313).

The industrialisation of Indochina did not occur for two main reasons: the first based on economic consideration, the second on social fear.

Concerning the first reason, Brocheux and Hémery underlined that, from the perspective of those opposed to the industrialisation of Indochina, the process "would have the consequence of adding to the destabilising effects of the agrarian crisis, those of mass proletarianisation and, moreover, would go against the interests of metropolitan industry". In the aftermath of the Great Depression, while foreign markets were closing and the French economic positions in central Europe were rapidly deteriorating, the colonial empire, Algeria and Indochina in particular, "became the principal regulator of the balance of trade and investment, which was in considerable decline". From the perspective of the French authorities, the role of the colonies was "to bolster French industries that were losing momentum, such as textiles, metallurgy, and sugar" (Brocheux and Hémery 1994, 311-313).

As for the social reason, the question of the industrial development was, in the mind of the French leaders, closely related to that of the development of the workers' movement. According to the author of Aux heures tragiques, a new industrial policy would have resulted "in the intensive development of a working-class population", but the Indochinese authorities opposed such a development. They considered that it would have increased "the social conflicts, sometimes already acute with the few workers of the mines and the railway men." The author of the book added that "these social movements were likely to increase" with a higher number of workers. A situation that the administration did not want and would have done "everything in its power to avoid it, even to the detriment of the defensive potential of Indochina" (Général X 1947, 31-32). He further explained that while the Indochinese population viewed favourably the idea of industrialising the country, "French officials and colonists" considered that the industrialisation would lead to "the development of a working-class population whose social demands could raise difficulties which were already very painfully avoided with the

workers of the railways and mines". From the coloniser's point of view, the process of industrialisation would bring about "rise in wages, syndicalism, etc., all things that the 'masters' of the large plantations did not want to see imported into Indochina" (Général X 1947, 65-66). Jean Chesneaux also pointed out that "[d]espite their small numbers, workers in factories, mines and plantations [were] indeed able to play a decisive role". As these workers were employed by the colonial companies and administration, "when they rose up against them to alleviate their misery, they rose up at the same time and directly against the colonial regime itself" (Chesneaux 1955, 211).

Authorities' fear related to the development of the industry – and the potential growing number of the worker-class population of Indochina – was fuelled by the role played by the communist organisations in the Vietnamese national movement. In fact, it seems that the French authorities were much less concerned with the external danger that threatened the colony than with the social movements that existed in Indochina. Japan could even be perceived less as a danger than as a guarantor against the progress of communism. According to Jean Chesneaux (1955, 223), Japan's success in Indochina in 1940 was the result of the "political solidarity" showed by the colonial interests towards Tokyo, "rather than strictly financial interest". From the First World War, they favoured Japan against the Soviet Union and, in the 1930s, they "warmly hailed Japanese successes" in China. At the same time, they turned a blind eye to the relations between Tokyo and Vietnamese right-wing nationalists. As Chesneaux wrote:

"Such is the Indochinese version of 'rather Hitler than the Popular Front': rather an understanding with Japan and a break with the metropolis than a victory for the national movement in Viet-Nam and democratic elements in France. But, taking this equivocal path, the colonial regime only hastened its own downfall."

Conclusion

Reynolds pointed out that the pro-Japanese orientation taken by Thailand was short-lived. It would have been interrupted due to the international situation, by the signing on August 28 of the German-Soviet non-aggression pact (Reynolds 1994, 30). In April 1940, the intelligence service of the French legation also noted that the signing of the German-Soviet pact had reduced the tension accumulated since May 1939. "Three days after the declaration of war in Europe, the [c]abinet of [Phibun Songkhram] officially announced the neutrality of Thailand". However, the threat remained, as the French intelligence also noted that the activity of the Japanese agents, even if it had become "little apparent", did not stop. At the same time, the Japanese economic "push" was described as "vigorous". The military and naval attachés, the "unofficial agents on the spot or passing through", continued to examine the lands and the Thai coastline, and to "assess the economic and warlike capacities of the [k]ingdom". Japanese activities sometimes spilled over Thai borders.[35] French intelligence observed an evolution of Thailand towards "a policy of neutrality and resistance against Japanese penetration" and two days after the invasion of Denmark and Norway the Thai government would have decided to side with the Allies in the event that it would have had to take a position. Yet even in these circumstances, when asked whether the Thais would militarily resist a Japanese attack, the French intelligence note's author replied that "[i]n the opinion of those who know them well the answer would be negative". They based their opinion "on the belief that the positions acquired by Japan [were] already very strong in political and military circles".[36]

When war was declared in Europe, despite the persistence of Japanese influence in Thailand, and despite the reinforcements

35 FMFAA(N)/Bangkok 66PO.1.69. "Propagande et préparatifs japonais au Siam en 1937-1941. A4". Bangkok, 29 Apr. 1940.

36 FMFAA(N)/Bangkok 66PO.1.69. "Propagande et préparatifs japonais au Siam en 1937-1941. A4". Bangkok, 29 Apr. 1940.

made by the ministry of the Colonies, the military situation in Indochina was not very different from what it was in the beginning of the year 1938. The French forces were then, according to general Bührer, "clearly insufficient to fulfil the task which could fall on them in the event of a conflict where the distant borders of the Empire could be in danger". And their role was essentially social: "At most they made it possible to ensure internal security and to intervene usefully to maintain order if it were to be disturbed by uprisings by indigenous populations" (Général X 1947, 41).

Although the French authorities subsequently proved incapable of defending the borders of the territories they administered, they were nevertheless able to repress the communist insurrection which broke out in Cochinchina on 22 November 1940 and which lasted until the end of the year.

As Pierre Brocheux related, the main leaders of the insurrection, members of the central committee of the Indochinese Communist Party, were arrested on the night of 22 to 23 November. In the Saigon-Cholon conurbation, the uprising was "shattered in the bud". But the movement spread around these cities. It was in the "most populated and richest provinces of the southern delta that guerrilla activity reached its maximum intensity until 30 November". From this date the rebellion spread to other provinces. "The repression ends up bringing calm in the second half of December" (Isoart 1982, 137). The movement involved several thousand men:

"The insurrection would have mobilized 15,000 men, 5,000 of whom had firearms, the others with bladed weapons. Its power and its duration were mainly a function of the location of the CP, the nature of the terrain.

"The centre of gravity and of longest duration [was] the province of Mytho. In the liberated villages, revolutionary power [was] established, the red flag with a gold star [was] hoisted as in Bac Son, 'the property of rich collaborators [was] confiscated and shared among the poor'."

The repression was harsh and mobilized the army, navy and air force. It led to the death of "more than thirty militiamen or notables", "more than twenty injured militiamen or notables", "3 Europeans killed" and "3 injured", "a hundred insurgents killed" and "5,848 individuals arrested". According to Vietnamese historians, there were 5,248 killed and 8,000 imprisoned (Isoart 1982, 139).

The means that were implemented by the French authorities with the aim to preserve the social order is evidence of a determination that was totally absent in the field of the defence of the external borders. The policy of appeasement pursued toward Siam created a situation that led, in the beginning of 1941, to the incursion of the Thai armies in Western Indochina, especially in the Cambodian territory, followed by the annexation, to the benefit of the government of Bangkok, of the Laotian territories situated on the right bank of the Mekong as well as Battambang and the North of Cambodia.

ABBREVIATION

FMFAA(C):French Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (Courneuve centre).

FMFAA(N):French Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (Nantes centre).

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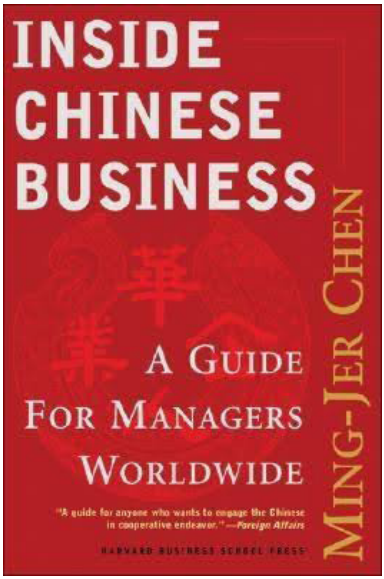

Introduction

Min-jer Chen is the founder-director of The Wharton School's Global Chinese Business Initiative. Senior fellow at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Visiting Professor of Management, Imperial College of Science. Technology, and Medicine, London, England. He is the Leslie E. Grayson Professor of Business Administration at University of Virginia Darden School of Business.

The book shares information to clarify and have a better understanding on how to conduct Chinese business. Managers or even anyone, particularly those who are curious, will be amazed with the uniqueness of the Chinese in doing business. A wonderful

journey of knowing how history, philosophy, family, relationships, and other elements or components of culture play a major part in Chinese business.

Summary

The book helps managers, or anyone interest, to have a clearer understanding of Chinese business from its cultural perspective, mostly from its history and philosophy. Readers will also better understand how Chinese business is conducted as rooted from their societal experiences such as social hardships, colonization, and other major events in the nation's history. One is guided to the view that conducting Chinese business revolves mostly on family, reciprocity, relationships, and trust; an extended web like networking; and the ability to sense the meaning of indirect answers or "reading between the lines." The success in conducting Chinese business relies also on the excellent working relationship with a local partner, establishing very strong understanding of each other and mutual respect, and goodwill within the industry and with the community.

Analysis and Evaluation

The objective of the book is to provide a deeper understanding about the relationship between Chinese business and culture.

The new knowledge contribution of the book is that the perceived intricacies or uniqueness of conducting Chinese business by managers, or anyone could be better understood if viewed from a cultural context.

The perceived intricacies or uniqueness of conducting Chinese business is discussed for clarification in each chapter. Chapter 1 is an overview of the characteristics of the Chinese and where some settled outside of mainland China. Chapter 2 makes us realize the importance and major roles of the family in conducting Chinese business. Chapter 3 focuses on the interconnectedness of networking, family, reciprocity, relationships, and trust. Chapter 4 explains the changing roles of an individual in the Chinese social system. Chapter 5 emphasizes the need to appreciate both local culture or ethnocentrism and foreign culture or xenocentrism. Chapter 6 clarifies why Chinese businessmen project an image of simplicity or low-key which is also slowly changing in recent generations. Chapter 7 emphasizes the importance of being respectful of the local practices and sample statements are made available to help communicate in an indirect and subtle way when conducting Chinese business. Chapter 8 clarifies that the practice of negotiations is in the context of a continuing dialogue. Chapter 9 gives importance on the changing landscape of conducting business in China particularly the combination or the right mix of international business practices with the local culture and business practices. The epilogue serves as a reminder to realize the importance of multicultural understanding to succeed in conducting business in any country.

The text in each chapter is supported with figures and tables with data for further clarification. There are also boxes with key or important information for a better understanding of the ideas and concepts. Chinese words, expressions, syllables and Chinese characters, philosophies, beliefs, and other local information are given meanings or explanations for better appreciation and understanding. These make the book easy-to-use to truly serve as an excellent guide in conducting business for managers or anyone who wants to explore the possibility of doing business in China.

It is made evident from the valuable information the challenges in doing business between China and the West that conducting Chinese business is more personal or relational in nature while the West is more straight forward and exercise the use of official

agreements. This tells us that conducting Chinese business and the Western way of business are "worlds apart" or polarized and can be rooted in and affected by their own culture.

Aside from the intended important use of the book as a guide for conducting Chinese business, onerealizes that certain chapters or sections narrate a few positive progressive changes not only in conducting Chinese business but also in economic and social development. For example, at the macroeconomic or country level, it has experienced the transformation of major economic growth centers concentrated in specific areas which made the country attractive to foreign investors and one of the most competitive countries in the world. While at the microeconomic or individual and organizational level, it can be observed that some Chinese business families or family members have developed also the preference for modern clothes and material items. In organizations, those managing Chinese business, particularly from the new generations who studied in the West may introduce or integrate business "know-how" and ideas that can be applied to be more efficient and effective in operating their family business.

These few positive progressive changes further raise various future implications that may eventually change the way to conduct Chinese business, affect culture, and help in economic and social development. The concentration of economic activity in certain areas has resulted in lack of development in most areas. However, the creation of the national rural development strategy, focused on sustainability (Organization for Economic Development Cooperation (OECD) Rural Policy Review: China. (2009), is a significant contributory factor, beneficial to the economic and social development in most of the less developed areas, which will eventually further help create sources of income and also attract investors to conduct Chinese business. The changing lifestyle, aside from clothing, such as the preference for food and entertainment, the interest in education and new experiences, particularly international travel, also affect the use of time, spending behavior, and motivations for pleasure and leisure or other elements or components of culture. The business "know-how" and ideas

of the new generation of Chinese business owners and managers who were educated in the West will have the opportunity to "transfer the technology" or pass the business "know-how" and ideas to their Chinese managers and other employees, creating a generation of more competent and skilled human resource, which is beneficial in terms of being familiar with how the West works and conducts business.

A key idea that we can also learn, is to develop an excellent working relationship with a local Chinese partner with the interest, capability, and traits to balance or have mutual respect with respect to the cultural differences in managing a business from both the Chinese and the Western business cultural context. There are several advantages with this key idea but some of the most important reasons are related to familiarity with regulations, providing understanding for policy decisions and the deeper understanding of the local market buying preferences or behavior. This is an excellent key idea in conducting Chinese business that is also applicable for other nations and organizations with a different cultural context in a fast and ever-changing world.

Conclusion

The book was able to provide a deeper understanding of conducting Chinese business with a cultural context. This clarified some of the unknown, less known, and perceived intricacies or uniqueness in conducting Chinese business and/or its culture. As a result, managers from the West as well as with any nationality will be encouraged and confident to conduct business in China. As an indirect result, the book inspires managers and anyone from any country to have a deeper understanding of conducting business in another country from its cultural context

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