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Migrant networks in Thailand and Malaysia: irregular Nanyu workers in Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur

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**Migrant Networks in Thailand and Malaysia: Irregular *Nayu*
Workers in Tom Yam Restaurants in Kuala Lumpur**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

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Faculty of Arts

2010

CERTIFICATION

I, Suttiporn Bunmak, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Social Science, Media and Communication and Centre for Asia Pacific Social Transformation Studies (CAPSTRANS), University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Suttiporn Bunmak

30 July 2010

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BRN	The <i>Barisan Revolusi Nasional</i> (National Revolutionary Front)
KL	Kuala Lumpur
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTP	Malaysian Training Providers
NEP	The New Economic Policy
NGO	Non-Government Organization
PAPA	The Malaysian Association of Foreign Workers' Agencies
PULO	The Patani United Liberation Organization
RELA	The Malaysian People's Voluntary Corps
SMS	Short Message Service
UMNO	The United Malays National Organization

LEXICON: MALAY AND THAI TERMS

Terms	Meaning
Patani Malay dialect	
<i>Nayu</i>	Malay-speaking Muslims in Thailand
<i>Oghae</i>	People
<i>Pondok</i>	Traditional Islamic boarding schools
<i>Siye</i>	Siam
<i>Thai Islae</i>	Thai-speaking Muslims in Thailand
<i>Tok Guru</i>	Traditional Muslim religious teacher
Malay standard language	
<i>Baju Kurung</i>	Malay style of dress
<i>Bumiputra</i>	Son of earth in Malaysian, embracing all people indigenous to the Malay Archipelago
<i>Hari Raya Aidil Fitri</i>	Muslim festival
<i>Hari Raya Puasa</i>	Muslim festival
<i>Melayu</i>	Malay
<i>Melayu Tani</i>	Malay-speaking Muslims from the far Southern provinces of Thailand
<i>Musjid</i>	Mosque
<i>Nasi Ayam</i>	Malay food
<i>Nasi Campur</i>	Malay food
<i>Nasi Lemak</i>	Malay food
<i>Non-Bumiputra</i>	Chinese and Indian people in Malaysia
<i>Ops Nyah</i>	Operation Go Away
<i>Ops Tegas</i>	Strong Operation
<i>Orang</i>	People
<i>Siam Melayu</i>	Malay-speaking Muslims from Thailand
Thai language	
<i>Farang</i>	Westerners
<i>Halal</i>	Islamic food
<i>Isan</i>	1. Lao-speaking group 2. Northeast Thailand
<i>Kathoey</i>	People whose sex was male but who identify as female by cross-dressing and who alter their bodies through medication and surgery
<i>Khaek</i>	Muslim people
<i>Lakoan</i>	Thai soap opera
<i>Molam</i>	Lao folk music
<i>Pleng Lukgrung</i>	Country music
<i>Pleng Lukthung</i>	Urban music
<i>Pleng Puae Chiwit</i>	Song of life music
<i>Pleng String</i>	Young urban music
<i>Tom Yam</i>	Thai spicy soup

Australian \$ 1= RM. 3.15 RM 1= Baht 9.85 by www.xe.com at 14 November 2009.

ABSTRACT

The growing number of foreign workers is having a significant impact on the development of Malaysia's economy. *Nayu* workers migrate to work through well-established networks. This study seeks to understand the migrant networks they create and use including their functions and outcomes before, during and after the migration processes. It draws on fieldwork carried out over six months between November 2008 and April 2009 which employed a qualitative approach involving participant observation and in-depth interviews of *Nayu* irregular migrant workers from the far Southern provinces of Thailand employed at Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur.

The study found that migrant networks are an essential element in the successful movement of *Nayu* non-migrants from the far Southern provinces of Thailand to Malaysia, and within Malaysia itself. Since the 1970s the migration process has become chain migration. The networks involving migrants, returned migrants, non-migrants, owners of Tom Yam restaurants and their families and relatives in the villages, play an essential role in the various stages of migration and involve economic, social and cultural aspects.

The study shows that within the migration networks differences exist between men, women and *Kathoey* workers in terms of their positions in the networks, and their access to the networks which exist separately for men, women and *Kathoey*s. Gender structures not only the migrant networks but also the spatial patterns of men, women and *Kathoey* workers and their leisure time after work.

This study is one of the few contemporary empirical studies of irregular migrants in Southeast Asia working in the informal service sector that deals with how the functions and outcomes of migrant networks contribute to migration processes.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, Thai emigration to the Gulf oil counties, East Asia and Southeast Asia has grown (Pongsapich 1995). Most Thai migrants came from a few areas, in particular from North and Northeast Thailand, which have become a major source of low-skilled Thai workers for other countries. Migration flows from the far Southern provinces of Thailand to Islamic countries such as Malaysia and Saudi Arabia (Klanarong 2003; Klanarong 2009a) are also part of Thai migration, but are seldom studied and need investigating in order to understand Thai labour migration overall.

*Nayu*¹ migration flows to Malaysia are not a new phenomenon: there has been cross border mobility of family and relatives long before British colonialism and after Malaysian independence. In 1940, during the British period there was an agreement that allowed traffic between British Malaya and Siam. Since Malaysian independence there have been flows of low-skilled workers from the far Southern provinces of Thailand to meet Malaysia's labour demands especially in the low-paid service sectors of the economy, and the increase in economic growth in turn has led to an increase in *Nayu* irregular migration.

This study investigates *Nayu* migrant workers from the far Southern provinces of Thailand and the border crossing to Malaysia that shapes their experiences as temporary migrant workers. It elucidates the complex social relations in migrant networks in which *Nayu* migrant workers operate and use within and between the two countries. This introductory chapter discusses the literature on Thai migration,

¹ *Nayu*: this concept is defined and discussed further below

states the key research objectives of this study, defines irregular migrant workers and identifies the limitations of the research.

In addition, this chapter focuses on the methodology used in this study to examine migrant networks among *Nayu* migrants from the far Southern provinces of Thailand working in Malaysia. It discusses the limitations and strengths of the research methodology and sampling techniques employed, including purposive and snowball sampling, interviewing, mapping and direct observation.

1.1 Reviewing the Literature on Thai Migration

There are a number of studies on the international migration of Thai workers in both Thailand (Warm Singh 1998; Sobieszczyk 2000; Chantavanich et al. 2001; Klanarong 2003) and in destination countries including Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore and Brunei (Chomchai 2000; Chunjitkaruna 2000; Kang 2000; Laodumrongchai 2000; Nagayama 2000; Sek-hong and Lee 2000; Wong 2000; Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001; Ruenkaew 2002; Tsay 2002; Hewison 2004; Suriya and Kitiarsa 2005; Kitiarsa 2006; Kitiarsa 2008). These studies have added to a growing understanding of Thai international labour migration. However, a review of this literature reveals some gaps in the research, including a failure to examine irregular migration, young migrants, the social and cultural aspects of migration and gender relations. As well, there are few studies of migrants working in the service sector and of migrants from the southern region of Thailand. In addition, few studies use qualitative research methods. I will now describe these omissions further and explain the significance of this study in relation to them.

Firstly, most previous studies were conducted with documented migrants employed as guest workers or as contract workers (Chomchai 2000; Laodumrongchai 2000; Sek-hong and Lee 2000; Tsay 2002; Hewison 2004; Kitiarsa 2006). While studying this group is necessary for understanding the documented migratory processes, the working conditions of migrants and the protection of their labour rights under the laws in destination countries, there has been very little in-depth study of unauthorised migrant workers (Chunjitkaruna 2000; Ruenkaew 2002). Historically, the number of irregular Thai migrants has been high and they are an important part of Thailand's historical emigration in the region (Brownlee and Mitchell 1997). Previous research in Thailand and Malaysia has not accounted for the experience of these migrants.

Secondly, migration studies primarily focus on migrants who are the main income earners in the household or are the heads of households, but pay little attention to young, single migrants. However, there is evidence that many Thais who go to work in Malaysia are between 15-24 years old (Klanarong 2003) and Muhamed and Chanatavanich (2001) found that some migrant workers in Malaysia were less than 20 years old.

Thirdly, the majority of international labour migration studies of Thai workers focus on economic aspects of migration. This literature shows that economic aspects are a major determinant of migration. However, economic factors alone are insufficient to explain migration and the behaviour of people during the process of migration. There are important reasons why scholars need to understand both economic and non-economic factors, from an interactive and interdisciplinary perspective at the macro-level (the role of the state), at the meso-level (social relations and ties between

individuals) and at the micro-level (individual motivations and experiences). Migration is affected by social and cultural factors as well, so it is important to draw attention to these factors too (Hugo 1981). In addition, informal migrant networks play a significant role in the migratory process. These networks provide resources for the migratory process and link migrants and non-migrants together both within and between origin and destination countries.

Fourthly, Thai migration studies, with a few exceptions, fail to significantly examine gender relations. Studies regarding Thai migrant workers have mostly focused on migrant workers in general (Warm Singh 1998; Chomchai 2000; Kang 2000; Laodumrongchai 2000; Nagayama 2000; Sek-hong and Lee 2000; Chantavanich et al. 2001; Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001; Hewison 2004) or on male migrant workers (Wong 2000; Kitiarsa 2006; Kitiarsa 2008). These studies pay attention to the general aspects and problems of international migration. While some focus on female migrants in order to explain female migration flows (Wille 2001; Ruenkaew 2002; Klanarong 2003), they do not examine gender relations for either female or male migrants, paying little attention to the differences between men and women which are set up by social and cultural forces. No attention at all is given to “third gender” migrant workers. In short, they tend to be blind to the gender practices inscribed in power, to the gender dynamics of control, to the gendered differential access to resources, to the sexual division of labour and to the gendered nature of decision-making.

Fifthly, most studies have focused on international migration from the Northern and North-eastern regions of Thailand (Singhanetra-Renard 1996; Warm Singh 1998;

Sobieszczyk 2000; Kitiarsa 2006; Kitiarsa 2008) because the data derived from government sources shows that migrant workers from these regions outnumber those from other regions. This has led to the southern region being ignored. This is compounded by the fact that the far Southern provinces of Thailand, which share a border with Malaysia, form a distinct subculture with their own ethnic, religious, traditional and cultural features which differ from the typical Thai social and cultural ethos. The majority of the people in the border provinces of Southern Thailand are of Malay ethnicity who normally speak Malay dialect and follow the Islamic religion. However, previous studies are mainly concerned with migrants from a Thai cultural background and with a Thai Buddhist orientation. Little is known about the far Southern region of Thailand as a specific source of out-migration.

Sixthly, there has been little attention to service sector workers. Most studies are of the construction, manufacturing and entertainment sectors (Chomchai 2000; Chunjitkaruna 2000; Laodumrongchai 2000; Wong 2000; Ruenkaew 2002; Tsay 2002; Hewison 2004; Kitiarsa 2006) and concern documented migrants employed as contract workers. In addition, some studies were conducted in villages of origin with returnees who have worked as general workers (Warm Singh 1998; Sobieszczyk 2000; Chantavanich et al. 2001; Klanarong 2003; Klanarong 2009a). However, there has been no attempt to study in any depth employees in the service sector, including workers who are involved in the hospitality industry, working in small businesses and restaurants.

Finally, most of these studies were conducted using quantitative methods based on surveys or questionnaires (Warm Singh 1998; Chomchai 2000; Laodumrongchai

2000; Ratanakomutra 2000; Sek-hong and Lee 2000; Chantavanich et al. 2001; Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001; Klanarong 2003; Hewison 2004; Butr-Udom 2007). This methodology has the advantage of providing general information about those features of the migratory experience amenable to statistical analysis. However, international labour migration processes are much more dynamic and complex than these studies can reveal. Quantitative methods do not uncover the migratory experiences in any substantial depth. For this it is necessary to use ethnographic and qualitative methods.

In filling these seven gaps, the thesis provides a detailed ethnographic investigation of young migrant workers from the lower part of Southern Thailand who work in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia. It examines the social and cultural context of Thai labour migration and provides a greater understanding of two key social and cultural elements in international migration - migrant networks and gender relations, and the relationship between them.

1.2 Migrant Network Analysis

Boyd (1989, p645) argued that “a starting point for research on social networks is that structural factors provide the context within which migration decisions are made by individuals or groups.” According to Massey (1990, p8), “migrant networks are one element of social context that strongly affect the migration decision”. However, Pessar (1999, p583) has argued that migration networks involve the production of social roles as well. Networks tie places of origin and destination together and impact on and are affected by migration they involve the key social and cultural variables that must be paid attention to in migration studies (Brettell 2000). Gurak and Caces

(1992) suggest that migration research should investigate the form and the function of migration networks across types of migration, cultures, political contexts, migration stages, and subpopulations. While research on migration has paid attention to the role of networks, it often does not consider how migrant networks affect the migration process itself nor pay attention to the differential effects of migration on the individual (Hagan 1998).

However, it is the case that in the last several decades, in a variety of ways, scholars have paid growing attention to the concept of migrant networks in order to understand migration (Choldin 1973; Bala'n 1992; Lindquist 1993). This includes: the decision to migrate (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991); the direction and persistence of migration flows (Massey et al. 1987; Tamar 1998; Bagchi 2001a); and the process of adaptation and patterns of settlement (Massey et al. 1987; Boyd 1989; Hagan 1998). The literature shows that networks link original and destination communities and ease the newly-arrived migrants into their new ways of life. Migrants pass on their knowledge through social ties to newly arrived migrants which assist their migration in several ways. They provide information about jobs and accommodation and reduce the costs of travel and of living (Massey et al. 1987; Massey 1990; Massey et al. 1998). These networks assist with finance, accomodation, food and transportation.

In migration studies, 'a migrant network' is defined as a set of cross-border interpersonal ties connecting migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in places of origin and destination through the bonds of kinship, friendship and a shared community of origin (Massey et al. 1987; Gurak and Caces 1992; Massey et al. 1998). Thus this definition refers to the personal relationships based on kin, family,

friends and community that connect people between and within two or more areas. These relationships establish mutual trust among network members. Migrant networks are important in facilitating migration and, more significantly in the beginning stages, in encouraging potential migrant workers. According to Hugo (1995, p88):

Social networks are a powerful factor influencing whether or not a person will move and also explain why some communities have high levels of emigration while others with seeming similar economic contexts have very few emigrants . . . Social networks are important in shaping patterns of legal migration. They are absolutely crucial elements in most unauthorised migration. It would, in most contexts, be very difficult for an unauthorised migrant to evade detection and adjust successfully without the assistance of a community of earlier migrants at the destination.

Many migration studies, in particular those concerning migration from Central America to the United States, emphasize migrant networks which they argue play an important role in expanding migration (Massey et al. 1987; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Zahniser 1999; Menji'var 2000; Bagchi 2001a; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003). Moreover, Massey (1988) argues that networks play a more crucial role for international migration than for internal migration because the costs of the former are higher.

Migrant networks facilitate, in particular, informal channels of migration and they provide the means to gain employment and to find accommodation. The costs and risks of movement for members of networks are lower because the experiences accumulated by earlier waves of migrants are available to newly arriving migrants (Gurak and Caces 1992). Migrants who have access to migrant networks are therefore more likely to be safer and to adapt more easily to the new culture than those without networks. For these reasons, Hugo (1995) argues that migrant

networks are a crucial part of migration to Malaysia. Klanarong (2003; 2009b) also found that female Thai Muslims who migrate to work in Malaysia tend to utilise their networks of friends, relatives and family members rather than a private recruitment agency.

A key focus of migrant network analysis, then, is the connection between micro-level interactions and the macro-level (Granovetter 1973; Goss and Lindquist 1995). The study of migrant networks provides greater insight into why and how people move. This study uses a migrant network approach to study irregular *Nayuu* migrant workers in Malaysia in order to understand the social and cultural factors shaping migration.

Gender is one of the core social and cultural factors shaping the dynamics of migration (Cheng 1999). Mahler and Pessar (2006) argue that “gender is a principal factor that organizes social life, and it has been operative since the dawn of human existence”. Understanding gender involves the study of power between men and women in different situations, contexts and times (Jolly and Reeves 2005; Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2006). Gender relations in everyday life involve both direct and indirect interaction between men and women and relations among men and among women. Gender relations are always being constituted (Connell 2002) and ways of being male and female, and the differences and similarities between them, are always fluid. Gender is a relational concept – the migration of women cannot be properly understood without also understanding the migration of men, and vice-versa (Bjere'n 1997).

Globally, the number of female migrant workers has increased in significance (Oishi 2002) and has begun to exceed the number of male migrant workers in some places. Previous research has demonstrated that gender relations are influenced by and also influence migration (Morokvasic 1984; Bjere'n 1997; Honagneu-Sotelo and Cranford 1999; Pessar 1999; Oishi 2002; Jolly and Reeves 2005; Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2006; Mahler and Pessar 2006). There are important differences between men and women in their patterns of migration, and the impact of the labour market on social life is mediated through gender relations (Sassen 1995; Greenwell et al. 1997). Hagan (1998) has also explored the different forms of migration undertaken by men and women and has examined the differences in settlement outcomes, particularly in the opportunities to become legal. He found that migrant networks operate differently for women and for men and that women not only have fewer opportunities for employment compared to men but also earn lower wages. This research considers the differences in migration networks for men and women and how gender relations in Thailand and Malaysia affect the form and function of migrant networks. Incorporating gender into migration studies helps to clarify the differences in the migration experiences of men and women and the gender inequalities that are reflected by and that emerge in migration processes.

1.3 The Research Objective

The intent of this study is to fill the seven gaps I have identified in the literature and have summarized above, through a qualitative examination of the movement of irregular male and female Thai service workers to Malaysia. Malaysia is one of the major destination countries for irregular workers from Thailand. The majority of Thai workers in Malaysia are *Nayu* workers, who are of Malay ethnicity and whose

religion is Islam (Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001; Klanarong 2003). They mostly come from five provinces in the lower part of Southern Thailand - Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and Songkhla. Most of these workers are under 24 years old and are single (Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001; Klanarong 2003); and they are mostly irregular migrants (i.e. they are working without a valid work permit). Significant numbers of these migrants work in restaurants scattered throughout Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Kedah and Kelantan (Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001; Klanarong 2003). These restaurants, known as *Tom Yam* restaurants, mainly prepare and sell *Halal* Thai food (Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001).

The purpose of this study is to understand the migrant networks created and used by *Nayu* migrant workers in Malaysia. Its main objective is to investigate the forms, functions and outcomes of networks among *Nayu* workers before, during and after the migration process.

1.4 Conceptualizing Migrant Networks

This thesis concerns irregular international migrant workers and migrant networks. As already noted, the application of migrant networks to the international migration process is an important contribution to the wider migration literature. However, previous studies of migrant networks lack the inclusion of irregular international migration which leaves gaps in the knowledge of how migrant networks develop and are used for the irregular international migration. As Boyd (1989, p649) asks “To what extent do personal networks represented not just by family but also by friendship and the original ties in a community, play a role outside corporate sponsorship in which immigration requires arranged and government approved

employment?”. Moreover, he suggests that further study needs to be done to identify the informal networks of migrants sponsored through occupational criteria and to establish the extent to which these ties encourage further migration. This study answers these questions by analysing the operation and roles of migrant networks and by demonstrating how migrant networks are not simply links between family, friends and the community of origin in Thailand but are more complex structures in both Thailand and Malaysia involving the social life and long-term relationships of international migrants.

1.5 Defining Irregular Migrant Workers

This thesis concerns irregular, international migrant workers and these terms require careful definition. An ‘international migrant worker’ can be defined as a person who crosses the border from one country to another to seek paid employment. There are many ways to define foreigners who come to work in a country where they are not a citizen. During the migration process, laws and regulations in both the destination country and the country of origin shape the status of migrants. These laws and regulations split migrant workers into two groups - authorized migrants and unauthorised migrants.

Those without legal status owing to unofficial entry or to the expiry of their visas, can be referred to as unauthorised migrants, illegal migrants, clandestine migrants and irregular migrants. In this study, the term ‘irregular migrant’ is used because this best expresses the characteristics of their migration. However, understandings of the term differ in the countries of origin and destination. From the perspective of the origin country, an irregular migrant is a person who crosses the border without a

valid passport or an equivalent document required by national laws. From the viewpoint of the destination country, non-nationals are considered to be in an irregular situation when they have not complied with the legal requirements of the country of destination; or have not obtained the authorization required by national law for admission or for residence or for their activity during their stay in the country; or when they cease to meet the legal conditions to which their residence or activity is subject (Ghosh 1998).

In the case of migration between Malaysia and Thailand, irregular migration occurs when any of the following conditions apply: a) a migrant enters Malaysia without any documents; b) a migrant obtains a false Thai passport and/or acquires a false work permit; c) a migrant obtains a valid Thai passport but a false work permit; d) a migrant enters Malaysia legally, is bound to an employer but works irregularly for another employer; or overstays beyond the permitted period; or works in an irregular capacity.

1.6 Situating Myself

I am a male Thai Buddhist from Nakhon Sawan, a province in the Centre of Thailand who speaks Thai standard language. Thus, unlike my research population, I am not an indigenous Malay-speaking Muslim. I do not operate from the same cultural and ethnic background as the respondents in this study who are Malay-speaking Muslims and Thai-speaking Muslims. But although I am an outsider, I lived and worked with Malay-speaking Muslims in the Southern provinces of Thailand from 2003 to 2007. This is not my first research project regarding Malay-speaking Muslims. I have had some experience both in the far Southern provinces of Thailand and in Malaysia

mostly with young Malay-speaking Muslims in high school and at university who speak fluent Thai standard language. This current research was my first opportunity to focus on less well-educated Malay-speaking Muslims in these areas.

I have been in Malaysia many times as an international student and as a researcher. I have travelled to several Malay states including Kuala Lumpur as an international student in the summer of 2005 when I learned of life in a Muslim country and culture from Malay-speaking Muslims who were both *Nayu* international students and residents in Malaysia. This led to my deep interest in the lives and experiences of Malay-speaking Muslim migrants and their networks in Malaysia.

1.7 Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to comprehend social reality on its own terms, based on the understandings of people themselves and on observations of their interactions in natural settings (Gubrium and Holstein 1997). Qualitative methods allowed me to access the inner reality of human experience because they emphasize the importance of examining social phenomena from the point of view of participants. However, Fetterman (1998) and Berg (2004) recommend using a variety of methods to gather data because it encourages rigour. Research methodologies each have their limitations, but by using a variety of methods, the negative effects of each can be minimised. Accordingly, this study obtained primary data via in-depth interviews but I also studied documents from a variety of sources and used direct observation.

1.7.1 Purposive and Snowball Sampling

Because many of them are irregular migrants the total number of Thai workers in Malaysia is not accurately known (Chantavanich et al. 2001) and the Thai government data that exists is not reliable. More than 100,000 *Nayu* workers are said to be working irregularly in Malaysia (Rahimmula 2008), but no one knows for sure what the real number is. Thus it is impossible to construct a sampling frame from which a random sample can be drawn. However, random sampling is not so crucial for a qualitative study which does not aim to be representative of a population but aims to find cases that clarify and deepen understanding about the processes of social life in a specific context (Neuman 2004). For this reason, non-probability sampling was used. Non-probability or purposive sampling does not employ the rules of probability theory on which random sampling procedures are based. Purposive sampling is not interested in representativeness *per se* but nonetheless ensures a wide cross-section of experiences and perspectives from different respondents. I identified five key characteristics which I used to select my purposive sample (Sarantakos 2005).

Respondents must: have lived and worked in Malaysia for one year or more, as I wished to exclude seasonal workers; come from the Southern provinces of Thailand (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun, and Songkhla); be *Oghae Nayu* who speak Malay dialect; currently work in Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur, the main occupation of Thai migrant workers (Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001); and be irregular migrant workers for I specifically want to study networks of irregular migrant workers, not documented workers, or employers.

Since I had few contacts in Malaysia among *Nayu* migrant workers, I decided to locate my purposive sample by using the snowballing technique. This technique is used when the research population is indefinite and is difficult to approach in any other way (Sarantakos 2005). Thus it was used here because a large majority of the *Nayu* workers are working irregularly and, hence, are unauthorised. Given that there are no records of irregular migrant workers that can be used as a sampling frame, snowball sampling was used. Snowball sampling is a sampling procedure that engages a few respondents who meet the criteria and who accidentally come into contact with the researcher. These respondents are asked to recommend further people who meet the purposive criteria. At the end of every subsequent interview session, informants are asked if they can provide further contacts within their networks who meet the purposive criteria. Snowballing also helped me to uncover and effectively delineate the networks of which these workers are a part, for in developing my sample in this way, I was effectively uncovering and mapping the network itself.

Although snowball techniques were useful to make contact with *Nayu* migrant workers, I did not conduct interviews with all those whom I accessed for not all met the conditions of the purposive sample that I have described above. Thus, in the end, I conducted interviews with sixty migrant workers who met my conditions. The following table lists the sixty respondents, their gender and their years of work in Malaysia.

Table 1.1 Years of Work and Gender of Respondents

Years of work in Malaysia	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
1-3	17	9	26
4-6	11	8	19
7-9	7	1	8
10-12	4	1	5
13-15	0	0	0
16-18	1	1	2
Total	40	20	60

In summary, the purposive sample consisted of people with the following characteristics:

- 31 respondents were born in Pattani, 11 in Narathiwat, 13 in Songkhla, and 5 in Yala. I found no migrant workers from Satun in this fieldwork.
- 22 respondents are 20 years of age or younger; 21 are between 21-25 years old, and 17 are above 25 years old.
- 28 respondents are single males, including 4 *Kathoey*; 12 are married males. There are 14 are single females, 3 married females and 3 widows.
- 16 respondents work for Malaysian Muslim restaurant entrepreneurs and 44 work for *Nayu* restaurant entrepreneurs.

I was surprised to find that after being in the field for a couple of months I had conducted interviews with only 14 married migrant workers, and still wanted to find more, but I was unable to locate them. To understand why, I consulted several of my respondents and some Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs. Two explanations were given to me. Firstly, I was told that married migrant workers are older and more experienced, so chances are that most of them would own their own small restaurants, and were thus outside my conditions. Secondly, if migrant workers

married non-migrant *Nayu* in Thailand, they generally return home as they can not legally live across the border with their partners, and were thus outside the scope of the study. As the result, a large number of married migrant workers return home or became Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs with their partners, and thus most do not meet all my research criteria.

1.7.2 Contacting Respondents

At the beginning of the fieldwork, one of my greatest concerns was how to contact *Nayu* migrant workers in Malaysia as I had few links with migrant workers in Kuala Lumpur, as it had been several years since I had studied there in 2005. I finally chose as an initial gatekeeper, Barloa, a *Nayu* international student whom I met when conducting research about Thai Muslim students in Malaysia in 2006. I called him and informed him about this research project, and in response he provided the cell phone number of his friends in Kuala Lumpur who could offer me further help.

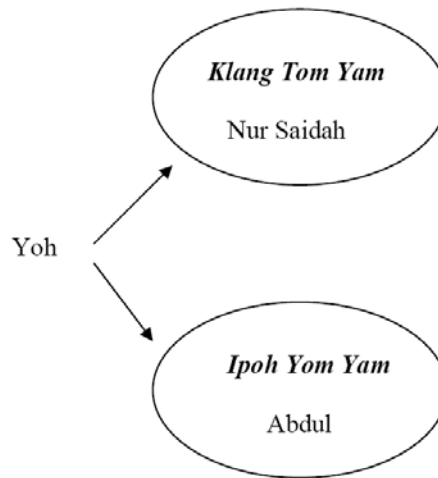
On the first day of fieldwork, I went to a Tom Yam restaurant in Little India, Kuala Lumpur, to find one of the potential connections he had provided. Unfortunately, this person no longer worked there, and although the restaurant still operated, it no longer employed *Nayu* workers. After that, I attempted to contact a friend whose uncle's Tom Yam restaurant employed *Nayu* workers with the hope of getting an interview through his assistance and to be introduced to other *Nayu* workers in the vicinity, but this attempt was also unsuccessful. Finally, I realised that I had to find new contacts to interview by myself.

On the second day in Kuala Lumpur, I met Yoh, a Masters Degree student at the University of Malaya (UM), who advised me to stay in accommodation near the university. I met her through a colleague at Thaksin University, Thailand. Yoh is a *Nayu* international student from Pattani Province. She arranged accommodation for me in a university hostel. During a conversation, I informed her about my research project. She offered me help because her family ran four Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia: two in Kuala Lumpur belonging to her elder sister; one in Sunway Selangor owned by her older brother; and another in Johor Baru belonging to her second brother.

During the weekend of the second week, Yoh introduced me to her family, firstly to her elder sister, the owner of the *Klang Tom Yam*² and *Ipoh Tom Yam* restaurants in Kuala Lumpur. She welcomed me warmly and was glad to support the project. After that, Yoh and I visited her sister's *Ipoh Tom Yam* restaurant about a kilometre from the *Klang Tom Yam* restaurant. This restaurant was under the management of Yoh's younger brother. Both restaurants employed nine workers and were the first places where I established contact with my respondents.

² All restaurant names are pseudonyms.

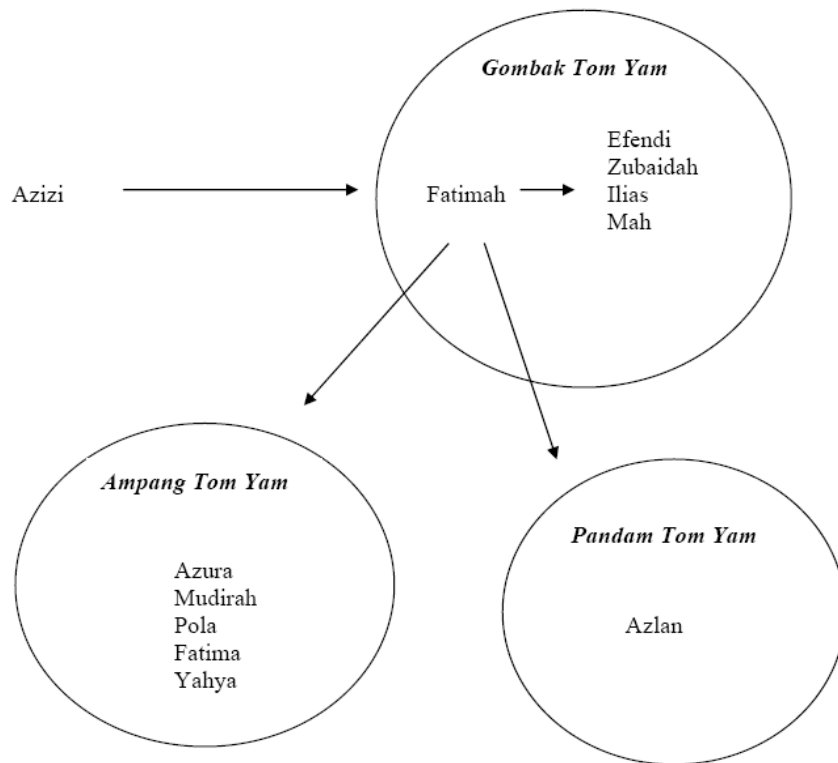
Figure 1.1 Yoh's Cluster



Having been introduced to the workers by Yoh, I next developed rapport and trust with them during meals in these restaurants. I became a regular customer engaging in a series of conversations as a means of establishing a relationship with them. To my surprise, the migrant workers in these restaurants interviewed me, as they were interested in my experience and in the project, and especially wanted to know why I was interested in this issue in spite of my different background to them. After I was certain that I had built a cordial relationship with the migrant workers, I asked their permission to interview them.

During the second week, I made contact with one of Barloa's friends, Azizi, and made an appointment to talk with him at the University of Malaya. I met Azizi while conducting research in Kuala Lumpur in 2006. Azizi was studying a Masters Degree in Malay Studies. I informed him about my research project, and was taken to *Gombak Tom Yam* restaurant at the university. While having a meal there, Azizi introduced me to some *Nayu* workers who were willing to take part in the research. Before leaving, Azizi and I asked for the bill, but the head chef, Fatimah, did not charge us as she and the workers were glad to assist me.

Figure 1.2 Azizi's and Fatimah's Cluster

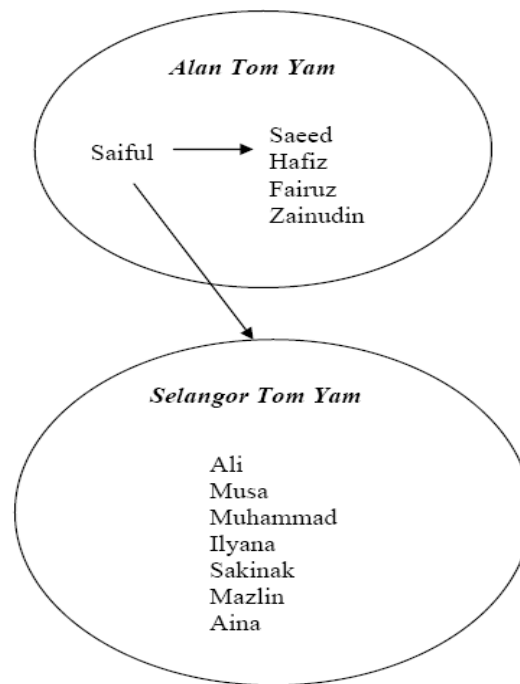


The *Gombak* restaurant was not far from my accommodation, so I regularly ate meals there to make general conversation to develop rapport with the workers. After a few weeks of become acquainted with them, I believed that they had enough trust in me and, hence, I asked their permission to conduct one-on-one in-depth interviews with them (see figure 1.2).

In addition, while walking for observation and mapping not far away from my accommodation, I found two more Tom Yam restaurants. I decided to have dinner in *Alan Tom Yam* restaurant which advertised Tom Yam dishes, but I was still not sure whether any Thai migrants worked there. After I took a seat, a young waiter came to take my order. I intentionally spoke Thai to see whether he was Thai or not. Upon

hearing my words, the waiter, Saiful, smiled and sat down opposite me at my table. He took my order and spoke with me for a while. After that, other staff came to serve me and to talk with me while I had my dinner. I approached five *Nayu* migrant workers in that restaurant and seven *Nayu* migrant workers in *Selangor Tom Yam* restaurant near *Alan Tom Yam* to obtain more respondents. Finally, my attempt to conduct interviews with them was successful (see figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3 Saiful's Cluster



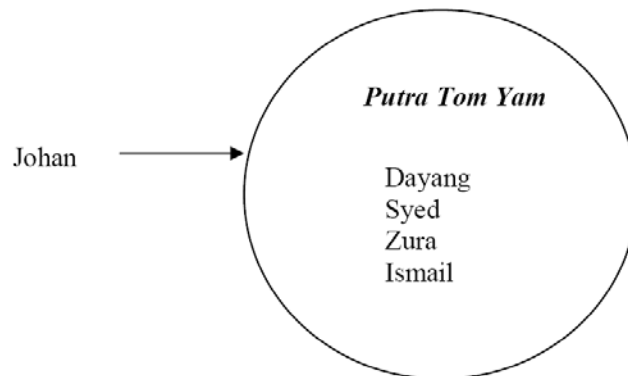
One day while travelling from Hat Yai to Kuala Lumpur by bus, I met Johan, the father of the owner of *Putra Tom Yam*, who gave me the address and the contact number of his daughter's Tom Yam restaurant in Kampong Tani³, the main area of Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur. A few days after the meeting, I tried to find this restaurant, but it took me a lot of walking to locate it as it was quite far from Kampong Tani railway station and not located on the main road. On reaching the restaurant, I went inside and ordered some Thai dishes. I knew that the staff were

³ This place name is a pseudonym

Nayu migrant workers, so I revealed myself as a Thai-speaking Thai. While having dinner, I conversed with many *Nayu* workers there. It was amazing that these workers could speak fluent standard Thai as well as their usual Malay and Southern Thai dialects. Almost all of them came to talk with me at the table as they had few chances to meet Thai-speaking Thai people in their restaurant. Many questions were directed at me while I was dining as they were interested in my reasons for doing research about their experiences. I answered many questions before they left to do their work due to an influx of customers, but had no chance to conduct any serious interviews with them at that time. However, in this restaurant I met a migrant worker who had come to visit her friend who worked there. After getting to know each other, I had the opportunity to interview her in Thai language. She said she rarely had a chance to speak Thai, so she was very happy to talk with me.

To develop my connection with and win the confidence of the workers in this restaurant, I visited them a few times each week for Thai dishes. The workers, both men and women, always sat and talked with me for a while when free of customers, and went back to work when there were customers to serve. However, a chance to conduct interviews with them in this restaurant was still unlikely as they were so busy working most of the time. Instead, I observed their behaviour at work and noted their social ties in the workplace. Four months later, I moved to live in Kampong Tani and finally found the chance to conduct interviews with them after work, between 3.00 and 6.00 in the morning in their restaurant (see figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4 Johan's Cluster

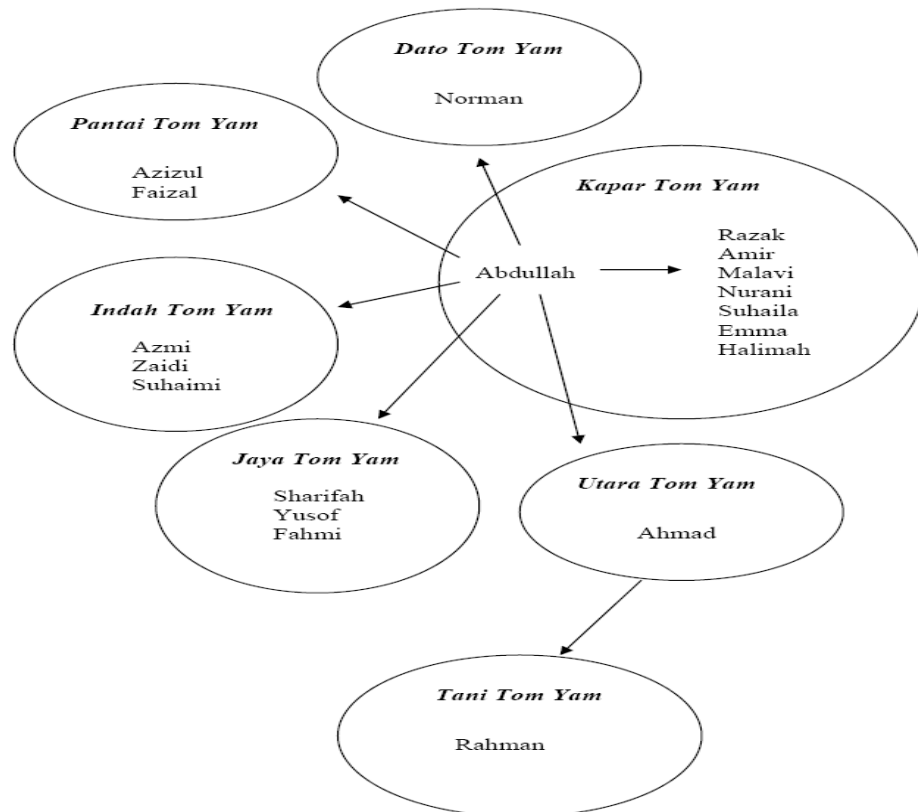


One day, while I was walking from Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) railway to the KLCC shopping mall, reading a Thai book, a man, Abdullah, approached me and spoke to me in the Malay standard language. He thought I looked like a Malaysian who had studied Thai. I replied in English that I didn't understand him, for I am not a Malay-speaking Malaysian, but a Thai. Then, he spoke in Thai, "*Abang Pen Khon Thai*" ("Brother, you are a Thai"). After establishing that we both were Thai, we talked together before he introduced me to his five relatives who had come to the shopping mall with him. I learned from Abdullah that they worked at *Kapar Tom Yam* restaurant in Kampong Tani. I introduced myself as a Thai student doing fieldwork for a project about Tom Yam restaurants, so he invited me to visit their restaurant in Kampong Tani.

A few days later, I went to visit this contact. I spent a long time walking around Kampong Tani village but was unable to find this restaurant. Eventually an appointment was made, he sent his young nephew to pick me up at the railway station. I ate and drank with everyone in this restaurant but as in the other Tom Yam

restaurants, I still could not engage in deeper and more extensive conversation because the workers were almost always busy with customers and did not have much rest time, but through Abdullah and his family, I was able to contact and eventually to interview 18 respondents.

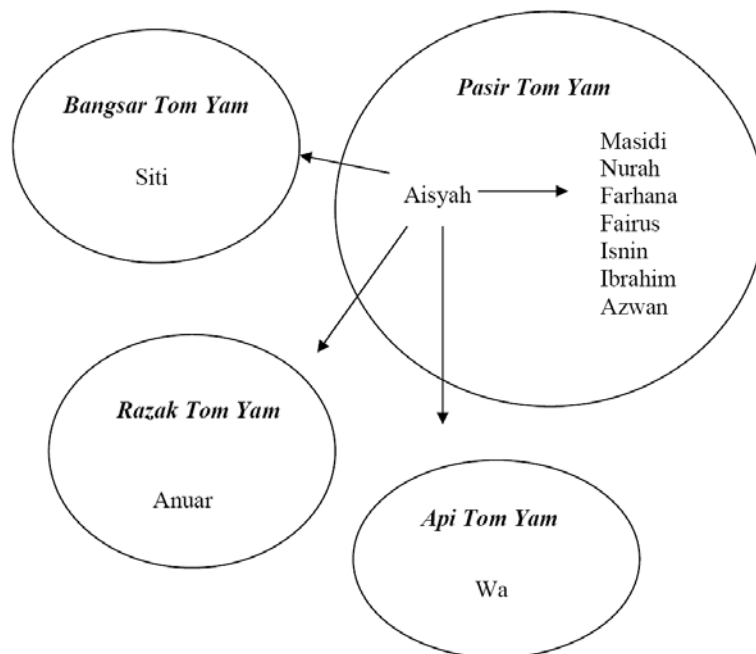
Figure 1.5 Abdullah's Cluster



Lastly, I found some respondents in a large and expensive *Pasir Tom Yam* restaurant in Kampong Tani. Here I met two migrant workers while ordering some Thai dishes in Thai language. After a waitress discovered that I was Thai, she sat down opposite me and asked me many questions. She was very interested in me as there were not many Thai customers having Thai dishes there. Then, a waiter came to serve me and stood talking with me for a while and then went back to work as there were customers coming in. I remained in this restaurant talking with these two workers. As I left, the waitress, Aisyah, asked me to visit them again when I had some free time.

A few weeks later, I went back for dinner, but I did not have much of a chance for an ongoing conversation as customers kept arriving. After I moved to new accommodation in Kampong Tani opposite *Pasir Tom Yam* restaurant, I asked my contacts for interviews. They were able to meet me around 1.00 in the morning at their restaurant after they finished working. I went for the interviews, just before closing time and was introduced to other workers in the kitchen. After meeting everyone, I conducted one-on-one interviews with these workers for a few days in the early morning. I was welcomed by everyone but could not interview every migrant worker there as some of them were too shy.

Figure 1.6 Aisyah's Cluster



1.7.3 In-depth Interviews

The in-depth one-on-one interview provides an understanding of the respondent's perspective. In this study, various informants were interviewed including migrant workers, restaurant entrepreneurs, Thai immigration officials and Thai labour officials. However, while interviews with other stakeholders provided a deeper understanding of the social, political and cultural context of the migrants' experiences, the key informants were the *Nayu* migrant workers themselves.

Schensul et al (1999) suggest beginning interviews with general conversation or with easy questions. Accordingly, at the beginning of the semi-structured interviews I collected personal information (Fetterman 1998). Increasingly complex questions followed later in the in-depth interview which lasted for one or two hours, depending on how much information the participant was willing to give me.

A problem with interviewing was that migrant workers work long hours with few if any breaks and usually do not have a day off. So, if I could not speak with them after work, I arranged an alternative time before they began work, around 4.00 or 5.00 in the evening. I interviewed my first respondent in a Tom Yam restaurant before work. As she is the chef and supervisor of workers in this restaurant, she could talk during the early period of business hours, as there were few customers to serve. However, when customers began coming, she had to go back to work, so the interview could not continue for long.

When interviewing in a restaurant, I made sure to respect all my informants' privacy by conducting the interview away from everyone, especially their employers. The employers did not come to the restaurant before it opened or during the first few hours of operation, but they usually came to collect the takings when the restaurant closed at 2.00 a.m. and to drive their workers back to their accommodation.

Before commencing fieldwork, I prepared semi-structured interview questions. However, after the first interview, the interview structure I had prepared seemed inappropriate because the migrant's life experience was richer than the semi-structured interview allowed for. It was too rigid and obstructed the free flow of conversation. However, I developed a set of interview topics to use instead, based on the key research themes. The themes were generally reflective of the workers' experience: their background; patterns of migration; their life experience; arrest and detention; travelling to Malaysia; working in restaurants; living and working with friends and relatives; and recruitment and job seeking. An interview with open-ended questions is a better way of gaining richer information from respondents than using semi-structured questions. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide detailed accounts of their experience. For instance, when I first embarked on the project, I did not pay attention to the role of cell phones in enabling and shaping the workers' migrant networks. However, while I was making observations, I discovered the use of cell phones to be significant in maintaining social ties among migrant workers, and this was confirmed in the open-ended interviews in which the workers talked about this issue themselves.

I usually had my dinner and lunch in Tom Yam restaurants where my potential respondents were working and I waited for a chance to talk with them. I sat eating and drinking every day from 3.00 p.m. to 1.00 a.m. Although I did not have many chances to strike up a conversation, I still spent a great deal of time observing them, leading to rich and detailed data acquired through my own eyes.

My *Nayu* respondents in Tom Yam restaurants were curious to know about my experiences and about the project, especially about why I was interested in this issue as they were “just ordinary people” with normal lives, not superstars. Within a few weeks, I believed that I had developed rapport and trust with them, so I asked them for one-on-one in-depth interviews of about one hour. Many of them said they were willing, but they did not have much time even for their own recuperation. They were very busy with their work in the restaurants and they needed to rest after their extensive working hours.

Nonetheless, I persisted and had a drink with them briefly when they had no customers. They suggested that I interview them at the beginning of business hours during the off-peak period, when there were few customers and no employers around. As they often lived far from their workplace, after they finished working, they had to return to their accommodation and it was not convenient for them for me to conduct interviews there. Consequently, I arranged interviews during the beginning of work hours at about 4.00 p.m. or 5.00 p.m. in their restaurant in a private room without their employers being present.

In the second period of my fieldwork, I moved into Kampong Tani village, where Tom Yam restaurants are concentrated in KL, where I got to know many of my potential respondents, but still I could not conduct interviews with them as they did not have enough spare time to do so. However, after I changed my approach and moved to live near them, and I arranged my life to fit into their schedule. I conducted observation from 3.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m. and interviews after they finished working around 3.00 a.m. After finishing work, they spent some time in their restaurant resting from 3.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m. During this time, I had an opportunity to conduct one-on-one interviews with all of the respondents working in this village before they left to sleep at 6.00 a.m. Thus I was able to enter the lives of migrant workers and they had time to give me an interview over a drink because most of them slept and worked in the village where I now lived.

Some interviews with *Nayu* were conducted with relatives or partners sitting beside them. In particular, young female migrant workers almost always had their female relatives with them while having a conversation with me. Some respondents were interviewed in their friends' restaurants when they had a day off and came for a drink and dinner. Thus, the atmosphere for such interviews was informal and relaxed, enhancing the reliability of the data I was collecting. However, this only developed over time.

When I first conducted interviews, I used a digital recorder and took some short notes. I soon realized that the use of the recorder disrupted the process: the respondents could not respond smoothly or pay attention with the recorder on the table. It was obvious that my respondents were not comfortable with it, despite

giving me their permission to record. (In Thai culture as a way to show politeness, saying “yes” can sometimes mean “no”). I asked my respondents why they could not talk fluently and naturally as usual. After we discussed the issue, I realized I had to stop using a recorder. I had to keep in mind that most of my respondents were young and uneducated, from rural villages. They were not used to being recorded, which gave them the impression of a formal interview. Despite their understanding that the information would be kept confidential, some migrants did not like being recorded because they were irregular workers. Others did not feel like having their voices recorded as they were embarrassed that they could not speak Thai standard language fluently. I decided to conduct interviews without a digital recorder and found this to be effective, for without the recorder, there was nothing to inhibit our conversation, and the atmosphere was more intimate and familiar. It was better to make conversation over a drink, so my respondents could relax and speak more fluently and naturally about their experiences.

After I conducted the initial interviews with my respondents, I always conducted follow-up interviews with them. However, four of my respondents transferred to other restaurants. Two respondents moved back to their previous restaurants, while the others moved permanently following their former colleagues into new restaurants. It was not only my respondents who transferred to other restaurants, but many migrant workers who were colleagues of my respondents had the habit of moving in and out of restaurants over time as well. This is typical of migrant workers. The workplaces of migrant workers in Tom Yam restaurants could always change rapidly as they were paid on a daily basis. After receiving their wages, they were free to move to a new place.

After I made contact with my respondents, they introduced me to their employers, almost all of whom, both Malaysian and *Nayu*, were glad to allow me to conduct my research and even offered suggestions themselves for people to interview. I had a drink with them and met them a few times when they came before the restaurant closed each day for a short time to check on their workers and to collect their takings. Sometimes I was able to make casual conversation and was eventually able to interview some of them. I conducted interviews with eleven employers, three Malaysian owners, and eight *Nayu* owners including both documented and irregular entrepreneurs. Almost all of these employers are also the employers of the migrant workers in my interview sample. The interviews with employers provided useful information about personal and family backgrounds, entrepreneurial experience, and the recruitment of and problems among *Nayu* workers.

In addition, I also conducted in-depth interviews with three Thai labour officials who were mostly specialists in Thai international migrant workers. One worked at the Office of Labour Affairs, Royal Thai Embassy in Malaysia; one worked as an official at Padong Besar check point in Amphoe Sadao, Songkhla Province; and another at Sadao checkpoint in Amphoe Sadao, Songkhla Province. Moreover, I also conducted in-depth interviews with the Head of the Sadao checkpoint in Amphoe Sadao, Songkhla Province, Thailand. The interviews were conducted during official hours in their offices. These interviews with the three Thai labour officials and the immigration official also proved vital to my understanding of the migration process.

1.7.4 Observation

Observation is a valuable research technique in migration studies because it is necessary to understand the cultural context of migrants' daily lives (Findlay and Li 1999; Schensul et al. 1999; Sarantakos 2005). Non-participant observation was conducted in respondents' workplaces and residences. Participant observation was also conducted as I also took part in their social activities when they had days-off. Observation was able to provide information on the everyday behaviour of migrant workers, which enriched the interview data which was limited by the questions I asked.

During my fieldwork, I kept a diary of my daily activities and experience in the field, including all the encounters between me and my respondents. I always wrote the diary in an unstructured form, as soon as possible after conducting each observation and interview while I still retained fresh memories. This first-hand knowledge importantly contextualised the interviews, enriching the information given to me verbally.

I quickly realised that sharing accommodation with my respondents would limit my ability to engage with other respondents and would have been an unnecessary imposition on people whose lives were already hard. Although I did not live in the same house with respondents, I made sure to locate a residence in a neighbourhood in which many of them lived. The migrant workers scattered over KL, were not assembled in any particular urban village or community, but they did tend to cluster within them. Most of them lived with their workmates in small and crowded rental rooms near their restaurants or in a small space in their restaurants.

1.7.5 Data Analysis

Data collected in the fieldwork was analyzed on a thematic and case study basis. All information from the in-depth interviews was transcribed. I read through all data, coded the key ideas and grouped them into themes or categories which related to the research questions (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). I presented the main results of the data analysis to key participants who confirmed its validity and reliability (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). The data derived from my observations was recorded in a diary and is kept confidential.

1.8 The Limitations of This Research

The first and most obvious limitation of this research is that it was undertaken in one city for a period of six months only. Time and budget constraints meant that the study was conducted between November 2008 and April 2009 in Kuala Lumpur. I decided to study *Nayu* workers who go to Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia, because the majority of them migrate there. Muhamed and Chantavanich (2001) found also that most *Nayu* migrant workers work in restaurants scattered across Kuala Lumpur and Selangor.

A second limitation is that, the study was undertaken only at one end of the migration chain, at the migration destination in Kuala Lumpur, not in the migrants' original villages and households. There is continuous violent conflict in this area frequently attributed to a simmering Muslim insurgency there but just as likely to be, in fact, a by-product of the extensive smuggling of illegal products. Personally, I have no qualms at all about working in the Deep South of my country, but the University of Wollongong made it clear that this was not to be. In addition, it is

anyway difficult to interview workers when they return to their villages, They much prefer to spend the short leave time they have with their families. However, I did gain extensive data about the pre-migration lives of those I interviewed, particularly since (as will become clear below, particularly in Chapter Five) the political economy of the village of origin is crucial in the formation and maintenance of the migrant networks themselves.

Thirdly, I am a heterosexual man and this, of course, affected my interactions with my respondents. Although I am happy that one third of my sample are women, I would have preferred more women in my sample. I attempted to find out why they were reluctant to be involved in my study and I was told that although they were well aware that I would appreciate their participation, female workers are too shy to talk to any man, including me, although I often met them when I had meals in their restaurants and I knew most of them as colleagues or relatives of other respondents. I had some difficulties talking freely with young female migrant workers and sought help from their colleagues or senior female workers. Some women workers were not very talkative and when their friends and I made casual conversation over a drink, they just sat near their friends, happy enough to be part of the situation but giving no verbal response.

My fourth limitation is linguistic. Three languages were involved in this fieldwork, standard Thai, Southern Thai dialect and Malay dialect, the first two of which I comprehend. When conducting interviews or making a casual conversation, I used standard Thai language, the official language of our country. Although some of the respondents could not speak standard Thai fluently, all were able to understand it and

me very well. Sometimes, when they did not know how to say some Thai words, they would ask their friends to interpret from Thai into Malay dialect. Although my observation provided rich data about my respondents' lives, there were some difficulties with my understanding the language my respondents spoke in casual conversations with each other. I could understand the Southern Thai dialect they spoke in their every day lives. However, sometimes they spoke Malay dialect to each other, which I was unable to understand. My language deficiency prevented me from understanding when my respondents made conversations in the Malay dialect. I resolved this problem by asking my respondents what they were talking about, and then they would translate their conversation to me..

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research objectives and described the study's methodology. In identifying seven major gaps in the international migration literature it has shown that there is a limited understanding of migrant networks among international migrant workers, in particular those from Thailand to Malaysia. This study fills these gaps and provides insights into the social and cultural aspects of international migration by studying *Nayu* migrant workers from the far Southern provinces of Thailand working in Malaysia.

In addition, this chapter has described the research methodology used in the study to explore migrant networks. It involves a qualitative approach, based on in-depth interviews, observation and document analysis and utilises the snowballing sampling technique. The purposive sample focused mainly on *Nayu* migrant workers but also included employers, immigration officers and labour officials. This chapter discussed

four limitations of the study as well as the benefits of adopting the methodology to examine the networks among *Nayu* migrant workers. The following chapter provides an overview of the international migration literature concentrating on Malaysia and Thailand.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing volume of international migration in Southeast Asia has resulted from and contributes to uneven economic development within the region. Countries with high economic growth such as Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan and Hong Kong, have a high demand for labour to support their economic development (Pillai 1992; Tsai and Tsay 2004). Local workers reject so-called 3D (dirty, difficult and dangerous) jobs and thus open up opportunities for foreign workers. The resulting labour-market segmentation can lead to some jobs being considered mainly appropriate for foreign workers.

In contrast, some countries in Southeast Asia and regions in some countries have slower economic growth or are less developed, such as the Philippines, Myanmar and Indonesia, and Southern Thailand. They face rapid population growth and high levels of unemployment. Migrants from these less developed countries and regions are attracted to work in more developed countries (Tsai and Tsay 2004; Martin et al. 2006; Kaur 2006a). In reality Thailand has reached the same levels of development as Malaysia. But Southern Thailand and its people are the exception. Economic development in the far Southern provinces of Thailand does not match the rest of Thailand.

In this context, more developed countries became the destination for, and less developed countries become the origin of, migrants. Thailand – a ‘middle-level’ country in relation to economic growth in Southeast Asia (Tsai and Tsay 2004) – is both a sending and a destination country for migration. Thailand has an economic

growth rate which is much higher than some neighbouring countries such as Myanmar, Lao and Cambodia (Asis 2005; Martin et al. 2006). However, it is less developed than some countries in East and Southeast Asia such as Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and Hong Kong. These countries pay wages higher than in Thailand, leading some Thai workers to want to migrate. As Malaysia borders the far Southern provinces of Thailand, Thai workers can comparatively easily cross the border to work there, particularly as irregular workers (Klanarong 2009b).

This chapter reviews the literature on the international migration of Thai workers in Southeast and East Asia. It discusses the socio-economic profiles of Thai migrant workers, the reasons for their migration, the recruitment system, living and working conditions and the impact of migration on workers and their families. Additionally, I provide a brief overview of research on Malaysia's role as a destination country for international labour migrants, focusing on Malaysia's immigration policies and its broad migration patterns.

2.1 Studies of Thai Migrant Workers in East and Southeast Asia

Although the number of Thai workers in East and Southeast Asia has increased since the late 1980s (Chantavanich and Germershausen 2000), there are still few studies of Thai workers in either Thailand or in destination countries. Research on Thai international migrants mainly focuses either on their experiences in destination countries or examines returnees in Thailand, and I will briefly discuss each in turn.

Firstly, studies of Thai workers in their destinations have been conducted in Hong Kong (Sek-hong and Lee 2000; Hewison 2004); South Korea (Kang 2000);

Singapore (Wong 2000; Kitiarsa 2006; Butr-Udom 2007); Brunei (Chomchai 2000); Taiwan (Laodumrongchai 2000; Tsay 2002); Japan (Singhanetra-Renard 1996; Chunjitkaruna 2000; Nagayama 2000; Ruenkaew 2002; Suriya and Kitiarsa 2005); and Malaysia (Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001). Most of these studies have been carried out by a team coordinated from the Asian Research Center for Migration at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. A number concern the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of Thai migrant workers (Chomchai 2000; Wong 2000; Hewison 2004) describing their backgrounds and characteristics. A few investigate the informal and formal recruitment processes of Thai migrant workers (Chunjitkaruna 2000; Wong 2000), examining whether Thai workers used recruitment agencies or were self-organized. The majority of studies, however, focus on living and working conditions in destination countries (Chomchai 2000; Chunjitkaruna 2000; Kang 2000; Laodumrongchai 2000; Wong 2000; Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001; Hewison 2004). These studies aim to improve knowledge of conditions of employment and to assist in the development and protection of Thai migrant workers' labour rights, and they analyse the economic and social causes and impacts of Thai labour migration (Chomchai 2000; Laodumrongchai 2000; Sek-hong and Lee 2000; Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001; Hewison 2004), developing an understanding of why Thai workers work abroad and the impact of their migration on the migrants themselves, their households, their villages and on Thai society in general.

While these studies provide a body of knowledge about the existing features of international labour migration from Thailand, there is no in-depth study which explains the pattern of international labour migration as a whole. In addition, because

most of these studies have been carried out by teams coordinated from the Asian Research Center for Migration, they share similar research objectives and approaches (Chomchai 2000; Chunjitkaruna 2000; Kang 2000; Laodumrongchai 2000; Sek-hong and Lee 2000; Chantavanich et al. 2001; Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001).

Although the literature focuses on various economic sectors, most studies examine construction and manufacturing workers (Chomchai 2000; Kang 2000; Laodumrongchai 2000; Sek-hong and Lee 2000; Wong 2000; Kitiarsa 2006; Kitiarsa 2008) or collect data on the migration of Thai workers into all sectors (Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001; Hewison 2004). Relatively few studies pay attention to the service sector (Chunjitkaruna 2000; Ruenkaew 2002; Suriya and Kitiarsa 2005) even though many Thai workers are employed in its various occupations including as restaurant workers, domestic workers, sex workers and entertainers.

Although some studies provide a general overview of documented and irregular workers (Kang 2000; Wong 2000; Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001), most studies focus on documented Thai migrant workers who are working abroad as contract workers or guest workers (Chomchai 2000; Hewison 2004). Relatively few studies pay attention to the migration of irregular Thai workers (Chunjitkaruna 2000; Ruenkaew 2002) and they mostly deal with Thais working in Japan.

The majority of these studies use a survey methodology and provide descriptive statistics that are sometimes supported by secondary data or by interviews (Chomchai 2000; Chunjitkaruna 2000; Kang 2000; Laodumrongchai 2000; Wong 2000; Hewison 2004). Very few studies use qualitative methodologies (Ruenkaew

2002; Suriya and Kitiarsa 2005; Kitiarsa 2006; Kitiarsa 2008). In addition, most of these studies were conducted before 2000 and the data are outdated.

Statistics show that the majority of Thai migrant workers are male. Thus it is no surprise that many migration scholars concentrate on male migrant workers (Wong 2000; Kitiarsa 2006; Kitiarsa 2008) and on both male and female migrant workers (Chomchai 2000; Chunjitkaruna 2000; Kang 2000; Laodumrongchai 2000; Sek-hong and Lee 2000; Muhamed and Chantavanich 2001; Hewison 2004; Butr-Udom 2007) yet these do not bring gender relations into their analyses.

The second group of studies focuses on Thai migrant returnees in Thailand (Warm Singh 1998; Sobieszcyk 2000; Chantavanich et al. 2001; Wille 2001; Klanarong 2003; Klanarong 2005; Klanarong 2009a; Klanarong 2009b). These examine migrants who have returned to their villages after having worked overseas in East and Southeast Asia. Warm Singh's (1998) study focuses on both the economic and non-economic consequences of international labour migration on migrants, their families and their communities of origin in rural Northeastern Thailand. Although based on primary data from a field survey, the study ignores gender.

Among this body of research, there is little on specific migration systems. An exception is the work of Klanarong (2003) who examined the patterns of international labour migration, the causes and impact of that migration and the implications for policy of female migration in the border region of Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia. This study was conducted among female migrants who returned to their villages within two years of working in Malaysia. The primary and secondary data

were based on surveys. But the study is restricted to migrants who have returned to Thailand and it provides insufficient explanation of the relationships between Southern Thailand and Malaysia in terms of their historical, cultural and migration ties. In addition, Klanrong did not follow the surveyed migrants progress once that they were in Malaysia.

Wille's (2001) study of female labour migration in Southeast Asia focused on specific aspects of migration including the experiences of women from four countries of which Thailand is one. This study investigates the recruitment process, life and working conditions abroad and the impact of migration. It is based on survey data from 98 Thai female returnees who had worked in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan and Singapore and came from Northeast and Northern Thailand and Bangkok but did not include the Southern region of Thailand.

Chantavanich et al (2001) investigate migration flows including migration recruitment, working and living conditions in destination countries and the impact of migration from Thailand to four major destination countries, namely Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan. This study, based on ILO guidelines, uses survey data from the Northern, North-eastern and Southern regions of Thailand. However, it did not examine the social and cultural contexts of migration and did not collect information about gender and migration.

In summary, much existing scholarship on Thai international labour migration, both in Thailand and in destination countries, is limited in at least four aspects. Firstly, the majority of Thai migrant worker studies pay attention only to male migrant workers.

Even when studies include Thai female migrant workers, they provide little information about gender relations between migrants. Secondly, the existing literature focuses on documented migrant workers and it is generally considered that in the South, irregular migrants greatly outnumber documented ones. Thirdly, most studies pay attention to the labour market and economic perspectives but do not thoroughly consider the multitude of reasons for migration including political, social, cultural, environmental and historical factors. They do not explain why workers migrate to a specific country. International migration is more complex than push and pull theories of migration suggest. Fourthly, migration from the Southern region of Thailand is largely ignored by migration scholars for reasons that remain unclear to me.

2.2 Studies of Malaysia as a Destination Country

Although foreigners who work in Malaysia come from various countries, including Bangladesh, the Philippines, Thailand, India, Pakistan and Nepal, most studies pay attention to the Indonesians who constitute the largest number of foreign workers in Malaysia, particularly of domestic workers. These studies focus on the policies regulating foreign labour; the features of and trends in irregular and documented immigration; the causes and consequences of transnational movement; female domestic workers; and also on international worker activism.

A number of studies have explored the Malaysian state's responses to migration using secondary data (Kanapathy 2001; Kassim 2001; Chin 2003; Ramasamy 2004). Many investigate immigration policies and migration law. Wong (2006) investigated the evolution of Malaysia's foreign labour policy from the early 1970s to find out

why these policies have shifted to a guest worker regime. She analyses the history of Indonesian labour migration to Malaysia. Pillai (1999) examines the evolution of government policy and the economic impact of the Asian Financial Crisis on migrant labour in Malaysia. However, this study was limited to the economy and labour market issues.

The features of and trend in irregular and documented immigration to Malaysia and the labour rights of foreign workers were studied by Kassim (2001). She provides much data on the domestic labour market and explores the consequences of international migration for Indonesian migrants (Kassim 1998; Kassim 2001). These studies investigate Indonesian migrants' socio-economic and documented status in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor.

Eki (2002) provides an analysis of the patterns of movement and causes and economic consequences of both economic and non-economic migration from Eastern Flores, in Indonesia to Sabah in Malaysia. Pillai (1992) also analyses international labour migration in terms of the nature, factors, and consequences of migration using neoclassical theories of migration. Firdausy (1998) outlines the characteristics and determining factors of international migration from Indonesia to Malaysia by surveying 101 return migrants in East Java and West Nusatenggara.

Studies of transnational worker activism in Malaysia explore migrant workers' rights and activism in Malaysia and detail some of the reasons for the limited activism of migrants (Gurowitz 2000; Kage 2005). Piper (2006) investigates the role of the state in migration in Malaysia and Singapore but her argument is based on secondary data

with interviews on worker activism only with NGOs and not with government officials nor with the workers themselves.

2.2.1 The Legal Dimensions of Foreign Workers in Malaysia

(a) The Legal Dimensions of Labour Migration

There are three major laws in Malaysia regarding foreign labour migration: The Immigration Act 1959/63 (Amended 2002); The Passport Act 1966; and The Employment Act 1955 (Amended 1968) (Ahmad 2003). The Immigration Act 1959 and The Passport Act 1966 concern the legal entry of non-citizens into the country. Under these laws, non-citizens entering the country must have a valid passport and a visa. It is, therefore, irregular to enter the country without them and non-citizens are subject to arrest and deportation if found in Malaysia without the relevant papers. However, Malaysia and Thailand are both members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), so a visa is not required for a Thai national to enter Malaysia. But under the Employment Act 1959 (Amended 1968), non-citizens who work in Malaysia must have a valid work permit. Under The Immigration Act 1959/63 (Amended 2002), a non-citizen can not immigrate without an entry permit or re-entry permit from a lawful authority. This Act assigns to the Director General of Immigration and to the Minister of Immigration the lawful authority to grant an Employment Pass, and to prohibit entry into the country, and to cancel any pass or permit to enter the country.

In Malaysia there are three types of entry as outlined below:

(i) *A Visitor's Pass for temporary employment of semi-skilled and unskilled foreign workers.* Unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers can obtain a visitor's pass for

temporary employment on short-term contracts of up to 12 months, renewable for up to 5 years. They must be between 18 to 45 years of age. Levies must be paid at different levels of skill. To employ domestic workers, Malaysian households must have a minimum monthly income of 2,000 RM to employ Indonesia workers and 4,000 RM to employ Filipino workers. There are also restrictions on age and nationality. Foreign workers may work only in sectors which have a labour shortage such as manufacturing, construction and service sectors and on plantations. Significantly for this study, foreign workers in restaurants throughout the country are allowed to work as cooks and general workers but not as waiters/waitresses and cashiers.

(ii) *A Visitor's Pass for professional skilled workers.* Skilled workers with professional qualifications are eligible to provide services for short duration stays of up to 12 months only to a Malaysian subsidiary on behalf of the overseas company which owns it. The foreigner must remain employed by the home country and cannot enter into direct employment with the Malaysian company. There is no levy under this type of pass. The government encourages the short-term hiring of these professional migrant workers.

(iii) *An Employment Pass for foreign expatriates.* Workers with skill and qualifications are eligible for employment in Malaysia with at least a 2 year contract. The minimum monthly salary required is 5,000 RM and employers who hire expatriates must pay levies to the government at differential levels depending on the employment position. This Pass is renewable up to 5 years.

The work permit and the levy system for managing foreign workers are costly for employers and workers who go through official channels. It is no surprise that many migrant workers prefer the irregular route which is free and quick but risky, to the legal route which is more costly and time-consuming. Although employers prefer to employ irregular workers because they are cheaper, they can be convicted under the Employment Act for hiring them.

(b) Legal Dimensions on the Rights and Protection of Foreign Workers

The Employment Restrictions Act 1968 provides labour rights and protection for local workers in Malaysia and requires Malaysian employers who employ foreign workers to get work permits for them, but they must try to secure local workers before hiring foreign workers. The welfare and rights of foreign workers are protected under Malaysian laws including The Employment Act of 1955, The Workmen Compensation Act 1952, The Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994, and The Industrial Relations Act 1967 (Ahmad 2003). These laws are not restricted to Malaysian workers and also protect foreign workers who have the same labour rights as local workers under Malaysian laws. Crucially for this study, however, these laws apply only to documented foreign workers and not to irregular workers.

Under The Industrial Relations Act 1967, employees have the right to become a member of a trade union and to participate in its lawful activities, but The Employment (Restrictions) Act 1968 does not allow foreign workers to become a member of a trade union (Ahmad 2003). This means that even documented foreign workers who are employed in Malaysia have no right to participate in a trade union

as The Employment (Restrictions) Act 1968 does not follow The Industrial Relations Act 1967.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 covers the safety, health and welfare of both local and foreign employees in Malaysia. Under this law, employers must ensure the safety and health of employees in their workplace (Ahmad 2003). However, and significantly for the study, only documented foreign workers have the right to access this protection. Finally, The Workmen Compensation Act 1952 outlines the protection of a general workman, any person who works as an employee under a contract of service or an apprenticeship. The Act applies to both local and documented foreign employees, but does not cover the rights and protection of domestic workers or irregular workers (Ahmad 2003).

2.2.2 The Evolution of Malaysia's Immigration Policy on Foreign Workers

Malaysia's policies on foreign labour immigration can be divided into four distinct phases.

(a) Phase one: 1971 to 1980

During the first phase, the policy was to not control foreign worker recruitment. The government ignored foreign worker flows into the country and encouraged irregular migration in order to fill labour shortages. After Independence, the Malaysian government stopped the immigration of Indian workers to the plantation sector because of the ethnic and religious differences between Malays and Indians. In addition, the Indian workers had started to organise and to demand better working conditions. The numbers of foreign workers gradually increased after the New

Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1971. This policy aimed to increase export-oriented industrialization, expand the public sector, re-structure the agricultural sector and to reduce poverty among the Malay population in the countryside (Pillai 1992; Jones 2000; Kaur 2007; Wong et al. 2008). The government's focus on industrialization and export agriculture led to shortages of low-skilled and low-wage labour, especially in the agricultural, plantation, domestic and some manufacturing sectors. Rising educational levels among young locals under the New Economic Policy led them to reject low status jobs they characterised as "3D" work – dangerous, difficult and dirty. (Hugo 1993; Kassim 2001).

The earliest foreign worker flows from neighbouring countries such as Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia were ignored by the Malaysian government because there was employment available for unskilled and semi-skilled workers. During this phase, the government allowed these people into the country because they shared the same religion as the Malays. The Filipinos came from the south of the Philippines and were Muslims and Indonesians and most Thais were also Muslims.

Kaur (2006), Wong (2008) and Pillai (1992) argue that from 1970 to 1980 foreign workers were recruited through a system based on shared culture, history, geography and migrant networks. Foreign workers soon became part of Malaysia's economy (Ramasamy 2004) and Malaysian employers have often smuggled in workers from neighbouring countries. They were employed informally through intermediaries and in this first period, there are implications for ethnic stability political control

concerning Malaysia's delicate balance between *bumiputra*⁴ (Malays and other indigenous groups) and non-*bumiputra* (Chinese and Indian people).

Increasing the Malay ethnic population increases the voting strength of *bumiputra*-based political parties. The assimilation of Malay Muslims from Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines helped to increase the proportion of the population which was *bumiputra*. Through the assimilation of Muslim Thais, Indonesians and Filipinos into Malaysian society (Pillai 1992; Asis 2005) the political and economic strength of *bumiputra* society grew at the expense of non-*bumiputra* power.

(b) Phase Two: 1981 to 1988

The second phase attempted to legalize irregular workers. Official agreements between the Malaysian Government and countries of origin were introduced to control the flows of irregular workers into the country which the Government used to balance labour shortages and the need for economic development. This led in 1982 to the establishment of an official channel for the recruitment of foreign workers, the Committee for the Recruitment of Foreign Workers.

At first, the policy on foreign workers was shaped by bilateral agreements with labour-sending countries. In May 1984, the Malaysian government signed the Medan Agreement with Indonesia, followed by a Memorandum of Understanding with the Philippines. These bilateral agreements aimed to control the movement of migrant workers into the country and to restrict foreign workers to certain sectors of the economy. But they failed to control the number of irregular foreign workers and only

⁴ *Bumiputra* means 'son of earth' in Malaysian, embracing all people indigenous to the Malay Archipelago. It does not apply to Chinese and Indian people in Malaysia who are not indigenous.

a small number of contract workers were employed under these agreements (Wong et al. 2008). Over a long period of time, huge numbers of foreign workers were employed through informal recruitment systems and intermediaries. According to Wong (2008), the Malaysian labour market continued to be supplied by a largely free-flowing irregular network based on chain migration.

(c) Phase Three: 1989 to 1996

The third phase included a worldwide economic recession (1985-86). The Government introduced a variety of policies to legalize and regularize irregular workers. Employers were given six months to register irregular foreign workers and to regularize the plantation sector. However, this directive was largely ignored by employers and by foreign workers as they had to pay a high registration fee. In addition, they believed, correctly, that the policy was not able to be implemented effectively nor enforced. As a result, legalisation was postponed and the deadline for regularization was extended to 1991. Because a huge number of irregular foreign workers paid no attention to the attempted legalization of their status, the Malaysian government declared an amnesty and irregular domestic workers were given an opportunity from November 1 to December 31, 1991 to obtain work permits and legalize their status. Employers were made responsible for bringing their irregular foreign workers to register. First, foreign workers had to obtain a temporary travel permit from their embassy. Then, employees had to obtain medical checks. Finally, employees were to register at the Immigration Department for temporary work permits. If the medical check showed they had a communicable disease, or were pregnant, they were deported. The amnesty policy was successful so the Government extended the deadline for permits until June 30, 1992 in order to cover the plantation

and construction sectors, and 442,276 irregular workers were regulated (Wong 2006).

During the registration period, there was a parallel policy called *Ops Nyah I* (Operation Go Away I) along coastal borders to deter irregular Indonesian migrants. At the end of the amnesty period, the government began checking irregular foreign workers at their homes and workplaces under a policy called *Ops Nyah II* (Operation Go Away II) which commenced in June 1992. Wong (2008) and Kaur (2006) argue that this phase of Malaysia's immigration policy, consisting of various attempts at registration and legalisation was much more successful in regularising the status of foreign workers than the earlier immigration policies. The effects of these policies on irregular foreign workers were severe. It became difficult to employ them and employers were forced to employ authorized foreign workers recruited through recruitment agencies.

In October 1994, a Task Force was established to act as a one-stop service agency. It directly employed foreign workers without using recruitment agencies. Applications for the recruitment of foreign workers had to be approved by the Task Force under the Manpower Department of the Ministry of Human Resources. This was to ensure that there were no local workers available for employment to reduce dependency on foreign workers (Pillai and Yusof 1998).

In May 1995, the government reduced the number of licensed agencies recruiting from Indonesia to 52 firms because some agencies allowed foreign workers to enter and become irregular workers. In October 1995, the Malaysian government's

Cabinet Committee on Foreign Workers created new regulations for the employment of foreign workers as follows: 1) employers could not deduct fees from the wages of their foreign employees; 2) employers must apply directly to the Foreign Workers Task Force to employ foreign workers; 3) employers are required to pay round trip transportation for foreign workers; 4) employers must pay the foreign worker levy themselves; and 5) Indonesian workers are only allowed to enter Peninsular Malaysia through airports.

Despite these and other policies for the management of foreign workers, the problems of the employment of irregular workers from neighbouring countries, in particular from Indonesia, continued. The government could not stop the flows of foreign workers because demand for foreign labour was too strong. Foreign worker flows from Southern Thailand, Indonesia and the southern Philippines supported by migrant networks built on cultural and religious affinities were too difficult to stop.

Consequently, in 1996, amnesty programs returned in order to control irregular foreign workers. Employers had to bring their unauthorised foreign workers to register at immigration offices from July 10 to December 31, 1996. After this deadline the government extended the amnesty until the end of January 1997. Some foreign workers who ignored these efforts to legalize their status were caught and forced to leave the country. After they were caught and paid a fine, they could return to work in Malaysia but they had to obtain the right documentation from their home countries. The policy was a great success in terms of reducing irregular foreign workers; 423,180 were registered and the government obtained substantial revenue from the levies charged to them.

(d) Phase Four: 1997 to the present

The fourth phase, from the Asian Financial Crisis to the present, has two important dimensions. Firstly, during the Asian economic crisis of 1997 and 1998 amnesties were introduced to control and reduce the number of irregular workers. Secondly, a work permit system based on offshore recruitment was introduced to reduce the dependency on traditional countries as the source for foreign workers. The Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 led to an economic slowdown and high unemployment in Malaysia. The government introduced several policies to reduce unemployment. Firstly, they did not provide new work permits and did not renew expired work permits for foreign workers. In November 1997, the government stopped the employment of foreign workers in some sectors and announced that foreign workers who were working in non-productive sectors and in many service industries had to leave their employment and return home by the end of August 1998. In addition, they transferred foreign workers from the service sector to work in the plantation and manufacturing sectors where there were labour shortages.

In January 1998, as the economic crisis continued to impact on Malaysia's economy, the Government did not allow new work permits for foreign workers in many sectors such as entertainment, small businesses and hospitality. As a consequence, during the Asian Financial Crisis, many irregular migrants returned or were deported to their countries. However, these policies were ineffective in reducing the total number of foreign workers. The Government estimated that there was still a huge number of foreign workers being smuggled into the country. It designed a new policy to increase the employment rate of Malaysian citizens and proposed a yet another

amnesty to legalize foreign workers from September 1 until the end of October 1998. Unauthorised immigrants and employers who did not attempt to legalize their status would face strict sanctions and fines. Many employers, afraid of the fines but unwilling to pay the costs of regularization, sent their irregular employees home (Wong 2006).

Kaur (2007) argues that this crisis marked a turning point in the attempts to control irregular workers. Malaysia's policy for foreign labour management is not consistent - it changes over time. Malaysia's immigration policy is driven by labour market conditions in each period. During the period of economic growth before the Asian Financial Crisis, the government allowed foreign workers to enter the country through official channels. With the economic slowdown, they introduced various attempts to limit foreign workers so as to reduce the unemployment rate for local workers.

After the Asian Economic Crisis, there was increased demand for labour in 2001. The Malaysian Government allowed the recruitment of Burmese and Nepalese workers to address temporary labour shortages in the manufacturing, construction and plantation sectors. This was the first step in reducing dependence on workers from Indonesia and the Philippines. In addition, the Malaysian Government allowed the entry of guest workers from Thailand, Cambodia, Nepal, Myanmar and Laos to work in the manufacturing and service sectors; Vietnamese and Filipinos to work in the construction, plantation and agriculture sectors; and Indians to work in the plantation sector. In March 2002, authorized migrant workers were given smart

identity cards which had their photos and bar codes including information about their employers (Wong 2006; Kaur 2007).

In November 2003, Malaysia and Bangladesh signed a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Malaysian Government had banned Bangladeshi workers in 1996. In addition, in 2004, Malaysia agreed to allow Pakistani workers to work in the country under a bilateral MOU. There were 100,000 Pakistanis employed in Malaysia in January 2004. In recent years, as already noted, the government has changed its policies and foreign workers have been recruited from Nepal, Laos, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Cambodia in order to reduce the country's dependency on neighbouring countries, in particular on Indonesia and the Philippines. According to Government sources, Indonesian workers do not respect Malaysia's laws and under the government's "Indonesians Last Policy", employers were only allowed to recruit migrant workers from distant countries. In more recent years the "Indonesians Last Policy" has been discarded, but the management of unskilled and semi-skilled foreign workers has been more closely controlled. Indonesian workers are only allowed to work in the plantation sector and as domestic workers.

In August 2002, the Malaysian government amended the Immigration Act 1959/1963. Under the new law, irregular workers could be fined up to 10,000 RM (about one year's wages) or imprisoned for up to five years and receive six strokes of the cane. In addition, under the Immigration Act (Amended) 2002, employers who hired irregular workers could be jailed for three months and fined 5,000 RM. However, there was another amnesty program for irregular workers. They could leave the country without penalty between March 22, 2002 and July 31, 2002, before

the new law was enforced. The Indonesian Government warned irregular workers to return home before the law was enforced and sent naval ships to pick up its citizens. Under the amnesty, a huge number of irregular workers, in particular Indonesian workers, left Malaysia

Another amnesty program was begun on 31 January 2005 after the earthquake and tsunami. Workers repatriated under this program could return to Malaysia as documented workers. With the expiration of the amnesty for irregular workers on 28 February 2005, many irregular workers left Malaysia to avoid punishment. After the amnesty finished, government officials and volunteers began to round up irregular workers in an operation called *Ops Tegas* (Strong Operation). Irregular workers who were caught faced blacklisting, caning, detention and fines. After *Ops Tegas*, it was reported that 270 irregular workers were caught in Kuala Lumpur, 500 workers and 84 employers in Penang and 527 irregular workers in Sandakan (Asian Migration News 2005d). The International Trade and Industry Minister announced that employers were to blame for the resulting shortage of labour caused by the deportations (Asian Migration News 2005a). The country faced labour shortages because of the slow return of Indonesian migrants as documented workers, attributed to red tape and high fees. In addition, the Malaysian Association of Foreign Workers' Agencies (PAPA) announced that Malaysia faced a critical shortage of local workers (Asian Migration News 2005b). Under a new program, foreign workers who availed themselves of an amnesty could return on social visit visas and subsequently register for work. After their social visit visas expired, they were allowed to apply for work documents providing the applications were made through their employers (Asian

Migration News 2005c). This policy was intended to help ease the short fall in the national labour market.

In 2004, the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Workers decided to recruit foreign workers from Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Bangladesh, China, Cambodia and Laos. They would have to complete an induction course on communication skills in English or Malay, Malaysian culture, Malaysian laws, and on regulations in their own countries before they could obtain work permits. The induction course was provided by the Malaysia Training Providers (MTP). This certificate of eligibility for the employment of foreign workers was extended to workers from Indonesia, India, Burma, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The new workers had to complete an induction course in their countries before being employed in Malaysia as of April 1, 2006 (Asian Migration News 2006a).

In May 2004, Malaysia signed an MOU with Indonesia. Under this agreement, employers are allowed to hold their employees' passports and other documents for safekeeping. In addition, there were new conditions for the hiring of Indonesian workers – they must be aged 18 to 40, and able to communicate in English or Malay. They receive a smart identity card as well. From March 2005, the Malaysian People's Voluntary Corps (RELA), who are an unpaid citizen's organization, have been allowed to search for and detain irregular foreign workers. Armed RELA members have the power to arrest irregular workers. They receive 60 RM for each migrant worker arrested. An estimated 500,000 RELA members help enforce the immigration laws. RELA volunteers are allowed to enter workplaces and

accommodation without warrants, to carry firearms and to make arrests after receiving permission from RELA leaders (Asian Migration News 2006d).

In August 2005, the Malaysian Government required all new foreign workers to undergo a medical check-up within 30 days of their arrival to detect communicable diseases, including HIV, hepatitis B, syphilis, tuberculosis and leprosy, and to check for pregnancy. This was in addition to the requirement that they obtain a medical certificate in their country of origin (Asian Migration News 2005a). If they fail the medical examinations, they are deported.

At the same time, the Immigration Department increased the levy on foreign workers in the farming and service sectors from 1,200 RM to 1,800 RM in Peninsular Malaysia and from RM 960 to RM 1,400 in Sabah and Sarawak (Asian Migration News 2005e), a huge burden for foreign workers. In October 2005, India and Malaysia signed an MOU on the recruitment of workers to protect them from exploitation by agents and middlemen. This agreement came about because of the increasing numbers of Indian workers being defrauded by recruiting agencies.

In May 2006, Malaysia and Indonesian signed a new MOU to establish a standard contract for Indonesian documented workers in Malaysia. The MOU specifies a minimum wage between 400 to 500 RM per month for domestic workers and at least one day off weekly. Prior to this, Indonesian domestic workers received an average wage of 350 RM monthly but Filipinos received 750 RM (Migration News, 2007b). In November 2006, Malaysia and Indonesia signed an MOU to cover the recruitment of domestic workers. Under this MOU, Indonesian recruiters charge domestic

workers a maximum of RM 1,300 and Malaysian agencies charge the households seeking Indonesian domestic workers RM 2,415. However, very few Indonesian workers arrived under this MOU (Migration News, 2007b). In 2007, the Malaysian Trade Union Congress and the Indonesian Trade Union Confederation reached an agreement to protect Indonesian workers in Malaysia (Migration News, 2007a).

As a newly industrialised country, Malaysia's economic development depends on low-paid, unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers. Without foreign workers Malaysia's economy cannot compete with other countries' labour-intensive export-oriented industries. Consequently, the Government must allow migrant workers to enter the country to meet labour market demands. The Malaysian immigration policies seem often to be driven by short-term labour market fluctuations. These policies are not constant and have been frequently modified in response to labour market conditions. During periods of economic growth, Malaysia has granted an amnesty for unauthorised workers but as the economy slows down, the Government reduces the number of foreign workers by clamping down on illegal migration.

According to Kaur (2006), the government has no long-term solution to the problem of this reliance on foreign workers. The lack of long-term public policy on labour shortages has led to a dependence on temporary foreign workers for economic growth. Pillai and Yusof (1998) argue that the lack of a long-term national policy has hindered human resource development at the macro-level and has stifled planning and training at the level of the firm.

Unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers are recruited as temporary or contract workers through private agencies. They are not directly recruited by employers. In recent years, as already noted, the Government has changed its policies and foreign workers have been recruited from far away countries, in order to reduce the country's dependency on migrant workers from neighbouring countries, in particular from Indonesia and the Philippines. According to Government sources, Indonesian workers did not respect Malaysia's laws and under the government's "Indonesians Last Policy" employers were only allowed to recruit migrant workers from distant countries. In recent years, the "Indonesians Last Policy" has been discarded but unskilled and semi-skilled foreign workers have been more closely controlled, although professional workers are not subjected to the same rules.

Malaysia has both documented and irregular migrant workers. Documented migrant workers receive social welfare and medical care from the government and are covered by human rights regulations and laws governing working conditions. But Malaysian policies on documented migrant workers actually do little to protect their labour rights but focus on controlling labour mobility and restricting irregular entry. Therefore, apart from the risk of a fine and deportation, being a documented migrant worker is not that much different from being an irregular migrant worker. Although official channels are safer, migrant workers still have to pay a high price – they must pay for a visa, a work permit, a levy, the cost of a medical examination and a recruitment fee. In contrast, irregular migrant workers face none of these costs.

2.2.2 The Migrant Situation

Workplace grievances for foreign workers are of two types. First are issues about low and unpaid wages. Second are issues about working conditions and welfare mainly related to accommodation, working hours, holidays and work hazards including physical and sexual abuse. Piper (2006) and Kassim (2001) point out that irregular workers have no employment rights and other benefits according to Malaysian labour law, so their rights are limited to their contracts with their employers. There is no minimum wage in Malaysia and foreign workers are paid less than local workers and are paid less for overtime and public holidays. In addition, while medical facilities, accommodation and other benefits have to be provided to documented foreign workers, it is not easy to access these. In addition, there are few social security provisions for foreign workers such as the Workmen's Compensation and Employees Provident Fund. However, most employers take out social security policies for their legal foreign employees. There is retrenchment welfare in case of accident or injury and occupational diseases at the workplace. In a case study of Indonesian workers, Kassim (1998) found that they faced a range of problems at the workplace. There was poor provision of welfare benefits, low wages, and a lack of labour rights. In fact, Indonesian workers, even when legal, had no recourse to justice from their employers. But although they have few rights and welfare provisions, Indonesian workers reported that they were satisfied with their accommodation and living environment (Kassim 1998). When they were ill or had to have their babies delivered, irregular migrant workers who did not have health insurance, received social and medical services from state hospitals and clinics. In addition, children born in Malaysia received Malaysian birth certificates and entry to public school

(Kassim 1998). Thus irregular migrant workers have some access to some public services in Malaysia, but it is very limited.

2.3 Conclusion

The pattern of international labour migration is that people move from the less developed countries to the more developed countries. Workers migrate in the hope that they will be able to improve their quality of life, financial situation and social status. Malaysia has had rapid and sustained economic growth which has supported the expansion of the Malaysian labour market, in particular the service sector which has a high demand for cheap, unskilled labour. Foreign workers are allowed in as long as there are labour needs and shortages. They come not only through official channels as documented workers but also as irregular workers.

Although Thai migrant workers in particular *Nayu* workers from the far Southern provinces of Thailand, are one of the many groups of irregular migrant workers in Malaysia, the migration literature has paid little attention to them. In particular, much of the Thai emigration literature focuses on movement from North and Northeast Thailand to East Asia and Singapore. The literature on international labour migration to Malaysia pays more attention to Indonesian and Filipino workers who make up the largest percentages of both documented and irregular foreign workers in the country.

A study with a focus on the socio-cultural aspects of irregular migration from the far Southern provinces of Thailand to Malaysia will be an essential contribution to understanding Thai labour migration as a whole. The following chapter provides an outline of the historical aspects and socio-economic contexts of the study area of

Southern Thailand and Malaysia in order to situate more recent migration between the two countries and provide greater insight into the lives *Nayu* migrant workers.

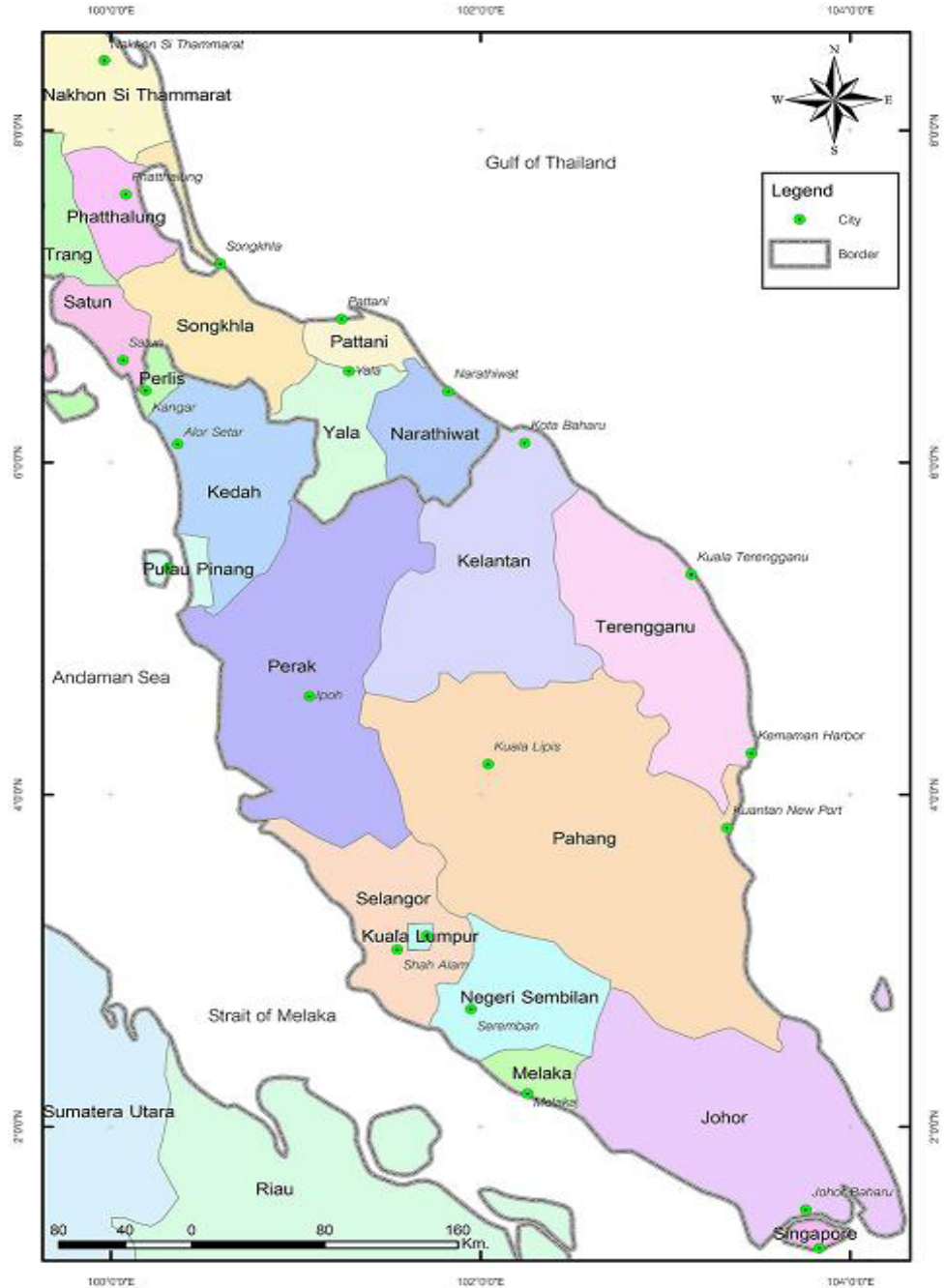
CHAPTER 3: THE STUDY AREA

This chapter describes the Thai Southern region including its geographic location, its history and economic, social-cultural contexts and levels of education.

3.1 The Location

Thailand and Malaysia are neighbouring countries with much in common. Particularly in the Southern region of Thailand which borders the Malaysian northern states, the population shares culture, language and religion, and people travel in and out of both countries for business and for social visits. Thailand's far Southern region comprises five provinces: Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and Songkhla (see Figure 3.1). Except for Pattani, these provinces are located on the Thailand and Malaysia border and abut four states of North Malaysia namely Perlis, Kedah, Perak and Kelantan. The border is 647 kilometres long stretching from the eastern coast on the Gulf of Thailand to the western coast on the Andaman Sea (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 The Study Area: The Far Southern Provinces of Thailand



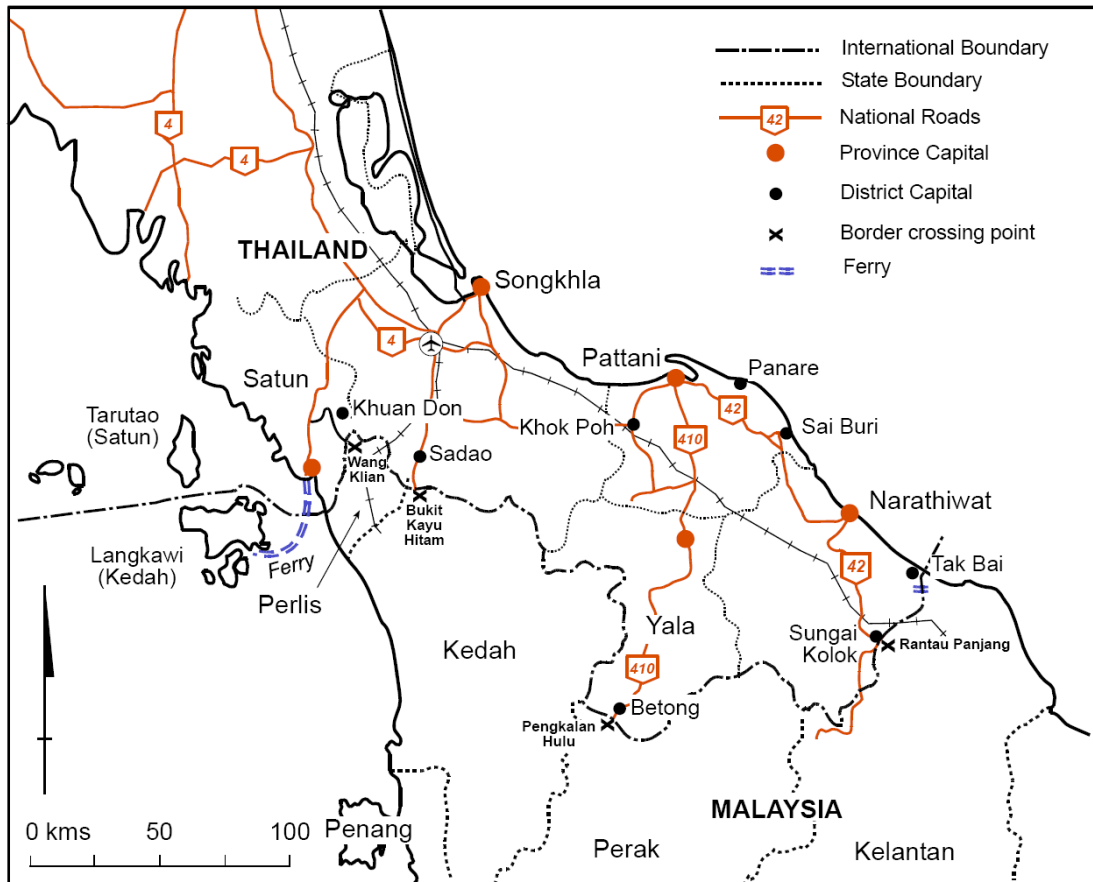
Immigration is managed at the regulated border area by officials of both countries who channel the authorized persons and goods entering and exiting both countries. The Thai and Malaysian Governments have agreed to maintain eleven official channels at the regulated land borders between Thailand and Malaysia (see Table 3.1 and Figure 3.2). Any crossing outside the regulated areas is considered unauthorised by both governments. Regulated land border checkpoints channel the immigrants and emigrants crossing in and out of Thailand and Malaysia by foot and by road vehicle and also by rail. The rail checkpoint is located not far from the road checkpoint so that rail passengers can cross conveniently through the checkpoint at a railway station.

In addition to monitoring immigration, the localities denoted with an asterisk* in table 3.1 below also maintain an inspection and job-seekers' protection checkpoint which enforces Thai labour regulations. Thus there are seven inspection and job-seekers' protection checkpoints in the same location as immigration offices plus Amphoe Muang checkpoint in Satun Provinces which monitors only labour migration.

Table 3.1 The Regulated Land Border between Thailand and Malaysia

<i>Provinces in Thailand</i>	<i>Checkpoints in Thailand</i>	<i>Checkpoints in Malaysia</i>	<i>Modes of Crossing</i>
Narathiwat Province	Sungi Kolok*, Amphoe (district), Sungi Kolok	Rantau Panjang, Kelantan State	1) By road from the border to the checkpoint at the bridge across Sungi Kolok river 2) By rail from the border to Sung Kolok Railway Station
Narathiwat Province	Tak Bai*, Amphoe Tak Bai	Pengkalan Kubur, Kelantan State	By boat across the river at Rachadapisak Port
Narathiwat Province	Ban Buketa, Amphoe Wang	Bukit Bunga, Kelantan State	By road
Pattani Province	Pattani Harbour, Amphoe Muang	-	By boat
Satun Province	Kuan Don*, Amphoe Kuan Don	Wang Kelian, Perlis State	By road
Songkhla Province	Padong Besar*, Amphoe Sadao	Padang Besar, Perlis State	1) By road 2) By rail from the border to Padang Besar Railway Station
Songkhla Province	Sadao*, Amphoe Sadao	Changlun, Kubang Pasu, Kedah State	By road
Songkhla Province	Ban Prakop, Amphoe Nathawi	Durian Burung, Kedah State	By road
Songkhla Province	Hat Yai Airport*, Amphoe Hat Yai	-	By airplane
Songkhla Province	Songkhla Harbour, Amphoe Muang	-	By boat
Yala Province	Betong*, Amphoe Betong	Keroh, Perak State	By road

Figure 3.2 The Regulated Land Borders Between Thailand and Malaysia



Source: Klanarong 2003 p11.

Checkpoints are also at the international airports. Southern Thailand has two international airports that offer flights to Malaysia. Hat Yai International Airport, in Hat Yai, Songkhla Province, is located near the border of Thailand and Malaysia. The other is Phuket International Airport, which is quite a distance from the Southern provinces of Thailand. In addition, there are two regulated checkpoints at harbours, but they are not available to travellers.

Despite these strict controls, the length of the border, nevertheless, facilitates irregular immigration and emigration. In particular, the length of the land border on the Kolok River and its estuary at Kuala Tabar makes border control difficult. Free movement across the border outside the regulated areas, avoiding authorized

checkpoints, is frequent, and migrants without any documentation cross relatively freely between the two countries. In particular, at the twin towns of Su-ngai Kolok and Rantau Panjang, the Kolok River is very narrow and easy to cross and there are many irregular crossing points there well-known to the local residents on both sides (Rachagan and Dorall 1976; Rumley 1991).

3.2 A Brief History of the Far Southern Provinces of Thailand and the Northern States of Peninsular Malaysia

It is impossible to adequately understand the nature of Thai/ Malay migration or to grasp its social and cultural dynamics without appreciating something of the history of the border region.

The Malaya Peninsula begins at Singapore in the south and stretches north along the Kra Isthmus to the Satun, Songkhla, Yala and Narathiwat provinces. In the north, the Malay Peninsula is currently part of the Southern provinces of Thailand. A large number of Malays live in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and in some districts of Songkhla. Although this area is currently located in Thailand, a largely Buddhist country, it is often seen as part of the Malay world (Barnard and Maier 2004). The far Southern provinces of Thailand and the northern states of Malaysia have a long historical relationship, extending well before the establishment of the British colony of Malaya.

Although Malays live in the Southern provinces of Thailand, they are not the original people of this area. Indigenous Pangans and Sakais were the original people of the land. Hindus from India arrived and took control of this area several hundred years

before the birth of Christ (Syukri 1985, pp4-8). Then people from Siam (present-day Thailand) moved south and ruled over the north of the Malay Peninsula in the fourth and early fifth centuries A.D. (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, pp2-3; Syukri 1985, p8). Later in the eighth century A.D., Malays from Sumatra arrived in this area and settled on the coast, while Siamese people settled in the interior after the power of the Siamese in Malaya began to weaken. There were no problems with the arrival of the Malays at that time, for Malays and Siamese had similar customs and religion, so both could easily live together. Later the number of Malays from Sumatra increased and they become more powerful (Syukri 1985, pp8-9). Patani⁵ in its origin, was not Malay and not Islamic, but the people who came to settle in this area were Hindus and Buddhists.

In the ninth century, the Islamic religion arrived from India to the Malay Peninsula at Kedah, and then spread across the land. The Hindu King of Melaka converted to Islam, followed by the King of Kedah. Islam then spread through the Malay Peninsula as far north as the Kingdom of Patani. Once dominated by Hindus and Buddhists, the kingdom now shifted to Islam. Later all the kingdoms in the Malay Peninsula under the rule of Siam - Pahang, Kedah, Kelantan and Patani - became Islamic. Malays in Patani were Hindus and Buddhists until the arrival and settlement of the Pasia people from the Island of Sumatra who brought the Islamic religion to Patani. Over more than three centuries, Islam spread among the Malays and the King of Patani converted to Islam between the middle of the fourteenth and the middle of the fifteenth centuries (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, pp5-6; Che Man 1990, pp32-34).

⁵ Patani denotes the historical Kingdom of Patani, but Pattani refers to the current Pattani province.

Soon after that, the royal family and then the people of the kingdom followed Islam which became the national religion (Syukri 1985; Leete 2007).

The Patani Kingdom strengthened its relationship with the northern Sultanates of the Malay peninsula, especially with Kelantan. Cross-marriage between royal family members of different Kingdoms and Sultanates was common especially in the Patani royal family. For instance, Princess Raja Ungu of Patani married the Sultan of Pahang (Syukri 1985). Also, the son of the King of Johor who governed the Sultanate of Terengganu married Princess Raja Kuning who was the daughter of Raja Ungu of Patani. Later she became the Queen of Patani (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970; Syukri 1985). Many royal family members of the Patani dynasty married royalty from Islamic Kingdoms and Sultanates in the north of the Malay Peninsula including Yala and Kedah. Cross-marriage had drawn Patani into strong and enduring relationships in the northern Malay Peninsula whose people shared the same ethnicity and religion.

In addition, on two occasions the royal family of Raja Kelantan was invited to become the ruler of the Patani Kingdom when there was no heir to the throne. The son of Raja Kelantan was the first royal family member to ascend the throne of the Patani Kingdom after Raja Kuning from the Raja Sri Wangsa dynasty passed away (Syukri 1985). Then, in 1842, Raja Kelantan, another member of the royal family, was selected to rule Patani. After that, Patani was ruled by the Sultan of Kelantan until the fifth King of Patani from the Kelantan dynasty ended the reign. In 1902, Siam assumed direct control of Patani and Patani became one of the provinces of Siam.

Finally, when the sultanates of the northern Malay Peninsula tried to gain their independence from Siam, Siam resisted and the surrounding Islamic Malay Kingdoms supported each other against Siam. For example, Kelantan and Terengganu gave military support to Patani when it was attacked by Siam's military. Kelantan helped Patani because their royal families were related. However, this was not the case with Terengganu. In addition, when Kedah launched an attack on Siam, Patani and other Kingdoms supported it in the fight against Siam because they shared the same ethnicity and religion. After the Patani Kingdom became Islamic, even though it was under the rule of Siam, it strengthened its strong trade relationships with the northern countries of the Malay peninsular, especially with Kelantan.

When the British colony of Malaya was established in 1909, the states of Patani, Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis were under the control of Siam. However, there were many efforts by Malays to resist Siamese governance and to gain their independence. Britain interfered with political matters in many places under the control of Siam, including Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, Perak and Patani. Britain sent emissaries there to negotiate with them and to offer help in many forms to convince them to betray Siam. In 1786, the Sultan of Kedah leased Penang Island, which was originally part of Kedah, to the British East India Company, followed in 1791 by the land opposite Penang Island (Andaya and Andaya 1982). In 1826, Siam and Britain established an agreement under the Bernierzy Treaty, that Malay states including Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis and Patani were still officially combined under the control of Siam. However, in 1909 under the Anglo-Siamese Treaty (or Bangkok Treaty) between Siam and Britain, Siam ceded its control of

Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis to Britain. However, Siam did not bequeath Patani to Britain. Pattani Province, Narathiwat (Re-ngae) Province, Songkhla (Singgora) Province and Yala Province including Satun (Setul) Province were separated from Kedah and remained under the rule of Siam (Andaya and Andaya 1982; Wyatt 1984; Syukri 1985). This ended Siamese control and it separated Patani from the Sultanates which now constitute the northern states of contemporary Malaysia.

This history is the major reason that Malay-speaking Muslims in Thailand have close ties on the other side of the border, in particular with the people of Kelantan (Haemindra 1977; Yusuf 2007). People cross the border to pursue their common traditional way of life and come to visit their relatives. British Malaya and Siam signed an agreement in 1940 that gave local people the right to hold special border passes to move freely between Thailand and Malaysia. This agreement, still in force, allows people who live in Songkhla, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and Pattani in Thailand to go without a passport twenty five kilometres into Perlis, Kedah, Perak and Kelantan in Malaysia.

Thus it is clear that *Oghae Nayu*⁶ have been living in the far Southern provinces of Thailand, in Satun, Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkhla for a very long time. They have maintained their own identity through their language, customs, tradition and religion and they remain connected to Malay ethnic communities in the northern states of Malaysia. In addition, they have a long history of political links to the northern part of the Malay Peninsula. Moreover, although this is irregular, there are

⁶ This concept will be defined below.

many Malay-speaking Muslims in Thailand who hold dual citizenship in both Thailand and Malaysia. Some *Oghae Nayu* from Thailand even vote in Kelantan state elections (Rachagan and Dorall 1976; Rumley 1991). A large number of *Oghae Nayu* in Thailand hold both Thai and Malaysian citizenship. Some Malaysian people on the Malaysian side of the border also hold Thai citizenship. According to a report in 2009 to Malaysia's Prime Minister, Najib Razak, there are 20,000-25,000 *Nayu* people who hold dual nationality (The Nation 2009).

3.3 The Social and Cultural Context of the Border Area

The social and cultural characteristics of the people of the study area, their religion, ethnicity, education and economic situation are different from the broader social and cultural context of Thailand. These differences are briefly outlined below.

3.3.1 Religion

The vast majority, 94.2 percent, of the population of Thailand is Buddhist. Muslims are the main religious minority, making up nearly five percent of the population. Muslims live mainly in two parts of Thailand, in the far Southern provinces and in the Central Region including Bangkok. Almost all Muslims from the Central Region speak standard Thai, are urban and are involved in trade. They have originated from South Asia and the Middle East over several centuries. They differ from the *Oghae Nayu* in the far Southern provinces of Thailand who are ethnically Malay and speak Malay dialect in their homes, mainly live in rural areas and are involved in agriculture. Muslims form a majority in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun. They make up 82 percent of the population in Narathiwat and Pattani, 68.9 percent in Yala and 67.8 percent in Satun. But in 2000 Muslims were still a minority in Songkhla (see Table 3.2).

In Malaysia, Islam is the official religion. All Malays and some indigenous *Bumiputras* are Muslim (about 60 percent of the population) and follow Islamic law according to the Koran (Liew 2003). They follow the same customs and religion as the *Oghae Nayu* of the far Southern provinces of Thailand.

3.3.2 Ethnicity

There are many ethnicities in Thailand. The main ethnic group is the Central Thai who constitute about 50 percent of the population and mainly live in the Central Region around Bangkok. The largest minority ethnic group is the *Isan* who are a Lao-speaking group who make up about 23 percent of the Thai population.

The focus of this thesis, *Oghae Nayu*, constitute only 2.2 percent of the national population but form the majority of between 66 and 80 percent in the far Southern provinces excluding Songkhla and Satun Provinces. However, the study area also contains Thai Muslims who form the majority in Satun Province, Thai Buddhists who comprise three quarters of the population of Songkhla Province, and a small number of Thai Chinese who are all distinctly separate groups with their own ethnic identities.

Table 3.2 Religion and Language in the Study Area, 2000

	Pattani	Yala	Narathiwat	Songkhla	Satun	Thailand
Thai Muslims who speak Thai (<i>Thai Islae</i>)	4.1	2.8	1.6	18.6	57.9	2.4
Malay Muslims who speak Malay (<i>Oghae Nayu</i>)	76.6	66.1	80.4	4.6	9.9	2.2
<i>Total Muslims</i>	<i>80.7</i>	<i>68.9</i>	<i>82.0</i>	<i>23.2</i>	<i>67.8</i>	<i>4.6</i>
Buddhists (<i>Siye</i>)	19.2	31.0	17.9	76.6	31.9	94.2
Other	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3	1.2
Total Number	595,985	415,537	662,350	1,255,662	247,875	60,916,400

Source: National Statistical Office, Population and Housing Census 2000 for Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Songkhla and Satun Provinces.

Malay people constitute an ethnic group who speak Malay (*Bahasa Melayu*) and who have Malay identity. Malays inhabit the Malay Peninsula, East Sumatra and Borneo, now comprising the four nations of Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Brunei. The cultural identity of the *Oghae Nayu* in the far Southern provinces of Thailand is based on Malay culture and on Islam. In particular, *Oghae Nayu* in Thailand speak a language very similar to the main language of the Northern Malaysian States.

Oghae Nayu in Thailand attempt to differentiate their own identity from that of both Thai Muslims and Thai Buddhists in Thai society. They face many obstacles in achieving this. During World War II, the Pribun Government (1938-1945) implemented a one nation-state policy which attempted to merge all ethnicities into the Thai culture (Winichakul 1994; Laungaramsri 2003; Yusuf 2007). Thai national integration was to be achieved through education and by a process of nation-building whereby Thai-ness would be developed through language, religion and the monarchy. This construction of Thai-ness included *Oghae Nayu* and when Siam

became Thailand, to promote national culture the word for ‘Malay Muslim’ was to be replaced by ‘Thai Muslim’ within the Thai polity. However, *Oghae Nayu* still do not call themselves Siamese people (*Oghae Siye*) or Thai people (*Oghae Thai*) as to them the Thai identity is by definition Buddhist. *Oghae Nayu* view their ethnic and religious identity as different from Thai Buddhists. *Oghae Nayu* continue to call themselves *Oghae Nayu*⁷ (Malay people) and to call other Thai people *Oghae Siye* or *Oghae Thai*.

Moreover, even when *Oghae Nayu* migrate to Malaysia, they do not call themselves *Oghae Siye* or *Oghae Thai*. They call themselves Patani Malay people (*Orang Melayu Tani* in standard Malay), differentiating themselves from mainstream Thai culture. However, *Oghae Nayu* do not call Malaysians what they call themselves, *Oghea Nayu* (or *Orang Melayu* in standard Malay), even though they feel affinity with them. They call Malaysians *Oghae Malaysian* (*Orang Malaysian*). Thus they also delineate their own identity (as Malay) from Malaysians in Malaysia. In addition, Malaysians also call them *Orang Melayu Tani* or *Orang Melayu Siam* (Siamese Malay people). From the *Oghae Nayu* viewpoint, the word “Thai” is used to refer to Buddhist Thais. The word *Nayu* in Malay dialect, or *Melayu* in standard Malay, means both Muslim-ness and Malay-ness as all *Oghae Nayu* are Muslims.

On the other hand, Buddhist Thais, in particular in the South of Thailand, call *Nayu* people *Khaek* or *Khaek Malay*. *Khaek* is an adjective and pronoun referring to Muslim people in general, including Muslim immigrants from Iran, Iraq, India, Pakistan and other countries. *Oghae Nayu* view *Khaek* as a derogatory term but Thai

⁷ *Nayu* is the word that Malay speaking Muslims in the far Southern provinces of Thailand use to refer to themselves. Accordingly, it is the word that I use in this thesis to refer to them, also.

Buddhist people use this word to indicate that an individual is not Thai. According to Winichakul (1994, p5):

Khaek also denotes Muslim, but by no means exclusively so. That is to say, a reference is sometimes made regardless of whether or not a certain characteristic really belongs to any particular nation or ethnic group, because the aim of discourse is to identify the un-Thainess rather than to define the characteristic of any particular people.

Table 3.3 below summarise the various terms which Malay-speaking Muslims, Thai-speaking Muslims, Buddhist Thais and Malaysians use to refer to themselves and to each other. In this thesis, which concerns *Oghae Nayu*, I have used their own terminology and their linguistic form of reference.

Table 3.3 Who Calls Who What

<i>The Subject Person</i>	<i>The Object Person</i>			
	Malay Muslims who speak Malay	Thai Muslims who speak Thai	Thai Buddhists	Malaysians
Malay Muslims who speak Malay	<i>Nayu</i> ¹	<i>Islae</i> ¹ / <i>Thai Islae</i> / <i>Siye</i> ¹ <i>Islae</i>	<i>Siye/Thai</i>	<i>Malaysian</i>
Thai Muslims who speak Thai	<i>Kheak</i> ²	<i>Thai Islam</i> / <i>Islam</i>	<i>Thai</i>	<i>Malay</i>
Thai Buddhists	<i>Kheak</i>	<i>Kheak</i>	<i>Thai</i>	<i>Malay</i>
Malaysians	<i>Melayu</i> ³ <i>Tani</i> / <i>Melayu Siam</i>	<i>Thai Islam</i> / <i>Siam Islam</i>	<i>Thai/Siam</i>	<i>Melayu</i>

1 in Patani Malay dialect

2 in Thai standard language

3 in Malay standard language

Religion, language and ethnic traditions create attitudes and behaviours that differ between *Oghae Nayu*, *Siye* and *Islae* (Knodel et al. 1999). The Malay culture shapes the identity of *Oghae Nayu* as their ethnicity relates to the Malay way of life, beliefs and behaviour. *Oghae Nayu* have lifestyles and beliefs different from *Oghae Siye* and *Oghae Islae*, which they maintain through their practice of traditional culture. They also regularly visit relatives and friends in Malaysia but maintain fewer social contacts with *Oghae Siye* in Thailand. *Oghae Nayu* live a culture similar to that in the Kelantan State and Terengganu State of Northern Malaysia. There are close relationships between *Oghae Nayu* in Thailand and *Oghae Malaysian* in these Northern States. However, *Islae* who are Thai Muslims speaking Thai, have attitudes and behaviours similar to *Siye*, and despite their religious differences, they have always maintained close social relations with each other. Unlike *Oghae Nayu* whose religion takes precedence over their nationality and draws them even deeper south to cross the border, *Islae* who share their religion have a sense of Thai-ness strong enough to overcome the attractions of religion.

3.4 Education

The Thai government policy of nation-building attempted to integrate *Oghae Nayu* people in Southern Thailand into Thai society by teaching their children Thai language and culture in government schools (Haemindra 1977). The Thai government school curriculum emphasizes speaking standard Thai (the official national language which is based on the Central Thai dialect), Buddhism (to be Thai is to be Buddhist) and devotion to the monarchy (to be Thai is to be loyal to the King). Many *Oghae Nayu* often feel that they are unfairly treated by the Thai Government and by Thai Buddhists in general (Haemindra 1977; Yusuf 2007).

Oghae Nayu view Thai public schools, where Thai language is used as the medium of instruction and learning, as a threat to their Islamic culture and identity (Haemindra 1977; Yusuf 2007). To avoid assimilation into Thai Buddhist culture *Nayu* parents are likely to send their children to *Pondok* schools (traditional Islamic boarding schools) or to Islamic private schools.

Islamic private schools teach the Thai government curricula as well as Arabic and Malay languages and Islamic religious studies and integrate academic and vocational subjects into their curricula. In the *Pondok* schools children are taught by *tok guru*, the traditional religious teacher. They operate as boarding schools and students live in accommodation within the school compound which they either build themselves or inherit from graduating seniors. The curriculum of *Pondok* schools teaches only religious studies, Islamic history, local history and Arabic language without any other academic and vocational subjects.

There are around 321 *Pondok* schools which teach Islamic Studies in the Malay dialect, and there are around 327 Islamic private schools in Southern Thailand. An estimated 85 percent of *Nayu* students attend Islamic private and *Pondok* schools in Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani, Songkhla and Satun provinces (Liow 2009). However, *Pondok* schools are limited in their ability to provide a good education and choosing them means losing the opportunity to benefit from mainstream education. Young *Oghae Nayu* who were educated in the *Pondok* schools have a limited ability to read and write in Thai language, which restricts their higher education opportunities in Thailand. Most graduates from religious schools have difficulty coping in secondary school or higher, where standard Thai is the medium of learning and instruction.

Many *Oghae Nayu* travel to the Muslim countries of Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt to continue higher education in religious studies (Yusuf 2007). They study in these countries because Thailand's public education system does not provide for their religious and ethnic identities.

The Thai population aged 15 years and over in 2006, on average had 7.2 years of schooling. The average years of schooling in the study area are lower than the average years for the whole of Thailand except for Songkhla Province. The average years of schooling for Narathiwat and Pattani are very low at 5.9 and 6 years. In addition, as in the other Provinces of Thailand, more than one third of the population in the study area do not or have not attended school at all.

Table 3.4 Educational Attainment of the Population in the Study Area, 2000

	Pattani	Yala	Narathiwat	Songkhla	Satun	Thailand
Average years of education attainment of population age 15 years and over	6.0	6.6	5.9	7.5	6.7	7.2
Population age 6-24 years not attending school (%)	39.4	34.9	38.2	36.5	36.8	38.9

Sources: National Statistical Office; Population and Housing Census 2000 for Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Songkhla and Satun Provinces.

3.5 The Economy

The economy of the far Southern provinces of Thailand is based on agricultural production in rubber and palm oil, and on fishing. Many *Oghae Nayu* are plantation owners in rubber, palm oil and rice or have village smallholdings (Haemindra 1977; Che Man 1990). In addition, along the coast of Pattani, Narathiwat and Satun, most *Oghae Nayu* are fishermen while most *Oghae Siye* and Thai Chinese in the towns of

the Southern provinces work in the service sector or as small traders. The main occupations of *Oghae Nayu* in the study area are seasonal and all their agricultural products have serious problems of price fluctuation. Although most people work in agriculture, the Gross Provincial Product (GPP) in the agricultural sector is lower than other sectors and other provinces because of low productivity, lack of funding and irresponsible and inefficient local government officials (Songsom 2005). In addition, this area is far from Bangkok which is the hub providing momentum for the country's economic development.

In 2004, there were 468,623 people who had average incomes below the poverty line in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. There were fewer poor people in Songkhla and Satun. Table 1.5 illustrates the average incomes per month for the Southern Provinces. In 2004 the average income was lowest in Narathiwat (1,626 baht), followed by Yala (1,903 baht), Pattani (1,975 baht) and Satun (2,783 baht). The average income of the country was 3,913 baht. In addition, excluding Songkhla, the percent of people below the poverty line (poverty incidence) in these provinces is higher than the average for the whole country, particularly in Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala where it is more than three times higher.

Table 3.5 Average Income and Poverty Incidence of Thailand's Far Southern Provinces, 2004

Provinces	Average Monthly Income (baht)	Poverty Incidence (%)
Songkhla	3,963	6.8
Satun	2,783	14.3
Pattani	1,975	40.3
Yala	1,903	36.6
Narathiwat	1,626	47.0
<i>Thailand</i>	<i>3,913</i>	<i>9.8</i>

Sources: The National Statistical Office of Thailand (TNSO) 2004

On the other hand, the GDP per capita of Malaysia in 2000 was 14,582 RM (more than 140,000 baht) more than three times the Thai national average. In Kelantan, which is the lowest income state in northern Malaysia, it was 6,137 RM (over 60,000 baht), more than three times that of Narathiwat, the poorest Thai border province (Leete, 2004 cited in Sugunnasil 2005, p.4). The considerable income disparity between the Thai and Malaysian border provinces is a powerful driver of migration.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described the area in which this study is located, providing insights into the geographical location, history and the social and cultural aspects of Thailand's far Southern provinces: Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and Songkhla. These provinces share culture, language and religion with the Malaysian Northern states. The social and cultural characteristics of these people their language, religion and ethnicity are different from the rest of Thailand. The following chapter provides background on Thai Government policies regarding Thai emigration. and explains

how irregular *Nayu* workers travel abroad without using the documented migration routes, successfully ignoring both Thai and Malaysian migration laws.

CHAPTER 4: TRAVELLING TO MALAYSIA

Before 1927, people had freedom to leave and enter the Kingdom of Thailand without any regulation or control. Although the Anglo-Siamese Treaty, or Bangkok Treaty, between Siam and Britain in 1909 separated Thailand from Malaysia, people living in the border lands of both countries could cross the border without undergoing any official processes. The Immigration Act 1927 ended this freedom of movement for local people pursuing their common traditional way of life. Thai workers who wanted to work in other countries were (and still are) controlled by this Act under which people can only leave the country through legal channels, at the immigration checkpoints, ports and railway stations.

This situation continues today. Increasingly during the 1970s and for most of the 1980s, large numbers of Thais emigrated for work (Pongsapich 1995). In 1985, the Thai Government passed the Employment and Job-Seeker Protection Act to protect them,, particularly those who use private recruitment agencies. All Thais seeking to work abroad have to abide by the Act including *Nayu* workers who would like to work in Malaysia. They, however, are also able relatively easily to cross the border irregularly. The international border and migration laws are not able to stop movement among *Nayu* border residents. This chapter focuses on the processes of worker recruitment both though formal legal channels and informal irregular channels.

4.1 The Formal Legal Channels of Emigration

Nayu workers from the Southern provinces of Thailand who want to work in Malaysia legally are covered by the Employment and Job-Seeker Protection Act 1985 (Amended 1995), and once in Malaysia, by The Employment Act 1955 (Amended 1968).

4.1.1 Labour Recruitment Regulation from the Thai Perspective

All Thai job-seekers who would like to work legally overseas have to register with or inform the Department of Employment in the Ministry of Labour. There are five legal ways of travelling to work overseas. Thai migrant workers: 1) are recruited through private agencies; 2) are sent through the Thai government employment services; 3) are recruited directly by their employers; 4) are sent as trainees to other countries; 5) arrange their migration themselves. The numbers involved in each of these are outlined in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 Thai Legal Workers Who Went Abroad through the Ministry of Labour, 2009

Sex	Forms of Migration					Total
	Private Agencies	Government Services	Employers	Training	Self-organization	
Male	43,854 (55.71%)	2,495 (3.17%)	11,151 (14.17%)	2,182 (2.77%)	6,752 (8.58%)	66,434 (84.40%)
Female	4,871 (6.19%)	548 (0.70%)	1,422 (1.90%)	1,756 (2.23%)	3,686 (4.68%)	12,283 (15.60%)
Total	48,725 (61.90%)	3,043 (3.87%)	12,573 (15.98%)	3,938 (5.00%)	10,438 (13.26%)	78,717 (100.00%)

Source: The Overseas Employment Administration Office, 2009

Under The Employment and Job-Seeker Protection Act 1985 (Amended 1995), all Thai job-seekers who go to work in other countries legally through these five process must be registered and must travel through checkpoints to leave the country. These checkpoints are responsible for the bureaucratic monitoring and control of migrants and for the protection of their labour rights from abuse by irregular private recruitment agencies. There are eighteen inspection and job-seekers' protection checkpoints for official labour control in fourteen provinces at international airports and along the border in Thailand. In the far Southern provinces of Thailand, there are eight checkpoints in four provinces as outlined in Table 1.1. If emigrants have no proof of their legal employment in Malaysia and have not informed the Employment Services, under The Employment and Job-Seeker Protection Act 1985, the officials at the inspection checkpoints have the authority to refuse them permission to leave Thailand (Amended 1995).

As with most countries, the emigration process in Thailand is complex and changing. The information in this section comes from interviews with the Minister-Counsellor for Labour at the Office of Labour Affairs, the Royal Thai Embassy in Kuala Lumpur; a Border Pass Official at Amphoe Muang, Songkhla; an Immigration Official at the immigration checkpoint, Songkhla Province; and from two labour officers at Padong Besar checkpoint and Sadao checkpoint, Songkhla Province. It was valid in March 2009.

(a) Recruitment by Private Agency

Private recruitment agencies organise the bulk of legal migration through the Ministry of Labour, accounting for 61.9 percent in 2009. Many labour recruitment

agencies in Bangkok have grass-roots recruiters based in the provinces of Northeast Thailand to recruit job-seekers in the villages (Wong 2000).

Job-seekers, who would like to work aboard, can contact a private recruitment agency which is registered with the Employment Department of the Ministry of Labour. They must pay a recruitment service fee and other document costs to the private recruitment agency. The private recruitment agencies must follow the processes and conditions set up under the Employment and Job-Seeker Protection Act 1985 (Amended 1995). First of all, the private recruitment agencies have to ask permission from the Government to recruit labour. After agencies obtain this approval, they select job-seekers and send them for a medical examination. Then, the agencies must obtain permission from the Department of Employment for these job-seekers to work abroad.

In the next stage, the job-seekers are sent to attend pre-departure orientation with the Department of Employment in their home provinces or in Bangkok. This orientation is to inform them about their labour and social welfare rights in other countries and how to live and work abroad. Agencies then have to pay money to the Fund under the Department of Employment to assist Thai Overseas Workers. The approved workers have to go abroad through one of the official checkpoints. Finally, when they arrive in Malaysia they have to report to the Royal Thai Embassy at Kuala Lumpur or to the Royal Thai Consulate at Penang and Kota Bharu or to the Thai Overseas Employment Administration (TOEA) at Kuala Lumpur.

(b) Recruitment by the Department of Employment

Some overseas employers who want to employ Thai workers and some Thai job-seekers do not use the private recruitment agencies because of their high costs. Both can use the Thai Government's employment service by registering with the Thai Overseas Employment Administration (TOEA) in Malaysia for overseas employers or at the Provincial Employment Office in each province for Thai job-seekers. The Employment Office takes responsibility for arranging recruitment and selecting employees for overseas employers. Overseas employers pay nothing for this service. Thai job-seekers have to pay but it is much cheaper than the service provided by private recruitment agencies.

After the TOEA has checked the job vacancies in Malaysia and ensured that the working conditions and welfare provisions meet the standards applicable under Malaysian law, it provides these job vacancies to each Provincial Employment Office in Thailand. The Provincial Employment Service Offices then select the job-seekers, if necessary by testing skills needed for technical positions. After selection, they are sent to pre-departure orientation and to obtain travel documents. At this stage, like the job-seekers sent by the private recruitment agencies, migrant workers have to exit through the inspection checkpoint and submit a labour departure card. In addition, when they arrive in Malaysia they also have to report to the Royal Thai Embassy at Kuala Lumpur or to the Royal Thai Consulate at Penang and Kota Bharu or to the TOEA at Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

(c) Recruitment by Employers in Thailand

Employers who have their businesses in Thailand, sometimes send their Thai employees to work abroad in Malaysia. To do this, they have to apply for permission from the Director-General of the Employment Office. Employers take responsibility

for paying travel costs and any migration process costs. The wages, working conditions and other labour rights in Malaysia must be up to the standards of the Employment Department. Employers have to provide the employment documents such as work contracts, work permits and visas for their employees

Once employers are allowed to send their employees to work in Malaysia, they must attend the pre-departure orientation with the Employment Office. Migrant workers then leave the country through the inspection and job-seekers protection checkpoints at the international airports or international land borders where they have to fill in and submit a labour departure card.

Thai employers who send their employees to work abroad can pay wages in Thailand or in Malaysia. These employees can be permanent or on a short-term contract. The employees' travelling costs and any migration process costs have to be paid by their employers. Employers may not legally receive any money from the employees they send to work in Malaysia.

(d) Temporary Emigration for Training

Some Thai and international entrepreneurs who have their businesses in Thailand send their Thai employees to train in Malaysia. They are not job-seekers going to work abroad for overseas employers but are Thai employees who are employed in Thailand under the Thai Labour Act who go abroad for training. The Employment and Job-Seeker Protection Act 1985 (Amended 1995) allows trainees a maximum period of one year. Employers must inform the Employment Office before their employees leave Thailand. They must ask permission from the Director-General of the Employment Office if their trainees go abroad for longer than forty five days. In

addition, Thai employers have to provide the Director General with the training program and time table. This is to ensure that Thai employees really do leave Thailand to train abroad.

After permission is granted, employers have to send their employees to attend pre-departure orientation with the Employment Office and they have to leave through the inspection and job-seekers protection checkpoints where they submit a labour departure card. In addition, Thai employers have to report to the Director-General of the Employment Office within fifteen days when their employees return to work in Thailand. This is to ensure that employers have sent their employees to train abroad and not to work.

(e) Self-Organised Emigration

Thai job-seekers who want to go work in other countries without going through any recruitment services, private or government, can make the arrangements themselves. Often most of them are migrant returnees who have experienced working and living overseas. They have the ability and knowledge to arrange travel documents and to find employment abroad themselves. Friends and relatives in destination countries can arrange for them to work abroad and find an employer with or without a service charge. Those who arrange procedures to travel to work abroad by themselves have to register with the Director-General of the Employment Office at the Provincial or Central Employment Offices if they leave Thailand for more than fifteen days. In addition, Thai migrant workers who return to visit Thailand for a holiday must also inform the Director-General of the Employment Office before they go back to work abroad.

When first travelling abroad, self-organised migrants must inform and provide employment and travel documents to the Director-General of the Employment Office at the Employment Department in Bangkok or in the province in which they reside. When they leave Thailand, they have to go through the inspection and job-seekers protection checkpoints at the international airport or international land border and must fill in and submit a labour departure form. When they arrive they have to report to the Royal Thai Embassy, to the Royal Thai Consulate or to the TOEA. For re-entry for a short period, migrant workers must inform the Director-General of the Employment Office and provide a copy of their employment and re-entry travel documents. To return to work in Malaysia, they have to go through the inspection and job-seekers' protection checkpoints and submit a labour departure card.

4.1.2 Labour Recruitment Regulation from the Malaysian Perspective

The employment of *Nayu* workers in Malaysia is not controlled under Thai legislation for the Thai Government has no authority there. Instead, it is regulated by the Malaysian Employment Act 1955 (Amended 1968), The Immigration Act 1959/63 (Amended 2002) and The Passport Act 1966.

In Malaysia, the employment of foreign workers is controlled by the Foreign Workers' Division of the Immigration Department in the Ministry of Home Affairs. As has been discussed in Chapter Two, only Malaysians are allowed employment in some sectors. Currently, employers are allowed to employ foreign workers in the construction, plantation, service and manufacturing sectors. Applications for the employment of foreign workers are made by their prospective employers. The Foreign Workers' Division has the authority to set a quota of foreign workers for

each company or business. The quota is to ensure that foreign workers are employed in particular workplaces only when needed. To restrict the number of foreign workers, the Government imposes a levy of 30 RM per month per worker in the agricultural sector and 125 RM per month per worker in the manufacturing, services and construction sectors.

Employers in Malaysia apply to the Foreign Workers' Division of the Immigration Department in Malaysia and normally do not use private recruitment agencies or Thai Government employment services. They must abide by the conditions of employment for foreign workers set by the Foreign Workers' Division. After they obtain an Approval Letter from the Ministry of Home Affairs, they can select foreign job-seekers who will be sent for medical examination and then obtain passports for them. Foreign workers who are approved for employment in Malaysia must meet the following conditions. They must have passed the health examination, be aged between eighteen and forty-five years old and employers must pay a levy. When these conditions are met, employers can apply for a work visa with the Immigration Department in Malaysia and obtain an Entry Visa at the Malaysian Embassy or Consulate.

Applications to the Malaysian Immigration Department to employ *Nayu* workers in Malaysia can be made directly by Malaysian or *Nayu* employers without going through the labour recruitment process with the Thai Government. These workers are protected under the Malaysian labour laws as documented migrant workers. Some *Nayu* workers are employed and obtain a work permit through their employers in Malaysia without going through the Thai Government. These workers enter Malaysia

with a social visit visa and then, through their employers, change it into a working visa.

In addition, *Nayu* workers who enter with a border pass into the Northern States of Malaysia can obtain a work permit if their employers submit an application for the employment of foreign workers with the local labour offices in the border areas. The local Malaysian Government allows *Nayu* workers using a Thai border pass to obtain a work permit for employment in fishing and agriculture.

In contrast, the Thai Government gives a border pass to Thai local residents only for visiting friends and relatives. But many use it to work in Malaysia, and once they are employed, the Malaysian Government allows them to obtain a work permit. The Thai Government has no authority to interfere in the employment of *Nayu* workers already in Malaysia because they did not emigrate directly to work there. .

4.2 The Informal Irregular Channels of Migration

There are few studies of migrant workers, in particular of *Nayu* workers, from the far Southern provinces of Thailand (Thaweesit 1986; Klanarong 2003; Klanarong 2005; Klanarong 2009a; Klanarong 2009b) and this area is seen as having little international labour emigration because the Thai Overseas Employment Administration (TOEA) records only low numbers of workers from this area leaving Thailand to work in the other countries. Only about a thousand migrant workers from the whole of Thailand have gone to Malaysia through the TOEA as documented migrants in 2009. But tens of thousands of *Nayu* workers migrate irregularly to work in Malaysia (Thaweesit 1986; Klanarong 2003; Klanarong 2009b) but are not

included in the TOEA data. The number of irregular *Nayu* migrant workers is unknown. However, an estimated 100,000-150,000 *Nayu* migrants reportedly enter Malaysia and work irregularly (Rahimmula 2008).

There are many ways that *Nayu* migrant workers come to work irregularly in Malaysia. There are those without legal status owing to irregular entry or to not having complied with the required emigration formalities; those with expired visas; those who have not obtained the authorisation required by the Malaysian Immigration Act and The Employment Act for admission or residence or for their activity during their stay in Malaysia; and those that cease to meet the conditions to which their residence or activity is subject. All these people can be referred to as irregular migrant workers.

However, some *Nayu* workers are irregular not because of themselves, but because their employers do not take the steps necessary to make them legal in Malaysia. They do not obtain a work permit for them. Employers in Malaysia have the responsibility to obtain a work permit to make migrant workers legal but many employers benefit from using irregular migrants as it avoids the costs involved and irregular workers are not covered by Malaysian labour laws and are thus devoid of legal protection.

There are six ways that *Nayu* workers enter and work in Malaysia irregularly through their own migrant networks, bypassing both the Thai and the Malaysian legal recruitment processes. *Nayu* workers become irregular migrants by: 1) travelling without using a passport; 2) travelling without a social visit visa; 3) travelling

without a border pass; 4) travelling without official documents; 5) re-crossing the border; and 6) overstaying after a social visit visa or border pass expires.

Nayu migrant workers travel irregularly to Malaysia without the permission of either the Thai and/or the Malaysian governments because:

- 1) It avoids many procedures with the Employment Service Office of Thailand. They do not inform the office of their employment in Malaysia or of their leaving Thailand to work abroad.
- 2) It avoids many procedures in Malaysia. Their employers do not obtain permission for them to work in Malaysia.
- 3) It reduces the costs of obtaining a work permit. The annual levy on foreign workers in Malaysia, the cost of processing the application for the employment of foreign workers and the fee for the medical examination make legal migration expensive. Documented migrants pay 1,310 RM (about seven weeks wages) for a work visa in the service sector while they pay nothing if they are irregular.

4.2.1 The Social Visit Visa

Normally *Nayu* migrants working in Kuala Lumpur use a passport to cross the border. A passport enables them to obtain a social visit visa and to stay in Malaysia for up to thirty days. After the social visit visa expires, *Nayu* migrant workers return to the border to have their visas re-stamped. This allows them another thirty days in Malaysia. Migrant workers continue to have their social visit visa re-stamped so that they can openly hang out and visit their friends in Malaysia or travel back to

Thailand when they have a day off or during their free time. Without valid passports and visas, they fear arrest by the police or the Malaysian People's Voluntary Corps (RELA) while travelling back to Thailand or when they are not working in their restaurants.

Mudirah: I always went back every month. I was scared when I was travelling to the border. It was a long journey home. I did not know if I would be caught or not. [Single, Female]

Saeed: My passport has never expired, although I worked without a work permit. If my passport expired, I could return home but it was a long distance from here to the border and there were many police stations on the way. I might be arrested. It was not easy travelling to the border. [Single, Male]

Although the legal purpose of the social visit visa is for visiting relatives and for short trips, migrant workers use it to work irregularly. With valid passports, they enter Malaysia as documented visitors, but they do not have a work permit for employment there. The day before the social visit visa expires, migrant workers go back to Thailand and re-enter Malaysia at any border checkpoint to get a new stamp on their social visit visa. Normally migrant workers exit and re-enter Malaysia on the same day. However, some migrant workers who enter Malaysia by using a passport stay in Malaysia longer than the thirty days permitted by the social visit visa.

4.2.2 The Border Pass

People who live in the far Southern provinces of Thailand, in Narathiwat, Yala, Satun, Songkhla and Pattani, can travel across the border by using a border pass. Under the agreement between British Malaya and Siam in 1940, Malaysian residents in the States of Kelantan, Perlis, Perak and Kedah are able to cross into Thailand. A border pass is provided only to residents who live along the border and is used to

visit relatives on the other side within twenty-five kilometres of the border. Travel outside this area is forbidden. This makes it easy to cross legally as border residents can get the border pass at their district offices, except those living in Pattani, who have to obtain the border pass from an office near the checkpoints they go through. The border pass can be issued by officials on the spot and received immediately, so people in these provinces can cross the border on the same day, and as many do, daily. The border pass expires six months after the date of issue. Although it can be legally used only for visiting relatives, many migrants use it to travel further into Malaysia for work. According to a report for The National Legislative Assembly in 2006, 50,000 people who hold a border pass cross the border at the Songkhla checkpoints of Sadao and Padang Besar each month to work (The Nation 2007). Although a border pass is valid for six months, the Thai Government has a new plan to establish a border pass valid for only one month and only for visiting friends and relatives in Malaysia.

Nayu workers use a border pass to work in Malaysia for many reasons. They can easily apply for a border pass in the districts where they live or at the border when they leave. The fee for a border pass is 10 baht which is cheaper than the fee for a passport, which costs 1,500 baht. They can reduce the amount of time it takes for a passport and the many procedures involved with the Employment Service Office by using a border pass. They can leave Thailand and enter Malaysia easily through the border checkpoint for Immigration Officials are not very strict with local people. Unlike people who use a passport, they do not have to fill in any forms, departure or arrival cards, in Thailand and Malaysia.

4.2.3 Travelling without Official Documents

Although the Thai and Malaysian Governments cooperate on irregular border crossing issues, including combating the trafficking of people, narcotics and arms (Thai Government News 2009), migrant workers continue to cross the border irregularly from Thailand to Malaysia without any documents at all. Some hire a boat to cross Su-ngi Kolok River near Sungai Kolok and Tak Bai immigration checkpoints. There is only one immigration checkpoint at the Su-ngai Kolok (Rumley 1994). If they arrive at the checkpoint before the start of business at 5.00 a.m., they can cross by irregular boat service. The Su-ngai Kolok River is ninety-five km long, very narrow and can be crossed without a boat during the dry season.

Many more migrant workers cross the land borders by going through immigration checkpoints without any documents. Local people often cross the border as part of their daily lives in order to do business and engage in other social activities in Malaysia, so it is hard to impose strict border control. Immigration security officers of both Thailand and Malaysia are not so strict with local people along the border, so some migrant workers sneak through the checkpoints when immigration officers are lax in their duty. In addition, some checkpoints allow the vehicles of migration agencies to cross the border. They sometimes carry migrant workers across the border with them, and even hide irregular migrants in their cars.

Dayang: I have no documents for travelling or working here. In fact, I didn't have my own passport for six years. I had one for a month and let it expire because I didn't want to have it stamped every month. During the festivals of *Hari Raya Puasa* I annually went back home though the Kolok River by boat. [Single, *Kathoey*]

Hafiz: When I decided to go back to Malaysia again, my passport was expired but I came back by ship. It was only 20 baht [2 RM] as I knew some one who works on the ship [across the Kolok River at Su-ngai Kolok town]. Also my house is close to the border, and I and my friends or anyone can go to Malaysia to shop many times without any passport or border pass. After arriving in Malaysia, I took the bus to KL without any documents for travelling and working in Malaysia. [Single, Male]

4.2.4 Re-crossing the Border

Migrant workers, who need a social visit visa extension, return to the border every month. There are many immigration checkpoints in the far Southern provinces of Thailand where migrant workers can go to stamp their social visit visa. They select those border checkpoints that usually take less travelling time and costs less. There are three border checkpoints that migrant workers from Kuala Lumpur prefer to go to, to extend their social visit visa. Su-nyi Kolok is quite popular among migrant workers from Kuala Lumpur because the immigration officials are not so strict with local Muslims crossing the border. Because *Nayu* communities exist on both sides of the border, a number of *Nayu* people travel across the border each day. In addition, the bribe to be paid to the checkpoint officials for leaving and entering Malaysia on the same day is lower here than at other checkpoints. Available transport includes both railway and bus services.

Nayu newcomers do not know much about going home and returning, so experienced migrant workers from their restaurants take responsibility to bring them to the border and back during their first period of work in Malaysia. Experienced migrant workers well know how to deal with immigration officials, but newcomers lack such experience. Thus, they are accompanied by an experienced worker who shows and teaches them where and how to go, and whom to deal with, at the land border

checkpoints. The newcomers follow established migrant workers for a few journeys so that they learn everything about how to travel back home and return to work again on their own.

Fatima: When I returned home the first time, I could not return home alone. I had to ask my friend, who worked here for a long time, how to go there, where I get on and off the bus. She helped me to cross the border and trained me how to go there, who I had to contact. When I moved to work in this restaurant, I return to stamp my passport every month. I want to know every way back to Thailand. I and my husband try to use every route to return home, such as Padong, Kolok and Takbai. Nowadays, I know how to go there. [Married, Female]

Pola: When I first came to work, I had to return to the border for the stamping of my passport every month with many friends together, but each person's passport expired at a different date. We would arrange to go together when the passport of one person was nearly due. So I know how to return to the border and come back to work again. [Single, Female]

Since the social visit visa of each migrant worker expires at different dates, they are sent for stamping one by one at different times so that the restaurant will not be short of labour. The remaining workers are better able to manage the workload if only one worker is absent. The migrant workers are usually sent to the border on weekdays between Monday and Thursday because these are not such busy days.

Under the Malaysian immigration laws, Thai citizens can not enter and exit Malaysia on the same day. Migrant workers, holding both passports and border passes, have to stay in Thailand for a few days. This rule came into effect a few years ago. This has led migrant workers to bribe the Malaysian immigration officials to let them enter on the same day. This is necessary because they must return to work in their restaurants

on the same day, for if they are absent even for a few days, they will lose the wages paid for those days and also risk losing their jobs altogether.

Migrant workers have to bribe not only Malaysian immigration officers to enter Malaysia on the date of departure but also Thai immigration officers. However, they do not offer bribes directly to Malaysian immigrant officers, but to middle-men who deal with this issue for them. These middle-men provide this service to all migrant workers, not only to *Nayu* migrant workers but also to sex workers from Thailand, China, Indonesia and Vietnam.

The service of the middle-men includes not only organising bribes but writing immigration cards and guiding migrant workers, both groups in cars and individuals on motorcycles, to the appropriate official at the checkpoint. The migrant workers pay from 30 RM to 50 RM (more than a day's wages) for these services depending on which border checkpoint they choose, as the costs vary among different checkpoints. Migrant workers who are not *Oghae Nayu* have to pay more for these services, on average 100 RM.

At the Thai checkpoints, migrant workers pay bribes directly to the immigration officials: they insert 10 RM inside the passports they hand to the immigration officials. Travelling monthly to renew a passport stamp costs the migrant workers a lot of money: transportation ranges from 80-100 RM for a return ticket; payment to the middle-man and the bribe to immigration officials, ranges from 40-60 RM; and food during the journey costs 40-50 RM. Depending on which checkpoints and what form of public transport the migrant workers select, these costs amount to between

160-210 RM, about one week's wages more or less. If their employers do not pay part of these costs, about one quarter of a worker's wage is always spent this way every month.

There are also private mini-bus services provided by *Oghae Nayu* for migrant workers to travel from Kuala Lumpur to the border checkpoints. The all-inclusive price of these services ranges from 150-160 RM for the round-trip, and includes the bribe, one take-away meal in the morning and the social visit visa extension. The driver picks up his passengers at their restaurants at about 3-4 a.m. They arrive at the checkpoint around 8.00 a.m. and are back at their restaurants around 6.00 p.m. Padong Besar, Sadao and Tak Bai are the most frequented checkpoints because these services have their contacts there and the highway to them is modern and in good condition. These private services are well-patronised because they are reliable and save time, and workers can be back on the job the next day, but the journey is uncomfortable because of the smallness of the seats and vehicles. Knowledge of these bus services is spread by word of mouth by restaurant entrepreneurs through their migrant networks. The entrepreneurs book a seat on the mini-bus every month for each worker. Some migrants are responsible for paying the full service fee, but some entrepreneurs pay part of the fee for their workers as part of their wages.

Ismail: I never let my border pass expire. I take the direct bus to Kolok border . . . I do the visa run every month . . . When I worked here, the shop owner let me do it every month. The shop owner would book a mini-bus every month, and he would pay for half so it was 80 RM each. The bus would take us for a visa run at Sa Dao border every time. [Single, Male]

Muhammad: I just went on the passport run yesterday. I travelled by mini-bus. He came to pick me up and take me there. This bus

went to the border only for the passport run. The price was 160 RM and included everything. I did not pay any more. He picked me up when I closed the shop at 3.00 a.m. I could get back in the evening and then work that day. I did not lose a day's work. I could get paid for that day. The mini-bus went to Batong border. It was easy and convenient. I knew this bus service from my colleague in this shop. She knew the bus driver. She gave his cell phone number to me. I called him to book a seat. [Single, Male]

In previous years, migrant workers themselves had no need to return through the border to stamp their passports because they used a different system: a middle-man came to collect their passports at the restaurants and brought them to be stamped at the Immigration checkpoint for them. These services were organized by the restaurant entrepreneurs who gave a middle-man a call before the passports expired. The middle-men did not come to collect just one passport but many passports at the same time. Migrant workers paid between 100 RM to 150 RM for these services. However, in recent years the Thai Immigration Bureau has implemented a new immigration system: every immigrant and emigrant has to be photographed when they are at the checkpoints. This new system means that the migrant workers have to take their own passports to the checkpoint as nobody is able to have them stamped for other people.

4.2.5 Overstaying

Some migrant workers do not return to renew their social visit visas or their border passes monthly. They remain in Malaysia even after they expire. These workers, in particular male workers, have usually been working in Malaysia for a long time. They are not newcomers. They have had plenty of experience in Malaysia, and they know many colleagues in restaurants and have a number of contacts within Malaysia, so they have enough knowledge and self-confidence to live as irregular workers.

The two main reasons migrant workers decide to overstay their social visit visas and border passes are money and time. Firstly, they do not need to pay the monthly costs when they overstay in Malaysia. This can save them 160 to 210 RM., an amount equal to their wages for around 4 to 8 working days. Secondly, travelling to the land border checkpoints, crossing and returning from Thailand to Malaysia on the same day takes many hours each month, between 14 and 19 hours per journey.

Migrant workers who overstay generally return to Thailand once a year. They travel home during the festivals of *Hari Raya Puasa* or *Hari Raya Aidil Fitri*, which last a few weeks. They take public transport to border towns near a border checkpoint and then cross irregularly into Thailand. Travelling to a border town is quite risky due to police surveillance, so they often travel with experienced colleagues who select a border checkpoint near the villages which have low border security.

In Malaysia, the overstaying migrant workers only use public transport such as buses and trains to travel to the border. They do not take the private mini-bus services because these services are well-known to cater only for *Nayu* workers. On public transport, nobody knows that these *Nayu* workers are Thais without legal documents. They are able to evade the immigration officials and police by impersonating Malay people by wearing their dress and speaking their language. They wear Malay traditional dress and speak only Malay standard language or a Malay dialect with their friends while on public transport, so everybody believes that they are Malaysian Muslims. The police regularly get on public transport to investigate irregular migrants and other issues, but they believe that the *Nayu* workers are Malaysian

Muslims and do not check their citizenship papers. This method is safer than going in a group with other *Nayu* workers. Overstayers are likely to travel in the morning because there is little police investigation during the day but intensive security control at night, so travelling in the daytime can lessen the danger of being arrested. Nonetheless, some migrant workers do get arrested by the police while on the way to the border towns.

After they arrive at a border town in Malaysia, there are many taxi, motorcycle and boat services that know very well the irregular ways to cross the border. Many *Nayu* workers cross the border in small boats. An irregular trip on a boat costs just 1 RM. and these boats cross all the time. Not only migrant workers but also local people who like to go shopping in Malaysia use these services because this irregular route requires no documents at all. *Nayu* workers often use these services both at Su-ngi Kolok and Tak Bai to cross the Su-ngi River, in the early morning before the checkpoints' official hours, as it is quite safe.

After migrant workers have returned home to Thailand, they often like to come back to work in Malaysia again, but their social visit visas have expired. To update their passports, they contact middle-men to renew the immigration stamps. They are given the cell phone numbers of the middle-men by their network contacts. A week before they return to Malaysia, they meet and give their passports to the middle-men, who obtain a valid social visa for them in a few days. Then, they are able to cross the border through the regulated checkpoints as social visitors again. The price of these services ranges from 1,500 to 2,000 baht (150-200 RM) depending on the middle-man. Migrant workers often use the services of middle-men in Su-ngi Kolok

checkpoint and Tak Bai checkpoint. However, there are also middle-men like this in other places, but they are less well-known and are more expensive than those at these checkpoints.

In addition, some migrant workers get new passports after their old ones expire. Their contacts suggest that they obtain new passports in Songkhla Province before coming back to work in Malaysia. The new passports are produced with the same names but with different passport numbers. Then they are able to enter Malaysia again but they have to wait fifteen working days.

Azwan: I have worked here for four years and have made a new passport three times. When I worked at the previous restaurant, I did not have my passport stamped until it expired. I had a quarrel with the owner. At that time I did not go to stamp my passport for one year, so I did not dare to go back home by Dan-Nork route. However, I noticed that when my friends' passports expired, they would go back to the Thai border through Kolok immigration route. Therefore, I asked my friend how to go that way, where I could catch the bus. Then they told me that I had to take the bus to the station first. Once there I could hire taxis and motorcycles that would take me to Thailand. I chose motorcycle service because, I thought, if there was something wrong, I could jump off the motorcycle and run away in time, while it was more difficult for me to run away if I took a taxi. Then I told the motorcycle driver that I wanted to go to the pier. I did not talk much because I was afraid that if I talked too much, he might know that I did not know the route and he might deceive me and take me to another place. The fare was sixty Baht. When I arrived at the pier, it was a small pier, the sun had not risen yet. There were some people there, but the immigration office was still closed. I got on the boat that crossed the river to Thai border before the immigration office was open. After reaching Thailand at 8 a.m., I took the bus to Hat Yai and went home by the Songkhla route [Single, Female].

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on both the formal legal and the informal irregular migration patterns and processes of *Nayu* workers in Malaysia. There are large numbers of Thai migrant workers who go to work overseas using five legal methods: private recruitment agencies, government employment services, employers, overseas traineeships and self-organization. But most *Nayu* workers in Malaysia are irregular migrants. There are a variety of ways to become irregular foreign workers in Malaysia, by failing to use a passport, a social visit visa, or a border pass; by travelling without official documents; by re-crossing the border the same day; and by overstaying after a social visit visa expires. *Nayu* workers use complex migration processes to travel to Malaysia to fill unskilled jobs. Their migrant networks connect them to informal irregular recruitment processes that do not involve private or government recruitment agencies or other services. In the next chapter, based on the stories and experience of *Nayu* migrant workers and their employers, I describe how migrant networks are created and developed by *Nayu* who work in Kuala Lumpur's Tom Yam restaurants.

CHAPTER 5: TOM YAM RESTAURANTS, MIGRANT NETWORKS AND THE MIGRATION PROCESS

International migration has been studied from various social science disciplines and interdisciplinary perspectives. Migration is a complex phenomenon and is itself a social process (Brettell and Hollifield 2000). As a result, an approach to migration is emerging that combines the macro, meso and micro levels and structures of migration. This network approach is interdisciplinary and is based on an analysis of the social relations and ties between individuals along the migration path. It also includes the historical aspects of migration between countries in a particular geographical region. However, studies of migration networks to date have not shed much light on irregular migrant workers and unauthorised migration. In particular they have not focused on irregular migration between Southeast Asian countries.

This chapter uses an interdisciplinary network approach to understand irregular migration flows between Thailand and Malaysia. It examines how migrant networks form and develop among *Nayu* migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in Thailand and Malaysia. The chapter begins by looking at the historical roots of Tom Yam restaurants in order to provide an overview of the origin and spread of Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia; it highlights the types of work performed within them and the place they occupy in the migrant networks and the migration process. The chapter is based on the stories and experiences of *Nayu* irregular migrant workers, including their employers, both *Nayu* and Malaysian Muslim entrepreneurs.

5.1 Tom Yam Restaurants in Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur has many Tom Yam restaurants. To explain why, it is necessary to briefly plot the history of the business. The first Tom Yam restaurant was established in Kuala Lumpur in the 1970s by Armad⁸, who was a Thai-speaking Muslim originally from Hat Yai, Songkhla, Thailand. He came to Malaysia to escape his financial problems and to improve his family's fortunes. He decided to open a small family restaurant in Malaysia which sold Thai dishes, including Tom Yam soup made by his wife. Armad's restaurant was located near the UMNO building in Kuala Lumpur. It was quite small with only 10 tables and opened for dinner between 5.00 pm and 2.00 am.

Although he had higher education qualifications, Armad decided to run a restaurant in Malaysia because he thought that running a food business required only a small investment, little risk and not much technical skill. At this time, no restaurants sold Thai food in Kuala Lumpur. *Nayu* people themselves ate Malay food and did not know Thai food, including Tom Yam soup. Thai food which is usually cooked and served immediately is quite different to Malay food which is often cooked and served cold. Tom Yam is popular with Malaysian Muslims, and Tom Yam soup was the main Thai dish served, so Armad's restaurant was well patronised.

To attract Muslim customers for whom the word "Thai" means "Buddhist", the first restaurant was called a "Tom Yam" restaurant, rather than a Thai restaurant,. They are still known as "Tom Yam" restaurants because they are operated by *Nayu* who are not called "Thai" by Buddhist Thais. *Nayu* do not usually call themselves "Thai"

⁸ This name is a pseudonym. A relation of Armad told me this social history of Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur. Many first generation Thai Muslim restaurant owners told me the same story.

either, (see Table 1.3) so there is little point in calling the restaurants “Thai” even though the cuisine originates in Thailand, and even though, as will be seen below, one must be Thai to cook it authentically.

There are no Tom Yam restaurants like the ones in Malaysia in the far Southern provinces of Thailand. Almost all Muslim people from these areas do not know how to prepare traditional Thai dishes. The restaurants they frequent are called *Raan Ahaan Islam* (Islamic restaurants) or *Raan Ahaan Khaek* (alien restaurants), which denotes restaurants that serve food which are *Halal* food as permissible according to Islamic law. Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia are quite different from Muslim restaurants in Thailand sell only Muslim food. In other words it can be call *Halal* food for Muslim people. In fact, Thai food in Thailand are not *Halal*.

In Malaysia, Tom Yam restaurants serve not only traditional Thai cuisine but also some local dishes from the southern Thai provinces. However, the Thai food served at Tom Yam restaurants must be *Halal*. This makes them different from the other Malay restaurants for Muslim people, which sell only *Halal* Malay food which is prepared in advance, such as *Nasi Ayam*, *Nasi Campur* and *Nasi Lemak*. Malay restaurants are quite popular with Malaysian Muslim customers in the morning and at lunch. On the other hand, Tom Yam restaurants serve fresh, hot dishes cooked right at the time the customer orders the food, so they are very popular for dinner and less popular at lunch time.

Armad’s business became increasingly successful. Within a year, he brought his young brother and two relatives from his home town to work in his restaurant. After

a year, all of them followed his lead and set up their own Tom Yam restaurants. They also were Thai-speaking Muslims from Songkhla, Thailand.

After a few years, two of Armad's friends in Malaysia, Malaysian nationals with *Nayu* mothers and Malaysian Muslim fathers, followed his lead and set up Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur. However, unlike Armad and his relatives, these friends were *Nayu* from Pattani province, in Thailand. Thus, although the first Tom Yam restaurant was developed in Kuala Lumpur by Thai-speaking Muslims, the business then spread through Armad's social ties into two types of Tom Yam restaurants, those run by Thai-speaking Muslims from Songkhla, Thailand and those run by *Nayu* people who were Malay-speaking Muslims from Pattani, Thailand. Although both are run by Muslims from Thailand, the owners have different ethnic backgrounds and speak different languages.

As the Tom Yam restaurants extended, restaurant owners continued to employ workers from their home towns who spoke the same language as them. In turn several migrant workers who were employed in these restaurants, set up their own restaurants with both Thai-speaking and Malay-speaking Muslims when they had more experience and enough funding. Although Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia started with Thai-speaking Muslims, ownership increased among *Nayu* people, as they were ex-employees who had the advantage of speaking the Malay dialect, which is quite similar to the official standard Malay spoken in Kuala Lumpur. Nowadays there are many Tom Yam restaurants scattered across Malaysia. Currently, Muslims from Southern Thailand and several Malaysian Muslims run Tom Yam restaurants and employ *Nayu* workers.

5.2 Tom Yam Food

Tom Yam spicy soup is one of the most popular Thai dishes. It is unique with its complex, hot, bitter, salty, sour and sweet taste. It is made from galangal, lemongrass, kaffir-lime leaves, red chilli paste, lime juice, salt, fish sauce and coriander leaves. It has become well known among foreigners throughout the world, including people in Malaysia. Tom Yam soup is a popular Thai dish loved by many Malaysians, in particular by Malay Malaysians.

Normally, young *Nayu* become the foreign workforce in the Tom Yam restaurants even though most of them in their homes have never eaten, let alone cooked, this spicy soup. However, the term “Tom Yam people,” used in reference to them, is well-known, wide-spread and well-accepted by *Nayu* workers themselves. Although there are some Malay and Indonesian chefs who were previously co-workers with *Nayu* in Tom Yam restaurants, the food they prepare is believed to taste inferior to the food cooked by *Nayu* chefs. As a result, the chef’s position is usually reserved for *Nayu* and for a few other Thais. Because Tom Yam is considered Thai cuisine, and both customers and *Nayu* migrant workers firmly believe that a non-Thai chef can never produce the delicious taste of Thai dishes which only Thai people can cook, the chefs have to be Thai. In fact, several *Nayu* who work in these restaurants consider that the food they prepare actually embodies the concept of Thai-ness, paradoxically unlike themselves who are generally resistant to being absorbed into Thai-ness.

In addition to their authenticity as cooks, *Nayu* are preferred as chefs because of their religion. Tom Yam food in Malaysia is Halal (cooked according to Muslim food law) and is supplied to Malaysian Muslims in an Islamic society, so the chefs should be Muslims. Thus the cuisine of Tom Yam in Malaysia is considered a unique speciality of Muslims from Thailand. Many Muslims from Thailand, both Thai-speaking Muslims from Songkhla and Pattalung, and *Oghae Nayu* from Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, are able to find work in Malaysia in Tom Yam restaurants due to two unshakeable convictions: that only Thais can prepare Tom Yam dishes, and that only Muslims can cook Halal food: and hence, that only *Nayu* can prepare Tom Yam.

5.3 Working in Tom Yam Restaurants

Like their staff, most Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs are Muslims from the far Southern provinces of Thailand. The restaurants are owned either by Thai-speaking Muslims or by *Nayu* entrepreneurs. Tom Yam entrepreneurs from Thailand in business for more than 25 years, obtained dual citizenship during the 1970s. At this time, the Malaysian Government allowed Muslim people from Southern Thailand and the southern Philippines to become citizens to increase the Muslim population relative to the non-Malay Chinese and Indian peoples (see Chapter Two).

The younger generation of *Nayu* entrepreneurs running their own Tom Yam restaurants, however, are not Malaysian citizens but are former irregular migrants whose networks helped them to establish their own restaurants irregularly. The irregular *Nayu* entrepreneurs have smaller restaurants than the older *Nayu*/Malaysian entrepreneurs. However, there are also some Malaysian Muslim entrepreneurs who

started up less than 10 years ago after Tom Yam dishes had become popular and a few *Nayu* who have married Malay-Malaysian men, run their own restaurants.

Thai immigrant entrepreneurs who share the same mother tongue tend either to employ Southern Thai-speaking Muslims, *Kheak*, from Songkhla and Pattalung Provinces or Malay-speaking Muslims, *Nayu*, from Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala Province. *Kheak* entrepreneurs employ more workers who speak Thai than those speaking Malay, and vice versa for *Nayu* immigrant entrepreneurs, as they do not understand the Thai Southern dialect.

Nayu workers from the far Southern provinces of Thailand are involved in Tom Yam restaurants more than other businesses not only because of the cultural niche they occupy, but also because the skills required can be learned on the job. Many migrant workers have not received standard Thai education in government schools as they are educated at *Pondok*, traditional Islamic boarding schools (See Chapter 3.4). Consequently, they have less chance to obtain employment in other trades in Thailand and Malaysia. For them, employment in Tom Yam restaurants is one of the best opportunities as they can get three meals a day and free accommodation which they think compensates for the low rate of pay.

Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs generally have low levels of education and possess few skills suitable for other occupations. After they have worked in the business for a while as an employee, they realise that if they learn how to cook, then they can probably operate their own restaurant. In addition, being a restaurant entrepreneur does not require a lot of official documents, so it is very appealing to

Thai migrant entrepreneurs many of whom are irregular migrants and who often lack literacy in both Thai and Malay languages.

Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs prefer to employ *Nayu* workers, not only because they share the same ethnicity and dialects and are from the same region, but also because they are cheap. Restaurant entrepreneurs pay wages to their co-ethnic, irregular migrant workers much lower than the standard payment for Malaysian workers who will not work in low paid jobs in restaurants. In addition, Malaysian workers enjoy good labour standards and can take days-off and holidays, while *Nayu* migrant workers do not have holidays or take any days-off. They are willing to work every day in order to save money to send to their families and to meet the monthly cost of their presence in the country.

Workers employed in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia get low pay according to Malaysian standards, but when converted into Thai baht the pay is very high by Thai standards. The wages paid to the restaurant workers are hierarchical according to the positions they occupy. The highest paid position, the chef, earns a wage of 30 RM to 50 RM⁹ per day, whereas the lowest paid is a dishwasher earning 20 to 25 RM per day. The wage rates for a bartender, a waiter and a kitchen hand range between 25 to 30 RM. However, the wages paid also depend on the size and workload of the restaurant. Normally, workers' wages are calculated on a daily basis but they obtain their wages at the end of the month. When they have days-off through illness or to return to get their passport stamped at the border, they do not receive wages for those absent days. When they do not work, they do not get paid.

⁹ Australian \$ 1= RM. 3.15 RM 1= Baht 9.85 by www.xe.com at 14 November 2009.

Normally, Tom Yam restaurants' operating hours are between 4.00 or 5.00 in the evening to 2.00 or 3.00 in the morning. Large and expensive restaurants operate at lunch time from 12.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m., and at dinner time from 6.00 p.m. to 1.00 a.m. Some restaurants also operate from 8.00 in the morning to 2.00 in the morning of the next day. In those restaurants operating for long hours, workers are divided into two shifts from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. and from 4.00 p.m. to 2.00 a.m. When they work the evening shift, a worker's lifestyle is very different from that of people outside the business. Most Tom Yam workers sleep in the day time, sometime between 4.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. and wake up to work every night. These workers have almost no social activities outside their restaurants and they receive no holidays. They also have no public places to hang out in like other foreign workers do in Malaysia.

5.3.1 Job Positions in Tom Yam Restaurants

In Tom Yam restaurants, there are five positions in a strict hierarchy, in which workers can be employed: chef, kitchen-hand, bartender, waiter and dishwasher. The number of workers filling these positions depends on the size of each restaurant. If the restaurant is small, there is a very simple dual division of labour. There are the chefs/kitchen-hands who work only on cuisine, and then the general workers who are responsible for and are able to undertake as required, all the other tasks: bartender, waiter and dishwasher.

(a) Dishwashing

Almost all *Nayu* workers in Tom Yam restaurants begin working as dishwashers. Newcomers usually start in this position if they do not have the skills for the other

occupations. Dishwashing, an easy job requiring no special skills, is suitable for untrained newcomers. While they are in this position, they are taught about customer service by their colleagues. When they have acquired sufficient customer service skills, they can rapidly become waiters/waitresses if they are fast-learners. However, some newcomers remain in the position of a dishwasher for quite a long period.

(b) Table-Waiting

Upon first working as waiters/waitresses in Tom Yam restaurants, the workers are usually shy and not so confident. Most come from rural villages and have never worked in the city before. They have few communication skills and feel embarrassed when they serve customers because they are still learning. In addition, most have problems with the language as they speak Malay dialect, the same as that spoken in Kelantan State in Northern Malaysia, which is different from the Malay standard language spoken by most of their customers in Kuala Lumpur.

Waiters must have some basic skills, such as people skills, service skills and literacy. These can be quite difficult for these young migrant workers to learn as they have only modest education. They have limited ability in both Malay and Thai languages, so reading and writing Malay words is quite difficult for them. However, some young migrant workers, who speak Malay dialect in everyday life, are able to read and write in Malay because they have been educated in *Pondok*, traditional Islamic boarding schools which teach the basic Malay standard language. They can write in the Roman alphabet and they can learn rapidly from their colleagues how to take orders.

When customers arrive for a meal, waiters welcome them, give them menus and take their orders. Waiters have to communicate with customers and write down their orders. Thus, to be promoted depends on a migrant worker's skills and personality. As a new waiter, their situation is difficult, for they have to listen carefully to customers' Malay words and write correct orders; otherwise, those in the kitchen could not respond properly to the food requests, and the waiters would be complained about by customers, and their colleagues in the kitchen would criticise their work. As a result, many new waiters worry about their service as they do not want anyone to complain about them, but the young workers with low skills, in particular, often make mistakes and are often scolded by their colleagues and by the entrepreneurs.

Waiting is divided into two tasks: order-taking, taking orders and serving customers in the front of the restaurant; and food-serving, carrying dishes from the kitchen to customers at their tables. Migrant workers who are in the food-serving position have fewer skills of communication and less mature personalities than those in the order-taking position. When taking orders from customers, the waiters use recycled A4 paper. Firstly, they ask customers about the beverages they would like to have, followed by the main dishes. They write down customers' drink requests at the bottom of the piece of reused paper and list the food at the top of the same page. After taking the order, they separate the drink and food orders: one part will be given to a bartender who makes and serves drinks at the bar, while the other part goes to the kitchen. In a large and expensive restaurant, carbon paper is used so that orders can be copied onto two pieces of paper: one is provided to workers in the kitchen and the other to the cashier in the front of the restaurant for the bill.

The writing of orders in Tom Yam restaurants requires training because the waiters use standard abbreviations of the dishes taught to them by experienced staff. All workers learn these abbreviations by heart, for they are used universally in this business because workers often cannot write and read full Malay words and because, abbreviations are easier and more convenient, especially during busy periods, as they can save time.

Migrant workers from the rural villages in the far Southern provinces of Thailand come to work in Kuala Lumpur, an absolutely new setting for them. They have to adapt their behaviour to a new life in the restaurants. To survive they rely on the support of their experienced colleagues who teach them the two main skills needed for waiting. Firstly, they learn service skills, how to deal with customers and they improve their personalities to become good waiters. Secondly, they learn the Malay language while waiting in the front of the restaurant. They begin by learning to read the menu and soon, they pick up a few Malay standard words to communicate with customers. However, while taking orders from Malay customers, they initially often have trouble understanding the requests, so they have to return to the kitchen to ask their colleagues about the meaning of the Malay words. After working in the front of the restaurant as waiters for a while, they gradually develop their language skills.

(c) Bartending

Every restaurant has at least one bartender. After working as waiters, workers could be promoted to be bartenders, depending on the availability of the position in the restaurant. Some waiters learn about bartending by assisting the bartender and by making drinks for their colleagues. They also act as temporary bartenders filling in

for their friends when they are away getting their visa renewed or go on holiday. If the bartender quits his/her job, a waiter, once taught how to make drinks, could take the position.

(d) Working in the Kitchen

Some workers are employed as kitchen-hands. All kitchen-hands used to be waiters because waiters get to know every dish on the restaurant menu and their abbreviations. After working as waiters for some time, they generally like to transfer to the kitchen-hand position, working as chef's assistants in the kitchen. The job of a kitchen-hand involves reading the lists of ordered dishes they receive from waiters for the chef to cook. Moreover, they must assemble the ingredients for each dish and hand them to the chef, so they have to know what each dish is composed of. After the chef has finished cooking the dish, the kitchen-hand will bring the food to the waiters for serving to the customers. Another duty of the kitchen-hand is to prepare all the ingredients, including vegetables, seafood and meat, before the restaurant opens or when any ingredients run out. Over a long period of time, the kitchen-hands, therefore, have a chance to learn about cooking from seeing the chef cook and by working with and tasting the food. In addition, they can practice their cooking skills in the kitchen when they prepare their own food to eat.

(e) Cooking

When the chef quits, often a kitchen-hand will take over the position as only a kitchen-hand is suitable to replace a chef. The kitchen-hand has more knowledge and experience in preparing dishes than the other workers. Those who have been working as a kitchen-hand for a long time and want to be a chef can also find a job as a chef in another restaurant. When they have enough confidence and skill to be a chef, they

ask their contacts to find them a job or to pass on any relevant information to them. Initially, they may seek a job as a chef in Tom Yam restaurants owned by Malaysian Muslim or Indian entrepreneurs as these entrepreneurs do not know Thai dishes like *Nayu* entrepreneurs. They know that their cooking skills may not yet be good enough to be a chef for *Nayu* entrepreneurs and they sharpen their skills by working for Malaysian Muslim or Indian employers.

The best position in Tom Yam restaurants is to be employed in a large restaurant cooking Thai dishes. Normally, there are two types of chefs in Tom Yam restaurants. One specialises in Tom Yam soup and other Thai soups, while the other is responsible for fried rice and deep-fried fish dishes. These chefs have power and receive higher payment than other workers as they are specialists in Thai cuisine. To finally attain a chef's positions, migrant workers have to undergo several years of working in Tom Yam restaurants in all the positions, as dishwashers, waiters, bartenders and kitchen-hands. Some migrant workers have worked in many restaurants before attaining the skills and experience necessary to become a chef. Being a chef is what most migrant workers in this business aspire to. A chef is the highest position with so much authority that every one else in the restaurant has to respect their words. Even entrepreneurs give careful consideration to chefs. When chefs can cook tasty Thai food, dish after dish and customers love their food, they can get higher wages than the average for migrant workers.

Both men and women can become Tom Yam chefs. Almost all chefs employed in Tom Yam restaurants have never cooked Tom Yam soup and other Thai dishes in

Thailand before. Most of them are young workers who have learnt to cook Tom Yam and Thai food after they were employed in Malaysia.

However, a few already have experience working in restaurants in Thailand before they are employed in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia. But despite their professional experience in Thailand, they are still taught to cook Thai dishes in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia because the taste and ingredients of Tom Yam dishes there are quite different from the traditional Thai dishes of Buddhist Thai people. However, these chefs know that their Thai dishes are not as excellent as those cooked in Thailand, so they seldom think of returning to run a business in Thailand.

Malaysian customers do not know the taste of real Thai dishes, as they eat Thai food cooked for the Malaysian palate. They are easily satisfied with Thai dishes even from chefs who are not at all excellent in traditional Thai dishes. They prefer food that is quickly prepared. If chefs cook a dish slowly, they cancel their orders and leave. Thai cuisine for Malaysians must be easily and rapidly made.

5.4 The Social Relations of Migrant Networks

Previous studies have found that there are networks of labour migrants and permanent migrants linking the southern border provinces of Thailand to Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Migrants remain connected to their villages by returning to visit home while working in destination countries (Klanarong 2003, p209). However, previous studies are limited and do not reveal how migrant networks operate among *Nayu* workers in particular, nor show the social relationships among migrant workers themselves and with other people within and between Thailand and Malaysia. As

Gurak and Caces (1992) correctly argue, there are too few studies that describe empirically how migrant networks actually operate.

Tom Yam restaurants cannot exist without migrant networks based on social relationships within and between migrants in Thailand and Malaysia. The ties may be strong or weak (Wilson 1998; Menjivar 2000). Strong ties are the relationships between migrants who are close relatives and family members, such as parents, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, children and cousins. On the other hand, weak ties generally include relationships between migrants who are not family members and relatives, such as friends, peers born in the same village, employers, customers and colleagues. The restaurants depend on and foster both strong and weak ties.

5.4.1 Migrant Networks and the Family

Family membership is the strongest tie for migrant workers, stronger than any other ties. Family relationships involved in Malaysia typically include husband and wife ties, ties between elder brothers and younger brothers, elder sisters and younger sisters, elder brothers and younger sisters, elder sisters and younger brothers, and ties between uncles or aunts and nephews and nieces, between cousins, and between in-laws.

Aisyah: I was able to come to work in Malaysia as my older sister worked here before I came . . . she came with her relatives. My sister invited me to work with her. If I did not have my sister here, my parents would probably not allow me to come here. [Single, Female]

Znra: My brother worked in Malaysia for long time. My brother called home and asked me to come to work here. He said that there

were two positions available in a Tom Yam restaurant. So I asked my friend from the same village to go. I and my friend decided to come and work together. [Single, Female]

Ismail: My mother had a Tom Yam restaurant with her friend. I worked with my mother for a year. [Single, Male]

Established migrants will offer their family members help to migrate when they require a job and would like to migrate. Family members are the first to be asked to migrate when there is a job available. They are contacted by cell phone or face to face when migrants come home to their families. The new migrants enter into the migratory process with the assistance of the established migrant workers who are their kin. When the new migrants arrive, they are warmly welcomed by their family members and set up their own social ties among people in Malaysia as well.

These new migrants are not lonely as they have family members in their networks. Family assistance to new migrants is not limited to the same gender. For instance, a senior brother who has experience as a migrant worker could bring his younger sister to work in his or in another restaurant. The elder sister could bring her younger brothers to work for her or in another restaurant as well.

In addition, family ties in this sense not only refer to the members of a nuclear family but also to those of the extended family. Established migrant workers are expected to offer their help to other relatives, such as nephews, nieces and cousins. However, such help is offered only after they help their own close family members. Help is then offered to other extended family members, after close family have been offered and declined a vacant position. Moreover, relatives do not only live in the same village but also live in different locations, as they marry people outside their native

village and may move there to live. Family members, hence, have ties with both husband's and wife's families and with their parental families who may live in different places.

Migrant workers, who work for their relatives, may like to move to work in other restaurants, although their relatives want them to stay. These employers trust their relative-workers more than other workers in the restaurants. They give their relative-workers a management role when they are absent, so they have to take more responsibilities but are paid the same rate as other workers. Some workers who migrate to work for relative-employers at first have limited opportunities to move to other restaurants. They wish they could have more freedom to move within Malaysia like others in their networks, but they are not able to.

Siti: I do not like working with relatives, however I do not know what other work to do because I cannot go out to work at other places. When having problem, I do not dare to talk to the owner. The owner does not want me to have a day off to go back home. When I ask for a grant to go back home for one week or go out with my friends, the owner usually shows her displeasure and frowns and does not talk to me. After I see this, I do not dare to go home and continue working. I always have consideration to others, especially if that person is my relative . . . when working with the owner who is my relative, I will be both relative and worker. So the owner orders me to do many more things than other workers. This owner also intrudes into my private life, but she will not intrude into other workers' lives. She will control other workers in working time only, but she controls me all the time. Working with other people makes me happier than working with my relative because I can say what I want to with my owner. On the contrary, I do not dare to talk to the owner, who is my relative, I just do what she wants me to do. I am the only relative who works with this owner. I have worked with my relative for six years. [Single, Female]

5.4.2 Migrant Networks and Friends

However, migrant networks are not limited to family ties. There are other social ties that link people in migrant networks. Friendship, although weaker than family, is another relationship through which help can be offered to a non-migrant in Thailand. If migrant workers have a strong relationship with their friends, they will trust them and offer help to bring them across the border as migrant workers. Their friendship must be strong because migrant workers have to take responsibility for a new migrant who often works in the same restaurant or in a restaurant in the vicinity. Most *Nayu* migrants' friends come from the same small remote villages where they have grown up. They have grown up, played together in the same school and village and shared experiences since their childhood. They are nearly the same age and are likely to have the same inclinations as they have been socializing in the same peer group for a long time.

Fairuz: I had a friend in the village who worked many years in Malaysia . . . When my friend returned home, I asked him to help. My friend offered me help to work with him. [Single, Male]

Sakinah: I came to work at a restaurant in Malaysia as my friend, who lived nearby my home, invited me to work with her. She was working with her other relatives at one restaurant in Pujong, Malaysia. [Single, Female]

When workers return to their villages on holiday, they have a chance to meet and drink with many people there, in particular with their friends. They share their work and life experiences in Malaysia with their friends, becoming a channel through which information about Malaysia passes to villages in Thailand. If friends want to migrate, the migrants organize work in a restaurant when there is a position available and offer their friends help to cross the border. *Nayu* workers have to take

responsibility for their friends' lives during the migratory process. If their friends, however, are not new migrants, they can deal with the migratory process themselves. Then, the established migrants just offer them the job and do not have to take so much responsibility for their friends.

After a non-migrant has agreed to take the job available at the Tom Yam restaurant, the existing migrant then provides information regarding crossing the border between Thailand and Malaysia. They advise their friends on how to obtain a passport. After their friends have prepared all the necessary documents for emigration, they return to Thailand and accompany them across the border. Newcomers learn many things from their migrant friends, including adaptation to the new life, training for the job, introductions to other network members, how to journey from and back home and how to make remittances.

Experienced *Nayu* workers also take care of the new migrants in the restaurants and have to take responsibility for them. This, of course, is not an easy job and without strong friendships, such help would never have been offered to them. New migrants stay with and work together in the same place as their *Nayu* friends, so their social relationships are also strengthened in this way as new workers are eased into the business.

On reaching the Tom Yam restaurant, the new migrants gain much new knowledge from the *Nayu* network members working there. Network members warmly welcome them as friends and share their experiences during coffee breaks while working at the restaurant. This way, the newcomers can obtain reliable information regarding

working conditions and the way of life in the new country. Moreover, the newcomers befriend colleagues and other co-ethnics, which enables them to extend and remain part of the same migrant network as the migrant friend who offered them work in the restaurant.

5.4.3 Migrant Networks and the Villages

When they have jobs in Malaysia, the migrant workers continue to maintain their social ties in Thailand partly because they come from the same village. They feel attached to one another as they have shared some experiences, such as community customs and activities, religious activities in the village mosque (*musjid*), socialising together and talking over a drink. *Nayu* workers from the same village or even province feel more like kin than others from outside their village. Although they have no blood-ties, there is a social tie connecting them as their houses are located in the same geographical area.

Ilyana: My brother's friend who lived in a different sub-district asked me to work with him. He opened a restaurant at *Cha-Ah-Lam*. He went to talk to my parents to ask them to allow me to work with him. [Single, Female]

Aina: I met one woman in a mosque in her village. She married a Malaysian man and runs a Tom Yam restaurant in Malaysia. She asked where I worked and if I wanted to change my job. She invited me to work with her in a restaurant in Malaysia. [Widow, Female]

Azura: My friends suggested that I work at a restaurant that was located in front of a university in Phuket because it was run by people who used to live in the same village as me. The people who worked there were also people from the same villages as me . . . This time, another restaurant owner and her relative came to ask me to work with her. This owner was a villager who lived in the same village as me, but we were not so close, just knew each other. At that time this owner was hiring workers, and I wanted to work with her so that I could travel around KL at the same time because I had not been to KL before. I thought the owner was a good person.

After talking with her I thought I could work with her. After working, I thought that the work here is fine, not as hard as the previous job, the working time was also shorter, and workers there also came from the same village as me. [Widow, Female]

Nayu people in the villages know members of many households who have migrated to work in Malaysia either as workers or as entrepreneurs. If they have no social ties with family and friends, villagers might request their co-villagers for assistance to get a job in Malaysia. If an owner of a restaurant needs workers but nobody in their families can or would like to go, their relatives will contact other villagers who would like to work in Malaysia. If the workers are young and unmarried, they contact their parents first, but if they are grown-up and married, they approach them directly. These social ties between villagers are based on mutual trust because they are not related. Young non-migrants who request help to get a job in Malaysia believe in and trust the restaurant owners' relatives who offer them a job because their parents are well-acquainted with these owners and with their families as well.

All *Nayu* entrepreneurs in Malaysia have families and relatives in Thailand. When they need workers in their restaurants, their families and relatives in the village will find a potential candidate who is unemployed. Their families and relatives select a person who meets the requirements, is trustworthy, easily controlled and well-behaved. They do not directly invite the young potential workers but first inform their parents about the job prospect. After the parents are aware of the requirements, they inform the young potentials and let them decide whether to stay or go. The process of decision-making takes into consideration their security and living conditions in Malaysia. Their parents can be confident that their children's lives in

Malaysia will be all right because at least they know the entrepreneurs' families who come from the same village.

Abdul: I came to work here when I was 20 years, as there was someone from my village who invited me to work there . . . I was jobless at that time so she asked me to come to work with her daughter who is the owner of this Tom Yam restaurant. I wanted to have a job and money. [Single, Male]

When newcomers have more experience and are linked with other *Nayu* migrants in networks, they have the ability to relocate to other restaurants in different places. When new migrants have worked for a while, they get to know their way better as their networks extend. They can move from their initial restaurant into a new one. Moreover, they become experienced workers themselves and can offer help to non-migrants in Thailand when there is a job available in their restaurant.

When workers leave one restaurant to work in another, they do not discard the ties with their colleagues in the old restaurant. If they do not have any problems with the entrepreneurs when they leave their job in the old restaurant, they normally continue to visit them. Sometimes when there is an urgent demand for labour in the former restaurant, these ex-workers will come back to work temporarily. Moreover, if the ex-workers who have moved do not like their new job, they will return to their old restaurant if they did not have any problems with the owners when they left.

The *Nayu* migrant villagers and entrepreneurs offer non-migrants help to cross the border to work. If non-migrants do not have any social ties in Malaysia, they can not enter the migratory process. They would not know how to prepare documents needed to cross the border; how to travel from the border to Kuala Lumpur; how to get a job; how to evade immigration officials and police; and how to return home. But if they

do have ties to migrant networks, everything will be arranged. Non-migrants can easily follow and learn from previous migrants. However, social relations between migrants and non-migrants are not easily developed. In order to be welcomed into the migratory process, relationships need to be created in the place they were born and grew-up in, and sustained for a long period of time.

5.5 Social Ties in Malaysia

As most Tom Yam restaurants are small businesses, their recruitment is informal, relying on networks of employees and/or employers. Knowledge of contacts and information about opportunities in the labour market come from personal social ties. Migrant workers have no access to employment opportunities through formal channels such as agencies, middle-men, or the Thai Office of Labour Affairs at the Royal Thai Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. Migrant workers who seek to move to Malaysia or within Malaysia find employment through their network members, from information and contacts provided by friends, relatives, villagers and restaurant owners. The bigger the network in Malaysia, the more employment opportunities they are able to find.

When newcomers cross the border to work in Tom Yam restaurants, they make friends with their new colleagues, forming new social ties at the restaurant. Although some newcomers have known some colleagues who come from the same village, most newcomers do not know whom they are going to work with in Malaysia, for many *Nayu* workers come from different areas of the far Southern provinces. They normally get to know each other when they come to work together. At the beginning, there are weak ties between newcomers and the established migrants in the

restaurant. After a period of working together, they become close friends because they work and live together all the time, seven days per week, strengthening formerly weak social ties, although they are not relatives, friends or village peers.

Most *Nayu* workers do not work in one restaurant for a long period. They often transfer to another restaurant either in a different location far a way or in the neighbourhood of the former restaurant. They leave their colleagues in terms of face to face communication, but they still maintain contact with them through a cell phone or by occasionally meeting over a drink on a day off at friends' restaurants. When their colleagues want to move to other restaurants for higher pay or a better position, they ask them for help. Their more experienced colleague may find a new job for their colleague in their own restaurant, or they may offer information regarding a job available in other restaurants they know. The movement of former colleagues around Malaysia expands the migrant networks to many large towns. Consequently, they can relatively easily find new work whenever and wherever they would like.

As discussed above, Tom Yam entrepreneurs consist of Malaysians; both Thai Muslim and *Nayu* people who later became dual citizens; and irregular *Nayu* entrepreneurs. Some newcomers do not know their employers, in particular Malaysian entrepreneurs, before they come to their restaurants. New workers may know *Nayu* entrepreneurs who were born in the far Southern province, although they can not have a close relationship if they are not relatives because of the gap in status and age. These entrepreneurs spend most of their lives in Malaysia and return to their homeland just for short periods and for holidays.

Employers and employees, then, often first meet one another in Malaysia, unless the latter seek employment or the former look for labour when they visit home on holiday. Even so, *Nayu* entrepreneurs are still expected to look after their *Nayu* employees when they have problems, such as being arrested by the police, family problems and health problems. These *Nayu* entrepreneurs do not think of their staff only as employees but rather as their kin as they frequently come or are related to people who come from the same village. Malaysian entrepreneurs, on the other hand, have a background different to their workers, so *Nayu* workers do not usually feel close to them. *Nayu* workers are often thought of only as day labour and when they are in trouble, Malaysian entrepreneurs do not offer them much help and may simply dismiss them.

Both *Nayu* and Malaysian entrepreneurs are also part of migrant networks. When entrepreneurs, in particular Malaysian entrepreneurs, need workers, they request their *Nayu* workers to help to recruit them. Malaysian entrepreneurs are not capable of recruiting *Nayu* workers themselves because they have limited contacts, so their *Nayu* workers take care of this duty and find new workers for them. *Nayu* entrepreneurs, on the other hand, have a wider variety of choices as they have more social ties among *Nayu* workers in both Malaysia and Thailand.

5.5.1 Migrant Networks in the Workplace

Normally, depending on its size there are three to fifteen workers in a Tom Yam restaurant who may come from different villages in Southern Thailand. Newcomers might know some of their colleagues if they are from the same village, but some colleagues have never met one another before working there. Obtaining a job, then,

immediately opens up opportunities. Most migrant workers remain working at the same restaurant for a while, gradually becoming part of migrant networks in Malaysia. But most do not stay in one restaurant throughout their time in Malaysia. They use the migrant network established in their restaurant to move to other restaurants, thus extending the migrant networks even further within Malaysia.

Migrant workers who have been working in their restaurants for quite a long time transfer to a new restaurant for several reasons. Firstly, they become bored with their work. Secondly, they would like to upgrade their positions and earn more money. Thirdly, workers change jobs if they have had some problems with their colleagues or employers which has made them unhappy.

Normally, migrant workers who are bored with their restaurants prefer to move to new restaurants after they have returned home for holidays during the *Hari Raya* period. They tell their bosses that they will not come back to work there after the holiday week. However, some change restaurants at any time, in particular if they have problems with their colleagues or employers, although almost all migrant workers continue to work in Tom Yam restaurants despite their change of jobs.

After they quit their job, they often take a few days to find a new position. Leaving a job also means changing accommodation. They may have to live with their friends who help with accommodation and food while they are unemployed in Malaysia. However, most migrant workers do not want to rely on another person for too long. If they are unemployed for some time, they generally move from person to person because they do not want to bother their friends by asking repeatedly for help.

5.5.2 Socialising with Workmates

Migrant workers, particularly men, usually visit their friends in other restaurants in different places when they have a day off. This occurs once a month when they return for a couple of days to the border between Malaysia and Thailand to stamp their passports. Some restaurant owners close their businesses for a few days each quarter to allow their employees to have days off. During this holiday they normally sleep and rest in their accommodation all day and wake up in the evening to meet their friends over drinks at their friends' restaurants. Almost all migrant workers visit their friends together with their work colleagues. At first colleagues introduce them to their own friends at other restaurants. They get to know one another and thus new people are befriended through their work mates. This leads to the establishment of new social relationships, and these friends become part of their networks if they develop good rapport. They are likely to exchange their cell phone numbers at their first meeting and then maintain their social relationship through cell phone networks.

Muhammad: Even though I have worked here for a long time, I feel happy and don't want to go back home. I think it is fun to be here. I have a lot of friends working at this shop and at other shops. Some of them used to work at this shop and changed to a new shop. They come visit me. When they come here, we chitchat with colleagues while we have a drink at my shop. [Single, Male]

Similarly, Anja Rudnick (2009) found that Bangladeshi men working in Malaysia are likely to meet their friends in the public realm at local restaurants for coffee or tea. According to Pattana Kitiarsa (2006), Thai migrant workers in Singapore maintain their co-ethnic relationships during their days off by gathering in small groups to talk, drink and have fun at the Golden Mile Complex, Thai labour's public space in Singapore. As Kitiarsa (2006, p15) has explained:

The Golden Mile on the weekend resembles the festive atmosphere in Isan's rural villages. Mostly middle and advanced aged men, gathering together to have a meal and a drink over fun-making conversation in corners of the buildings or in the parking lots and footpaths, are scenes common to household ceremonies or village festivals, especially those during the post-harvest time when villagers might find themselves with the luxury of time to celebrate and enjoy themselves after heavy work in fields.

Similarly, and unlike *Nayu* women, *Nayu* men visibly engage in social activities in public places within their villages in Thailand, and in their work places in Malaysia.

As Lertit (1992, p41) says:

In Muslim villages in the southern border provinces you see men sitting in the tea or coffee shops or food shops, but one is less likely to see women except those who work in the shop.

5.5.3 Customers and People from Home

For *Nayu* migrant workers, another important social relation is with the customers in their restaurants. The restaurant serves Halal dishes, so their customers are often Malaysians who observe the same religion. The fostering of social relationships between workers and their customers is important in the service sector. Not only do they have to serve Thai dishes, but they also must deal with all the other demands to ensure the satisfaction of their customers. They try to provide the best service so that their customers will come back again. Enjoying Halal food and good social relationships with the workers turns customers into regulars, and regulars provide work, tips and information.

Social activities between the migrant workers and their customers are not limited to the restaurant. Some workers and customers play football, fish and stroll in the shopping malls together. These social relations depend on the similarity in preferences and behaviour between the migrant workers and their customers. Mostly, it is customers who invite workers to social activities. They often come from Kelantan State on the border, so as well as sharing a religion, they speak the same language. When their customers learn that workers come from the far Southern provinces of Thailand, they are likely to speak with them in their Malay dialect, their Kelantanian vernacular tongue, somewhat similar to the *Nayu* dialect spoken in the far Southern provinces of Thailand. Some *Nayu* workers develop close relationships with Malay men who are initially their customers but later become their boyfriends. Some even marry them.

In addition to social activities, some customers also offer *Nayu* workers help in various forms when requested. Many workers who have good social relationships with their customers have received help from them when they are in trouble. For instance, they hide in their Malay customers' houses near their restaurants to escape from the Malaysian People's Voluntary Corps (RELA), a voluntary citizen's organization given power to help the government find and detain irregular foreign workers. Or when they have problems regarding official documents as they can not read Malay language, they will ask the customers who have good relationships with them for help. However, not all *Nayu* workers can receive such help especially if they have only recently arrived in Malaysia.

Most Thai people in Malaysia are Muslims, especially those speaking Malay dialect in their daily life, such as *Nayu* and Thai international students, Thai workers in other sectors, or *Nayu* women who have married Malaysian Malays. *Nayu* migrant workers usually warmly welcome Thai people, no matter what religion they observe. These migrant workers take an interest in Thai people they meet there. They are often eager to learn their background, where they come from and what they do in Malaysia. If the Thais they meet have lived in Malaysia for a long period of time, they will build a social relationship with them. Many migrant workers have social relationships with Thai people living in Malaysia. They share their sense of nostalgia with Thai people from the same homeland, in particular with those from far Southern provinces of Thailand.

Some *Nayu* workers have strengthened their social relationships with other Thais in Malaysia and have become good friends after knowing one another for quite a long time. *Nayu* workers and their *Nayu* employers tend to prepare a special Halal dish for or give a discount to Thai people who have a meal in their restaurants. In return, *Nayu* migrant workers ask for help from Thai people when they have some difficulties, for example, from Thai people who work for the Thai Royal Embassy in Kuala Lumpur who can help them with official documents.

5.5.4 Networks and Travellers

Migrant workers who hold valid documents are likely to travel back to a border checkpoint between Thailand and Malaysia monthly. In addition, some migrant workers who let their passport expire in Malaysia also return to visit their families in the festival period every year. When migrant workers have to return to the border

either to stamp their passports for their validation or to visit their families in their villages, almost all of them travel by public transport, on trains and buses. This means they have opportunities to meet other workers on the way, since public transport passengers are mostly composed of migrant workers who travel regularly to the border towns. As described in Chapter 4.2 above, there are also weekly mini-bus services, all of whose passengers are *Nayu* workers from around Kuala Lumpur and Selangor who have valid passports and travel to stamp their passports at check points. Travelling to the border takes quite a long time, from 6-8 hours. Migrant workers have a chance to talk to other workers while they are travelling although they may not have met one another before.

Migrant workers tend to share their background with their travel-mates, including their work and living experiences in Malaysia. Having met, they are likely to exchange their phone numbers to maintain contact in Malaysia. Some migrant workers who have met up on the way become important social contacts after a period of communication via cell phones. These new contacts have the potential to provide support useful for them in Malaysia, they are likely to support one another when they are needed.

Mazlin: When I went back home to stamp my passport at Sungai checkpoint, I sat behind a lady. That lady wanted to adjust her seat, so she asked me for permission. At first, I thought that she was Kelantan but she was *Nayu* wearing *Baju Kurung* [Malay style of dress]. She also knew that I was Thai as I had my speaking Thai accent so she told me that she was Thai. We enjoyed talking to each other and we exchanged our phone numbers. After that, we kept in touch on the phone for 2 or 3 months. Usually, we liked to send text messages to each other. When I went back to work at my relative's shop, I didn't want to work there anymore. My relative also knew that I was bored. Later, that lady called me and told me that there was a vacancy at her shop. I, thus, decided to quit my first job and start a new job with this

lady friend. I could sense that this lady was a good friend and I could trust her. We stayed in touch after we met on the bus. Although we didn't get to know each other before, I felt that my new friend was a good person. That was why I came to work with her. [Single, Female]

If migrant workers travel to Malaysia by public transport, they usually select the border checkpoint where there are buses or railways to Kuala Lumpur. However, these are limited and they tend to use the train because it is cheaper than the bus. There are two railway lines at the Malaysian border and only one of them services passengers from Thailand to Malaysia at the railway checkpoint.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by asking how migrant networks develop among *Nayu* migrant workers, former migrants and non-migrants in Thailand and Malaysia. It examined the meso-level structures that are emerging through the linked social relations and ties between irregular *Nayu* migrant workers in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia. All *Nayu* migrant workers enter Malaysia to work in Tom Yam restaurants through networks which grow by continuing to bring non-migrants into the Tom Yam restaurants and spread through out Malaysia. In addition, long term workers often become Tom Yam entrepreneurs, the main form of self-employment for *Nayu* immigrants, and these entrepreneurs create a strong demand for more *Nayu* workers to serve *Halal* Thai cuisine in Malaysia. Over time, Tom Yam restaurants have drawn *Nayu* workers into the Malaysian labour market to prepare and sell the Thai cuisine associated with *Nayu* identity – Tom Yam.

This chapter has argued that migrant networks between the two countries shape and facilitate irregular migration. Without any recruitment agencies, the already high

volume of migrant workers increases through their social ties, as *Nayu* workers extend their migrant networks further in the Malaysian labour market. Without migrant networks between and within the two countries, irregular *Nayu* migrant workers from the far Southern provinces of Thailand would not be able to cross the border, gain employment in Tom Yam restaurants and live in Malaysia. On the other hand, without the existence of migrant networks, Tom Yam entrepreneurs could not employ *Nayu* workers, as cheap labour, to meet the unique demands of the *Halal* Thai food businesses in Malaysia.

All *Nayu* migrant workers in this study crossed the border to work in the Tom Yam restaurant business with the aid of their social contacts in the migration process. These ties were created and developed in many ways and have served and supported the movement of workers over many years. These networks are resilient and effective because they are a part of everyday life, based on concentric sets of interpersonal ties of family, friends, co-villagers, workmates, customers, people from home and employers. These ties operate as a complex structure not linked only to or limited by the migration process, but created and developed as social life itself.

The next chapter examines the role and function of networks in locating irregular work for *Nayu* migrants in Malaysia.

CHAPTER 6: THE ROLES OF MIGRANT NETWORKS

A number of international migration studies have highlighted the positive aspects of migrant networks which connect individuals between sending and destination countries (Massey et al. 1987; Bala'n 1992; Menjivar 1995; Bagchi 2001b; Lee et al. 2005; Huang 2006; Trinci 2006; Harvey 2008). However, the body of literature on international migrant workers only provides limited knowledge of the negative aspects of networks and social ties on migrant workers' experiences. This chapter draws attention to both the positive and negative aspects of migrant networks which connect *Nayu* irregular migrant workers between Thailand and Malaysia and also within Malaysia.

6.1 The Positive Roles of Migrant Networks

This section examines the positive aspects that migration networks play among *Nayu* migrant workers in the various stages of the migration process. Many previous studies have argued that migrant networks play important positive roles in the migration process (Massey et al. 1987; Gurak and Caces 1992; Hugo 1995; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Menji'var 2000; Winters et al. 2001; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Klanarong 2003; Klanarong 2009b). The section provides greater insight into why and how migrant workers achieve such positive outcomes from their migrant networks in Thailand and Malaysia and how the migrant networks shape migration among irregular *Nayu* migrant workers.

6.1.1 The Risks of Receiving Information

All new migrant workers receive and exchange information regarding the migratory process from their contacts in migrant networks while they are in Thailand. According to Klanarong (2003, pp158-160) intending female migrant workers mainly access information regarding employment and other working conditions in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia by talking to relatives and friends in the villages who have migration experience. This is because there is no private agency to recruit workers for Malaysia in the Southern border provinces of Thailand (Klanarong 2003, p213). The main source of information related to employment in and migration to Malaysia among new migrant workers is their personal social contacts in the villages. However, much of the information they receive is not complete and gives only part of the information they require about working and living in Malaysia. Former migrants do not usually discuss the negative aspects of migration, so most information is about positive experiences, which they spread to their friends in the village.

Nur Saidah: The owner came to visit me and my mother at my home . . . She told us that we would live and eat with her. However, details of work and other things, I did not know, I came to learn here. When I came here, I was shocked about the accommodation. All employees would live together, ten people in one room. She did not tell us that. How could I do it. I was already here. I remained silent because I was already here and I did not want any problems. [Single, Female]

Amir: My friend invited me to work in a Tom Yam restaurant. I did not know what a Tom Yam restaurant was. My friend told me that I firstly had to be a dishwasher but he did not tell me much. Malaysia is a modern country and there are many things to do and to see there. I wanted to come travelling here. I wanted to know what Malaysia was and what Malaysians do. [Single, Male]

Migrants provide not only financial remittances to support their families but also social and cultural remittances about ideas of work and travel in Malaysia to the next generation of young workers. When migrant workers go back to their homes, they are likely to meet over a cup of tea with their friends in the village, during which they are likely to talk about their various experiences, most often emphasising the positive aspects of the modern Malaysian life style which non-migrants have never experienced. This makes some of their friends eager to follow them to Malaysia to work and enjoy travelling aboard as well.

In addition, former migrant workers have a better look and style in comparison to their peers in the villages, as they have more money to buy more luxurious accessories making them envied among the villagers. Hence, the stories of migrant workers are well known among villagers. Known as “Tom Yam people”, through their colourful stories, these migrant workers pass on their attitudes to work and travel to other young villagers and some actually follow their network to Malaysia.

Muhammad: When I went back home, I told my friends about my life and my work here. I told them about how much money I could get for working at a Tom Yam food shop and working as a drink maker. Some friends who didn't want to pursue further their studies seemed to be interested in working in Malaysia, too. [Single, Male]

Azizul: I saw people who came back from Malaysia. They had much money. They could buy motorcycles. I saw them and I wanted to have money like them. I told my father that I wanted to come to work here. [Single, Male]

Most migrants return home, appearing to be prosperous and in good health looking modern and westernized. To their friends in the village, they are obviously different compared to when they left the village to work in Malaysia. Their new image and other changes are thought by their fellow villagers to be signs of the good life they

have while working in Malaysia. Many non-migrants do not think about negative experiences because of the image projected and the information provided by the returning migrants. They imagine that working in Malaysia is a good idea.

Razak: There was one person who came to Malaysia to open a Tom Yam food shop. When he went back to the village, he acted as if he was very rich. He was well-dressed and drove a Honda Civic car. Everyone in my village went to greet him. He acted as if he was of high social status. He didn't greet anyone first. All people in the village admired him. However when I came to work in Malaysia also, I found that there was no difference between my life and his. When I was here, he started talking to me. It was completely different from the time he came to the village when he never looked at me. People in my village thought that people who worked in Malaysia were rich. It was because those people usually made themselves important when they went back home. Actually, in my opinion, there was absolutely no difference. [Single, Male]

When I asked my respondents why they had come to work at their initial restaurant in Malaysia, all replied that they did not know about it before they arrived. They just followed their migrant networks that carried them across the border to these restaurants. If they had emigrated alone, they would not have arrived there.

Most migrants had not been told the full details of wages, working conditions, accommodation and working irregularly. It seems that their networks fail to provide them with complete information. Almost all *Nayu* workers use their networks to get a job. Information about vacancies is spread widely by word of mouth among members of a particular network. Sometimes information comes from a person they do not know via the cell phone. This information may be unreliable and lacking detail regarding accommodation and employers' behaviour as sometimes none of the network members actually works there. However, despite knowing little about the

new restaurant, migrant workers will often take the job if they are unemployed or need to move to another workplace. Consequently, some workers can be deceived by employers with regard to working conditions and the wage rate as they rely on the weak ties in their networks not on established relationships with someone they know at the new restaurant.

Almad: When I was bored with working for the first shop, my friend called me and told me that someone needed a chef and gave me phone number. I did not know that guy and my friend didn't know that guy as well because my friend got information and contact from another friend. I had no idea how it would be but I called to that number to ask for information, where to go and how much I will get. I was informed that I will get 60 RM a day and the wage will be paid weekly. So I decided to quit my relative's restaurant and go to work there. One week after working for the new place, I found that the deal wasn't like we had talked about. I did not receive money for one week . . . This is because I did not have my friend who had worked there but my one friend is the friend of that guy. I had never seen that guy, only talked on the phone. I had no idea how this guy would be and he didn't tell me about the shop owner either. [Married, Male]

Non-migrants often take a risk when making the decision to become international migrant workers. They do not know much about working and living in Malaysia but once they have arrived they can do little but accept it as they cannot easily return home. Many are not satisfied with their first restaurants due to the poor living and working conditions.

6.1.2 Decision Making

Transnational networks linking Malaysia and Thailand have an important influence on decision making. Non-migrants become migrant workers by following their social ties to former and existing migrant workers in Malaysia. Some newcomers migrate to join their families or their relatives. Others follow to work with their friends or

fellow villagers. Most migrant workers I spoke to said that a family member was important in their decision to migrate.

Aisyah: I could come to work in Malaysia as my older sister worked here before I came. She came with her relatives. My sister invited me to work with her . . . I decided to come here because she was here. [Single, Female]

Znra: My brother worked in Malaysia for long time. My brother called home and asked me to come to work here. He said that there were two free positions in a Tom Yam restaurant. So I asked my close friend from the same village to go. I and my friend decided to come to work together . . . If my brother did not work here, I would not come here. [Single, Female]

Zainudin: During that time, one of my mother's relatives staying near my home was looking for two workers to work in a restaurant in Malaysia. This relative has his own relative [a cousin] who already works in Malaysia. I didn't know the person working there [in Malaysia] as they were not my relatives and friends . . . He did not want to go there alone, so he asked me to go to work there as well. I decided to go with my friend because I didn't have anything to do at that time. [Single, Male]

Migrant networks in Malaysia influence the decision to migrate. Newcomers follow the social ties that offer them help during the migration process. Social ties not only influence migrant workers but also the parents of new migrants. They allow their children to leave home to work in Malaysia as they trust their social contacts.

Pola: Then the owner, who already knew my mother, went to see her to ask for permission to take me to work in Malaysia. At first, my mother did not want me to go to work. My mother said if I went to work, there would be no one taking care of my brother and sister when my parents went out to work. However, I insisted that I wanted to work to earn money. Finally my parents allowed me to work . . . I felt quite excited, but did not feel afraid of anything because I knew my friend who worked here and her family well. For the owner, I knew that she came from the same village as me, and I have seen her before. My parents also knew her quite well as they were neighbours in the village and she also still has her family there. As they know each other from the village, my parents trust her and let me come here with her. [Single, Female]

Social networks are also influential in the decision to move from one workplace to another in Malaysia. Some respondents did not work in Kuala Lumpur at first, but got experience working in other cities of the other states such as Johor Bahru (Johor), Alor Setar (Kedah), Shah Alam (Selangor), Puchong (Selangor), Kajang (Selangor), Cheras (Selangor), and Ipoh (Ipoh) before they transferred to their current restaurants in Kuala Lumpur. These respondents preferred to move to Kuala Lumpur after they had been working in other restaurants for a long period of time. They were bored with their life, so they travelled to another place for the new experience. Kuala Lumpur is among their first choices as it is the capital city of Malaysia. They transferred to new work places with the assistance of their migrant networks, their former colleagues or friends, *Nayu* migrant workers whom they knew, or new restaurant owners they met in Malaysia or Thailand. Once they have arrived, they can thereafter transfer to as many places as they like.

Zubaidah: When I visited home during the festival of *Hari Raya*, I met my close friend at the village. She worked in Johor and invited me to work with her there [Johor Bahru]. I was working in Selangor state [with her aunt]. I wanted to travel to Johor with my friend because she said that it was fun there. There were many places to visit. There were many friends. This friend is my close friend since primary school and we lived in the same village . . . I decided to follow my friend to work there. [Single, Female]

Syed: When I was working in Kuantan [Pahang State], I was bored with working then I went back home . . . I met my friend there [Thailand], and my friend knew the sister of my shop owner's wife there. I worked there [Pahang State] for a long time and I wanted to change to a new place and I had many friends here [Kuala Lumpur] too. I decided to move to work here with my friend. [Single, Male]

Networks also affect the decision to re-migrate and to stay in Malaysia.

Saeed: I ended up working in Malaysia and returned home for a year. I didn't want to come here [Malaysia] any more but I was doing nothing at home [in Thailand]. My friend called me to work

here [Kuala Lumpur] with him in running a new restaurant so I decided to return to work in Malaysia again. [Single, Male]

Farhana: I and my sister were bored and ended up working in [first restaurant]. We didn't think that we would return to work again but I returned home for 20 days. My relative who took me to work in [the first restaurant] knew this restaurant's owner. She said that this restaurant was short of workers. She told me to come to work here but I have never known this restaurant . . . We decided to return and she took us to work in Malaysia again. [Single, Female]

Malavi: I didn't want to work with other workers . . . I work and stay with my relatives here [current restaurant]. I enjoy my life here. I had worked with other people in another restaurant. When I had some problems with colleagues, I could not say anything there. Here [current restaurant], we are relatives. [Single, Male]

Klanarong (2003, pp214-215) found that female migrant workers from four Southern border provinces chose to work in destination countries because they mostly know people who have already worked there. They follow their social contacts and without the migrant networks in destination areas, they would probably not migrate there. However, this study found that the migrant networks shaping migration among irregular *Nayu* workers in Malaysia are even more dynamic in the decision making process from Thailand to Malaysia and within Malaysia. The migrant networks play an important role in decision making in the beginning stages, and also play an important role in making the decision to move within the destination country as well.

6.1.3 Reaching the Destination

The networks are simultaneously about the placement of labour, the transfer of people across the border and their welfare after arrival. New migrants obtain a job with the help of their networks before they leave their homes as their migrant networks recruit newcomers for vacant positions. The new migrant workers also receive other forms of assistance from their networks. The journey across the border

to Malaysia through the official routes is not easy for new migrants to undertake alone as they need documents, such as passports or border passes. At first, they do not know how to deal with the process of legal migration or how to provide the information that the Immigration officers of both Thailand and Malaysia require at the checkpoints. However, their networks contacts teach them how to reach Malaysia and offer them help in every step of the migratory process. They learn how to answer the Immigration officers when questioned about their journey to Malaysia. They are not alone; on their first trip they travel with their contacts who previously migrated there.

Saiful: At first my brother took me to work in Malaysia. I crossed the border to Malaysia from Sungi-Kolok checkpoint. At that time I didn't have a passport but a border pass. I came to work here but I did not know anything. He took me here. I just followed him. I did not know that I had to have a passport for crossing the border. I came and worked in this restaurant when I was 17 years old until now [He is 21 years old]. [Single, Male]

Zainudin: . . . my mother sent me off at a mini bus terminal. I went from Pattani to the border to meet a friend's relative at the checkpoint. I also first met the other workers working at the shop there. The workers went there to stamp their passports. It was our first meeting . . . I travelled by bus at Su-ngai Kolok checkpoint in the morning. I was not afraid of being cheated because the person who took me was a relative of my cousin's friend. I didn't come alone and other workers took me to KL. I didn't do anything, just followed them. [Single, Male]

There are many different ways into Malaysia, and as already discussed in Chapter One, there are many immigration checkpoints on the border. Mostly, *Nayu* workers use the routes closest to their homes if they already have valid documents for crossing the border through the official channels. After they cross the border, new migrants travel by bus or train to Kuala Lumpur. Although there are some transportation networks enabling them to pass through the border and travel to Kuala

Lumpur directly, they are more expensive than taking a bus or a train. All this information is passed onto the new migrants by more experienced migrants.

6.1.4 Remittances

Nayu workers place considerable trust in their migrant networks as they remit a large part of their wages to their families in Thailand through their their friends, in particular friends of the same age, or relatives from the same village. *Nayu* workers visit their friends at their restaurants if they know that they are going to return home in that month, and they ask them to take money and deliver it in person to their parents at the village. Sometimes when there is no one from the network returning home, but parents need the remittance immediately, they arrange to meet their parents at the border checkpoint in Thailand when they travel across the border for Immigration stamps on their passports every month. However, if they overstay their social visit visas, this cannot be done. Instead, they remit money to their parents through their contacts who are going back to stamp their social visit visas in that month. When their contacts arrive at the border checkpoints, they contact their friends' parents to deliver the money in person.

Ahmad: Even if I could not go back home I always remitted to my family. I ask my friend who comes from the same village when he will go back home, and then I go to visit my friend and give him money for my family. I trust my friend because our houses are very close to each other. We know each other since we were young boys. If I did not trust my friend, I couldn't give money to my family, 3,000-4,000 baht every time my friend goes back home. [Married, Male]

Razak: Even though I don't go back home as often as I did in the past, I ask my friends working at the same shop to take my money and give it to my father. I would ask my friend for help when he goes to stamp his passport. He would call my father to wait for him at Kolok or Padang Checkpoint . . . If one of my friends went back home, I would then ask them for help. This month

[December 2008] there was no one going back home, so I kept my money for next time . . . Last month [March 2009] I asked Abdulah's brother to help me. [Single, Male]

Because many parents do not know where and how to exchange money and often live in rural villages far from towns, members of the networks also change money from Malay ringgit to Thai baht in the currency exchange. In this way, the networks sustain the political economy of the village which provides the labour to earn the remittances by returning part of the money earned to pay some of the costs of social reproduction. The networks then, are the crucial link in the provision of village labour to the market and the consequent remittance of some of its fruits back to the village.

6.1.5 Providing Accommodation

Accommodation provided to migrant workers by employers is mostly low-quality, cramped and uncomfortable, and is considered part of their wage. When they finish working in a restaurant, they no longer have accommodation in Malaysia. Leaving a job at the former restaurant also means a change of accommodation as well. Between jobs *Nayu* have to live with their friends who help them when they are unemployed. Their network provides a place to stay and meals when they are without a job. However, most migrant workers do not want to rely on the same people for too long. If they are still unemployed after a certain period, they move from one person to another to get help because they fear over-using individuals in their networks by asking repeatedly for help from the same people over a period of time.

Abdullah: One time, I did not have a job in Malaysia. I stayed with my friend around here. I stayed with my friend only a few nights and moved to other friends in different accommodation. I

did not stay with friends for a long period of time. I feared that the owner of the restaurant would complain if I stayed there a long time. When I stayed with friends, they gave me free food and accommodation. I did not pay for food. I was unemployed a few weeks and then got a new job. [Married, Male]

Fatimah: If you are unemployed in Malaysia and have no money, you can still have food, if you just go to your friends. They will give you free meals and free accommodation and the restaurant owners of my place do not complain about this to your friend and to you as they know that we are *Nayu* as well. [Married, Female]

6.1.6 Creating Communities

Migrant workers do not have their own supportive associations despite some attention from some NGOs which work with *Nayu* workers in Malaysia and from some Thai organizations for Thai workers such as the Office of Labour Affairs and also the Royal Thai Embassy. The Thai Club for Thai immigrants in Malaysia at the Royal Thai Embassy, Kuala Lumpur, works with Thai workers and Thai immigrants, but they attend less to *Nayu* migrant workers. Although Thai government organizations are located in Malaysia, an Islamic country, Thai officials are considered to be Buddhists by the *Nayu* workers, so their ability to contribute to *Nayu* workers is very limited. In addition, *Nayu* work in different places around the city, so it is hard for Government migration officials to approach them. Nor do these official Thai organizations support the social activities of *Nayu* workers although the Office of Labour Affairs does provide some activities for them, such as training in cooking, and gives some financial support for the national Tom Yam football competition, which will be discussed further below.

As almost all migrant workers are irregular, they seldom contact the officials of the Office of Thai Labour Affairs even in Kuala Lumpur, where an office of this

organization is located reasonably near their workplaces. In a few cases, their employers apply for a work permit for them so they have legal status, but the application is not done through the Office of Labour Affairs. Generally both irregular and documented migrant workers do not wish to contact Thai officials. Using their own resources and networks and without the official intervention of the Thai Government., they are able to establish and maintain their own space and communities with their co-ethnic workers in two principal ways. The first is by playing football together and the other is through the Tom Yam Association for restaurant entrepreneurs. These are discussed further in Chapters Seven and Eight.

6.2 The Negative Effects of Migrant Networks

The body of literature on migrant networks in particular from Central and North America concerns mostly the positive aspects of migrant networks (Massey et al. 1987; Gurak and Caces 1992; Winters et al. 2001; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003). While their work is illuminating, these scholars have not shed much light on the negative aspects of migrant networks for irregular migrant workers. Although, as seen above, migrant networks play a vital role in the migration processes in terms of their positive aspects, they also impact negatively on the individuals using them. This section pays particular attention to the negative aspects of using migrant networks. The section discusses the limitations of opportunities for upward mobility and the restrictiveness of local ties including illegal drug use within the networks.

6.2.1 Restricted Opportunities for Future Employment

Work at Tom Yam restaurants is the main employment for *Nayu* migrant workers, in particular the young ones. They are drawn across the border by their networks to

work for several years at these restaurants when they were quite young, and some even grow up there. Almost all learn the work skills necessary in these restaurants, including service skills for waiters and cooking skills for chefs. Indeed, the specific skills of cooking *Halal* Thai dishes can be learnt only in these restaurants as the dishes are uniquely provided by the immigrant entrepreneurs in the Tom Yam business. This means that *Nayu* workers, particularly chefs, who are employed in this business can not bring their skills learnt from working in Malaysia to start their own business in Thailand. The skills they learn at considerable personal expense in Malaysia are not transferable to Thailand. This is because *Halal* Thai dishes in Malaysia are not the traditional or popular dishes in Thailand so this kind of business is not patronised by *Nayu* people in the far Southern provinces of Thailand, even by returned migrants themselves. The niche market that only they can fill in Malaysia does not exist for them anywhere else at all.

The jobs in the Tom Yam restaurants filled by migrant networks are narrow in nature and limited regarding future employment in other sectors. They are not very useful in helping migrants establish their own businesses after they return to Thailand and settle down. Both young migrants who end up emigrating after marriage and retired migrants who have been working in this business for a long time, can not transfer easily to other industries requiring higher skills or seek to be further educated for higher-paid jobs in their villages. Instead they become agricultural workers or resort to their original occupations learned in their villages to make their living, such as fishermen, rubber tappers and rice farmers.

Sakinah: I feel bored working here but I will continue working until I don't have enough energy to work or I am too sick to work. Working here I could save up much money to build a house, buy

land, and buy *Long Kong* [a kind of orchard]. I want to work at my home. I can stay with my parents. At home, I can't work like this. Thais don't eat outside their households. Every Thai can cook but Malaysians like to have food at restaurants. They don't have time to cook. If I finish working here, I will become a farmer, I will have my orchard. [Single, Female]

6.2.2 The Limiting Effect of Co-ethnic Ties in Malaysia

As we shall see in detail in forthcoming chapters, almost all *Nayu* workers maintain and create their social relationships among co-ethnic migrant workers in Malaysia through face-to-face social activities and via cell phones, both at an individual and community level. Such relationships lead to strong harmony and inclusion among *Nayu* people in Malaysia. However, the negative side of these strong ties is that migrant workers inevitably and automatically limit their opportunities to learn and establish social ties with local people while working in Malaysia. While some have developed relationships with customers, and others have Malaysian employers, many *Nayu* workers do not have any local people in their networks as they do not seek to establish social relationships with local people despite the fact that local ties can be more beneficial to them in Malaysia, particularly if they remain there for many years.

Lee et al. (1997) found this to be the case in their research in Denver, U.S.A. where jobs were created and businesses continued to source their workers from the Chinese ethnic community through personal social networks. They found that in general personal social networks are the main reason that ethnic businesses heavily employ co-ethnic staff. Both workers and employers come from the same ethnic, cultural, language and religious backgrounds and the labour supply is linked to small ethnic

businesses through these networks (Menziés et al. 2003; Butter et al. 2007). But Butter et al. (2007, p57) point out:

A concrete example of a negative externality of co-ethnic employment is that information about job opportunities and applicants' skills is not public for all networks. As a result, members of ethnic minority groups may fall into the 'ethnic trap'. They must find jobs in the co-ethnic networks, because they miss contacts in other networks. As a result, they also do not become members of other networks, which reduces the chance of other ethnic minority group members finding a job outside the social ethnic network. This problem of path dependency is worsened by the phenomenon of co-ethnic employment.

In this way, then, the social network which supports and assists migrant workers becomes a restraining net that reduces their career opportunities to the few types available in the small Tom Yam industry.

As mentioned, a few informants in my study, however, have established social relationships with a few local people. These local ties provide some support that their irregular networks can not provide, for example, in reading Malay documents, and by providing a place to escape from the authorities controlling irregular labour. Although the local ties are less committed and helpful than their *Nayu* ties, they are still useful to them in light of the fact that they are irregular migrant workers.

In contrast to the 'ethnic trap' experienced by workers, however, Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia create and develop inter-ethnic ties with both local Malaysians and other migrant communities based on their religious identities, in their neighbourhood and work places (Sultana 2008). This might be because these Bangladeshis are skilled migrants and businessmen who have a higher socio-economic status than migrant or contact workers. As *Nayu* migrant workers have a

low socio-economic status as a cheap labour force in Malaysia, they have a low potential for involvement with local communities, and their capacity to engage with local trade unions and other NGOs is severely restricted by their irregular status.

6.2.3 Illegal Drug Use

Some *Nayu* young men who smoke tobacco use their networks to access illegal drugs. Most *Nayu* workers who take illegal drugs while working in Malaysia have a history of drug use before migration, but the amount they used was less as they did not have as much money to buy drugs in Thailand, although the price of drugs there is much lower than in Malaysia. Once they have their own income from working in Malaysia, the desire for drugs seems to increase. Most *Nayu* workers who take illegal drugs buy them from their friends who take them as well. In addition, they do not take drugs alone but together with other *Nayu* friends who belong to their networks. The members of these networks may not be their colleagues at their workplace. They meet these friends while having a drink among friends. The drug users get to know who likes to use drugs through common social activities, and then they ask these like-minded migrant friends to participate in drug use. They share their money to buy drugs and take drugs together. If one of their network members knows a Malaysian drug seller who is a customer, he will contact the seller and invite others in his network to take drugs together at his accommodation.

Ismail: Last year, I bought Gunja and heroin, I kept it in my pocket. Unfortunately, I was standing in the dark, so the police came to see and check me. Anyway the shop owner saw that, so the shop owner talked and gave 3000 to the police to help me. If my boss did not do that, then I would end up in jail but my boss deducted the money from my salary anyway . . . When I had money to buy drugs, I had many friends because of the drugs. When I had no money, then no friends, a true friend needs time to prove that they will not take advantage on me. I work here for long time and I have many

friends. I can talk and go with anyone but not too close. I have some true friends at work and some of them play football together . . . When I was working at the old place, some *Oghae Nayu* did drugs in the shop or just came for visiting. If you do drugs, then you would see who does it as well. When they get to know each other, then they can go out to do it together. When they play football together for many times, then they get used to each other and become friends. Some of them do drugs, and they aske the new friend to do also. I know who takes drugs and who does not. It is good to play football I meet many new friends. We always see each other at the football field, and it is good to do drugs. Even if you do drugs before you play football when you play it, you will sweat and then all the drugs will be chased out of your body, you will feel fresh. Some people say that sport is better than drugs but some sport players also do drugs. Sport cannot help you to quit, it depends on you to quit or not. [Single, Male]

In Thai culture, it is believed that friends have a strong impact on each other's behaviour. It is generally thought that "a good friend is your own glory but if you associate with a ruffian, he will lead you to crime". Naksook (1994 p56) has explained that

Thai people believe that there are two kinds of friends namely, *die* friends and *eating* friends. *Die* friends are highly valued but are very rare. On the other hand, *eating* friends are common. In times of trouble, *die* friends can help and fight or even die for each other, but *eating* friends will neglect you and flee.

Illegal drugs are a significant social problem among unemployed rural youth in the Southern border provinces. Klanarong (2003) however, found that international migration reduced drug-taking problems among young men in the villages. This is because some of the young unemployed men in the villages who take drugs go to work in Malaysia, thus reducing the number of drug-users in the villages. However, in this study, I found that *Nayu* drug-users continue to take drugs while they are working in Malaysia because their income is higher. Drug-taking is as big a problem

among *Nayu* men in Malaysia, as Kitiarsa (2006) found among Thai migrants working in Singapore.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the positive and negative aspects of migrant networks in shaping the migration experiences of *Nayu* migrant workers in Thailand and Malaysia. Migrant networks perform various functions. They are an essential resource for *Nayu* migrants who use them to: cross the border; receive information about the migration process; decide how to reach the destination; learn how to negotiate the border and how to travel back home again; remit money; provide accommodation; find work, and assist in creating and sustaining one's own business. Without migrant networks shaping and directing the migration process, *Nayu* non-migrants could not migrate as individuals, cross the border between the two countries and find work. As migrant networks extend and develop within and between Thailand and Malaysia, increasing numbers of *Nayu* workers are drawn towards the destination country. However, migration ties have negative outcomes for migrant workers that are not usually discussed in the literature. *Nayu* migrant workers using migrant networks find they have very limited opportunities to establish ties with local Malaysians and other migrant workers, and very limited post-migration, employment skills and opportunities. Network ties can also encourage some male migrant workers to increase their use of illegal drugs.

Nayu migrant workers use their social contacts to meet specific goals and short-term interests, but the social ties developed emerge as long-term relationships within vibrant migrant networks. The next chapter discusses the gendered nature of these

migrant networks. Using empirical data, it highlights the different ways *Nayu* men and women and *Kathoeys* experience and create gendered networks between and within Thailand and Malaysia.

CHAPTER 7: GENDER AND MIGRANT NETWORKS

Although international migrants are still predominantly male, the number of females who work outside their countries is growing, migration is becoming increasingly feminised (Pedraza 1991; Honagueu-Sotelo and Cranford 1999; Oishi 2002; Jolly and Reeves 2005; Piper 2005). Studying the gendered nature of international migration is already a feature of migration studies and the understanding of the pattern, causes and impacts of the feminisation of migration is deepening. But while some studies focus on women who migrate in their own right, without a husband or their families, the main body of the literature still sheds little light on the gendered nature of migration networks or on women's and transsexuals' experiences as non-masculine migrants.

This chapter provides an in-depth examination of the role gender plays in the various stages of the migration process and in the experiences of *Nayu* workers. It provides greater insight into how gender relations influence and are influenced by migrant networks. It demonstrates that there are gender differences between men, women and transsexuals in terms of their use and maintenance of migrant networks.

7.1 Gender and Migration to Malaysia

In Thailand, as elsewhere, patriarchy dominates other social relations, restricting women to the household and limiting their access to the public sphere. Women in the household, in particular single daughters, are not independent from the rule of the father. The father's traditional system of authority in the household rules more over single women than over young men.

As patriarchal relations predominate in personal life, single daughters are not free to choose to migrate. Unlike single men, the migration decision of women occurs within the traditional patriarchal system of gender roles that dictate that women should stay in the household with their parents. It gives men access to the public sphere and restricts women to the private realm, and so men also control women's access to the migration process and to paid work in Malaysia.

Studies of international migrant workers have established that making the decision to migrate to work overseas is different for men and women. Male migrants make their own decision to migrate to work overseas whereas female migrants are not able to be as independent when it comes to making decisions to migrate due to their family's restrictions on their movements. Klanarong (2003) found that the parents, or husband if the woman is married, play a significant role in decision-making when it concerns their daughters and wives migrating to work overseas. Anja Rudnick (2009), for instance, found that many Bangladeshi women migrants make the decision to work in Malaysia after seeking consent and cooperation from their families. Obtaining consent from their families, however, is not as easy for women migrants compared to male migrants.

7.1.1 The Gendered Nature of Migrant Networks

As is clear from the previous chapter, migrant networks play an essential role in irregular migration to Malaysia, and men, women and transsexuals are likely to access different networks when they first migrate. Men are offered help for their trip through their multiple social ties, from men and women who are family members,

from relatives, friends, villagers and restaurant owners. In contrast, almost all women receive help only from very close contacts in Thailand such as family members and relatives who have experienced work in Malaysia. Although all women make their own decision to migrate, they need permission from their parents, because the migration journey and social life in Malaysia are regarded as risky for women. Normally, parents allow them to migrate only with people with whom they have close ties and in whom they have a high level of trust.

Znra: My brother called home and asked me to come to work here. There were two free positions in a Tom Yam restaurant. So I asked my friend from the same village to go. At that time, my brother worked at Mama Shop which is opposite my place . . . My parents wouldn't let me come to work here if my brother didn't work here. After I worked for a while, nobody worried about my safety, they know I can live here even though my brother doesn't work here anymore. He returned home after a year but I still work here alone without him. [Single, Female]

Mazlin: I came to work with my aunt the first time. My aunt's house is next door to my house and she came to work here a long time ago. I was invited to work by my aunt. She, at first, asked my parents and my mother asked me if I wanted to work in Malaysia or not. I wanted to come here so I followed my aunt to work here. [Single, Female]

Experienced migrants must agree to accompany and take responsibility for new women migrants during their migration so that their parents will trust them and allow their daughters to go there with them. In addition, those who offer them work sometimes allow the women's parents to travel to Malaysia with them in order to protect them from risks during migration.

However, a few women receive help to cross the border from people who are not close relatives, such as friends and restaurant owners from their villages. This is a big

deal for these women, for they risk refusal from their parents. In this respect, someone who has power and respect in the village has to ask permission from their parents. Mostly this mission is done by *Nayu* female restaurant owners who, while asking for permission, have to guarantee the safety of their daughters in Malaysia. The more trustworthy the person is, the higher are the chances that the parents will allow their daughters to migrate with non-relatives.

Ilyana: My brother's friend who lived in a different sub-district asked me to work with her. She opened a food shop at Cha-Ah-Lam. She went to talk to my parents to ask them to allow me to work with her. She also told them details concerning working and staying in Malaysia. She said she had prepared accommodation for me as well. Therefore, my parents allowed me to work here. [Single, Female]

Sakinah: When my friend asked me to work here, I actually wanted to work in Malaysia. I thought it was not dangerous to come to work with my friend. I and my friend knew each other since we were children. We lived in the same village. At first, I wasn't brave enough to tell my family that I wanted to work with my friend. So, I asked her to talk to my mother. She and her boss who was a Thai Tom Yam owner, came to ask me and my mother. The *Nayu* woman owner is a relative of my friend. I also talk to my father who was very strict. My friend told my mother details about the work. My mother said it depended on my father. She wanted him to make the decision. When I talked to my father, he said nothing. I knew, then, that he would let me go. [Single, Female]

Male migrants, in contrast, can receive help from a variety of social contacts in the migrant networks. They enter the migration process through any social tie that can offer them help when they need it. Consequently, male workers have more

opportunities to enter the labour market in Malaysia when jobs are available. It is easier to persuade men to become migrant workers than women. There is no need for a third person to ask permission from their parents as men themselves tend to ask permission from their families when they receive an offer to cross the border. The male migrants' networks include friends, villagers and restaurant owners who do not necessarily have close or strong relationships with their families. Usually their parents are not worried about the person with whom their sons are going to migrate with because of the greater freedom men enjoy in both Malaysia and Thailand. They are not controlled and restricted by social norms and traditions like women are.

Azlan: I was invited to work here by my friend. He thought that I just stayed at home and didn't do any work. So, it was better for me to work in Malaysia. My friend had worked at the shop before. Later, there was a vacancy and the owner wanted a worker to work there. He was a friend living in the same village. My friend was older than him but they were very close to each other. After I decided to work with my friend here, I told my father by myself alone. He said that it was my own decision. He didn't make any comment about whether I should stay at home or go there. [Married, Male]

Azizul: At that time I was bored because most of my friends in my town came to work here and there was nobody to hang out with. Most of them didn't study either. And finally they came to work in Malaysia. I made up my mind to work in Malaysia in order to earn a living for myself and I did not think about giving my money to my parents. [Single, Male]

Male migrants can receive help from a variety of social contacts in their villages. This may be because men take part in activities outside the home. They meet up with friends at local coffee shops in the village and hang out in town, but women's activities are more confined to the household and neighbourhood as women are not allowed far away from their guardians. As Lertit (1992, p22) notes, "Malay Muslim women often stay at their homes but men have more chance to go into the public realm within and outside the villages".

This means that *Nayu* women receive less help from social contacts than men do as men have a greater number of social contacts among friends and villagers than women. In addition, the roles and status of women limit them to the home and they are subordinate to family members in particular to the father and husband. Nevertheless women have developed strategies to obtain and keep work in Malaysia. They use social contacts with whom they have close relationships and who are more trusted by their families, but as we shall see, this has mixed blessings.

7.1.2 Women's Networks and Female Subordination

In their first migration, female migrant workers tend to rely on strong female relationships. Like *Kathoeys*¹⁰ workers, they have been drawn into the foreign labour market of Tom Yam businesses by *Nayu* women. Almost all persons who offer women help to work in Malaysia are women from the same village who are restaurant owners or experienced migrant workers. These women make the proposal to work in Malaysia to women in their villages when they come back to visit their parents on holiday. Mostly the recruited women tend to be family members, relatives. But if nobody close to them is available, the recruiters then look for women in the villages who are unemployed. In some cases, female friends who are former migrant workers persuade non-migrants to work in Malaysia. However, their friends, who are the same age as they, do not have enough credibility in their parents' eyes and usually are not successful in persuading them. As a result, the friends of non-migrant women have to go with female restaurant owners to ask for permission from the girls' parents.

¹⁰ *Kathoeys* in this study refers to people whose sex was male but who identify as female by cross-dressing in the course of their daily lives and who alter their bodies through medication and surgery.

Fatimah: I just brought two young ladies from my village to work here for a few months. These people are my friend's nieces. They were jobless then. I asked my friend if her nieces would like to work. There are vacancies at my place. The guys whom I brought to work like my relatives, they trust me, also their parents too. If their behaviour is not good, then their parents allow me to correct them. [Married, Female]

Young non-migrant men, however, are not dependent only on male migrant networks for their first migration to Malaysia. Any former migrants of any gender are able to offer them help to work in Malaysia. Non-migrant men have multiple options to access the labour market in Malaysia. In addition, the people who offer them help can be the same age or even younger. Their opportunities are greater because according to the perceptions of people in their culture, they face fewer risks by migrating and living far away from home. The multiple ties available to young men means that a greater number of male than female migrants work in Malaysia.

Like young women migrants, *Kathoey* workers in their first migration to Malaysia have fewer opportunities than men to receive help. However, they still have some labour market opportunities in Malaysia. All of them that I spoke with were offered a job by women restaurant owners who are relatives and they followed villagers who know them. These restaurant owners are not upset by the sexual identities of *Kathoey* workers whom they employ. Like most young male migrants, after they were invited to migrate and work in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia, they make the decision by themselves without asking permission from their parents.

Syed: I came to work here when I was around 20 years old, and I changed my jobs three times. I am 30 years old. I worked in Kuantan city, Perak State for five years as there was a lady owner from my village who invited me to work there. I decided to come to

work here myself as I was unemployed at that time. [Single, *Kathoey*]

Sharifah: One of my women friends from my village who is a restaurant owner invited me to work in Malaysia with her the first time I travelled to work here. [Single, *Kathoey*]

There is a strong demand for cheap labour in Malaysia and there is a special demand for *Nayu* workers in Tom Yam restaurants because *Halal* Thai cuisine is served and the workers must be Muslim and must have Thai national identity to cook and serve Thai cuisine. *Nayu* migrant workers play a vital role in the Tom Yam restaurants in which their religion and their Thai-ness combine to transcend their gender. The demand for workers in the *Halal* Thai food business in Malaysia draws *Nayu* migrants into the labour force in Malaysia, no matter what their gender.

Although the traditional *Nayu* social and cultural norms control women within the household and village, the high demand for *Nayu* workers encourages female *Nayu* to obtain work away from their households. Almost all *Nayu* migrant workers are working because they were invited to, but this is particularly so for female and *Kathoey* *Nayu* workers. Young women and *Kathoey* are more dependent on gender-based migrant networks than their male counterparts. They rely almost exclusively on other women with whom they are closely connected.

Female *Nayu* workers use these migrant networks strategically to seek work in Tom Yam restaurants away from their villages where they are unemployed or work as unpaid labour in the family-household. Social ties to migrant networks through close relatives and ties to *Nayu* women who are powerful and trustworthy help them to negotiate the traditional social and cultural norms which restrict them to the

household and block their access to the labour market and to public life. Although both men and women *Nayu* use migrant networks for their first migration to Malaysia, female and *Kathoey* migrant networks are more significant for them because they are usually accompanied to Malaysia by close personal contacts and, as will be seen below, are more dependent on gender-based migrant networks when they arrive in Malaysia.

7.2 Gender, Networks and Movement within Malaysia

Once they have settled in the new job, male migrant workers move more frequently to find a new workplace within Malaysia than their female and *Kathoey* counterparts. Men's access to labour market opportunities is still dependent on their peer networks there, but they tend to depend on them for information about available jobs and then to contact the owners of the possible restaurants themselves: they do not need to have their contacts actually working in the new restaurant. They are able to transfer to any restaurant where a position is available and in which they are content to work. When transferring, male workers tend to consider wages, job positions and workplace locations. They do not worry so much about the dangers of staying in a new workplace in an unfamiliar environment.

Ahmad: When I was bored with working for the first shop, my friend called me and told me that someone needed a chef and gave me the phone number. I didn't know that guy first and my friend didn't know that guy as well because my friend got the information and contact from another friend. I had no idea how it would be but I called that number to ask for information, where and how much I would get . . . So I decided to quit my relative's restaurant and go to work there. [Single, Male]

Azizul: I have worked in Malaysia for eight years. I used to work in many towns in KL and Selangor. Whenever I am bored with the workplace, I will move to a better place by asking my friends about new workplaces. And now I want to move to another place. I love to travel when I move to another place so I hang out and travel with my friends. I was kind of nomadic and liked to hang out with other people. Whenever I wanted to go somewhere, I would go there with my friends. When I stayed at home, I always begged money from my mum because I didn't have a job. But it is easy to earn money here. That is to say, I need not worry about buying something and travelling to some places since it is my own money.
[Single, Male]

However, female migrant workers do not move as frequently as male workers despite their access to labour market opportunities through their networks in Malaysia. Migrant women differ from their male counterparts in that they do not use their networks to seek information about available jobs and contacts with restaurant owners no matter how many connections they have. Migrant women usually stay in their workplaces for a long time before they consider moving to a new workplace. Having close contacts in new workplaces is more important for migrant women. Almost all female migrants have their established contacts whom they trust and workers they are familiar with in new workplaces. Women are thought to be at higher risk so they need to establish close ties to protect themselves which takes some time. So moving within Malaysia is not easy for women. Despite the labour market opportunities available to them, *Nayu* female migrant workers are less prone to transfer to new workplaces than their male counterparts.

Fatimah: The young workers, in particular the men who work here for a long time, might feel bored but I am not. I am not young and I

am married and have a daughter. It is not strange for the young men to be bored if they are somewhere for a long time. Then they will go to work somewhere else to get new experiences, like Johor State or some other place. They always go with their friends after they come there. They will know who is who in Malaysia, so they can move to work with their other friends. [Married, Female]

Sakinah: I came to work here because one of my friends who used to work at this shop recommended me to work with her at that time. When I wanted to look for a new job, I had to call friends . . . I connected to my friends by phone and my friends would help me by asking their employers. When they knew a shop with a vacancy, my friends would give me the shop owner's number. [Single, Female]

Migrant men are not dependent on close male social ties for their first migration to Malaysia. However, it is different when moving to new workplaces within Malaysia where both male and female migrants depend on gender-based peer ties. Small Tom Yam restaurants usually employ workers of the same gender, whereas larger restaurants have both female and male employees. However, even in mixed workplaces, migrant workers tend to establish their closest social ties in their workplaces on a same-gender basis. After working for a while both male and female migrant workers have established their own networks within Malaysia, mostly made up of peers of the same gender and age, usually ex-workers from the same workplace or friends of friends. Their networks are able to provide them with information about jobs and contact details of restaurant owners when there are employment opportunities in Malaysia.

*Kathoe*y migrant workers also depend on their own gender-based peer ties for transferring to a new workplace within Malaysia. Transsexual migrants working in Malaysia, depend on their friends of the same gender to find employment. Moreover, this group of migrant workers very strongly prefers working with their friends.

Syed: We are *Kahtoey* the same. Lily is my friend. One day my friend came to visit me and told me that Lily is working here and gave me the phone number so I called Lily and she came to visit here with her *Kathoe*y friends. So I knew other friends here. They always come and talk to each other after work. It is so easy to talk and understand each other when you are the same kind . . . I met my *Kathoe*y friend there, and then my *Kathoe*y friend met the sister of my shop owner's wife there who is *Kathoe*y as well. She came to work here. Anyway I didn't know anyone here except my *Kathoe*y friend who asked me to work here . . . My *Kathoe*y friend told me that the shop owner is very kind and she doesn't mind *Kathoe*y people. I am *Kathoe*y as well as my friend. [Single, *Kathoe*y]

When *Kathoe*y go to work in Malaysia, they get to know new *Kathoe*y friends through their *Kathoe*y friends who are already working there. After they get to know each other and become close friends, they are likely to follow their *Kathoe*y friends to find work together. It is not easy for *Kathoe*y to get a job in Malaysia. Teh (2008) found that most Malaysian transsexuals are unemployed as they are not well accepted in Malaysian society. So *Nayu Kathoe*y nearly always depend on their *Kathoe*y contacts for employment. Their contacts in the new workplace have already established that their new employers are open to employing them. In this study, two restaurants have *Kathoe*y workers who openly display their sexual identity. Putra Tom Yam restaurant and Jaya Tom Yam restaurant both employ two *Kathoe*ys who are respondents in this study.

Sharifah: I have worked in many states around Malaysia such as Johor, Terengganu, Perak, Kelantan and Selangor. My friends invited me to work there and I followed my friends. I have both *Kathoe*y and women friends but mostly I went to work with my *Kathoe*y close friends. I met my *Kathoe*y friends through other *Kathoe*y friends who introduced us. *Kathoe*y friends of my *Kathoe*y friends became my friends when we met each other. We would move to work together. I always move to work in another place with my *Kathoe*y friends. There is a job vacancy. I invite my *Kathoe*y friends [who already work within Malaysia] to work with

us. I came to work in this restaurant the first time with two *Kathoey* friends and then invited another *Kathoey* friend to work here. Now, we work together in the same workplace, three *Kathoey* friends. The shop owner asked my *Kathoey* friend to come to work with him at the Tom Yam restaurant here so my friend invited me to work together. We always move together. It is not lonely as we cannot stay alone. We have to have *Kathoey* friends living together. [Single, *Kathoey*]

Kathoey do not change jobs as frequently as young male migrants but also differ from young female migrants. Malaysia is an Islamic country and Muslim Malaysians make up fifty one percent of the population. *Kathoey*s are discriminated against in employment in Malaysia. It is quite difficult for *Kathoey*s to work and live in Malaysia because transsexuality and homosexuality are illegal (Berman 2008; Chung and Singh 2009) and gays and lesbians are not socially accepted in Malaysian society (Baba 2001; Teh 2008). Under The Minor Offences Act 1955, a person who is effeminate or cross-dresses, like *Kathoey* migrant workers, can be arrested by the police and fined. Then if she is Muslim, she is also sent to the Syariah Court for offences against the Islamic law for a fine or imprisonment or both (Teh 2008).

Yusof: Last night two *Kathoey* chefs were arrested because they rode a motorbike without a helmet and without any documents. They rang the boss and he went to negotiate with the police. He paid the police 300 RM [a bribe]. [Single, *Kathoey*]

Both Islamic and Malay cultural norms in Malaysia do not welcome *Kathoey* behaviors and lifestyles. However, *Kathoey*s can obtain employment with some employers without harassment about their sexual identity. Some of these owners stipulate conditions of the employment for *Kathoey* workers such as they cannot cross-dress and make-up as female while working or they can only show themselves to be transsexual in the kitchen, not in front of customers. However, they are

relatively free to display their own sexual identity after working hours and in their free time.

Dayang: My working life was difficult because many people didn't like me because I am a *Kathoey* person. Once, I worked at a Mama Tom Yam shop. The shop owner had me on probation for four months and paid me daily but at last he decided not to employ me because he thought that his customers didn't like me. They didn't like me because I am a *Kathoey*. In some shops where I worked, I was required to dress like a man. It was because of a religious principle that only a man or a woman could cook food. I was not either. Thus, when the customers saw me, they didn't like eating my food. The shop owners, then, wanted me to dress like a guy, or I could dress however I wanted but I had to only be in the kitchen. I had to stay only in there and stay away from the customers. For some of those shops, I couldn't do that. [Single, *Kathoey*]

Like both men and women workers, *Kathoey* migrants get bored and lonely. They have very limited opportunities for leisure and recreation. They are at greater risk than heterosexual males if they venture out at night, and are more likely than women workers to be apprehended by the police when they travel to the border to renew their visa. To survive in Malaysia *Kathoey* friends must work and live together.

Most migrant workers, both men and women, were offered help from their kin in their first migration. Particularly in case of women, they nearly always have to work with close relatives throughout their period of migration, so they feel a lack of freedom in Malaysia. They have to ask permission from their relatives to visit friends in other places, to hang out with friends or to return to Thailand. Many female migrant workers seek to move to work in other restaurants within Malaysia as a means to escape from their kin ties there. They are likely to move from their kin ties in their first restaurant to contacts in other restaurants. Interestingly, *Nayu* migrant women do not ask their parents for permission when they would like to move but

they inform their parents of their decision after they have already transferred to new restaurants. They are afraid that their parents will not allow them to work in other restaurants without the company of their kin or close contacts whom their parents trust. Moving to work with peers without the permission of their parents is the *Nayu* women's strategy to become independent in their daily life. After they separate from their relatives in Malaysia, they are free to do things they want in their daily life without the restriction of the social norms and traditions enforced by their parents and relatives. They are able to hang out with their friends, to visit their friends over night, and to have boyfriends.

Aisyah: When I wanted to change my workplace, I did not tell my parents, but I just asked some advice from my sister. I told my parents after I had already changed my workplace. I also told them that I was fine and the new place was also good. My parents did not criticise me because I did not tell them before, they just wanted me to take good care of myself, especially about safety. I did not tell my parents first because I knew that they would not let me change my workplace and would tell me to go back home. I did not want to go home because I did not have a job there. I also did not want to cut rubber because I would get little money. But if I worked here, I had wages, free accommodation and free meals. [Single, Female]

Farhana: I worked with my relative for two years . . . Anyway, I didn't want to work there as in my opinion I was not independent. I needed to be independent and didn't want to be under anyone's control. I just wanted to do whatever I wanted. Being with my relative, it was quite uncomfortable for me to do anything. I, then, asked permission from my relative to work at another shop. The shop I was going to work at was the shop my friend worked at. [Single, Female]

Nayu workers' gender-based peer ties are mostly built up in Malaysia. After they have received a job offer from another restaurant through these networks, women are likely to move to find freedom and to escape from the control of their close kin. After moving to work with their peers, they have more freedom in Malaysia as they are far

away from their relatives, who have controlled their daily life. Men, on the other hand, have more freedom in Malaysia even when they work with their close kin. After work, male *Nayu* are able to hang out with their friends over night without having to ask permission from their kin. Men are thought to face less risk in the way they behave and live and independence is considered a masculine trait.

7.3 Helping New Migrant Workers

After newcomers have been working in Malaysia for a while, they become experienced migrant workers within established social networks, from which they get information about the labour market. Almost all new workers get offered a position through their migrant networks before following their social ties across the border to work. However, *Nayu* women workers are likely to be more careful than men in deciding whom they choose to help.

Ilyana: I never took anyone from my village to work in Malaysia because I thought that if the ones I took to work with me made trouble or were not able to work, they would say something bad about me when they got home. I, then, decided not to take anybody to work at the shop I worked at. I thought it was better to help other friends in Malaysia who were not from my village. When I first left my place to work in Malaysia, the people at my village gossiped, saying that I worked as a prostitute because I got a lot of money. Some asked me if I really worked at the food shop. I would tell them that they could go to work in Malaysia and they would know the truth. Later, I was able to save some money to build a new house for my parents. After that, no one said anything bad about me. Instead, they said that I was a good woman, hard working and industrious. When the people in my village got to know that I could save a lot of money, they came to me to ask me to help them find jobs in Malaysia. I would always tell them that there was no vacancy at the shop where I worked. I didn't want to take anyone to work with me even though in fact I could give them help. I didn't want to have any problems with them in the future. Although I never took any one from my village to work here, I helped my friends whom I just got to know here to find jobs . . . At least, if I had problems with them, it would end when they left their jobs. But for the people from my village, when problems occurred, they didn't really end. [Single, Female]

Male migrant workers tend to offer people from their villages help with migration and to find jobs for them in Malaysia. As experienced male migrants have information about labour market opportunities from their employers, they are likely to make a job available to non-migrants in their villages. Female *Nayu*, in contrast, are not likely to offer to help new migrants to work with them even though they could get a job for people from their village. In particular, single migrant women do not want to work with those coming from the same village as they are afraid they might face restrictions on their social life in Malaysia. If experienced migrant women offer to help non-migrants from the same village to work with them, they may be subject to gossip among the villagers. As *Nayu* social norms do not easily allow single women far from their homes unsupervised, they would not only be expected to act *in loco parentis*, but also their own behaviour would be open to (ill-informed) criticism.

These risks are real and high, because the single women who journey to work far away from the parents who supervise their daily behaviour, frequently do not obey the social norms and customs as strictly as they did at home.

Fatimah: I brought a sixteen year old girl to work with me. I took that girl to get her passport and paid the fee for her. After one month working, she mentioned that she wanted to go home. I asked if she had come to work or just to travel. She told that she had come to travel, so I allowed her to go back home. I gave her money after I took my money for her passport and transport. I thought that it wouldn't be a good idea to keep this girl working for long as only one week after starting work, this girl went to see a male worker in his room. And when this girl arrived home, she told her parents and villagers that I was not a good person and didn't treat her well. Then her parents believed their daughter. [Married, Female]

Single female *Nayu* workers in Malaysia protect themselves from malicious talk by not offering to help non-migrants from their village to work with them. However, male migrants are not so controlled when they are far away from home. As a result, men like to help non-migrants from their villages to work with them because they do not have to fear gossip and social ostracism and they like to build their social networks because they realise that the more extensive their networks, the greater are their opportunities for work and travel.

Although they help each other within Malaysia, *Kathoey* workers, on the other hand, seldom assist in the process of migration itself. Their networks do not seem to extend across the border, and mostly their employment contacts are female shop owners in Malaysia or female relatives.

Sharifah: I never helped anyone from Thailand to work in Malaysia. My *Kathoey* friends too were not asked to work here. In my opinion, it was hard to work here as they couldn't express themselves much. They were not able to show that they were *Kathoey*. And working in Malaysia was tough and difficult. If my friends worked in Thailand, it would be more comfortable. Although I never took anyone from Thailand to work here, I helped my *Kathoey* friends who worked here look for another job. [Single, *Kathoey*]

Kathoey workers in Malaysia are often doubly illegal, both as transsexuals and as irregular workers. Most work in the kitchen as a chef or kitchen hand. However, some *Kathoey* workers, who are effeminate but do not cross-dress, are able to work in other positions, as waiters for example because they do not display their femininity to the customers. In addition, some employers, such as the owner of Putra Tom Yam, employ *Kathoey*s but do not allow them to dress as women. They make them wear male clothing not women's clothing and hide their long hair. However,

Jaya Tom Yam's owner accepts their *Kathoey*-ness even at work. By cross-dressing, making up with cosmetics and wearing long hair, these *Kathoeyes* come out as fully transsexual, but they seldom work in the front of restaurants. To come out as transsexuals in Malaysia is difficult for *Nayu Kathoey* workers. Local gays in Malaysia, both Muslim and non-Muslim, seldom come out to family, friends and their communities either (Baba 2001; Teh 2008).

Although homosexuality, transvestitism and transsexualism are forbidden by Malaysian laws and cultural norms, life in the big cities in Malaysia is relatively more liberal, less pressured and less oppressive than in the rest of the country, but is still much more restricted than in Thailand (Baba 2001). Many queers appear to migrate to an environment where they can be anonymous to be free of the social and cultural norms of their family and village. When *Kathoey Nayu* work at the Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru and Alor Star, they can more openly display their sexual identities as they feel some degree of freedom from the pressure of discrimination and disapproval. Thailand, on the other hand, is without legal injunctions against the practices of non-heterosexuals. *Kathoeyes* and other queers are free of legal discrimination and *Kathoeyes* are commonly found throughout Thailand, including in small towns, in both urban and rural areas (Jackson 1997; Jackson 2004). Even Muslims display their sexual identities as *Kathoeyes* in the cities and villages of the far South (Sanguankaew 2002).

7.4 Social Activities, Gender and Networks

In comparison to *Nayu* male workers in Malaysia, *Nayu* migrant women have fewer opportunities for social activities outside their workplace or accommodation. Male

workers have as much freedom in daily life in Malaysia as in their home villages. They take part in plenty of social activities with their peers in Malaysia. After work, they like to participate in social activities and gatherings, for example, meeting over a drink with their *Nayu* male friends from other restaurants, visiting their friends overnight at their accommodation, or playing football with other *Nayu* male migrants at night. This enables them to extend their networks in Malaysia: they can meet and make friends with their friends' friends. After having met for the first time, they develop their social relationships through social activities and by cell phone. These new social ties can become close and may offer them help with employment opportunities.

Women *Nayu* workers, however, have fewer chances for social activities in Malaysia after work. Without exception, outside of work women are still expected by their families and relatives to be confined to the household in Malaysia, where they are still controlled by their relatives. They do not enjoy social activities in public at night. As they work from the evening to 3 a.m. every day without any days off, they also do not have any free time for social activities in the day time and at weekends. Although they might have a little free time during the day, *Nayu* women workers are not likely to engage in social activities at night. They usually stay in their accommodation, instead. Some women go out to visit their friends at their places, but the social activities they have with a friend or with a limited circle of friends seem to be rather private. This limited social activity means that migrant women meet fewer women and establish fewer social ties in Malaysia than male workers.

Fatimah: Most of the girls don't like to go out, they like to work and save money for their family. That's the ideal girl. But not the young

men. They have friends and always they go out with their friends and they will ask for advance pay. [Married, Female]

Similarly, Anja Rudnick (2009) found that Bangladeshi migrant women are confined to their homes doing household chores, such as cooking and laundry or watching Hindi movies. The Bangladeshi women migrants always remain with other co-national migrant workers who are in their own networks. They might sometimes visit female migrant workers at neighbouring houses but unlike Bangladeshi men they usually do not take part in outdoor activities after work. According to Rudnick (2009, p192):

Since the working days were long and many also worked overtime at the weekends, the amount of free time was limited. Once or twice a month, the women would leave in small groups to do their shopping in town. Bangladeshi men were more visible in the public realm: they bicycled to visit friends in other neighbourhoods and met up at local restaurants for coffee.

When they have free time after work, *Kathoey* workers are likely to socialize with women and with *Kathoey* friends in their restaurants and accommodation. Although some *Kathoey*s live and work with heterosexual men, heterosexual men prefer to socialize with other men. Men's networks are based on male contacts, while *Kathoey* workers are involved in both women's and *Kathoey* networks. *Nayu* men like playing football and watching it on television while *Kathoey*s and women both like watching Thai soap operas. However, surprisingly, *Kathoey* workers undertake more public social activities than women and they more frequently visit their *Kathoey* friends and women friends in other restaurants than women workers do.

Sharifah: We go to hang out sometimes. I ride my motorbike to visit my friends in other shops. I know *Kathoey* friends who are working around here from other friends. I knew Pa and always go to

visit her at her shop as one of my friends introduced us to each other when I came to work around here the first time. My friends told me that she has *Kathoey* friends who work here so I went to see her there. We are easy going and became close friends as we are the same people. [Single, *Kathoey*]

7.4.1 Women, Networks and Thai Soap Operas

Lakoan Thai (Thai soap operas) have become important to the Thai national identity of *Nayu* workers, although the identities that they depict are dissimilar to their own. These soap operas use Thai national language and some Thai *Isan* dialect which are not spoken at home by *Nayu* workers, usually their parents have only a limited understanding of Thai standard language and are not proficient at speaking it because the older generations have not received the Government education which teaches the language. But although Thai soap operas affirm the identity and ideology of Thai Buddhist people in Thai society, they are nonetheless popular among *Nayu* women in Malaysia. A few Thai soap operas are shown on Malaysian Television and while I was in the field, one was shown twice a week from 3.00 a.m. to 4.00 a.m. on Channel Three. This soap opera is in Thai national language including some *Isan* Thai dialect and uses subtitles in the Malay national language. There were many episodes broadcast in three months, and although it was three years old, the *Nayu* workers enjoyed watching it. Its theme is romantic love among young people and it deals with family problems among young urban Thais. This soap opera shows Thai Buddhist culture in Bangkok which is quite different to the *Nayu* culture.

Women of all ages like to watch these soap operas with their colleagues. However, some workers' accommodations have no television so they go to watch soap operas at their friends' places nearby after they finish work. Watching television is an

individual activity but they like to watch with their women friends and while they are watching they like to discuss the story, and to talk about other matters, too.

A few owners have set up unlicensed satellite dishes for their employees. These workers can watch Thai television channels when they have free time. However, they sometimes have to work while Thai soap operas are on air. But the Thai soap operas also are reproduced on DVDs and VCDs. Although these soap operas on VCD are quite out of date, the *Nayu* workers still enjoy watching them and they bring VCDs from Thailand when they return to Malaysia.

During my fieldwork, I watched Thai soap operas with *Nayu* migrant workers in their accommodation and in their restaurants. In many accommodations, there are Thai soap opera magazines and other Thai magazines in the corner of the room or on a shelf under the television. *Nayu* women like to read Thai soap opera magazines and Thai celebrity gossip magazines in Malaysia. They do not read Thai magazines much when they are at home because some women are not able to read, because many can not afford to buy them and because they do not feel the need to be Thai in Thailand, content enough to be *Nayu*.

When *Nayu* return from Thailand, they bring these magazines to their friends in Malaysia. I was always asked to bring Thai magazines which they share with their women and *Kathoey* friends after they have finished reading them. A Reading Thai magazine gives *Nayu* workers a sense of home and Thai-ness when they are in Malaysia. Even though they are discriminated against in Thailand, it appears that when they are living in Malaysia, *Nayu* workers identify more with Thai popular

culture and the Thai national identity than they identify with Malay culture despite its linguistic and religious affinities with *Nayu* culture.

Nayu workers watch Thai soap operas and read magazines for entertainment and to escape from their lives of hard work in Malaysia. They do not have other forms of relaxation while they are in Malaysia. Watching Thai soap opera with other women workers helps them to stay in touch with Thailand and to consolidate their migrant networks. Unlike male workers who like to hang out in outdoor settings and to visit their friends, sometimes far away from their workplaces, and to play football, *Nayu* women prefer to invite friends in their social networks to their accommodation to socialise by reading and sharing magazines and watching Thai soap opera videos together.

Nayu women and Thai Buddhist women are separate groups in Malaysia. They do not mix very often as they have a different language, culture and religion. Thai Buddhist women have their own public space in the Buddhist temple in which to build a social network while the *Nayu* workers most frequently remain in the private realm. Watching Thai soap operas in their accommodation is the best and possibly only choice for the *Nayu* women workers as they can enjoy social gatherings with their friends in small groups and feel a sense of Thai-ness in Malaysia. There are very limited opportunities for irregular *Nayu* women workers in Malaysia to recreate their social networks in public places, unlike Thai Buddhist women who gather at the Buddhist temple in Kuala Lumpur to meet their friends and extend their networks. There are many Thai Buddhist women in Malaysia married to non-Muslim Malaysians. Many Thai Buddhist women go to meet their friends every Sunday at

the temple and to eat Thai food, in particular Thai *Isan* and Northern Thai food. Every Sunday Thai vendors sell Thai food without *Halal*, Thai utensils and up-to-date Thai soap operas and Thai magazines in front of the temple. The Thai Buddhist women buy these commodities and at the same time network with Thai Buddhist friends. The temple is a public space for all Thai Buddhist women in Malaysia to replenish their sense of Thai-ness.

Nayu migrant workers in Malaysia are scattered over Kuala Lumpur and in all states working in small numbers in Tom Yam restaurants, unlike other foreign workers who work in factories and plantations and on building sites in large numbers. The *Nayu* migrant workers in Malaysia are not a large concentrated group. There are very few social activities they can engage in for common leisure time and public social space for them is very limited in Malaysia especially for *Nayu* women and *Kathoey* workers. Watching Thai soap operas in private accommodations gives these *Nayu* workers a space and time in which they can share their sense of Thai-ness and thoughts of home. This social activity also builds their social networks among all ages of *Nayu* women workers and *Kathoey*, both their work colleagues and their friends from other workplaces. *Nayu* men, too, build and maintain their networks through leisure activities particularly through sport.

7.4.2 Men, Networks and Sport

An informal football playing community exists among male *Nayu* migrants who work around Kuala Lumpur and Selangor for the men regularly play football with other *Nayu* workers in their networks. These games are not officially organized. The workers have established this activity themselves and it enables them to have a social

life after work. Their daily life differs from many other migrant workers as they work at night. Their leisure time is in the morning from 3.00-6.00 a.m. This football competition in Kuala Lumpur is not only about playing, but is a powerful and meaningful means by which they can create and maintain their social relations and develop good social relationships with other *Nayu* workers. This activity has the potential to provide other supports as well, such as helping to find work.

Amir: I often play football every week with my workmates and other Tom Yam workers at a sports club. There is nothing to do after we finish work. When I go to play football at the sports club, I meet many *Nayu* friends who work in other Tom Yam shops, then we join their football team and sometimes we have a competition with another Tom Yam shop. When another Tom Yam team want to play with our team, whichever team loses pays the field fee. Sometime we go to play at other places when they have a match at Gammak and Selayang. [Single, Male]

Similarly, Kitiarsa (2006) found in a study of Thai *Isan* construction workers in Singapore that they organised an annual football tournament, the Thai Labour Cup. The use of cell phones by the captains of twenty teams over several months aided with the organization of the games which helped create a community for *Isan* workers in Singapore. As Kitiarsa (2006, p24) explained:

Men from different villages and provinces throughout *Isan* and Thailand deal with one another. In other words, football is a true masculine game in which *Isan* male workers play to define and redefine their masculine selves outside their extremely physically demanding jobs and socially suppressed and marginalized social milieu. Thai *Isan* workers in Singapore bring with them not only their work skills but also their multi-sport talents and skills, which they have acquired in their village school and daily village sporting events.

Among male *Nayu* workers there are informal and formal football competitions in which the men regularly compete with teams from other Tom Yam restaurants. Team

captains will invite another team around to their workplace by cell phone for informal competitions, which are usually played for a small wager: the defeated team has to pay the rent of the football field.

Around Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, there are also big formal matches, in which a number of *Nayu* workers' teams take part, organized at different football fields by Tom Yam restaurant owners. The teams have to pay competition fees, and the winner gets rewards and trophies. This football competition, called the Tom Yam Cup by *Nayu* workers, brings together a large number of male migrant workers who work in Tom Yam restaurants around Selangor. Not only the players but many other *Nayu* men who work in Tom Yam restaurants from different locations come to the games where they have opportunities to meet workers from different restaurants. Some migrant workers catch up with their old friends from the same villages or with those who have studied in the same *Pondok*. Opportunities to meet new friends increase when they attend the competition as the matches are regularly held. Almost all the players know one another well; some players who appreciate others' playing style become friends. Again, they stay in touch by cell phone and visit their football friends from time to time in their workplaces. When they want to play football, they organise the match by phone. Playing football builds and strengthens the migrant networks which have the potential to provide support for migrant workers in Malaysia.

Ismail: I always play football also but I haven't played for over a month now as I hurt my leg. I met my friends who work for another Johan shop. They asked me to join their team because I can play very well. They wanted to play against Suriya shop. When they play together, the loser will pay the field fee. They play together very often in Kampong Tani. And if they have another match around Gombak, Selayang, they will pick me up at my shop. I

played for Johan shop for the Tom Yam cup last year, and they came 4th. When they play football together many times, they get used to each other and become friends. [Single, Male]

Zaidi: When I played football, I got to know many friends from different places. Some places were too far and I never went there. Some came to talk to me because they liked the way I played. After the match, they came to have conversations with me. At some places I liked players from other teams, so I would go to talk to them. I could make more friends this way. We exchanged phone numbers. Whenever there were football matches at other places, those friends would call me if they wanted to play. [Married, Male]

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on gender and migrant networks and the international migration experiences and processes of *Nayu* workers who temporarily move from the far Southern provinces of Thailand to and within Malaysia for paid work in Tom Yam restaurants. It fills the gap in the literature by showing how the gender relations of *Oghae Nayu* operate in and shape the migration processes in complex ways. Migrant networks play a vital role in migration to Malaysia. Men and women and *Kathoey* migrant workers have their own distinct networks and obtain help from their network in different ways. Because of patriarchy in the household and the village, unlike men, women are less free to move and work away from their parents. Numbers of young single women migrate by using a migrant network with close women-based ties to find work in Malaysia. Moreover, they also use the female migrant network to move within Malaysia to find a more independent life and to improve their working conditions and wages. They follow their trusted female peer contacts to move to find freedom and to escape from the control of their close kin. Female workers, in addition, are not likely to offer to help other migrants to work with them. Single female *Nayu* workers in Malaysia protect themselves from

malicious talk at home by not offering help to non-migrants from their village to work with them.

On the other hand, *Nayu* men are offered help for their first migration through varieties of social contacts, from both men and women, in their migrant networks. Consequently, new male workers have more opportunities to enter the labour market in Malaysia. In addition, men workers move more frequently to find new workplaces within Malaysia by using male peer networks sometimes connected to the sporting contacts they have established. *Kathoeys* migrants, unlike men, use only close women restaurant owners in their first migration to Malaysia. *Kathoeys* do not change jobs frequently like men because they are discriminated against and oppressed in Malaysia and because their networks are quite limited, comprising mainly other *Kathoeys* and some women.

Gender structures the spatial and temporal patterns of *Kathoeys*, men and women. As men and women are gendered subjects, they create and reproduce their time and space in order to meet their own needs and desires within what are often fairly tight constraints. Social space is usually created through the patriarchy which puts men into the public sphere and confines women outside of paid work into the private sphere, generally the family-household. Gender forms men and women's and *Kathoeys*, migrant networks separately and they strongly impact on the opportunities for work and travel and on the number of social contacts made with others within Malaysia. *Kathoeys* workers are involved in limited ways in women's networks. They are likely to socialize with women but mainly with *Kathoeys* friends in their restaurants and accommodation. *Kathoeys* workers undertake more public social

activities than *Nayu* women and they more frequently visit their *Kathoe*y friends and women friends in other restaurants than women workers do. *Nayu* men tend to have more social contacts and a greater range of social relations including relations with non-workmates and with both *Nayu* men and women, while *Nayu* women tend to have mainly female social contacts based on the family and the workplace. This limited social activity means that *Nayu* women make fewer contacts and form fewer new social ties in Malaysia than male workers.

The next chapter identifies the relationships between Tom Yam restaurant employers and the networks of *Nayu* migrant workers discussed in this chapter. It explains how employers sustain and develop links to *Nayu* migrant networks to draw temporary migrant workers into their employment in the Malaysian labour market.

CHAPTER 8: MIGRANT NETWORKS AND EMPLOYERS

Employers are a part of the networks which create social relationships among *Nayu* migrant workers and they provide and use some of the social resources that facilitate migrant networks. The *Nayu* migration process does not happen unless employers in Malaysia create the demand and the need for *Nayu* labour based as it is on the particular connections between Thai nationality and *Halal* food. In this respect, employers have created a need for labour within their own businesses. The study of employers, then, is a significant part of understanding networks among *Nayu* migrants . This chapter examines how employers create and develop networks of *Nayu* migrant workers. It begins by describing the characteristics of the owners of Tom Yam restaurants and explains why they decided to build their own businesses. The chapter then discusses why they employ *Nayu* workers and outlines the recruitment processes they use. The chapter identifies and examines the relationships between Tom Yam restaurant's employers and the networks of *Nayu* migrant workers.

8.1 Employers in the Tom Yam Restaurant Business

Thai Government officials have not differentiated *Nayu* migrant workers from other Thai migrants to Malaysia, and *Nayu* migrant workers are irregular migrants who do not travel to Malaysia through official channels, so it is impossible to really know how many *Nayu* work in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia. However, as already noted, reports by Chidchanok Rahimmula (2008) suggest that there are 100,000-150,000 migrants working in Tom Yam restaurants all over Malaysia. Similarly, because the data available is too limited, the exact numbers of Tom Yam restaurants

in Malaysia is not known but there are an estimated 5,000 Tom Yam restaurants owned by *Nayu* entrepreneurs. Although this study did not investigate the scale of Tom Yam restaurants and the number *Nayu* migrant workers, from the interviews with key informants it can be roughly estimated that there are about 4,000 entrepreneurs and about 80,000 migrant workers in this business. However, restaurant owners who are members of the Tom Yam Restaurant Association number just 500.

Almost all Tom Yam restaurant owners used to be employed in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia before starting their own businesses. They had worked in Tom Yam businesses in Malaysia long enough to accumulate funds and experience sufficient to start their own restaurants. They come from various backgrounds and include Thai Muslims speaking a Southern Thai dialect; *Nayu* people who hold a Malaysian Identity Card but were born in the far Southern provinces of Thailand; Malaysian Muslims of mixed descent from Malaysian and *Nayu* parents; *Nayu* women from Thailand who married Malaysian Muslim men in Malaysia; and *Nayu* entrepreneurs speaking a Malay dialect who are irregular migrants running their businesses without Malaysian Identity Cards. Most of the owners are *Nayu*, speaking a Malay dialect from Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat who are ex-workers. But some owners are Thai Muslims speaking a southern Thai dialect from Songkhla and Pattalung. There are also a few Malaysian Muslim owners in the later generation who started businesses after Tom Yam dishes became popular in Malaysia.

Most first generation *Nayu* and Thai Muslim owners who were born in Thailand obtained their Malaysian Identity Card when they arrived in Malaysia and began

running their own businesses, but later generations of owners have no Malaysian Identity Cards as they arrived in Malaysia and ran their own business after the period (which I have referred to as Phase One in Chapter Two) when the Malaysian Government adopted a policy to increase the Muslim Malay population in Malaysia.

Almost all restaurant owners are couples: husband and wife help each other operate their businesses. Some owners also work as chefs in their restaurants and their business is like a small family firm, in which family members do various jobs in the restaurant. In this study, there are no single owners as all the owners began running their own businesses after they had married. The ages of first generation owners range from 45 to 60 years old, while the second generation owners who used to be migrant workers are aged between 30 and 50 years old.

Abubakar: I came from Pattani province. I have been married to a Malaysian gentleman for 18 years. At that time, I was only the employee in a Tom Yam restaurant where I met my husband as a normal customer at that restaurant . . . Nearly 20 years ago I followed my aunt to work as an employee in a Tom Yam restaurant in Kampong [Tani]. It was my first time to work in Malaysia. Only one year later, I was in love with the Malaysian and finally married him. We have run our restaurant for 15 years now. I have two restaurants and all my staff are *Nayus* who mostly come from my village but some come from other villages. [*Nayu* Female Owner]

Laily: I was from Yi-Ngor, Narathiwat. I got married with a biracial Malaysian man whose mother came from Narathiwat like me and his father is Malaysian. I had not known my husband before I got married. At that time, my husband had just come back from studying in Pakistan, but he did not graduate from any school. When he came back here, he opened a Tom Yam restaurant in the medical university's canteen about 3 months before marrying me. After marrying, I moved to live in Malaysia with my husband to help him take care of the restaurant which is my first restaurant. At the beginning, it was a small restaurant that had less than 10 tables. I have worked here since 1993. Now, I have 3 restaurants in KL and I am running a new restaurant in Sunway. I hire *Nayu* employees, about 30 people from Thailand, who mostly come from my village. I cannot work elsewhere, because I have worked here for a long time, I do not

know what else I can do. There are also lots of workers who work with me such as Fatimah and her husband. They have worked with me for 15 years. If I close down the restaurant, where will my workers go to work? [*Nayu* Female Owner]

Although a large number of Tom Yam restaurants are spread all over Malaysia, the restaurant owners generally choose to set up their businesses in a common location which is densely populated. There are a large number of Tom Yam restaurants in Kampong Tani, which is well-known among Malaysian Muslim customers as the place to buy Thai dishes in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Malaysian Muslim customers come from other areas to have Thai dishes in Kampong Tani. From my experience, this place has the biggest concentration of Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur. Interestingly, there is an increase in the number of Tom Yam restaurants run by both *Nayu* people and Malaysian Muslims, which leads to fierce competition for customers. As a result, new restaurant owners have to set up their restaurants in other areas. Nevertheless, the significant choice of a location still depends upon the number of residents, the potential customers, living near Tom Yam restaurants. It is widely assumed that the right location guarantees more customers and a successful business.

Working in Tom Yam restaurants allows some migrant workers to learn many skills in the business from the entry level jobs to the highest rank, including how to manage the business because, eventually, they take almost full charge of the restaurant for their employers. Their employers usually provide them with business-relevant skills, which allow them to run their own restaurants. They can change their lives from being workers who only receive their daily wages to become entrepreneurs who receive all the profits from their own businesses.

According to Boissevain, Blaschke et al (1990, p140) learning business-relevant cultural skills in a small ethnic firm allows immigrant employees to open their own business:

The careers in the ethnic enclave range from entry-level jobs as dishwashers or cashiers, to some higher-level jobs as headwaiter or manager, and finally to ownership of one's own firm.

The employers' achievements also serve to motivate the migrant workers to run their own restaurant successfully and to work hard to acquire experience. However, there are many who do not succeed, as almost all of them are irregular entrepreneurs.

Faisal: After I quit studying, I wanted to get a job and I knew a man in my village who worked as a chef in a small restaurant in KL. So I went to ask for help when that man came back to my village. I was brought to Malaysia to work with that man when I was 16 years old. I worked there as the dishwasher. I earned 10 RM a day; I worked for a year then I was promoted to be a bartender and earned 18 RM a day. Two years later, I was promoted to be a chef earning 35 RM a day after the old chef quit and returned to his home. I worked there till I was 20 years old, then I came back to Thailand to serve in the army. After being in the army for one year, I went back to work at the same restaurant until I was 23 years old, and I married a girl from my village then. Two years after my marriage, the male restaurant owner passed away. The owner and his wife are *Nayu* but his wife has Malaysian relatives. After her husband passed away, she wanted me to rent the restaurant from her for 4,500 RM per month. Therefore, I could become a restaurant owner. I work with my wife and I brought my wife's relatives to work in this restaurant as well. [Irregular *Nayu* Male Owner]

There are a few Tom Yam restaurant owners who have never worked as employees in this business. These entrepreneurs are usually in a strong financial position and include biracial Thai-Malaysians and Malaysian Muslims partly because they are automatically Malaysian citizens. Although they do not know how to cook Thai

dishes, they have greater opportunities to run their own businesses. Mostly, they employ *Nayu* migrant workers who have previously worked in other Tom Yam restaurants.

8.2 The Reasons for Establishing Tom Yam Restaurants

To understand why there are so many Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia, it is necessary to explain the reasons why migrants establish these businesses. Many *Nayu* and Thai Muslim owners decide to run a restaurant selling Thai dishes in Malaysia because they have few educational qualifications, from either Thailand or Malaysia. They are not able to be employed as skilled workers in Malaysia. They have few options but to be employed as low paid labour because they are less educated than Malaysian workers and this restricts their ability to be employed in higher paid jobs in Malaysia, so the best alternative for them is to establish a small business. Migrants also operate small food businesses in many countries including Australia, Canada, the U.S.A., and the United Kingdom (Desbarats 1979; Waldinger and Aldrich 1990; Yoo 1998; Warde 2000; Ram et al. 2002; Josiam and Monteiro 2004). According to Clark and Drinkwater (2000) the lack of fluency in the *lingua franca* restricts migrants' employment opportunities and is the cause for their higher rates of self-employment. Ethnic food businesses require few skills, deal less with officialdom and require only a small investment with lower risks and a higher chance of success compared with other types of business, because food can easily be sold to everyone. Everywhere human beings need to eat, not to mention the desirability and uniqueness of ethnic food.

Mah: Tom Yam was quite well-known and popular among Malaysian Muslims in KL in the 1990s. There were many Tom Yam restaurants

at that time. I decided to run this business because my wife had experience running a restaurant with her family in Thailand before we married . . . *Oghae Nayu* tend to run Tom Yam restaurants because it requires little knowledge. We have a lower level of education. We can't do other jobs as we have no degrees, don't speak fluent Malay, can't read and write. It is quite difficult to do other jobs. Running your own restaurants is easy. There is no need to deal with any documents. No need for a degree. If you know how to cook, you can run your own restaurant. If it is going well, other people will patronise your business. Most *Oghae Nayu* begin as employees at a restaurant and then become restaurant owners when they have the money. [*Nayu* Male Owner]

In addition, some Malaysian Muslims saw the success of many *Nayu* owners and the popularity of Tom Yam restaurants among Malaysian Muslim customers, so they decided to run this type of restaurant themselves.

Hassan: This restaurant belonged to my father. My father served only breakfast and lunch. In 1998, I was jobless after working in a factory. So I told my father that I wanted to sell Tom Yam because Tom Yam was very popular in Malaysia and I wanted to open the restaurant at night to serve Tom Yam. [Malaysian Muslim Male Owner]

However, Malaysians who run Tom Yam restaurant are not competent to cook Thai dishes; they always have to employ *Nayu* migrant workers. After ex-migrant workers became restaurant owners, they also employ *Nayu* migrant workers from their villages in Thailand. The growth of the Tom Yam restaurant business in Malaysia among ex-migrant workers has led to increasing numbers of migrant workers, mostly from employers' villages in Thailand, as the restaurant owners need cheap labour to work for them in Malaysia. Subsequently, migrant networks in both Malaysia and Thailand keep expanding in response to the growing labour demand caused by the spread of Tom Yam restaurants.

Another factor contributing to the increase in Muslim migrant workers from Thailand includes the stories of successful migrant workers passed down to younger generations. The majority of those who had been employed for some time in Tom Yam restaurants, especially at the top rank of chef, dream of running their own Tom Yam restaurants if they have the chance. These workers have seen many examples of successful Tom Yam restaurant owners who make a lot more money selling Thai food than they could earn working for someone else. The profits of these restaurant owners are a significant motivating factor and workers often start operating their own business as soon as they can accumulate enough money and can acquire the necessary Malaysian ties to deal with Malaysian Government officials.

The large number of Tom Yam restaurants spread all over Malaysia creates job opportunities for numerous *Nayu* workers from Thailand. Despite their small size, the ever-increasing number of Tom Yam restaurants makes them reliable sources of employment for migrant workers as these restaurants always seek to employ *Nayu* migrant workers from Thailand to cook delicious Thai cuisine for Malaysian Muslim customers in Malaysia. These enterprises rely on migrant workers flowing across the border through their networks in Malaysia and Thailand to provide the labour needed to produce *Halal* Thai dishes in Tom Yam restaurants.

8.3 Recruiting Workers

The Tom Yam restaurant owners fall into two main groups. The first group comprises original Muslims from Thailand including *Nayu* from the border provinces; Thai Muslim immigrants who have obtained Malaysian citizenship; *Nayu* women married to Malaysian Muslim men; and those with one *Nayu* parent from

Thailand and one from Malaysia. These all have their families, relatives, and social networks in Thailand to help recruit migrant workers from Thailand to work for them in Malaysia.

The second group are Malaysian Muslim owners who legally run Tom Yam restaurants. These Malaysian Muslims are native Malaysian and do not have any close social ties in Thailand. Employee recruitment for them is much more difficult and restricted, so they have to rely on their migrant employees' networks to ensure the supply of labour to their restaurants.

During the Muslim festivals, *Hari Raya Puasa* and *Hari Raya Haji*, most *Nayu* migrants in Malaysia return to their home in Thailand, including Tom Yam restaurant workers and entrepreneurs. Particularly during *Hari Raya*, many migrant workers leave their restaurants for new ones, informing their employers that they will not return to work again. Consequently, restaurant entrepreneurs have to seek new migrant workers to replace them. Before leaving, these workers are asked to find new migrant workers by their employers. Employers often prefer workers who are young and who have never worked in Malaysia as they are more easily controlled.

When there is a job vacancy in a Tom Yam restaurant, migrant workers who are working there will be asked to recruit a new migrant worker. In particular, the chef, who is the most powerful worker, is likely to make the decision about employing a new worker to fill a vacancy. The chef will turn to his/her close contacts first.

Ahmad: I have more power in the shop as I am the chef, the highest position in restaurant. If the shop owner needs more employees, it's up to me to arrange all this. I will tell my friends that my shop

wants more employees and then my friends will keep telling other friends. [Married, Male]

For the less skilled positions such as dishwasher, new workers tend to be newcomers from Thailand as these positions require no skills or experience. For the higher positions such as assistant chef, kitchen hand and bartender, the prospective employees are likely to come from other restaurants because the candidates must have the skills and experience necessary for these positions.

Nayu workers in the restaurants needing labour offer the vacant position to their relatives first, followed by their close social ties such as fellow villagers when no relatives of theirs needs that job. Although each *Nayu* worker has a large number of social ties in their migrant networks both in Malaysia and Thailand, network support is not equally available and accessible to all network members. Help and support is given first to the closest people with the strongest ties in a person's migrant network.

Malaysian restaurant entrepreneurs themselves are not able to recruit new migrant workers as they do not have recruitment systems and networks in the far Southern provinces of Thailand, unlike their *Nayu* migrant counterparts who very often use their social ties in Thailand to recruit new migrant workers, in particular young people, from their villages. Sometimes they even contact their networks in Thailand before they return home during *Hari Raya*. Their social ties, in particular their parents, contact the parents of unemployed youths, usually under 20 years old, in their villages. They themselves will not directly approach potential workers. After the potential young migrants' parents are informed of the work proposal, the parents

ask their children whether they want to go or to stay. The final decision depends on the young people themselves.

Abubakar: When I want employees, I find them from my village. I ask my parents to find someone who wants to get a job here. My parents then ask the people in the village if their children want to go to work in Malaysia or not. When I return to my home and someone agrees to work with me, I go back to the village and pick them up. First, I tell them to get a passport in Songkhla before my arrival. Someone, I pay the passport fee and then deduct this from their wage later. Sometimes my relatives organize the recruitment for me . . . I pay the transport costs for those who go to work with me first but I reduce their wage to pay for transportation and the passport after they have worked for a month. [*Nayu* Female Owner]

The entrepreneurs' relatives and families also recruit young people from other villages in the same manner. Sometimes the labour demand is so urgent that there is not enough time for preparation. In this case, former migrants advise newcomers to get a border pass which can be obtained immediately at the Amphoe office, while getting a passport takes about two weeks. Newcomers usually do not know how to deal with officials so former migrants explain the details of this process to a newcomer's parents who arrange to take their children to the local office concerned.

If they want to employ a chef, the entrepreneurs arrange the recruitment themselves. They obtain relevant information from their networks in Thailand. After they find some prospective candidates, they visit them personally because much consideration needs to be taken regarding the candidates' qualifications. Most chefs interviewed by the entrepreneurs are mature, married and experienced migrant workers. The entrepreneurs have to negotiate the payment and working conditions with them to the best satisfaction of both parties. After *Hari Raya*, the new recruits follow the restaurant entrepreneurs across the border to work for them.

Hassan: At first, I didn't know any *Siam Melayu* employees. So, I went to the Tom Yam restaurant in KL and then I told the staff there that I needed three people to work with me. Workers from that restaurant told me that they have a friend who was a Tom Yam chef. I, then, left my contact number there. That was the first time for me to hire *Siam Melayu* staff at the opening of the restaurant. Whenever I want someone new to work or some of my employees resign, all I have to do is to tell my staff that I want a new worker. I don't have to do anything else because my staff will find me a new employee. [Malaysian Muslim Male Owner]

When owners select a new worker, the major criterion is personal trust. Although experience is important, foremost is personal trust between the new worker and the owner and the other workers in the restaurants. All migrant workers have to live and work together with their colleagues all day and night long. New workers must have integrity and be able to work with their colleagues as a team. In addition, all workers in Tom Yam restaurants are irregular migrants. If they are not reliable and trustworthy people, they may cause trouble for their employers and co-workers, so employers need to have a certain level of confidence in them before hiring them. Most employers do not employ a person whom they do not know, or who people they trust do not know, or who applies for a job directly without references from their networks.

Nurdin: I come to work for a few hours a day and then I leave the shop with the staff. They work together like a family business. The staff call me "uncle" and I take care of them like they are my relatives. I went to visit my employee's home in Pattani for a week on New Year's Eve 2007. I wanted to know how my employees live. If they work together, they need to trust to each other. I leave my staff to work on their duties freely. It's the way to makes staff be honest to me. I never have any problem with my staff. They never steal my money. I even leave everything to some of them to run for me. It's trust. [Malaysian Muslim Male Owner]

The owners usually hire workers whom they are personally familiar with or whom their current employees know or introduce to them. Despite their different job levels,

almost all workers in the restaurant have been recruited through this same process. New migrant workers in entry level jobs are found by current workers in the restaurant or by the owner's relatives in their village, just the same as workers in the high level jobs although they are usually found in Malaysia. The main reason for recruiting people via this process is personal trust. Normally, owners only employ those who have personal contact with the current workers or with their relatives both in Thailand and Malaysia: the relationship with new workers is based on these social ties.

Migrant networks are crucial in the employment of labour. Thus, in the recruitment process, the owner is not an independent agent, but depends on current workers and their networks. Although some new workers might not personally know any of the current workers, they usually have some personal linkage and are introduced by friends or acquaintances of the current workers. Recruiting people through networks and relationship ties is no guarantee that a new worker is the right person for the job because some new workers, mostly those introduced by friends of friends, may have a weak relationship with the current workers. But generally speaking, employers believe that the closer the ties, the more trustworthy the workers.

Migrant workers also acquire information concerning better employment opportunities than in their current restaurants. However, they do not immediately move to other restaurants although they have the right to move wherever and whenever they would like as there are no formal contracts or agreements with their employers. The reason they stay is purely the gratitude they feel toward their employers who have helped them migrate and have offered them employment. These

workers appreciate the kindness of their employers, so they remain loyal so as to repay their obligations.

Both Malaysian and *Nayu* employers trust their *Nayu* employees more than other employees. Similarly, Jin-Kyung Yoo's study in the U.S.A. (1998, pp156-159) found that Korean entrepreneurs tend to heavily rely on Koreans as a cheap resource because Korean workers are believed to be more trustworthy in both the enclave and non-enclave economy than non-Koreans. This is why Tom Yam employers are likely to employ *Nayu* workers through network references. Non-*Nayu* workers who work as waiters do not collect customers' bills like *Nayu* waiters do. Only *Nayu* workers can be cashiers at the counter or bill collectors at customers' tables. In addition some have the full authority to manage the restaurant while their employers are absent.

Recruiting friends and relatives to work in the same restaurant also benefits the current workers. Because they know one another, it is easy to work together harmoniously in the restaurant. Generally, owners of Tom Yam restaurants do not post a job advertisement or resort to middle-men for recruiting migrant workers because working in these restaurants does not require any documents and educational qualifications. As a new worker is recruited via current workers, the workers who introduce their friends or relatives to work in the restaurant have to guarantee the new workers' behaviour.

Employers' also like to recruit employees through the familiar networks as they have no need to pay the cost of foreign recruitment which is high in Malaysia. Through their networks and employees' networks, employers need no middle-men and

agencies for formal recruitment, eliminating the cost of this process, which is appealing to them as they are just small entrepreneurs. In some cases, those employers who use documented *Nayu* migrant workers also select their employees through their informal networks to reduce the costs of recruitment and employment. However, these employees have to migrate to work in Malaysia first and then apply for a work permit directly themselves. This eliminates the employers' cost of recruiting through agencies. Employers themselves are able to recruit their employees without reliance on the official recruitment system overseas.

When using legal recruiters, employers and documented migrant workers must pay a high recruitment cost. Other studies have found that contract Bangladeshi and Indonesian migrant workers pay the highest fees for their migration to work in Malaysia (Jones 2000; Rudnick 2009). However, it is not only migrant workers who have to pay recruitment fees. Business entrepreneurs also have to pay a levy and other costs when recruiting workers through legal channels. As a result there are many irregular migrant workers working in Malaysia without work permits due to the high cost of recruitment. Entrepreneurs in Malaysia, in particular in small businesses, would not see migrant workers as a cheap labour force if they had to pay the high recruitment costs. Irregular migrant workers without temporary work permits are more cost-advantageous for entrepreneurs, and through their employees' networks, *Nayu* and Malaysian employers easily access *Nayu* workers, a cheap labour force for their businesses without paying any recruitment costs.

8.4 Why *Nayu*?

There are several reasons why Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs employ *Nayu* in their businesses and why almost all *Nayu* work in Tom Yam restaurants, but the major reason is the existence of migrant networks. *Nayu* workers are employed by co-ethnic entrepreneurs, both *Nayu* and Malaysian Muslims, as they share the same ethnicity, language and cultural and religious background. The employers and the employees, thus, are of the same Malay ethnicity, speak a Malay dialect, have Islamic religion and come from the same villages or regions. A certain degree of sharing between workers and owners is utterly important. *Nayu* owners usually employ *Nayu* workers, while Thai-speaking Muslim owners prefer Thai-speaking Muslims workers in their restaurants. According to other studies (e.g. Boissevain et al. 1990; Lee, Cameron et al. 1997; Heberer 2005; Jones, Ram et al. 2006; Butter et al. 2007) employers rely more heavily on the employment of labour from the same ethnicity, cultural, linguistic or religious background than on labour from different backgrounds. No Indonesian workers are employed by both Thai-speaking Muslim and *Nayu* owners, but some Malaysian owners employ Indonesian workers as dishwashers in their restaurants.

Mah: I trust *Malayu Siam* staff more than Indonesian. I think that people from Patani are also Malaysian and have the same culture as me. We speak the same language and understand each other. The people from the three border provinces of Southern Thailand and the northern province of Malaysia use the same language and I feel that my staff are *Malayu* like me. My wife comes from Kelantan and she speaks the same language as these people. So I feel that I can trust Thai more than Indonesian staff. There are many differences between Malaysian and Indonesian culture and language. Even though we are Muslim they don't have good Malay communication. [Malaysian Muslim Male Owner]

Nayu workers are preferred also because Thai food at Tom Yam restaurants is considered so unique that only Thais can cook such exotic dishes. Because of this notion of Thai-ness in Thai food preparation, both *Nayu* and Malaysian Muslim restaurant entrepreneurs employ only *Nayu* migrant workers to prepare food. The skills required for Thai cuisine are highly valued by *Nayu* workers in the Tom Yam restaurants as such knowledge of Thai-ness and the requisite culinary skill is considered to be specific to Thai-speaking Muslims and *Nayu*. Thus, Thai-speaking Muslims and *Oghae Nayu* take advantages of this, using their national identity, religious affiliation and knowledge of Thai dishes, to be employed in the Tom Yam restaurants. Moreover, customers in Malaysia expect that the Thai dishes they consume in Tom Yam restaurants have been prepared and cooked by Thai people. Customers expect staff to link culture and product through culturally specific skills that non- ethnic staff do not possess (Butter et al. 2007).

Laily: I hire *Nayu* workers because these are Thai dishes which only Thais know how to cook well. Malaysians do not know how to cook a Tom Yam soup. Although another person may know how to cook it, it isn't a good dish unless it's cooked by Thais. [*Nayu* Female Owner]

The notion of Thai-ness means that an exotic Thai dish can only be known and cooked by Thai people. Similarly, Thai scholars believe that only Thai scholars can produce profoundly real Thai studies because they know better than non-Thai scholars, in particular Western scholars, who are not Thai and do not understand Thai-ness. As Thongchai Winichakul (1994, pp7-8) points out, Thai people, scholars or not, have always been warned not to *tamkon farang* (“tag along behind the Westerners”). For them Thai-ness, Thailand, Thai people, Thai cuisine, Thai studies, everything Thai, are things that the *farang* can approach but never reach with the utmost intimacy that Thai people can.

As well as being unique in their culinary skills, *Nayu* workers are also cheap to employ. The Tom Yam restaurants provide only limited and poor working conditions. Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs cannot afford to employ local workers. Consequently, they rely heavily on *Nayu* migrants who are cheap so as to earn high profits and make a success of their business. So, it is not surprising that almost all Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs prefer recruiting *Nayu* workers from Thailand. They need cheap labour and they employ *Nayu* workers although, and perhaps because, they are irregular.

Furthermore, Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs demand long hours of work without days off. Malaysian workers do not want to work like this. They do not want to work in this business because of its low-skilled status in Malaysia. In addition, the standard wage for local workers is higher than that of migrant workers. Very few Malaysians are willing to work under such conditions, as they have more chances to work in higher paid jobs with better working conditions. Therefore, migrant workers fill the demand for low paid labour in Malaysia.

Abubakar: I hire only *Nayu* workers because the Malaysians sometimes don't like to work from my experience. I had hired some of them before and found that they were quite lazy and wanted to go out more than working. *Nayu* workers prefer to work more than playing or going out like Malaysians. In addition, I do not like Indonesian workers and have never employed them. [*Nayu* Female Owner]

Nuridin: Malaysian people don't like to work like this. It is normal to see Thai, Indonesian, Bangladesh and Indian workers as Malaysians prefer to work for the easy and good money or in a job which needs special skill. Malaysians always go to work abroad including my daughter. They can make more money than working in Malaysia. And the unskilled jobs, we can hire foreigners to do that. [Malaysian Muslim Male Owner]

Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs continue to employ cheap irregular *Nayu* migrant workers, following the successful business model of other entrepreneurs, most of whom are their former employers. Irregular *Nayu* migrant workers are very important for the Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs because they only employ low paid labour to work long hours. This labour helps them to keep costs low and to run successful businesses in Malaysia, as the entrepreneurs themselves freely acknowledge.

Hassan: I know that one of my staff doesn't have a passport. She uses just a border pass to come here. I don't know how she does it because normally a border pass allows one just to cross some border provinces. However, this staff member can travel far away to KL. The government authorities know that the Tom Yam restaurants are places where *Siam* people work. There might be Malaysian or *Melayu Siam* owners but the staff are *Melayu Siam*. And they do nothing, even though they know this. If they wanted to arrest *Melayu Siam*s, they would have done so a long time ago as they know very well where they live. I prefer *Melayu Siam* workers as they are not only cost less but they are more trustworthy and diligent and work long hours. They have never asked about holidays or a day off. They can work every day for a daily wage. [Malaysian Muslim Male Owner]

According to Boissevain et al (1990, pp141-144) and Jin-Kyung Yoo (1998, pp157-159) the employment of mostly co-ethnic minorities is the main strategy of ethnic entrepreneurs for survival and success. Similarly, research in Birmingham, U.K. found that irregular co-ethnic labour is advantageous for restaurant entrepreneurs, because these businesses are open long hours and the work is labour intensive and demanding (Jones et al. 2006). Co-ethnic labour is characteristic of ethnic businesses because workers can be paid low wages, work long hours and put up with uncomfortable working conditions because irregular workers do not have access to good labour standards. The employment of low waged irregular or documented co-

ethnic labour is a success strategy for ethnic minority entrepreneurs in many host countries.

8.5 Working Conditions

Tom Yam restaurant owners usually provide accommodation for their workers. They rent a room for all the workers to live together. The number of rooms provided depends on the number of workers and their gender. In the case of male staff, sometimes the living quarters are located on the ground floor of the restaurant. Some accommodations are private houses or apartments within walking distance of the restaurants. Almost all workers are single. The rooms are assigned by gender: they are shared among members of the same sex, from four to six persons per room. Small restaurants provide only one room for all staff as there are only male or only female workers in this type of restaurant. The accommodation in a small restaurant naturally limits opportunities to employ workers of the opposite sex.

For larger restaurants, there are more rooms provided, enabling both male and female workers to work and to share residential quarters. Some large restaurants even have a small separate accommodation for couples. The facilities, usually toilets and bathrooms, are shared among the residents in the house or sometimes by the whole apartment block. The latter case includes not only the restaurant staff but also all the residents in that particular place. There is no kitchen and no common room. The residents always have their meals in the restaurants, and some take their meals away. There is no washing machine, so the residents have to do their own hand washing in the toilets and bathrooms. The overcrowded living conditions and lack of adequate facilities for the residents mean the accommodation serves only for sleeping: usually

the workers sleep on the floor, but some employers provide a small single bed. Despite the poor living conditions and low standard of accommodation provided by their employers, the workers feel that they do not have any choice or any right to criticise what is provided to them.

In the Tom Yam restaurants owners allow free meals for their staff. There are two common meals in the restaurant, at the beginning of work and after the restaurant closes. The meals are cooked by the kitchen-hand or by other staff, and all the staff share meals together in the restaurant. However, in some restaurants, staff rarely cook their meals themselves and do not share meals together. These owners usually allow their workers to cook their own meals by using anything in the kitchen although some prohibit the cooking of seafood and fish because it is expensive.

As *Nayu* employers have more opportunities than Malaysian employers to find new employees in Thailand, they are likely to employ their workers, particularly newcomers, at a very low rate. They do not care about the standard of living and wages they provide for their workers as they can find new employees any time they want. They can fire any of their employees at any time or let them go when they do not want to work with them anymore.

Sakinah: *Nayu* employers don't care much for their workers. If they felt dissatisfied, they would fire the workers. Malay employers, on the other hand, were calmer and nicer. They didn't often fire their employees . . . I used to work with many *Nayu* employers. I thought that the *Nayu* employers were fussy and unkind. They liked to cheat me of my wages. They closed their shops late. I once worked for a Thai for a year. At first, she seemed to be nice but later she didn't give me my wages on time. Three months passed, I didn't get my own wages and I decided not to go back to work there anymore. When I went back home, I also went to that employer in Thailand to ask for my wages. She refused to give them to me. I told her that a person

who cheated other people of this money would definitely not be successful in their work. After that, I never went back to her. She cheated me of about 18,000 bahts. [Single, Female]

Azlan: But many times my boss didn't give my wages. I think that *Nayu* employers don't care much about their workers as they think that they can find new ones. However, Malay employers don't act like that, in my opinion, because they find it more difficult to look for new workers. *Nayu* bosses always think that they have influence over others as they have worked here for a long time. They have connections with their Association and the police. They know that the workers come to work irregularly, so they can frighten them and do whatever they want. In addition, some *Nayu* employers don't pay ringgit but bahts when ringgit was strong for when they paid bahts, they paid less. On the other hand, if the baht was strong, they would pay their employees in ringgits. [Married, Male]

Employers continue using *Nayu* migrant labour as they can take advantage of the low wages generally paid to migrants in Malaysia. They do not employ local workers as the wages of local workers are higher. As Malaysia does not have a legal standard minimum wage, employers would prefer to employ workers, both local and migrant, at the same low rate. However, local workers will not accept the same rate as migrant workers do, so it is not surprising that migrant workers are in demand in the Tom Yam business.

8.6 Employer Organization

Jin-Kyung Yoo (1998) found that a large number of Korean entrepreneurs involved themselves in many types of organizations and some of these organizations became a significant resource in the establishment and success their businesses. The Korean church was important for the entrepreneurs in the enclave economy as a customer source while the business association became important for Korean entrepreneurs in the non-Korean economy for the security of their business (Yoo 1998, pp145-150). Another study on the Bangladeshi diaspora in Malaysia found that business migrants

also built their informal association with other Bangladeshis while living and working in Kuala Lumpur by meeting at the Mosque, establishing as well other inter-ethnic ties and links with other migrant communities. These networks are part of the survival strategies of migrants in Peninsular Malaysia (Sultana 2008).

Some *Nayu* Tom Yam restaurant owners are closely related to Muslim separatist organizations in Pattani, Thailand, both the Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO) and the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN). Some restaurant entrepreneurs were members of these organizations in Thailand, and, in addition, their restaurants have become meeting places for members of Muslim separatist groups, and with politicians, both Thai and Malaysian. This is because some early Tom Yam restaurant owners, who were the pioneer members of the Tom Yam Association, were previously members of either PULO or BRN, and they escaped from Thailand to live in Malaysia because they were wanted by the Thai police (Songkhlatoday 2006).

Some *Nayu* who were separatists in Pattani, Thailand, established the Tom Yam Association, an organization for Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs in Malaysia. Almost all the members are *Nayu* entrepreneurs from the far Southern provinces of Thailand. This organization is run by Mustapha, the first *Nayu* restaurant entrepreneur in Malaysia. It had 30 members at its beginning in 2001 and has expanded to 500 members from all over the country in 2009. The main aim of this organization is to promote and support members who operate Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia. Although this organization is an official association, registered with the Malaysian Government, its members are very likely to employ irregular *Nayu*

migrant workers from Thailand. Thus, the organization does not only give business support to its membership, but also offers help with police regarding the arrest of irregular migrant workers and helps with other legal issues. Respondents told me that some workers had received help from the Tom Yam Association to deal with the police and free them from prison.

Haji Mush: The earliest Tom Yam restaurant owners who knew each other well in Malaysia were interested in running a Tom Yam association in Malaysia because there were many problems regarding the operation of Tom Yam restaurants. They are *Nayu* who set up Tom Yam restaurants when they arrived in Malaysia but they did not have the power to demand a solution to problems from the Malaysian government. By setting up our association in Malaysia, we would have more power to deal with any problems with the Malaysian government. However, we are not political . . . The objectives of the Association are to help Thai restaurant owners who set up business in Malaysia. . . It is a one of the Association's objectives to help members who have problems regarding the police. The Association can help restaurant owners who have a problem. We can deal with the police but they have to operate a legal business and pay their fines. Sometimes they pay a bribe to the police. Tom Yam migrant workers have never gone to the Thai embassy for any help because we could solve their problems. [*Nayu* Male Owner]

The Tom Yam Association was supported by some Malaysian politicians in the Government party when Dr. Mahathir Bin Mohamad was Prime Minister of Malaysia because the Association encouraged their members to vote for the UMNO Party (Songkhlato 2006). In addition, when there were elections in Thailand, members of the Association encouraged their employees to return to vote for the Hope Party in Thailand because a leading figure in the Association, One-Muhammadnor Matha, is a strong supporter of this party,. The Association organises votes from *Nayu* people in Malaysia who hold both Thai and Malaysian citizenship.

In addition, there are reports that some members of this Association provide funding for separatists who are fighting for a Malay homeland separate from Thailand.

8.7 Conclusion

Significantly Tom Yam restaurant growth in Malaysia depends upon the availability of a large number of *Nayu* migrant workers who fill the demand for workers with a Thai national back ground to prepare and serve *Halal* food in the Thai ethnic food businesses. This chapter has explained why so many entrepreneurs employ *Nayu* migrant workers in their Tom Yam restaurants. The chapter argued that employers' use of migrant networks is related to the high labour demand for low paid *Nayu* migrant workers to serve in their restaurant businesses. To successfully run their businesses employers must be integrated into the networks of *Nayu* migrant workers.

Almost all *Nayu* Tom Yam restaurant owners worked in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia before starting their own businesses. But some owners are Thai Muslims speaking a southern Thai dialect from Songkhla and Pattalung. Entrepreneurs learn many skills in the restaurant business working as employees in entry level jobs to the highest ranking jobs where in some cases they manage the restaurant for their employer. Employers set up their businesses in a common densely populated location in particular in Kampong Tani, Kuala Lumpur. They have few educational qualifications which mean fewer employment options, so the best alternative for them is to establish a small business.

A large number of Tom Yam restaurants spread all over in Kampong Tani, Kuala Lumpur not only serve *Halal* Thai dishes, but also create job opportunities for

numerous *Nayu* workers. These *Nayu* enterprises rely on migrant workers flowing across the border through their networks in Malaysia and Thailand to provide the labour needed to produce *Halal* Thai food in Tom Yam restaurants. *Nayu* owners' networks in Thailand help them to recruit *Nayu* workers from Thailand from their villages to work for them in Malaysia. These employers have easy access to irregular *Nayu* workers, a cheap labour force. While Malaysian Muslim owners do not have close social ties in Thailand, their workers help them to recruit new migrants from their own networks. Employing irregular *Nayu* workers without the temporary work permits is more advantageous for entrepreneurs, because documented migrant workers are more costly and less vulnerable.

Because of the close connection between Thai-ness and religion in Thai cuisine, restaurants rely heavily on the employment of co-ethnics. Co-ethnic employment is advantageous for employers, but the poor working conditions, the very long unsociable hours and low pay are not enjoyed by *Nayu* workers. As a result many take steps to start their own restaurant business and like their ex-employers they want to be financially successful by continuing the employment of cheap and willing irregular *Nayu* workers from Thailand. The network will take maybe ten per cent of them to the top and will keep them there as long as they maintain it. The Tom Yam Association is one way that they do this.

Nayu owners form their own community in Malaysia and some of them established the official Tom Yam Association, an organization for Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs in Malaysia to promote and support members who operate Tom Yam restaurants. At specific times, because of Government connections the Association

also encourages its members and the members encourage their workers, to vote for a particular Malaysian or Thai politician.

This chapter has revealed how chain migration is connected to the Tom Yam restaurant business in Malaysia through *Nayu* migrant networks and has described the connections between the labour demands of the Tom Yam restaurant business in Malaysia and the labour supply of *Nayu* workers in Thailand. Migrant networks which are simply links between family, friends and community underpin and sustain more complex structures in both Thailand and Malaysia including Tom Yam restaurant businesses which in turn have economic and political requirements of their own.

That this whole structure, involving at least a million people, operates without systemic economic, political and industrial interruptions and eruptions is in no small part due to the widespread adoption and skilled use of personal communications technology. In the mobile telephone the labour market and the migrant network mingle and, maybe, merge. The next chapter explains the increasing use of cell phones as a significant part of everyday life among *Nayu* migrant workers in Malaysia. Cell phone usage creates and sustains networks that are integral to shaping migrant workers' experiences between Thailand and Malaysia and within Malaysia. It describes how the cell phone is used to create, maintain and reinforce migrant networks and to build new social ties among irregular migrant workers.

CHAPTER 9: CELL PHONES AND MIGRANT NETWORKS

The cell phone is a communication technology that is easy to use and access everywhere. Even migrant workers with low incomes and limited literacy in both Thai and Malay are able to own and use cell phones. The cell phone is important as *Nayu* workers are not easily able to connect to their networks on a face-to-face basis and the cell phone provides a channel for communication between people in different locations with those physically absent from their lives. Everyone in Malaysia is able to access the cell phone as there are cell phone towers all over the country, even in the countryside and in remote rural areas. The cell phone, thus, has become an important tool to connect migrant workers and maintain their social ties regardless of space, distance and frontiers.

Nayu workers in Kuala Lumpur have little education and a low income. Writing is not their greatest skill or their preferred form of communication. Computers are not accessible to them. Although Wi-Fi internet is available free in their restaurants, as Kuala Lumpur's local government supports free access to the internet throughout the city, they do not use the internet. Even if they were able to access the internet, they could not connect with their networks outside Kuala Lumpur and with their families who live in the Thai countryside which lacks access to the internet system. The cell phone, on the other hand, has none of these problems. It is cheap in comparison and is accessible to everyone.

This chapter examines how cell phone networks are integral to migrant networks. I begin by describing the reasons why migrants decide to have their own cell phone,

and then discuss where they purchase their phone and how they choose a cell phone provider. I identify who migrant workers call and examine the relationships between cell phone networks and migrant networks.

9.1 Why Migrants Have a Cell Phone

There are several distinct reasons why migrants decide to own cell phones. The main reason is because they need their cell phone to stay in touch with their family at home. The second reason is that individual phone ownership signals their independence from the family and relatives that they use it to stay in touch with. The cell phone is a mobile, audible and visible social status symbol signifying both their independence from and their connectedness to, their kin. Thirdly, cell phones make the continuation of parenting possible across long distances. The extended family is able to become more extensive. Fourthly, a cell phone enables communication among members of migrant networks in Malaysia. Indeed, one's network is in one's phone. Finally the *Nayu* workers like to have their own phone for personal safety and in case of an emergency.

Nayu workers use their cell phone to maintain relationships with their families in Thailand while they are far away from home. Having a phone means that they can exchange experiences and news across the border. They call their family when they are homesick and their family can also contact them.

Mazlin: I have my phone to contact my parents when I need to talk and I miss them. Another thing is that they can also contact me here. [Single, Female]

Malavi: I got one as I need to call my parents. I could contact them any where and any time and also my parents could contact me when they miss me. [Single, Male]

Similarly, Ke Yang's study (2008) on cell phone use among internal migrant workers in Beijing found that the cell phone allows migrant workers to maintain connections and develop relations with the people they have left behind. The phones connect workers to family members at home and allow them to hear the voices of loved ones alleviating some of their loneliness and sadness in Beijing. Talking on the phone alleviates their emotional distress while far away from home (Yang 2008). Law and Peng (2007) also found that migrant workers in China use their cell phone for keeping in touch with their families and their relatives.

Secondly, young *Nayu* workers feel the need to be independent. There are some *Nayu* workers who do not have their own cell phone. In particular, young new migrants share a cell phone with their kin while working with them in the same workplace. Independence means having more privacy to contact and communicate with friends without using kin's phones. After they have worked in Malaysia for a period, they make new friends in Malaysia, in particular boyfriends or girlfriends.

Fatima: While I didn't have it, I borrowed it from others and paid for credits used, but not often because I was considerate to them. Since I was uncomfortable to use it, I bought a new cell phone with which I could call anyone at any time. [Married, Female]

Farhana: In the past, I shared the phone usage with my sister. She gave me a cell phone as my birthday present last year. Now I don't use her phone because she already has a boyfriend and needs privacy too. We both have boyfriends already. My boyfriend always calls me twice a week whereas I call him whenever I miss him. [Single, Female]

Wang also found that Vietnamese female migrants in Taiwan used cell phones to create their own space to escape the surveillance of their relatives (2007, p722). She explains that:

Many informants have their own mobile phone, which saves all the phone numbers of their close friends. Since the parents-in-law often monitor their daughter-in-law's phone calls, the best way to escape this censorship, and at the same time create a private space of their own, is to use a mobile phone.

Thirdly, most *Nayu* workers are not likely to go out much with their friends in Malaysia because they are irregular migrant workers with little time off. Life is without freedom, and having a cell phone means they are able to maintain contact with their network although they seldom meet. According to Pattana Kitiarsa (2006, p16) the use of the cell phone is popular among Thai migrant workers in Singapore to maintain their co-ethnic contacts through voice calls and SMS because they have no time to meet in everyday life.

Thai workers can come together and make a village out of their virtual social networks, which, during weekdays, are minimal but maintained through face-to-face contact and via popular mobile phones. A large number of Thai workers possess mobile phones and wireless technology has made it possible for them to keep alive their placeless social network and community through instant live chat and SMS messages.

Although *Nayu* workers purchase a cell phone to contact their family at home while working in Malaysia, they use it for many other reasons, to alleviate loneliness and for information and support.

Syed: The cell phone is important for me to live here as if I don't have a phone then I can't contact anyone. In the past, everyone didn't have cell phones. I could live happily but when they got them, I needed to have one too. Life without the mobile phone would be a

terrible life; it would be too lonely then. I work here all the time and don't go out. [Single, *Kathoey*]

Fatima: After working here for 4 months, I could buy my own cell phone. I didn't own one before coming here because it wasn't necessary. . . . A cell is really important for me here. When I first came here, I didn't go anywhere because I didn't know the places, and there was no one to give me a ride. Having a cell phone, I could call my friends and ask them how to get around. When I first used RLT [railway service], I didn't know how to buy a ticket so I called my friends and asked for their help. Now I know every place around here. [Married, Female]

A cell phone is a visible social status symbol. Although the price of cell phones has decreased, it does not mean that migrant workers necessarily buy cheap phones. They prefer purchasing expensive popular brand names, such as the Nokia N series, Sony, Motorola and the expensive cell phones with multimedia entertainment functions including camera, music, games, and a 3D function. These additional functions not only serve the purpose of communication and entertainment but are a signal of social status as well. These cell phones are quite expensive and can cost more than the migrant workers' monthly income.

Nurani: Last month I got 400 RM for my salary, but it was not enough to buy one. The phone was 500 RM, so I was not able to buy a phone. The new cell phone comes with camera, a memory, a memory card and other music features. [Single, Female]

Migrant workers love to use a luxury cell phone to flaunt their social status with their friends. Some migrant workers buy new cell phones when their old one becomes outdated. They show their phones to their friends when they meet and socialise, displaying them on the table or holding them in their hands while meeting friends who have just ordinary cell phones without many multimedia functions. For them, the cell phones are a high value commodity like gold, which gives them confidence.

Aisyah: I bought a new cell phone which was my first cell phone in my life when I started working in Malaysia. The first one was a normal Motorola. Then I changed it for a new Nokia because it was far more appealing, can take pictures, and allows me to listen to music. In my free time, I like to play the options on the phone . . . If no one calls me, I will use it to listen to music and to play games. In the past, I could live without it, but today I am addicted to it. I know its usage wastes money, but I still use it . . . People here [migrant workers] like to show off their new cell phones and they are kind of competitive in having cell phones. [Single, Female]

Some *Nayu* workers purchase a second-hand cell phone as it is cheaper than a new one. They tend to purchase a phone with many functions at a lower price and often exchange their old cell phones for the new ones when theirs are out of date, often at least twice in a year. When they possess an expensive cell phone, they are seen by friends as having higher social status and wealth. They like to show off to their friends.

Razak: I just bought a second-hand cell phone last night for about 600 RM. I was interested in this cell phone's version for a few months but I didn't have enough money to buy it. It cost about 1000 RM. But now I could buy it as it wasn't too expensive.... I just bought this old one 3 months ago. I got bored with it and I might buy a new one. If I want something and I can buy it, I feel happy. It encourages me to work. [Single, Male]

Similarly, in Wallis Cara's study (2008) on cell phone use and young internal migrant women in Beijing, she found that some migrant women bought expensive phones with camera and mp3 functions which are important among them in the presentation of their identities, as a part of their everyday life, and as status symbols. In addition, a phone is clearly associated with sophisticated femininity, with being modern and with being urban among rural migrant women (Cara 2008, pp158-161). According to Law and Peng (2007, p130), not losing face, a deeply rooted cultural element, is very important too:

When some workers have cell phones, other workers in the same assembly line who get the same monthly wage will feel the pressure to also buy a cell phone; otherwise they will lose face. A worker remarked that it was not until he had saved enough money to have one that he felt the pressure to buy one immediately.

Finally, some *Nayu* have their own cell phone in case of emergencies while in Malaysia.

Masidi: I went out after living here for 2 months. A policeman came and checked my passport. Unfortunately, I couldn't communicate with him at all. I didn't know what to do, and I didn't have a cell phone. I asked him if I could use a public phone to call the shop owner. But there was no public phone around there. After that, the Chief of Police came and looked at my visa. He told me that the visa was not expired and it was new. Then, they let me go. If I was caught at that time, my boss probably wouldn't know. So, I think that cell phone is important. [Single, Male]

Other studies have also found that the cell phone has an emergency function, as many consumers employ it to call a help line in the case of emergency and for help in special non-routine situations in their daily life (Chapman and Schofield 1998; Geser 2004).

Cell phones play an important role in maintaining networks that are geographically mobile. *Nayu* workers are likely to move to other restaurants. They are mobile workers, who usually do not stay in the same place for very long. When they leave their former colleagues in Malaysia, they would lose contact with them without a cell phone as there are no fixed-line telephones at their restaurants or at their accommodation. Having a cell phone is like having a friend on hand. Migrant workers are able to connect with their friends everywhere and at any time when they feel lonely, bored or in need of support and information. The cell phone, thus,

enables immediate and easy connection to people in their networks who are physically far way from them.

9.2 Where Migrant Workers Buy a Cell Phone

New migrants do not obtain their own cell phone before they reach Malaysia. They do not need to have their own phone while they are in Thailand, for two common reasons. One is that there is no need to have their own cell phone because they work and/or live with their families who have a phone which they can use. The other reason is that unemployed people cannot afford a phone which costs more than a month's wages for a dishwasher. New migrants often borrow their colleague's cell phone to contact their families. Almost all would like to have their own cell phone, but to buy one they must save some of their wages.

Ibrahim: I haven't got my own cell phone. At present, I borrow my friends' cell phones to contact my parents, but I refill the credits by myself. I call back home twice a week. At the end of this month [January 2009], I will go back home [to Thailand] to buy a cell phone because it is easier to use and read. [Single, Male]

Halimah: I bought my cell phone here [in Malaysia] because I didn't have time to go back home [to Thailand]. There's no cell phone at home. At that time, I didn't have my own money to buy things. Nobody uses a cell phone at home. When I come to work here, I have my own salary and I bought the cell in order to call back home. [Single, Female]

The cell phone is the first consumer commodity that migrant workers purchase after they begin to earn their own income from working in Malaysia. There are two usual places where they purchase a phone, one in Thailand, and one in Malaysia. Migrant workers buy a cell phone in Thailand because these phones have a Thai font and they are illiterate in English and Malay. The use of a cell phone is an innovation in their

lives so it is difficult for them at first and it is easier to use a phone in their own language. *Nayu* workers, who are not able to understand Malay and English, are likely to purchase a cell phone at a border town in Thailand when they go there for the stamping of their passports.

Fairus: I bought a new cell phone when I came back to Thailand for the stamping of my passport. I bought one in Thailand as the cell phone supports Thai language which is easy to use. I couldn't skilfully use a cell phone with Malay language. [Married, Male]

Zura: When I got enough money to buy a cell phone, I went back to Thailand. I bought it in Thailand because I use a Thai font more easily on the phone. My Malay in both writing and speaking are not fluent, but I can read and understand it. [Single, Female]

Those migrant workers able to understand Malay or English purchase a phone in Malaysia, as Malay or English font is not a problem. They mainly purchase a cell phone in Malaysia because they are working in Malaysia and they do not wish to return to Thailand. Many *Nayu* workers let their passports expire, they need a cell phone while working there so they purchase one in Malaysia.

Halimah: I bought my cell phone here [in Malaysia] because I didn't have time to go back home . . . The language in the cell phone is Malay so I can read it. I used to learn Malay, but I'm not fluent in the language. When I send messages, I type them in Malay. Typing in Malay is easier than typing in Thai because there're only 24 letters. On the other hand, there're 44 letters and lot of vowels. Therefore, it's easier to type in Malay. However, I always type in short Malay dialect, and others can understand the meanings. But they can't understand if I type in short Thai. [Married, Female]

Some of the informants explained that a cell phone in Malaysia costs less than in Thailand. Kuala Lumpur has various types of cell phones and many cell phone shops. A cell phone may be too expensive at a border town in Thailand.

Aisyah: I bought my first cell phone in Malaysia when I started to work here I didn't have any money to spend while I was in Thailand . . . I bought one here [in Malaysia] because it was cheaper than in Thailand and I didn't have time to look for it in Thailand. The important thing is that I can resell it when I want a new one. [Single, Female]

9.3 What Cell Phone Provider Migrants Use

After they purchase a cell phone, *Nayu* workers chose an appropriate service from the wide variety offered by network providers. All of them use the prepaid service system from the same network providers as those of their migrant network in Malaysia, as the rate is cheaper when they call other cell phones on the same phone network. New migrant workers follow the older members of their networks, using the same providers to save money.

There are many prepaid network providers in Malaysia. The selection of a provider is strongly influenced by migrant networks. Almost all purchase the provider advised by their friends, relatives and colleagues. The migrant workers use the same network provider because it is cheaper to make calls to other people on it. The prepaid service rate on a different network is quite expensive. Having obtained a cell phone and a prepaid network provider, *Nayu* migrant workers are now strongly linked to their networks in both Thailand and Malaysia. However, they tend to connect only with those who use the same prepaid phone network.

Saeed: I have used the *Maxis* cell phone network since I first started working because my friends have used the network too. They suggested to me to subscribe to the network. Finally, they got a subscription with the network for me. [Single, Male]

Aisyah: I have used the SIM card of the *Maxis* cell phone network provider since I first started using the phone because several friends

have used the network to call each other and save their money on the internal network. At that time, my friend in the restaurant took me to buy the phone and subscribed to the network for me at a mobile phone shop. I have never changed this network. [Single, Female]

Some informants have one cell phone but two different providers. They have two providers for the one cell phone because they use one provider for domestic calls to their friends in Malaysia and another for international calls to their family in Thailand.

Ilyana: I would always call my family myself as it would be much more expensive for them to call me. When I call my family in Thailand, I use *DiGi* for it is cheaper. However, calling my own friends in Malaysia, I use *Maxi*. In my cell phone, there are two phone numbers. [Single, Female]

Azman: I used *Maxi* when I first came here as my friend suggested to me to use it but I call my wife frequently after she returned to stay in Thailand. I switch to using *DiGi* only when I call her as it is cheaper. However, I regularly used *Maxi* to call my friends in Malaysia as it is expensive if I use the other network. [Married, Male]

As *Nayu* workers are foreigners in Malaysia and many are irregular, having their own cell phone provider is not easy because they have to provide some proof of their identity. They need a passport and an address in Malaysia. This can be a big deal for newcomers so they follow the advice of experienced migrant workers to obtain a provider. Some new migrants' passports have expired and most migrant workers have no address because they live in a tiny divided room or in a small space in the kitchen in the restaurants in which they work. However, some migrant workers live in small rental accommodation which their owner provides for them as permanent accommodation. So newcomers who would like to have their own prepaid provider, need to take an experienced worker with their own address along with them for help and consultation.

All informants use prepaid providers because it is cheaper. They top up a prepaid card online as there are many prepaid cell phone service shops near their restaurants. They do not spend much topping up their prepaid cell phone once they are connected to their networks: around 5 to 10 RM at a time, making a total cost of 50 to 150 RM per month. However, this cost is quite high in proportion to their income and is their principal living cost per month. Everyone knows that they spend a great deal of their income on prepaid cell phones, but they would never think of giving it up.

9.4 Who Migrant Workers Call

Nayu workers live in two worlds simultaneously. They stay in contact with their kin and friends in both Malaysia and Thailand to maintain their social relationships and to stay connected to their networks. As other studies on transnationalism have shown migrants manage linkages with two countries at the same time (Rudnick 2009; Suksomboon 2009). With transnational calls, migrant workers connect with their parents, their spouses and their children. *Nayu* workers live a long way from their families, so they regularly make contact by phone. Voice calls and text messages maintain social cohesion among families fractured by distance. Although young migrant workers and single migrant workers are separated from their parents and family members, the cell phone makes intimacy possible. Migrants living and working overseas use the cell phone to express love of the family (Rhacel 2005; Wilding 2006; Nagasaka 2007; Uy-Tioco 2007; Fresnoza-Flot 2009).

Young female migrant workers make more international calls than their male counterparts. They use voice calls to their homes in Thailand more than text

messages because the price is no different between sending a text message and making a voice call. They make more voice calls to their family than their family makes to them. Their family often make “a missed call¹¹” which signals that their family would love to talk with them in Malaysia and then they call their families back in Thailand. Their families make a missed call because the price of voice calls from Thailand to Malaysia is more expensive than for voice calls from Malaysia to Thailand.

Azura: Yesterday, my son gave me a missed call and then I called him back. He called me last time and he told me that he spent a lot of money for calls so I told him that if he wants to talk with me, let's make a missed call and I would call him back later. Making a call from here to Thailand is cheaper. [Widowed, Female]

Mazlin: I have my phone to contact my parents when I need to talk and I miss them. I always use my phone. I call my mother at home, I miss my mother. But they don't miss me. They don't call me. I always miss them as I live far away from my family. I just have my phone for calls to them. When I miss them or am bored, then I call back home. I mostly spend my money on calls back home. [Single, Female]

Syed: I use my cell phone to keep in contact with my family as I live here not at home. Sometimes I call my family because I live far away from my home. When I cannot go back to visit my family, I call my mother to ask her about many matters. [Single, *Kathoey*]

According to Fresnoza-Flot (2009), Uy-Tioco (2007) and Hernandez-Albujar (2004), migrant mothers maintain relationships with their children even when they are far away from home through voice calls. Migrant mothers continue to play a motherhood role for their children while absent, by international voice calls or by sending messages. As Uy-Tioco has argued concerning Filipino migrants:

¹¹ A 'missed call' means that a cell phone connects for voice calls to another phone and then the connection is cancelled by the caller.

Many Filipino migrant mothers use cell phone technology to maintain relationships with their children: the technology impacts relationships and raises troubling implications. Cell phone technology has empowered these women, creating new ways to 'mother' their children across time and space. While allowing for deep-seated ideological beliefs of traditional mothering to continue, these mothers are also simultaneously reinventing transnational motherhood (Uy-Tioco 2007, p253).

There are a few migrant workers who are parents and have left their children behind while both work in Malaysia. They generally leave their young children under their grandmother's care. Their children grow up with their mother's mother and with other extended family members due to their parents' long period of work abroad. Migrant parents, in particular mothers, take care of their children by cell phone usually belonging to members of the family because their young children do not have their own cell phone. Some parents have mature children who have their own cell phone in Thailand and they connect directly to them. They often call their children in Thailand for they are concerned that something might happen to them. They miss their children and want to keep up with their whereabouts and well-being. Migrant workers try to be good parents and take care of their children by phone during their physical absence from their home.

Fatimah: I always use my phone, I call my child at home. I miss my baby. Today I got a call from my daughter that she misses me and wants me to call back home. Then I called her back to ask her about school . . . I spend much money on the phone. I topped up my phone account more than 100 RM. last month. Mostly, I call my daughter.
[Married, Female]

During my observation in Fatimah's restaurant, I often saw her using a cell phone to talk in the evening around 5.00-6.00. I saw her receiving a call and going outside from the kitchen to talk. She was very happy while she was talking. When she was free, I asked her whom she had called. She told me that she spoke with her daughter

who lives with her mother's family in Thailand. She calls her every fortnight but sometimes her daughter calls her, as her daughter knows how to use a cell phone even though she is only nine years old.

Some male *Nayu* workers are married and are separated from their wives and children because they had married either non-migrant women or former migrant women who had returned to Thailand before they had children. These migrant men use their cell phone to connect with their wives while they are away. They try to take care of their wives and children and to be a good father and husband by using the phone. This helps them feel better while they are separated from their family but they spend a lot of their wages on voice calls.

Faizal: I always call my wife in Pattani. I miss her and my baby. Although it is expensive for calls, I often call them as I miss them. I have not seen them for a long time as I work here for them and I send my wages to them each month by using a Bangkok bank here. I live far away from them to make money for them. I call her to ask her about her life and my baby. [Married, Male]

Zaidi: I call my wife and child at home every day. A cell phone enables me to call my wife and child every day. When my wife is at home I call her every day. In the past, I miss her only, but today I miss the newborn baby more than her. I want to know about her and my baby's life at home and how they are [He shows me photos of his daughters on his cell phone]. [Married, Male]

In the past, even *Nayu* workers who had worked for a long time in Malaysia did not have a cell phone as the price was too expensive for them. They had limited opportunity to connect with and maintain their networks. In some cases, restaurant owners had a cell phone which they could use but only for a few minutes. Life without a cell phone in the past meant that maintaining social relationships both inside and outside Malaysia was very difficult.

Sakinah: In the past, I could live here without a mobile phone, but today, I cannot live without it. And I do not want to imagine how to live without it. In the past, when I wanted to contact my friends I had to visit at their restaurants. I was going to their restaurants for a while. Nowadays, I have a cell phone. I can contact my friends any time and any where here. [Single, Female]

They used the public phone booths on the street outside their workplaces before and after working hours. The use of public phone booths was not easy and convenient for them. Having their own cell phone allows them to connect more easily with their family any where and any time. In the past, migrant workers made a transnational call to the village's public phone booth in Thailand. Some migrant workers called a neighbour's phone in the village to make a time to call their family. Then the call receiver would go to tell their family at home. The family would come to wait and then the workers would call back again. Without cell phones, remaining in touch was difficult and contact with the family was infrequent.

Fatimah: When I had no cell phone, it was very hard for me to call back home. I had to use the public phone booth. There was no phone at my home too. When I called back home, I had to call my neighbour's home to leave a message in case there were any important issues. But if I wanted to talk with my family, they would come to wait to talk to me when I called on the time I told them. [Married, Female]

Azmi: In the previous ten years working here, I could not afford a mobile phone. Any time I wanted to call my family, I had to use the public phone. However, there was no telephone at my family's house too, so I had to call my family through the public phone that was nearest to my family's house. When it rang, anyone who was near the phone would answer the call, then. I told that person who I wanted to talk to so that the person could help me find the person that I wanted to talk to. While waiting, I would hang up for a while and then make a call again. For this reason, at that time I hardly called my family. However, today is different. Everyone has a mobile phone because if you do not have it, no one can contact you. [Married, Male]

In contrast, Anja Rudnick (2009, p192) in her study of Bangladeshi migrant women in the Malaysian export industry found that they used letters to keep in contact with their family. She points out that:

Their interactions with the home country were sporadic and mainly took place via letters. Some women who could not write would ask for help from friends. Others sent messages recorded on cassette tapes. Phone calls to relatives in Bangladesh were made only in case of emergency or great emotional urgency.

Today, as well as using their phones to stay in touch with their families at home, the migrants use them to connect with *Nayu* worker friends, both old friends from the same villages, and new friends whom they have met after migrating. The longer new migrants work the more their networks grow in Malaysia, and the cellphone stores the details of their developing network and allows them instant access to it.

Fairuz: I work here and don't go out, so I always call my friends when I am bored or feeling lonely but I don't like to send SMS as I am not good at typing. If my friends send me SMS, I wouldn't reply but call them instead. It is easier than writing the messages as I can talk and hear their voice too. . . . My cell phone is to keep contact with my family as I live here not at home so I need to contact my family sometimes. When I feel bored or lonely, I usually call my friends here. Mostly I use my mobile phone to call my friends especially when I have not seen them for a while or when I miss them. Anyway, I don't talk much as it is expensive. It is not as cheap as it is in Thailand. [Single, Male]

Aisyah: I use my mobile phone to contact my friends here, and my parents in Thailand. A mobile phone makes connection easier. I always call my friends—some work at my former work place, some live around my work place, and some met me on the way when I travelled to immigration to stamp my passport. We usually talk about our daily life. I usually call my friends when I cannot go out to see them, or if I do not know where they live. [Single, Female]

As well as staying in touch with old and new friends, *Nayu* workers like to contact members of the opposite sex. Young unmarried *Nayu* workers enjoy chit-chat with boyfriends and girlfriends on the phone after their restaurants are closed from 3.00 a.m. until the morning prayer at 5.00 a.m. Young *Nayu* workers like to connect with their boyfriends or girlfriends for romance. Young men make more domestic calls for romantic love than young women. Male migrants spend a lot of their wages to pay for flirtations on the phone. They refill their prepaid card or use online prepaid services from cell phone and grocery shops which are located around city and near their workplaces. Because they work a seven-day week, they have limited freedom of mobility and because they are irregular workers, most of the time they have to be confined to their workplaces and residences. The cell phone can fulfil their desire to connect with and to maintain a face-to-face relationship with their girlfriends.

Nurani: I and my boyfriend also talk on the phone. My friend gave him my number. Then, he called me when I was at the shop. We talk on the phone every day. I have met him here. He came to visit his friend here and to eat at the shop. [Single, Female]

Malavi: Boys usually call many girls all the time, but I do not do that because I do not want to waste my money. In other words, I do not have much money to act like that. However, my friends—Amir and Rasak—always flirt with many girls on the phone and waste lots of money every month. [Single, Male]

Halimad: When I used my mobile phone, I let my boyfriend refill the money in my phone. Then I used that money to call other boys. And when I broke up with my boyfriend, I did not pay anything and also I was not sad because I still had other boys waiting for me. [Married, Female]

Similarly, Katz (2001) also found that the cell phone plays an important role in the conduct of relationships between the genders and enhances people's search for partners. The use of cell phone by both men and women to find romantic love is

increasing and this deepens existing or creates new relationships and expands networks (Nagasaka 2007).

9.5 The Roles of the Cell Phone in Migrant Networks

9.5.1 The Cell Phone and the (Re) Production of Migrant Networks

Cell phone network systems link not only two cell phones for individual communication but also entire social networks. Indeed, migrant networks can be considered to be the cell phone networks which arise from individual communication. Cell phones, which provide both individual and group contact among network members, form migrant networks. Almost every one in a migrant network has nearly all the cell phone number of its members. The cell phone is a medium that helps support communication and exchange of information among network members. Although some new migrants do not have their own cell phones, this does not mean that they can not make a call to other network members for they are able to use the cell phones of another person.

Similarly, in the case of Vietnamese female migrant workers in Taiwan, Wong (2007) found that the use of cell phones is one of the strategies they use to connect with and develop their social networks among their friends and expand their sense of community in Taiwan. In Loveband's (2009, p45) study of Indonesian domestic workers in Taiwan, she reported that they have many names in their cell phones some of people whom they had never met. The use of cell phones among Indonesian workers in Taiwan was quite common and provided a sense of community and a source of information between both friends and strangers of Indonesian origin:

Indonesian foreign domestic workers use mobile phones to create community and share information. This occurred before, during and after the SARS crisis, and continues to represent a way in which to obtain support with is difficult to otherwise access, especially from consular representation.

The cell phones are useful not only for maintaining strong ties with migrants' families in Thailand but also for forging links with new ties later developed in Malaysia. Newcomers form relationships at work and by living together in the same place so their social relations develop and become strong.

Most *Nayu* workers do not work only for one restaurant; they are likely to move from one restaurant to another. Without a cell phone, migrant workers would lose contact with their network members. However, since almost all migrant workers have their own cell phones, they are able to maintain the social relationships among their ever-growing networks even while moving around within Malaysia. No matter where they live, they all can be linked on their cell phone networks.

Razak: However, as for sending text messages, I like sending them to many people. . . Sending text messages is free, so I can do that often. It is different from making phone calls for which I need to spend money. [Single, Male]

Rahman: I will send messages by typing *Jawi* [Malay dialect] to other people when they send messages back to me. They send me messages every day to ask about my daily life. Let me show you [He showed his SMS messages in his cell phone "Had dinner yet" and he replied "Not yet, I'm going to...".] I receive messages from friends and they call me too, not too often. They send many messages to me because we haven't met for ages. Everyone has to work every day and I have not seen some people for a month. For this reason, I send messages to them. [Single, Male]

Migrant workers in Malaysia hardly ever turn off their cell phones. They keep their prepaid cell phones on seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, to maintain

contact with their migrant networks and their families. After business hours, from 3.00 to 5.00 in the morning, is the peak time for calling and sending SMS messages.

The main limitation to using a cell phone is the high service price. However, *Nayu* have developed strategies to reduce the cost. Calling people on the same networks is cheaper, Phone companies have promotions for some periods of time and on SMS messaging, too. The sending of SMS messages is a less expensive method of maintaining migrant networks, especially if they are able to use free SMS promotions from their prepaid cell phone services. Their network contacts teach them how to do this after they have topped up their prepaid cell phones on the system. While working, they are still able to get SMS messages and to answer back without their employers noticing. They do not often make and receive voice calls when they are busy working.

However, despite simple use and easy access, the sending and reading of SMS messages can be too complicated and difficult for those migrant workers with limited literacy in both Thai and Malay languages. The sending and reading of SMS messages is not possible if they cannot read and write in Thai or Malay. Consequently, these migrant workers can only use their cell phones for making voice calls.

Migrant workers, who purchase a cell phone in Malaysia, are likely to send SMS messages in Malay dialect. However, unlike the older generation, most young *Nayu* workers have been educated in *Pondok* which provide traditional Islamic education and basic Malay standard language, so most young *Nayu* workers who have studied

in *Pondok* are able to send and read SMS messages in Malay dialect via their cell phones. However, *Nayu* workers who purchase a cell phone in Thailand, always send SMS messages using Thai font.

Anuar: My friends send me messages every day, but they hardly call me. They send me messages because we do not have a chance to see one another, maybe for a year, and everybody has to work every day too. Another reason is that my friends have promotions that allow them to send messages free. [Single, Male]

Nurani: Tom Yam's friends finish work at 3 a.m. Then, they take a shower and wait for prayer at 5 a.m. After that, we always chat before going to bed. [Single, Female]

Nur Saidah: I seldom go out because I'm not fluent at speaking Malay. Also, I don't have the work permit. Being so tired after working every day, I don't go out and spend my free time in bed. So, I call my *Thai-Melayu* [*Nayu*] friends. It's boring always being at the shop and seeing the same faces in the shop. [Single, Female]

9.5.2 The Use of a Cell Phone for Getting a Job

Most *Nayu* workers do not work for only one restaurant while abroad. They transfer to other restaurants which offer them a better position. *Nayu* workers obtain almost all their jobs from their migrant networks through the cell phone. When migrant workers wish to transfer from their restaurants, they request their migrant networks to supply employment contacts and information by sending SMS messages and making voice calls. As small enterprises do not usually resort to formal recruitment systems, word of mouth is the most efficient and cheapest way to spread recruitment news.

Raymond Ngan and Stephen Ma (2008) in their study of internal migrant workers in China's Pearl River Delta found that there is relationship between the increasing use

of the cell phone and job mobility among migrant workers. The young generation of migrant workers has more convenient access to information on jobs with better wages, working conditions and living environment. This job information from their kin and friends provides them with a better chance to change workplaces and to improve their lives.

Not only do *Nayu* in Malaysia use their phones to find new jobs, but they contact their relatives in Thailand via cell phone, when there is a job available. If no relatives wish to work there, they offer that position to other members of their network. As a result, the cell phone makes recruitment easier. Without cell phones, it would be much harder to get a job in a restaurant, and more difficult to fill a vacant position.

In the past, recruitment was done in Thailand when *Nayu* workers and restaurant owners returned to their homes. They sought new employees face-to-face. Moreover, migrant workers did not transfer to new restaurants as often as they do nowadays. If they would like to transfer to a new restaurant, they had to wait until they returned home during the period of *Hari Raya Puasa* or *Hari Raya Hajii* when they had a chance to meet prospective employers and to get a new job. *Nayu* workers had such a chance only twice a year in the past, but at present, they can transfer to new restaurants as frequently as they wish because cell phones enable instant contact with the labour market in Malaysia. Consequently, they do not need to wait for *Hari Raya* for recruitment.

Fatimah: In the past, they [*Nayu* workers] used to find out about a job in Thailand but nowadays the cell phone is popular so they can find out about a job and change if they like. There are many people who come to Malaysia without a job. The bartender at this shop, his friends always come to see him, and I would let them stay and have food and then his friends would call other people if there are

any jobs. In the past, they wouldn't come to Malaysia if they didn't have a job. [Married, Female]

Anuar: When some of my friends are jobless or finding a job, I call a lot of other friends and ask for a job for my friends. Sometimes I send text messages as it is free and I can send it to many people also. I received nearly 100 SMS messages today, as I sent SMS messages to my friends and then they replied. My brother is jobless now and my friends sent me SMS messages to tell me about jobs. [Single, Male]

9.5.3 Remittance, Networks and Cell Phones

As there is no widespread official remittance system between Malaysia and Thailand, and *Nayu* workers do not go home often, almost all *Nayu* workers remit money to their families through their migrant networks. They consign their cash or some goods to their friends who are returning home. They contact their friends who come from the same village whom they trust. Their returning friends go to meet the migrant's parents at their home to hand over the cash or goods. After that, the migrant workers who remitted the money or goods call their parents to check that they have arrived. The cell phone provides the migrant workers with a form of security. They can find out, quite easily, if the money or goods have arrived safely.

Ahmad: Even when I couldn't go back home I always remit to my family. I call my friend when he goes back home, and then I go to visit my friend and give money to my friend for my family. After that I call my parents to check that it is fine. [Married, Male]

9.5.4 Personal Safety and Cell Phones

Migrant workers use their networks to receive on-the-spot and up-to-date information. For instance, when the Malaysian People's Voluntary Corps (RELA) comes to catch *Nayu* workers around their restaurants other *Nayu* workers, who see them, or know such information, ring or send SMS messages to warn their friends

and other *Nayu* workers in and around their restaurants. Moreover, they also forward this news through the cell phones to other members of their networks in their neighbourhood, so that they can escape RELA. When RELA arrive to find and detain irregular foreign workers, they can catch only a few as the workers have warned each other through their phones and have run away or hid.

Not only can migrant workers receive up-to-date information in Malaysia, they also obtain information from Thailand through phone networks across the border. Migrant networks can update news and information, such as news about crime and violence, in far Southern provinces of Thailand, or about political conflicts in Thailand. News about the border and border crossing are also passed on by phone.

Fairuz: To be safe and secure, I went to Thailand every year during *Hari-Puasa* [*Hari Raya Puasa*]. I would stay in Thailand for around one week before coming back to Malaysia. Before going, I would call someone I knew at the checkpoint. One was a motorcyclist working for money at that place. I would call him and ask him if it was a secure situation at that time. If the answer was that it was secure and not bothered by police, I would go home. I needed to travel at day time. I went back by bus like other people. I got off the bus at Su-ngai and travelled by boat across this border [an irregular crossing]. I travelled like this many times. [Single, Male]

Similarly, other studies of migrant workers have shown that a cell phone is very important among migrant workers because they can share and exchange news and information useful to their daily life including urgent and unusual incidents while working in distant places away from home (Law and Peng 2007; Nagasaka 2007).

9.5.5 Social Support in Times of Emotional Crisis

When migrant workers have problems with their employers or colleagues, they often call their friends who are not in their restaurants. They tell their friends their stories, consult them about their problems, and receive advice based on their friends' experiences. They feel better after getting counselling from their migrant networks via cell phone conversations. Furthermore, when they get bored with their lives, communication via cell phones can cheer them up as they have few chances to meet their friends face-to-face in Malaysia. They need social support through cell phones because there are a few places for *Nayu* workers to party and enjoy their time together, unlike other foreign workers who have somewhere to go in Malaysia when they have days-off. Instead, migrant workers have virtual space on the cell phone networks where they can socialize with their networks.

Masidi: When I work in the restaurant, there are many problems that make me feel stressed. Whenever I feel stressed, I call my close friend who works at a different restaurant. In fact, I do not want to gossip with my friend who works at the same place, but I just want to speak about some thing on my mind so that I will feel better. Moreover, my friend is a good consultant. She always gives me some good advice. We understand each other well, maybe because we do the same job. [Single, Male]

9.5.6 Maintaining Contact with Thai Culture through Bluetooth

The cell phone is used not only to maintain networks in Thailand and Malaysia but also for entertainment such as listening to Thai popular music. When *Nayu* waiters are without customers, they use tiny mobile phones with ear buds to listen to Thai popular music. In the kitchen, there is the sound of Thai popular music turned on by *Nayu* workers. Listening to Thai popular music on a cell phone often plays a key role in their lifestyle for they are Thai nationals in Malaysia even though they are *Nayu* in

Thailand. Young *Nayu* workers in Malaysia enjoy Thai popular music because it provides a sense of Thai identity as presented in Thai urban Buddhist culture. However, only young people listen to Thai popular music. Older *Nayu* workers do not pay attention to Thai or to Malay music.

The major styles of Thai popular music are *Pleng Lukgrung* (country music), *Pleng Lukthung* (urban music), *Pleng String* (young urban music), and *Pleng Puea Chiwit* (song of life music). However, the *Nayu* migrant workers prefer *Pleng String* and *Pleng Puea Chiwit*. *Pleng String* is quite popular among young men and women. It deals with the lifestyles of and romantic love between young Thai Buddhist men and women. *Pleng Puea Chiwit* is quite popular among *Nayu* male workers. Some men like it because it concerns social problems and has political content in opposition to conservative tradition.

Similarly, a study of Thai *Isan* migrant workers in Singapore found that the three genres of Thai popular music, Thai folk music (*Lukthung*), *Isan/Lao* folk music (*Pleng Molam*) and song for life music (*Pleng Puea Chiwit*), are quite popular. These music genres represent their Thai *Isan* and Thai national identities (Kitiarsa 2006). However, these migrant workers differ from *Nayu* workers in Malaysia who are mostly young and Malay speaking.

Thai popular music is not produced only in the form of CDs but is also distributed in the form of electronic files available to download through cell phones. Although listening to Thai popular music is an individual entertainment, it is the most popular form of entertainment among the *Nayu* workers in Malaysia. Original music from

Thailand flows through transnational networks crossing the border and linking the migrant networks themselves.

There are two ways Thai popular music is accessed. Sometimes it is downloaded from computer service shops in Thailand and sometime it is sent by Bluetooth through migrant networks in Malaysia, from one friend's cell phone to another friend's. Thai popular music in the cell phone's music folder goes from one friend's cell phone to another friend's cell phone. Music files are exchanged and spread out among their networks in Malaysia. When *Nayu* visit their friends at their restaurant, they like to ask if they have any new Thai popular music which they can select and send through Bluetooth. They can send and receive music files without payment so although they are in Malaysia, they are able to listen to up-to-date Thai popular music through their networks and their cell phones.

Listening to Thai popular music helps *Nayu* workers feel closer to home while they are working in Malaysia. Although this music is in Thai language, they enjoy listening to it even though they are able to more easily access and listen to Malay popular music. There are few *Nayu* who listen to Malay popular music while they are in Malaysia. Listening to Thai popular music is a part of their cross-border activities which involve renewing their sense of Thai identity. Thai popular music links them and the Thai nation closer in their hearts while they are outside Thailand.

9.6 Conclusion

The increasing use of cell phones is a significant part of everyday life for migrant workers. This chapter examined the relationship between cell phone networks and

migrant networks among *Nayu* workers and found that the cell phone is used to create, maintain and reinforce networks among irregular migrant workers. The cell phone is also employed to download Thai music allowing workers to create a sense of Thai-ness while they live and work in another nation. Migrant workers are always connected to their networks by cell phone networks whether they are absent from home, at work or crossing the border.

Nayu workers decide to own cell phones to make contact with their networks in Thailand and Malaysia, to signal their independence, as a social status symbol, to continue parenting, and for personal safety in case of an emergency. Almost all *Nayu* workers do not obtain their own cell phone before they reach Malaysia. Many migrant workers buy a cell phone in Thailand because these phones have a Thai font and they are generally illiterate in English and Malay. For those purchasing a phone in Malaysia, a Malay or English font is not a problem. All of them use the prepaid service system from the same network providers as those of their migrant network in Malaysia because the prepaid service rate from the same provider is quite cheap.

Nayu workers connect with their parents, their spouses and their children. The longer new migrants work the more their networks grow in Malaysia. They use their cell phone to contact *Nayu* worker friends in Malaysia. The cell phone is utilized to maintain or create new relationships, expanding their migrant network. Their phone networks can supply employment contacts and employment information. They also obtain up-to-date information from their migrant networks in Thailand and Malaysia via cell phone conversations and these conversations can cheer them up as they have few chances to meet their friends face-to-face in Malaysia. The cell phone is also

used for entertainment such as listening to Thai popular music which helps to maintain their Thai-ness.

This chapter has provided an analysis of network operations via the cell phone which is significant among *Nayu* migrant workers in Malaysia for it connects their networks in different locations with those absent from their lives. Migrant networks exist not only as simple face-to-face links, but as more complex structures embodied in a technology which transcends space and allows instant communication.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarises the major findings of the thesis and makes some recommendations for further research arising from the study of transnational migrant networks operating between Thailand and Malaysia, which comprise *Nayu* migrant workers from the far Southern provinces of Thailand who work in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia. The research concerns the way these networks of *Nayu* migrant workers shape the international migration process; the creation and the use of migrant networks; and the gender relations influencing migrant networks in both Thailand and Malaysia before, during, and after the migration process.

10.1 Conclusion

There are a number of studies of the international migration of Thai labour in Thailand and in destination countries. However, a review of them reveals some gaps. Most of these studies focus on male migrant workers from North and Northeastern Thailand and largely fail to examine some significant issues, including gender relations, irregular migration, young migrant workers, the social and cultural aspects of migration, migrants who work in the service sector, and migrants from Southern Thailand. The present study has provided a detailed investigation of irregular *Nayu* migrant workers from the far Southern provinces of Thailand who work in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia.

The objective of this thesis was to investigate the operation, functions and outcomes of migrant networks among *Nayu* migrant workers before, during, and after the migration process, with a particular focus on Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia,

which serve as the main source of employment for *Nayu* working in Malaysia. This research into the social and cultural aspects of international migrant workers has provided an understanding of the processes of international migration from Thailand to Malaysia and the conditions of migrant workers. Migrant networks impact on and are affected by the migration process including gender relations which are a principal factor shaping the social life of *Nayu* men and women.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation and secondary document research to provide a detailed understanding of migrant networks among *Nayu* workers. The respondents, sixty *Nayu* irregular migrant workers from Patani, Songkhla, Narathiwat and Yala working in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, were selected via the snowballing sampling technique. The study also drew on key informants including Malaysian and *Nayu* employers and immigration and labour officials.

Tom Yam restaurants serving popular *Halal* Thai cuisine are scattered across Malaysia, but do not exist in the far Southern provinces of Thailand. The first Tom Yam restaurant opened in Kuala Lumpur in the 1970s and such restaurants quickly spread, opened by *Oghae Nayu*, Malay-speaking Muslims from Thailand. The owners of these businesses continue to employ *Nayu* irregular migrant workers who speak the same language as they and *Nayu* migrant workers are involved in Tom Yam restaurants much more than in any other businesses. Having the same ethnicity and culture are not the only reasons why Tom Yam restaurant owners employ them. They also do so because of the cheap cost of their labour.

Many *Oghae Nayu*, in particular young men, migrate to Malaysia to work in Tom Yam restaurants and keep going to work in these restaurants because there are migrant networks supporting them to get a job and cross the border. They like to work in Tom Yam restaurants because both their Thai-ness and their Muslim identity uniquely equip them to serve *Halal* Thai cuisine to Malaysian Muslim customers. Only Thais can cook authentic Thai food in Malaysia, while at the same time their Malay Muslim identity qualifies them to prepare *Halal* food.

Nayu workers from villages in Thailand migrate to work in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia through migrant networks. The level of social contacts among these networks within Thailand and Malaysia and between the two countries is high, bringing non-migrant workers directly into the Malaysian labour market to work in Tom Yam restaurants without the services of any recruitment agencies or government services. These social contacts play a crucial role in finding jobs for non-migrants who, without them, are not able to obtain employment. These social ties, including *Nayu* entrepreneurs' relatives in Thailand, help strengthen the rich social relations and ties among *Nayu* co-ethnics, *Nayu* workers and *Nayu* immigrant entrepreneurs in Malaysia and bring thousands of new migrants into the Malaysian labour market.

In Tom Yam restaurants, there are five job positions in which migrant workers are employed, and a strict hierarchy exists from the chef at the top, down through the kitchen hand, bartender, waiter and to the dishwasher at the bottom. Working in Tom Yam restaurants usually requires employees to learn the job skills from the bottom

up to the top. As irregular *Nayu* migrants get lower wages than Malaysian workers, Tom Yam restaurant owners prefer to keep employing them.

International migration among *Nayu* migrant workers is not simply a matter of travelling from Thailand to Malaysia, but it is about the creation and shaping of migrant networks in the migration process itself. It is about the networks linking Thailand and Malaysia and within Malaysia through which migrant workers relate to other migrants, share their experience of crossing the border and make sense of it to their co-migrant workers from the same villages. The pattern of migration of *Oghae Nayu* interlinks with their way of life in the far Southern provinces of Thailand resulting in its constant reiteration in *Nayu* villages. The *Nayu* non-migrants are connected to experienced migrants and ex-migrants who are their relatives and friends, so the migrant networks are part of the *Nayu* way of life. Once migrant workers had established a close connection with the first generation of *Nayu* Tom Yam restaurant owners in Malaysia, they tend to recruit other fellow *Nayu* workers who are family members or close relatives and friends from their villages. The international labour migration flow thus expands across the Deep South of Thailand through the migrant networks, which have been an important feature of *Nayu* village life since the 1970s.

Migrant networks which link migrant workers from Thailand to Malaysia are based on social relationships in a variety of forms such as families, friends and co-villagers as well as on social ties with workmates in the workplaces and with *Nayu* workers while playing sport, watching TV, sharing popular music and socializing. These networks usually offer help to non-migrants in Thailand who wish to work in Tom

Yam restaurants and to those already employed in Malaysia who seek new workplaces. These migrant networks, which begin from the relations between experienced migrants and non-migrants in their villages, develop further into extensive migrant networks in Malaysia.

Nayu workers going to work in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia mostly have a contact who can guarantee a position in their workplace before they arrive there. So all *Nayu* workers already have a job before they leave Thailand through the support from those who already work in Malaysia. Most migrant workers travel across the border for the first time with an experienced migrant contact who guides them. Contact with non-migrants in Thailand is conducted via cell phone, the most convenient and popular method which migrant network members use for keeping connected with each other.

All new *Nayu* workers access information regarding employment and the migratory process from their personal social contacts, but as new migrants they risk receiving incomplete and unreliable information. Migrant networks influence not only the decision to migrate but also the capacity to move within Malaysia, to re-migrate, and to stay further in Malaysia. Migrant networks are involved with the migration process and the way of life of their members in multiple levels and ways, both in Thailand and Malaysia. *Nayu* migrants use their networks to establish their own space. The women socialise at home together, the men play sport together and employers participate in the Tom Yam Restaurant Association.

Migrant networks yield great benefits but they also have negative effects for migrants in many ways in the limiting of their opportunities for moving, restricting their employment opportunities, curbing their independence and reducing their opportunities for occupational mobility. Scholars need to be aware of both the positive and negative impact of migrant networks and social ties on irregular transnational migrants.

Gender relations importantly shape the social life of men and women in migrant networks. They are influenced by and also influence migrant networks as men and women workers behave and are treated in different ways. Women workers use close women-based ties for first journey to work in the Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia because patriarchal conditions in the household do not normally allow *Nayu* women away from their homes. Therefore, relying on close women-based ties is the only strategy available for women to loosen the control of their parents. Moreover, women workers also create and use female networks to move within Malaysia when they want to relocate to other workplaces for greater freedom and to escape from the control of their close kin who helped them to get a job in the first place. These female networks consist of trustworthy female peers who can help protect them from any risks in Malaysia. However, women workers less frequently move within Malaysia than their male counterparts.

Male migrant workers, in contrast, obtain help to obtain work from multiple social contacts, from both with men and women, from close and more distant ties. These multiple social contacts lead to greater chance of obtaining jobs in Tom Yam restaurants. Male workers also create and use their male migrant networks to relocate

within Malaysia and move more frequently to find a new workplace, regardless of the greater trust and intimacy established by women workers in their networks. *Kathoey* workers, in contrast with men and women migrant workers, create and use migrant networks involving only *Kathoey* and close women restaurant owners whom they contacted in their first migration. This severely limits their opportunities to work in Malaysia in comparison with both men and women migrants. They do not change their workplaces as frequently because of discrimination against and oppression of transsexual workers in Malaysia.

Gender relations also influence the patterns of spatial use and recreation among migrant networks. The networks are gendered and exhibit different patterns in order to meet different needs and desires. Male workers create a male space in the public sphere, while women workers create their own space and leisure time in the private sphere similar to when they lived in Thailand. The spatial patterns and leisure time of male and female migrants in turn effect their capacity to create useful networks. Men have more opportunities to develop new social contacts with others within Malaysia from their football networks in the public sphere, unlike women who inadvertently limit their opportunities to search for new social contacts by watching soap operas in their residences.

Kathoey workers spend their leisure time with women and with other *Kathoey* after work. However, *Kathoey*'s space is larger than women's as they are not limited only to the private sphere like women; like men they socialize more in public social activities with their *Kathoey* peers. The spatial patterns of leisure time after work

differ between men, women and *Kathoey*s and mean different opportunities to extend their respective migrant networks.

A large number of Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia provide jobs for *Nayu* in Thailand. These *Nayu* employers use their contacts and ties with their families in Thailand to recruit *Nayu* non-migrants from Thailand to work in Malaysia, in particular as irregular workers. On the other hand, Malaysian Muslim employers do not have many social ties in Thailand, so they generally cannot directly recruit *Nayu* non-migrants for their restaurants. Instead, they mainly rely on the networks established by their employees to recruit labour for them. Both *Nayu* and Malaysian Muslim employers have great demand for *Nayu* workers as they are keen to work, cheap, vulnerable and under-educated and their Thai identity and Muslim affiliation serves well to in the production and sale of Halal Thai cuisine. Those *Nayu* ex-workers who establish their own successful businesses also continue to employ their co-ethnic workers as suitable and cheap labour. These *Nayu* ex-workers have easy access to the *Nayu* workforce because they have close social ties in Thailand.

The increasing use of cell phones makes up an important part of the migrant networks, both domestically with their peer networks and internationally with their parents, relatives, spouses and children in Thailand. Among *Nayu* workers, the cell phones are used to create, maintain, reinforce and materialise migrant networks while they are absent, distant and crossing the border. The cell phone is vital for the migration process and very valuable in the way of life of the network members for several reasons. Firstly, *Nayu* workers keep alive their social contacts and participation in their communities through instant live voice calls and SMS

messages. Their phones produce and reproduce migrant networks both at individual and group levels because *Nayu* migrants have few chances to meet their friends face-to-face in Malaysia. Secondly, cell phones are used for getting a job through their migrant networks. The phone provides easy access to information for getting a job in Malaysia and for recruiting new migrant workers from Thailand. Thirdly, via the cell phone, migrant workers also obtain updated information and news from their migrant networks in Thailand and Malaysia which is beneficial to emotional connection and involvement and provides social and psychological support. Finally, cell phones are also used for entertainment purposes such as listening to Thai popular music which relieves boredom and maintains Thai-ness.

10. 2 Contribution and Significance

This study has demonstrated the significant importance of migrant networks in the irregular international migration process for *Nayu* workers. It has examined how migrant networks are created and used among these workers in Thailand and Malaysia. Understanding this migration process is particularly significant because irregular migration is different to the migration process through formal legal channels which is much more frequently studied. *Nayu* workers are able to employ networks to cross the border through informal illegal channels to find employment without using a work permit. The existence of migrant networks both in Thailand and Malaysia is a powerful element in most of this irregular migration. It would be difficult for new migrant workers to access the migration process without the assistance of social ties both in Thailand and Malaysia which provide knowledge and protection for migrant workers. In the far South of Thailand, it is critical to receive accurate and realistic information concerning irregular working and living conditions

of employment from reliable people before making decisions to cross the Thai border to live and work.

While social economic structures are crucial factors influencing international migration, migrant networks are also involved in facilitating migration and more importantly in encouraging international migration. Migrant networks are absolutely key elements in linking migration between the far Southern of Thailand and Malaysia. Migrant networks make important contributions to the migration process, but migrant networks are not simple, but complex structures that link in many ways many sets of interpersonal ties often based on long-term relationships both in Thailand and Malaysia.

This study has found that migrant networks have both positive aspects and negative aspects in the migration process on the individuals using them. The literature on migration studies does not usually discuss the negative aspects of migrant networks, but they can be used for negative purposes even while they are being used positively. The study, along with the existing literature on migrant networks has established that networks are a valuable economic resource providing information, housing, jobs but many studies have been limited in their investigation of other essential social and cultural resources. This study has found that migrant networks themselves dissolve the differences between economic and non-economic resources. Migrant networks are complex and perform various functions which shape the migration experience both positively and negatively. Migrant networks exert influence on and are created out of a broad range of social, political and economic factors and are part of the *Nayu* way of life.

Most existing studies are not generally concerned with the role of the new communication technology in facilitating and maintaining migrant networks. In the modern era, the cell phone is used for connection and to maintain social contacts. It is a significant part of the migration process enabling migrant workers to connect to their migrant networks and maintain their social ties regardless of time, space, distance and frontiers. The new communication technologies have been integral to migrant networks in keeping social ties connected with those absent from face to face communication. The cell phone is a tool, like a channel through which networks are built up through the continuation of social relationships. Migrant workers are able to connect with their family and other social contacts anywhere and anytime through their phones.

Migrant networks approach used in this work explains why irregular migration flows tend to reproduce themselves through personal recruitment. By applying the migrant network approach, this study has illuminated the connection between micro-level interactions and the macro-level by providing greater insight into why and how people move only to some destinations and to some sectors; and how, as was the case with *Nayu* workers, they are able to turn their low status as impoverished and undereducated *Khaek* in Thailand into an essential component in a thriving Malaysian industry – the preparation of *Halal* Thai food. Tom Yam, while exotic to *Nayu* can be created only by them and it relies upon a continuous transnational flow of their labour.

However, the migrant network approach has its own limits. This approach frequently is blind to the agency of gender in the creation and use of migrant networks. As this study has clearly shown there are important differences between how and why men, women and transsexuals become involved in the migration process, produce and operate migrant networks, and engage in social life. By incorporating gender into migrant network analysis this study has identified and clarified the similarities and differences in the networks of men, women and transsexuals and has identified some of their differential positive and negative effects in terms of job opportunities, career advancement and geographical mobility among irregular *Nayu* migrant workers.

Whatever their gender, migrant networks are an efficient social technology facilitating international migration and, encouraging potential migrant workers, particularly irregular ones. These networks exist with the complicity of and beyond the effective control of governments in both original and destination countries. As this study has shown there is no need for *Nayu* to use regulated migration or the formal recruitment industry, Potential irregular migrant workers can migrate more easily and more cheaply, even relatively safely, can evade detection and can adjust to a new job in a new land, all by successfully using existing migrant networks based on and accessed through interpersonal social ties.

10. 3 Recommendations for Further Study

Significant growth in the Tom Yam restaurant business has occurred in Malaysia since the 1970s. The self-employment pattern of ethnic small business is successful in the Tom Yam business. This study found that many ex-workers, both irregular *Nayu* and *Nayu* Malaysians, now run their own restaurants in Malaysia. It also found

that *Nayu* employers continue to use *Nayu* workers as cheap labour. At this point, there is a need to investigate: how social networks play a role in helping *Nayu* immigrant's become successful entrepreneurs; how they set up their own businesses in Malaysia, especially irregular *Nayu* entrepreneurs who do not have Malaysian citizenship; how existing networks of *Nayu* entrepreneurs operate to encourage entrepreneurship; and how the process of network establishment operates among the members of *Nayu* Tom Yam business world. Further studies might examine the self-employment pattern of Tom Yam restaurant businesses and could investigate the social resources like funding associations, a protected market, and cheap labour sources within the migrant networks and family networks of *Nayu* entrepreneurs.

This study found that the networks of *Nayu* workers play significant roles in the economic outcomes of and social support for *Nayu* migrant workers. Having established links with *Nayu* employers in Malaysia, the migrants tend to recruit fellow *Nayu* migrants, their friends and relatives from their villages. Among the *Nayu*, experienced migrants constitute a very important source of information about the availability of jobs in Malaysia. Newly arrived migrants are also initially assisted by and settle with co-ethnic migrants. This pattern may be consistent with other foreign workers in Malaysia, for as well as *Nayu*, large numbers of irregular Indonesian, Filipino, Burmese, Nepalese, Vietnamese and Bangladeshi workers also play a significant role in the development of Malaysia's economy. Future research could take a network approach to studying other foreign workers in Malaysia to understand the social contexts shaping their migration and might compare and contrast the migrant network patterns operated by different groups of migrants.

This research found that *Nayu* migrants work for low wages with long hours in poor working and living conditions. There is a great need to examine the issues of wages, labour rights and health regarding irregular migration. Migration itself may influence the health of individuals migrating to Malaysia in complex and multiple ways due to sub-standard working conditions. There is already some literature on the health problems and the health care of migrant workers (e.g. Jatrana et al. 2005). The irregular status of migrant workers may make accessing health care services in Malaysia difficult. There is a need to investigate how health and health care can differ between irregular and documented migrants, how irregular migrants might better access health care services in Malaysia; and how working conditions effect the health of *Nayu* workers in Malaysia.

Many *Nayu* workers and *Nayu* businesses in Malaysia remit some of their wages and profits to their families in their villages. Migrant workers send back large remittances to their families in Thailand, as this practice is a part of the strategy for the survival of the rural household (Murphy 2009). Remittances positively impact on social and economic development by reducing poverty and unemployment and promoting well-being, security, education and healthcare for individuals, families, and communities. Further research could investigate how much money *Nayu* workers earn and spend; how much they remit to families in the villages and what the effects of this are on the households and communities in Thailand; and what the relationship is between the remittances of migrant workers and social development is including economic development at individual, family, and community levels.

Further work could also pay attention to the impacts of migration on people related to migrants such as children, spouses, extended family members and communities, with a particular focus on people who are left behind by the *Nayu* migrant workers. This study found that while most *Nayu* workers are unmarried, the mothers and fathers who do migrate generally leave their children in Thailand with their parents. There is a need to investigate how labour migration effects the people around *Nayu* workers at the individual, household and community levels in Thailand. Family members left behind have to adjust to the absence of *Nayu* migrants, so further studies could examine the impacts of migrant workers' absence on their families' structure and on their communities as a whole. In the end, the question must be asked and answered, are the personal, social and economic costs, the negative side, at least balanced by the positive aspects of migration for irregular *Nayu* workers and their communities.

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APPENDIX A LIST OF RESPONDENTS

Table 1 Lists of *Nayu* worker respondents

Case	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Province	Marital Status	Years of Work	Restaurant Owner
1	Abdul	Male	23	Pattani	Single	3	<i>Nayu</i>
2	Fatimah	Female	32	Pattani	Married	17	<i>Nayu</i>
3	Efendi	Male	32	Pattani	Married	18	<i>Nayu</i>
4	Nur Saidah	Female	18	Yala	Single	1	<i>Nayu</i>
5	Saiful	Male	19	Narathiwat	Single	3	Malaysian
6	Saeed	Male	27	Pattani	Single	7	Malaysian
7	Zubaidah	Female	19	Pattani	Single	4	<i>Nayu</i>
8	Azlan	Male	25	Pattani	Married	8	Malaysian
9	Hafiz	Male	24	Pattani	Single	3	Malaysian
10	Fairuz	Male	28	Pattani	Single	10	Malaysian
11	Zainudin	Male	16	Pattani	Single	3	Malaysian
12	Razak	Male	18	Pattani	Single	2	Malaysian
13	Musa	Male	18	Pattani	Single	5	Malaysian
14	Muhammad	Male	18	Yala	Single	2	Malaysian
15	Ilyana	Female	33	Pattani	Single	8	Malaysian
16	Sakinah	Female	32	Pattani	Single	5	Malaysian
17	Mazlin	Female	25	Pattani	Single	4	Malaysian
18	Dayang	<i>Kathoey</i>	23	Narathiwat	Single	7	Malaysian
19	Aina	Female	33	Yala	Widowed	10	Malaysian
20	Ahmad	Male	21	Pattani	Single	5	Malaysian
21	Razak	Male	21	Pattani	Single	5	<i>Nayu</i>
22	Abdullah	Male	21	Pattani	Single	5	<i>Nayu</i>
23	Amir	Male	18	Pattani	Single	1	<i>Nayu</i>
24	Anuar	Male	30	Narathiwat	Single	11	Malaysian
25	Azura	Female	42	Narathiwat	Widowed	1	<i>Nayu</i>
26	Mudirah	Female	18	Narathiwat	Single	2	<i>Nayu</i>
27	Pola	Female	20	Narathiwat	Single	1	<i>Nayu</i>
28	Malavi	Male	18	Yala	Single	1	<i>Nayu</i>
29	Ismail	Male	20	Yala	Single	3	<i>Nayu</i>
30	Syed	<i>Kathoey</i>	30	Narathiwat	Single	4	<i>Nayu</i>
31	Sharifah	<i>Kathoey</i>	28	Pattani	Single	5	<i>Nayu</i>
32	Fatima	Female	26	Narathiwat	Married	2	<i>Nayu</i>
33	Aisyah	Female	25	Songkhla	Single	4	<i>Nayu</i>
34	Masidi	Male	23	Songkhla	Single	2	<i>Nayu</i>
35	Nurah	Female	24	Songkhla	Single	4	<i>Nayu</i>
36	Farhana	Female	22	Songkhla	Single	4	<i>Nayu</i>
37	Mah	Male	22	Narathiwat	Married	4	<i>Nayu</i>
38	Fairus	Male	24	Songkhla	Married	5	<i>Nayu</i>
39	Yusof	<i>Kathoey</i>	35	Pattani	Single	8	<i>Nayu</i>
40	Halimad	Female	19	Pattani	Married	3	<i>Nayu</i>
41	Nurani	Female	20	Pattani	Single	3	<i>Nayu</i>

Case	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Province	Marital Status	Years of Work	Restaurant Owner
42	Suhaila	Female	17	Pattani	Single	1	<i>Nayu</i>
43	Emma	Female	15	Pattani	Single	1	<i>Nayu</i>
44	Azmi	Male	29	Pattani	Married	11	<i>Nayu</i>
45	Zaidi	Male	25	Pattani	Married	8	<i>Nayu</i>
46	Suhaimi	Male	24	Pattani	Single	5	<i>Nayu</i>
47	Yahya	Male	26	Pattani	Married	2	<i>Nayu</i>
48	Ilias	Male	17	Pattani	Married	1	<i>Nayu</i>
49	Znra	Female	20	Pattani	Single	4	<i>Nayu</i>
50	Isnin	Male	20	Songkhla	Single	1	<i>Nayu</i>
51	Ibrahim	Male	20	Songkhla	Single	1	<i>Nayu</i>
52	Azwan	Male	22	Songkhla	Single	2	<i>Nayu</i>
53	Hisham	Male	25	Songkhla	Single	8	<i>Nayu</i>
54	Norman	Male	30	Songkhla	Married	10	<i>Nayu</i>
55	Siti	Female	22	Songkhla	Widowed	6	<i>Nayu</i>
56	Azizul	Male	23	Pattani	Single	8	<i>Nayu</i>
57	Faizal	Male	25	Pattani	Married	2	<i>Nayu</i>
58	Fahmi	Male	23	Pattani	Married	4	<i>Nayu</i>
59	Azman	Male	26	Narathiwat	Married	4	<i>Nayu</i>
60	Rahman	Male	20	Pattani	Single	3	<i>Nayu</i>

Table 2 Lists of Tom Yam Restaurant Owner Respondents

Case	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years of Self-Employment	Background
1	Faisal	Male	32	7	<i>Nayu</i>
2	Abubakar	Female	37	15	<i>Nayu</i>
3	Nurdin	Male	64	4	Malaysian
4	Hafizzuddin	Male	25	1	Malaysian
5	Hassan	Male	40	10	<i>Nayu</i>
6	Mah	Male	46	10	Malaysian
7	Shahirah	Male	42	16	<i>Nayu</i>
8	Laily	Female	36	16	<i>Nayu</i>
9	Hunsen	Male	54	27	Thai Muslim