Analysis of the Causes of Discrimination in Transnational Labor: A Case Study of Southeast Asia[1]

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of workplace discrimination faced by multinational workers in the context of globalization, utilizing the push-pull theory to analyze its underlying causes. The push-pull theory highlights the interaction between forces that drive workers to leave their home countries (e.g., economic inequality, political instability) and those that attract them to new locations (e.g., better employment opportunities, improved quality of life). Due to globalization, many workers migrate in search of enhanced living conditions and career prospects. In Southeast Asia, discriminatory practices against workers from various countries manifest as biases based on race, gender, and cultural background. These forms of discrimination are evident not only in recruitment processes but also in workplace environments, promotion opportunities, and compensation packages. Through a comprehensive literature review and analysis of international policies, this study reveals how the experiences of transnational workers are shaped by multiple factors, including legal frameworks, social perceptions, corporate culture, classism, and racism. The results indicate that the workplace experiences of multinational workers are profoundly influenced by the policy environment and social culture of the host country. In some nations, labor laws are inadequate to effectively protect the rights of foreign workers, while social prejudices further exacerbate discrimination. Moreover, the corporate culture's emphasis on diversity directly impacts workplace equity for multinational workers. This study suggests that governments and corporations should implement more effective diversity and inclusion policies to enhance workplace equity for multinational workers. Recommended measures include strengthening legal protections, providing orientation training, and fostering supportive communities to encourage understanding and collaboration among workers from diverse backgrounds. Only through these initiatives can true fairness in the workplace and social harmony be achieved.

Keywords: Transnational Workers, Anti-Discrimination, Globalization, Economic Inequality, Intercultural Adaptation

[1] This study was presented as an oral presentation at the 3rd Scientific and Academic Research Congress.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, the phenomenon of workplace discrimination against multinational workers has garnered significant attention. This study aims to explore the complexities of this issue within the context of globalization, focusing on the various factors that contribute to discriminatory practices in the workplace.

METHODS

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the causes and manifestations of workplace discrimination faced by multinational workers, particularly in Southeast Asia. By employing the push-pull theory, this study seeks to understand the interplay between the motivations for migration and the challenges encountered in host countries. Additionally, the research aims to identify the legal and social frameworks that influence the experiences of these workers and to propose actionable recommendations for improving workplace equity.

Research Methods

To gain an in-depth understanding of why migrant workers in Southeast Asia experience "employment discrimination" in many regions, this study employs a mixed-methods approach that combines literature review and observational methods. The literature review will help us synthesize existing research findings, particularly those related to theories and empirical studies on migrant worker discrimination, thereby establishing a solid theoretical foundation. Additionally, by systematically examining international conventions and relevant policy documents, this research will reveal how these legal frameworks impact the rights and working conditions of migrant workers. In terms of observational methods, this study will conduct field observations to understand the experiences and challenges faced by migrant workers in actual work environments. This approach will allow us to gather more intuitive and concrete data, complementing the theoretical insights gained from the literature review. Through direct interaction with migrant workers, we will gain a deeper understanding of the forms of discrimination they face and the underlying socio-cultural factors. Furthermore, to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, this study will strictly adhere to ethical standards and respect the privacy and consent of participants during the data collection process. The theoretical support for the qualitative research aspect will be based on an in-depth analysis of relevant literature, which will help us better understand the experiences of migrant workers and the structural barriers they encounter. In summary, through the combination of these two research methods, this study aims to comprehensively explore the phenomenon of employment discrimination against migrant workers in Southeast Asia and provide valuable recommendations for improving their working conditions.

Scope of the Study

This research specifically focuses on multinational workers in Southeast Asia, a region distinguished by its rich tapestry of cultural diversity and dynamic economic landscapes. Southeast Asia is home to a multitude of ethnicities, languages, and traditions, which significantly influence the labor market and workplace interactions. The study investigates various sectors where these multinational workers are employed, including manufacturing, services, and technology. Each of these sectors presents unique challenges and opportunities, reflecting the broader socio-economic conditions of the region. By concentrating on this geographical and occupational scope, the research aims to elucidate the complexities of employment discrimination faced by multinational workers. It seeks to uncover how factors

such as cultural differences, economic disparities, and regulatory environments contribute to the experiences of these workers. Furthermore, the study will analyze the implications of these findings for both policymakers and corporate leaders. The insights derived from this research are intended to inform the development of effective policies and practices that promote inclusivity and equity in the workplace. By addressing the specific needs and challenges of multinational workers, the research aspires to contribute to the formulation of strategies that enhance workplace diversity and foster a more equitable labor market. Ultimately, this study aims to serve as a valuable resource for stakeholders committed to creating inclusive work environments that recognize and celebrate the contributions of all workers, regardless of their cultural or national backgrounds.

RESULTS

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature discussed in this section can be analyzed from two perspectives: "class" and "discrimination issues." The first two subsections explain the "emergence of social classes" and the "consequences of class divisions," both of which aim to clarify the issues surrounding the labor class. When distinctions are made between the dignity of labor, so-called discrimination arises, which can also be discussed from the perspective of the "commodification of labor." The scope of discussion in this section focuses on migrant workers in Southeast Asia; however, it will also address how discrimination issues in Southeast Asia differ from those in Europe and the United States.

The Emergence of Social Classes

The Marxist-oriented 'theory of social class' posits that class cannot be formed merely from sources of income or social division of labor; it must be determined by production relations. A person's position within production relations constitutes a class situation, and individuals with the same class situation will develop a common way of life. Marx divides classes into 'dominant class' and 'subordinate class' based on the availability of means of production, while also explaining the formation and conflict of classes through the incompatibility of production relations, class interests, and class consciousness. The Marxist perspective of 'conflict theories' asserts that social stratification arises from the distribution of power and interests—power and interests are rare assets in society, and those who possess them can occupy higher social strata; the result of stratification is not a necessity of the division of labor in human society, but rather a fact of leadership and domination in human society. (Li, 2002).

In Southeast Asia, the issue of social class in various countries stems from multiple factors, including historical, economic, cultural, and political aspects. Historically, the social class structure in Southeast Asia has been profoundly influenced by colonial history. Colonizers often established a social system based on ethnicity and class, leading to the fragmentation of local societies. For example, certain ethnic groups were granted privileges while others were marginalized. This historical legacy persists even after independence, forming a lasting social inequality. From an economic perspective, many Southeast Asian countries rely on agriculture and low-skilled labor, resulting in clear class divisions. During the process of urbanization, the development of industry and services has widened the income gap between high-skilled and low-skilled workers. This economic structure reduces social mobility and exacerbates the wealth gap.

Another critical issue is the level of education. Education is an important channel for social mobility, whether it be early childhood education or higher education. However, in Southeast Asia, the distribution of educational resources is often uneven. Wealthy families can

access better educational opportunities, while children from impoverished families face a lack of educational resources. This unequal access to education further reinforces the fragmentation of social classes. Many studies have noted that disparities in educational attainment can exacerbate class issues. For instance, in Taiwan, the educational programs provided for new immigrant women (foreign spouses) often emphasize their need to integrate into Taiwanese society, portraying them as relatively low-quality foreigners. Such stereotypes affect not only the new immigrant women but also extend to their next generation (Lin &Yau, 2013).

Cultural and political factors are also significant. Certain cultural and religious beliefs in Southeast Asia may reinforce the existence of social classes. For example, in some countries, traditional social values may emphasize respect for elders and authority, making class divisions more pronounced. Additionally, societal biases against poverty can make it difficult for lower-class individuals to break free from class constraints. The stability and transparency of political systems also significantly impact social class dynamics. Corruption and unequal distribution of political power can lead to an upward flow of social resources, further intensifying social inequality. When power is concentrated in the hands of a few, the voices of lower-class individuals are often overlooked, leading to the entrenchment of social classes. In terms of labor relations, the hierarchical (subordinate) nature of these relationships is evident in such social structures. There exists a power imbalance between higher-class employers and lower-class workers. For instance, low-skilled workers often earn wages below the cost of living, making it difficult for them to improve their social status. Low-class workers frequently face poor working environments and lack job security, further limiting their social mobility. The absence of effective social security systems exposes lower-class workers to greater risks, making them more vulnerable during economic fluctuations.

Overall, the social class issues in Southeast Asia are the result of an intertwining of various factors, while the hierarchical nature of labor relations exacerbates the severity of these problems. To improve this situation, comprehensive reforms must be implemented across education, economy, and politics.

Consequences of Class Divisions

In a capitalist society, the pursuit of profit through capital activities becomes the mainstream force. A static definition of capitalism is that the means of social production are based on private property, which is a common phenomenon in capitalism. Centered around capitalists, the opposing concept is labor, where profits are generated through the exploitation of labor. Consequently, all goods are produced with the aim of increasing profits, and this objective extends to market transactions. Thus, the relationship between capital and employed labor forms the foundational social class relations.

Yen-Fen Tseng (2006) argues that since World War II, many industrialized countries have faced labor shortages in specific sectors. However, policymakers often view this shortage as a temporary phenomenon, tending to rely on foreign temporary labor to address the issue, with short-term work visas becoming a common policy tool. Despite the existence of labor shortages, countries that have traditionally been less welcoming to foreigners have not considered allowing foreign labor to become permanent residents. In recent years, however, the demographic structure of industrialized countries has undergone changes with long-term implications, transforming labor shortages from a temporary issue into a persistent challenge (McDonald & Kippen, 2001). Consequently, these countries must rethink how to attract new immigrants to simultaneously address labor shortages and future population supply issues (Mahroum, 2001). As a result, policies for attracting skilled long-term immigrants have gradually gained importance in many countries, which have begun to recognize the potential benefits of allowing high-skilled foreigners to settle. Moreover, companies are increasingly

eager to exchange long-term residency rights for the loyalty of skilled labor. Therefore, revising immigration laws and policies to acquire the necessary technological workforce through immigration channels has become a primary driving force for immigration policy reform in several industrialized nations .(Cobb-Clark & Connolly, 1997; Fuess, 2003; Trempe & Kunin, 1997)

Socioeconomic status (SES) is measured by standards such as education, income, and occupation. Therefore, it provides a robust basis for indicators of resource-based socioeconomic status. The relationship between parental income and offspring income, conditioned on attending a specific level of university, accounts for only a quarter of the entire intergenerational effect. Thus, parental background primarily operates through children's access to specific levels of universities (Witteveen & Attewell, 2020). Although educational outcomes play a crucial role in the future social mobility of young people, they represent only part of the narrative. Once young individuals leave the education system, various barriers related to social, economic, and demographic factors—including socioeconomic status, race, and gender—impact their entry into the labor market, thereby affecting their social mobility (Shaw et al., 2016). SES is a critical indicator of an individual or family's relative position in society, typically assessed through income, education level, occupational type, and social capital. Members of the working class often perform poorly on these indicators, resulting in generally lower SES.

Income is one of the core components of SES. Working-class individuals typically engage in low-wage manual labor or low-skilled jobs, which directly affects their income levels and, consequently, their SES assessment. Furthermore, education is another significant factor. Many working-class members may not have access to higher education, limiting their opportunities for higher-paying positions and further reducing their SES. In terms of occupation, the types of jobs held by the working class are often perceived as having lower social status, which not only affects their economic returns but also their social recognition. Additionally, the lack of social capital places the working class at a disadvantage in accessing information and resources, further restricting their social mobility. Ultimately, SES is closely linked to health status, with working-class individuals facing higher health risks and poorer access to healthcare, negatively impacting their quality of life. Therefore, the relationship between SES and the working class is multifaceted, reflecting the interplay of economic, social, and cultural factors that profoundly affect individuals' life opportunities and overall well-being.

The consequences of class distinctions are particularly evident among Southeast Asian migrant workers. Due to social class divisions, these workers often face economic exploitation and social marginalization. Low-skilled migrant workers experience severe limitations in wages and working conditions, with many earning wages that fall below the cost of living, making it difficult for them to improve their social status. Additionally, these workers are often forced to accept poor working environments, lacking basic labor protections and social security, which further limits their social mobility. The scarcity of educational resources also hinders their children from escaping the cycle of poverty, resulting in intergenerational wealth disparities. Cultural biases and discrimination against lower classes make it even more challenging for migrant workers to integrate into local societies, exacerbating their feelings of isolation and helplessness. This situation not only affects the quality of life for migrant workers but also poses potential threats to the stability and development of the entire society.

An Analysis of the Differences in "Discrimination" Between Asia and the West

In market-driven economies, this freedom and preference are even more pronounced. Everyone has different tastes and considerations, making it difficult to determine which preferences are right or wrong. Even if our choices and preferences lack a rational basis and are merely subjective, that is not inherently wrong. Most of our consumption choices, social habits,

and partner preferences are often based on "irrational" intuition. We should not hastily label any personal taste—no matter how extreme you might consider it—as "discrimination." People make choices daily, reflecting various value judgments. From a democratic political perspective, society collectively has the right to choose common values or to prioritize different values. Criminals cannot accuse society of "discriminating against murder and arson." For individuals, everyone's consumption and social behaviors are based on a value hierarchy of "as long as I like it, it's fine. "Situations deemed "discriminatory" typically arise when the mainstream group uses its "power" to exclude and demean other groups. Due to this "power" dynamic, marginalized groups find it challenging to carve out a path for themselves. They cannot safeguard their interests through the "free market" or "voting elections," which is why they are often referred to as "vulnerable groups." Furthermore, the mainstream group not only exhibits rude attitudes but also employs various means to exclude vulnerable groups from significant social competition areas, especially in employment, voting, and crucial transactional contexts. Therefore, laws should address and restrict "discrimination," focusing on "power dynamics" and emphasizing the management of the "public domain." Employment, education, voting (and other political rights), and certain critical transactional areas are typically the focal points of legal regulations. Any group excluded from these domains will struggle to fully exercise equal citizenship rights and develop normally within society.

Laws such as the Employment Service Act and the Gender Equality in Employment Act primarily regulate the "employment" sector because providing job opportunities is a form of "power." If vulnerable groups cannot secure employment, their livelihoods and competitive opportunities remain unprotected. In the United States, federal and state anti-discrimination laws not only prohibit discriminatory practices in employment but also regulate discrimination in "public accommodation" or in areas like lending and housing rentals. In addition to targeting specific "domains," laws cannot manage every type of preference; thus, they need to address differential treatment that easily leads to "exclusion" and "devaluation." If those in power categorize individuals based on "immutable characteristics" such as race, gender, or disability, or impose disadvantages on "historically disadvantaged groups" (like minorities, women, and people with disabilities), such situations are more likely to provoke legal regulation.

Discrimination against Southeast Asians is primarily linked to "occupational class," often stemming from biases regarding their economic status and social roles. In certain societies, Southeast Asians may be viewed as low-income or low-skilled workers, leading to devaluation and exclusion in workplaces and communities, especially in service-oriented jobs such as domestic work, caregiving, and cleaning, which affects their employment opportunities and social integration.

Tseng (2004) refers to this phenomenon as "racialized classism," emphasizing the structural inequality faced by migrant workers in the labor market due to their race, nationality, and other identity markers. Both blue-collar and white-collar migrant workers experience differential treatment compared to domestic workers in areas such as recruitment processes, restrictions on switching employers, residency rights, and naturalization. This phenomenon not only reflects the power dynamics within the labor market but also reveals the mechanisms of surveillance and exclusion imposed by the state on foreign labor in the process of global capitalist expansion. Although migrant workers should, in principle, be protected by national labor laws, their rights in practice are often incomplete or suppressed. Positioned at the bottom of the social stratification system, they lack the power to resist the combined control of capitalists and state authorities. Consequently, they become a "reserve army" used to lower wages and suppress labor movements. Using Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital, we can further analyze this situation: migrant workers are disadvantaged in the labor field due to their lack of cultural capital (e.g., language skills, social networks) and social capital (e.g.,

relationships, support systems). Their identity capital (racialized capital) is institutionalized as a tool for exploitation, serving the interests of the capitalist system.

From the perspective of World-Systems Theory, the plight of migrant workers also reflects the unequal relationship between core and peripheral nations. Core nations exploit the cheap labor provided by peripheral nations to maintain their economic dominance, while peripheral nations are relegated to being sources of labor supply in the global capital chain. This globalization of labor flows, driven by the mobility and expansion of capital, has become a norm, highlighting the unequal distribution of human resources under global capitalism. In this context, migrant workers are not merely passive participants in the labor market; their lives and bodies are subordinated to capital, turning them into "disposable labor." Through precarious employment relationships, capitalists place migrant workers in a state of "partial citizenship," depriving them of basic rights and deepening the intersecting oppression of race, class, and nationality. This analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of the marginalization of migrant workers in the global labor system and its profound impact on social structures. (Ma, 2013).

In contrast, white discrimination is rooted in a sense of racial superiority, believing that white individuals are superior to others. This form of discrimination manifests not only as systemic exclusion of non-white groups but may also accompany hate speech and acts of violence. The impact of white discrimination is more profound because it not only affects the targeted groups but can also exacerbate societal divisions and inequalities, threatening the stability of the entire society. Although equality among ethnic groups is widely advocated, it remains challenging to erase the conflicts and discrimination, or the sense of "disdain" between different ethnic groups. Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) conducted related research through experiments and found that resumes with white-sounding names received 50% more callbacks than those with African American-sounding names. Compared to African Americans, white-sounding names were more sensitive to responses regarding job quality. Overall, the focus of discrimination against Southeast Asians lies in their occupational and economic status, while white discrimination involves deeper notions of racial superiority (Banks & Dracup, 2006). Both forms of discrimination exhibit significant differences in their roots, manifestations, and social impacts. Moreover, the "superiority" or "discrimination" inherent in racism can cause harm to others. For instance, racism can influence health in various ways, particularly impacting mental health, potentially leading to depression or self-harm (Williams & Mohammed, 2009).

Discrimination Phenomena Faced by Southeast Asian Migrant Workers

Prejudice and discrimination are persistent and challenging issues in social development, falling within the realm of social psychology. Early research in this field began in the 1920s when scholars incorporated prejudice-related topics into social psychology. Within the global capitalist system, the uneven internal development of "marginal and semi-marginal countries" has led marginalized individuals to seek solutions through international marriage, which can even be interpreted as an escape from their home countries (Chuanget al., 2024).

Generally, foreign migrant workers in Taiwan tend to integrate into different cultural societies as groups. Their lives and work often exhibit a "collective nature," allowing them to gain social support and assistance from peer groups. This ethnic clustering and social support enable migrant workers to adapt to local life more easily and quickly, enhancing their life satisfaction and work-life balance. "Organizational support" primarily influences their adaptability, while social support has a more significant impact on life satisfaction and well-being.

Migrant workers face various challenges, such as language barriers, educational disparities from their home countries, cultural differences, personal factors, and policy

environments, all of which affect their cross-cultural adaptation. However, it is observed that many migrant workers, having left their homes, often find their social lives confined to workplaces and dormitories, making it relatively difficult to integrate into Taiwanese society. Cultural differences arise from the discrepancies in symbols and psychology between the parties involved, stemming from the misunderstandings that occur among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Although Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries share relatively close cultural distances, significant cultural differences still exist, including language, religious beliefs, customs, and fundamental values. These differences must be overcome through the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

Researchers have studied cultural differences among workers from various nationalities, revealing significant disparities in national cultural values that affect adaptation and job performance (Cai & Yu, 1998). From a legal perspective, regulatory frameworks can be categorized into five types: (1) general gender employment discrimination; (2) principles of equal pay for equal work; (3) maternal protection systems related to pregnancy, childcare, and childbirth; (4) special protection systems for gender differences; and (5) other systems related to anti-gender employment discrimination.

Taking Southeast Asian migrant workers as an example, they typically engage in lower-skilled jobs, such as:

A. Construction and Infrastructure: Many migrant workers participate in construction sites as laborers, masons, or in other related positions.

B. Manufacturing: Migrant workers serve as assemblers or operators in factories, participating in the production of various products.

C. Agriculture: They work on farms, including harvesting, planting, and farm management.

D. Service Industry: This includes the restaurant industry, hotels, cleaning, and domestic services, with many migrant workers taking on roles such as cooks, waitstaff, or caregivers.

E. Fisheries: Some migrant workers are also employed in the fishing industry, engaging in fishing and aquaculture activities.

These jobs typically offer lower wages and may involve harsh working conditions, particularly in fishing-related roles. However, for many migrant workers, these positions provide opportunities to improve their families' economic situations.

Discrimination against Southeast Asian migrant workers in foreign countries is quite common, manifesting in various forms. For instance, in Malaysia, foreign workers often receive lower wages than local workers, sometimes even below the legal minimum wage, resulting in economic exploitation. Furthermore, these migrant workers frequently face unequal treatment regarding working conditions, often laboring in harsh and dangerous environments without basic labor protections.

The reasons behind this phenomenon are complex. On one hand, cultural biases lead local societies to hold stereotypes against migrant workers from Southeast Asian countries, influencing employers' and colleagues' perceptions. On the other hand, economic factors play a crucial role, as many local workers fear that migrant workers will take away their job opportunities, fostering hostility toward them. Additionally, the legal and policy frameworks in many countries inadequately protect migrant workers, leaving them without effective legal recourse when facing discrimination or exploitation. Finally, social structural inequalities exacerbate this discrimination, placing migrant workers at a disadvantage in the job market.

These factors collectively contribute to the challenges faced by Southeast Asian migrant workers abroad.

Forced labor and exploitation

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 18, 1990 (Resolution 45/158), came into force on July 1, 2003. The Convention comprehensively addresses migrant workers' and their families' rights, including access to voting rights, healthcare, education, legal protection, social welfare, and insurance. Additionally, it considers broader policy areas, such as international relations, national sovereignty, national security, and immigration. However, despite these international standards, migrant workers in Taiwan frequently face violations of their fundamental rights, particularly in the form of "exploitation by intermediary systems" and "unjustified forced deportations".

Exploitation through intermediary systems has emerged as one of the most severe and pervasive issues. It has become an "open secret" that some employers, along with domestic and international recruitment agencies, exploit migrant workers by charging exorbitant placement fees under the guise of quotas. These fees, often referred to as "kickbacks," significantly erode migrant workers' earnings and violate their basic rights. This predatory system places an immense financial burden on migrant workers, often leaving them trapped in cycles of debt and vulnerability.

In addition, unjustified forced deportations present another major concern. Certain employers dismiss migrant workers under pretexts such as unsatisfactory performance or incompatibility. Without prior notice, explanation, or consent, these workers may be forcibly repatriated—sometimes directly by employers or through intermediaries. This practice undermines the legal and human rights protections to which these workers are entitled, further exacerbating their precarious position. While government authorities have made efforts to address these challenges, evidence from academic literature, investigative reports, and news media suggests that the situation has seen limited improvement. The persistence of systemic exploitation and forced repatriation highlights the gaps between international commitments and on-the-ground realities. Addressing these issues requires more robust enforcement of protective measures, stricter regulations on intermediary agencies, and heightened awareness of migrant workers' rights to ensure that they are treated with dignity, fairness, and equality under international human rights norms.

According to global survey data conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the issue of forced labor, it was estimated that as of 2016, approximately 43 million people worldwide were trapped in what is referred to as "modern slavery" (Huang, 2022). Of this figure, about 25 million individuals were subjected to forced labor, while another 15 million were victims of forced marriage. From a sociological perspective, this phenomenon underscores the persistent structural inequalities and systemic power imbalances that perpetuate forms of exploitation globally. Forced labor and modern slavery are deeply embedded within the frameworks of global capitalism, where marginalized populations—particularly individuals in poverty, migrants, and women—are rendered especially vulnerable to coercion and exploitation. Using Immanuel Wallenstein’s World-Systems Theory, these inequalities can be seen as manifestations of the core-periphery divide, where labor from peripheral regions is exploited to sustain the economic prosperity of core nations.

Modern slavery is not merely an individual or localized issue; it is symptomatic of broader social structures that prioritize profit over human dignity. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence further highlights how normalized and legitimized systems of exploitation—such as exploitative recruitment practices, debt bondage, and legal loopholes—sustain forced

labor by masking coercion as consent. Workers may appear to enter these arrangements "voluntarily," yet their choices are constrained by structural poverty, lack of education, social exclusion, and limited alternatives, perpetuating their exploitation. Additionally, forced marriages, often overlooked in the discourse on modern slavery, highlight the intersections of gender, patriarchy, and cultural norms. Women and girls, particularly in underprivileged societies, are disproportionately affected, reflecting how gender inequality and societal expectations converge to deny them autonomy and agency.

While global organizations such as the ILO have initiated frameworks to combat forced labor and modern slavery, including the ILO Forced Labour Convention (No. 29) and its subsequent Protocol of 2014, the persistence of these issues reveals the challenges in enforcement and the need for systemic change. Policies must address the root causes, such as economic disparity, unequal access to resources, and power imbalances, while promoting international cooperation and accountability.

In sum, the existence of modern slavery and forced labor reflects deep-seated inequalities in the global economic and social order. A sociological lens allows us to see these phenomena not as isolated abuses but as products of structural forces that demand critical examination and transformative solutions. Global solidarity, ethical labor practices, and legal protections are essential to dismantling the systems that sustain exploitation and ensuring the dignity and rights of all individuals.

OBSERVATIONAL FINDING

Since many countries in Southeast Asia are still developing and their economies are in the early stages, insights can be drawn from data on labor migration and economic development across these countries. Due to the "push-pull theory," a large number of young people aspire to work abroad for "higher wages" and jobs that "allow for rapid capital accumulation." However, these high-paying jobs are often associate Countries in Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia, have witnessed a surge in labor migration driven by multiple factors. The outflow of labor from these countries is not only an economic phenomenon but also the result of intertwined

The primary issue driving labor migration is economic. Many Southeast Asian countries face slow economic growth, insufficient job opportunities, and low wages. These nations have large youth populations, but the demand for jobs falls far short of supply. For example, in the Philippines, many workers choose to work abroad because overseas wages are significantly higher than those at home. This allows them to improve their family’s financial situation and even support the development of their hometowns. Social and political factors also drive labor migration. In countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam, political instability or social issues push people to seek safer living environments. Migration serves not only as a means of pursuing economic benefits but also as a way to escape difficulties. Additionally, social expectations and cultural values, especially the emphasis on family responsibilities, encourage many individuals to take on greater risks by working abroad. Geographical and market demand factors cannot be overlooked either. Many Southeast Asian countries are geographically close to developed countries and other Asian economies, facilitating easier access to foreign labor markets. With the acceleration of globalization, demand for foreign labor—both low- and high-skilled—continues to grow, particularly in the Middle East and East Asia, attracting large numbers of Southeast Asian workers.

Finally, the development of information technology and the spread of social media have made it easier for people to find job opportunities abroad and connect with other migrant workers, lowering the barriers to working overseas and increasing people’s aspirations for such jobs. Thus, the phenomenon of large-scale labor migration in Southeast Asia is the result of

multiple intertwined factors. Economic needs, sociopolitical conditions, geographic advantages, and the rise of information technology all contribute to this trend. It reflects not only the changes in the global labor market but also reveals Southeast Asian countries' strategies for coping with economic challenges.

In order to protect the rights and interests of Indonesian family migrant workers, Indonesia announced in 2020 that it will implement the zero payment policy for Indonesian family workers exported overseas, after more than a year of negotiation and negotiation, the Ministry of Labor announced on the 4th that the Indonesian government has officially replied in writing, excluding Taiwan from the application of the zero payment policy for migrant workers, and the follow-up Indian side will respect Taiwan's reasonable adjustment of the salary of domestic migrant workers to 20,000 yuan, and after the formal salary adjustment, Indonesian domestic migrant workers will be allowed to come to Taiwan. The Indonesian government was expected to implement the "zero payment for migrant workers" policy for newly exported migrant workers from January 15 last year, that is, employers in importing countries must bear the cost of migrant workers coming to Taiwan, including air tickets, passports, visa fees and intermediary service fees, with a total cost of up to 100,000 yuan, triggering a backlash from officials and civil society groups in many countries. Looking back from the previous question, we can understand why these Southeast Asians are "discriminated against" when they work abroad, which this article believes is caused by "class consciousness", please refer to the figure below for the detailed concept and context.

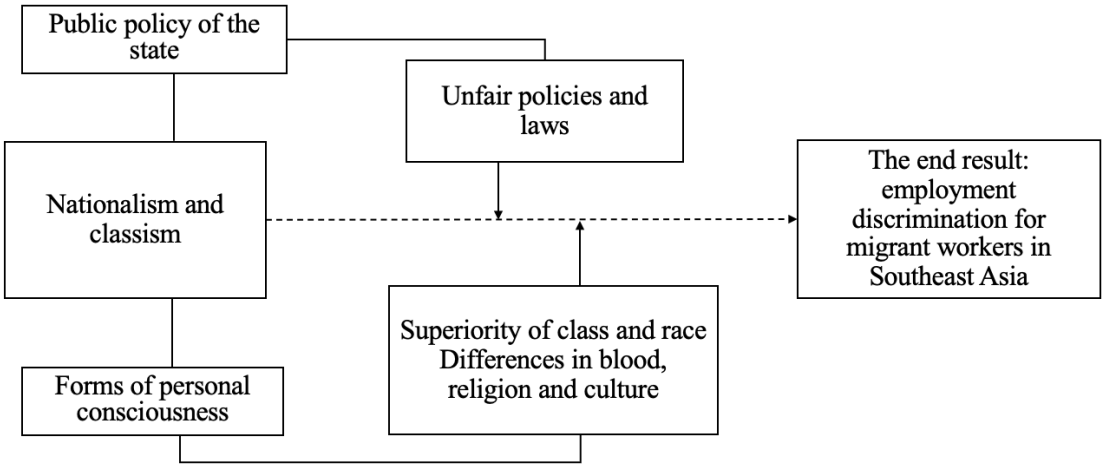

Figure 1. Linear diagram of the factors that form discrimination (This study was self-plotted)

From the image above, it can be observed that many discrimination issues are occurring. This study not only observes the occurrence of discrimination but also directly interacts with migrant workers in Southeast Asia to collect concrete and intuitive data, complementing the theoretical insights gained from the literature review. The results of the interactions indicate that there are many causes of discrimination and unequal treatment, but most migrant workers express that employers and recruitment agencies view them as being a lower tier. They believe that what they want is merely labor, or perhaps employers fundamentally just want "a labor force like a robot, without emotions." This aligns with the earlier point that, due to the relatively underdeveloped countries of origin of migrant workers, employers develop class-based discrimination, leading to exploitation, abuse, and verbal mistreatment.

Some migrant workers have told me: "The elderly man I care for has been sexually harassing me with inappropriate physical contact, making me uncomfortable. When I reported this to the agency, they said: 'Just let him touch you; after all, he pays you.'" Other migrant workers have expressed that they feel completely unfree while working away from home because employers restrict their rights to make phone calls to their families. The reason is simple: employers want to maintain complete control over these foreign migrant workers. From control to discrimination, this is an inseparable process. Under this interconnected force, the human rights protections of migrant workers deserve greater attention from the world.

CONCLUSION

The discussion surrounding human rights protections and discrimination against Southeast Asian migrant workers is gaining attention. Many international organizations, such as the United Nations and the International Labour Organization, emphasize the need to enhance protections for foreign workers to ensure their basic human rights are not violated. This includes fair wages, decent working conditions, and social security. However, the reality remains challenging. Many Southeast Asian workers face discrimination in certain countries and are often regarded as “low-skilled labor,” resulting in significant disparities in treatment compared to local workers. They may experience unequal wages, harsh working environments, and social exclusion. Although some countries have started formulating laws and policies to improve the situation for foreign workers and established dedicated institutions to handle related complaints, the effectiveness of these measures remains to be seen. International cooperation and advocacy efforts are also driving improvements, but many challenges persist, including cultural differences and social biases.

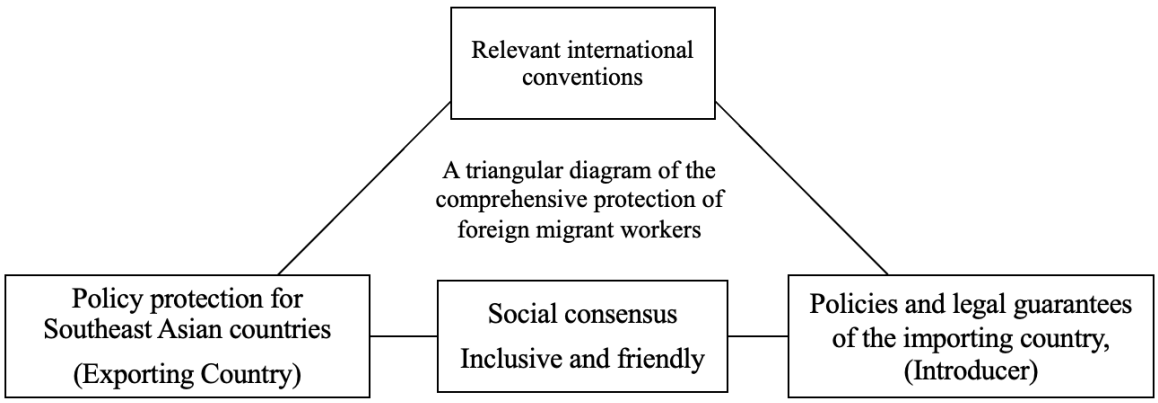

Figure 2. A triangular diagram of the comprehensive protection of foreign migrant workers (This study was self-plotted)

The international community has long recognized the importance of protecting the rights of migrant workers and has proposed a series of recommendations to address the long-standing inequalities in the global labor market. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and relevant United Nations agencies emphasize that migrant workers should enjoy equal rights with domestic workers, including basic protections such as wages, working conditions, leave, and healthcare. Furthermore, the International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families states that governments and businesses must take responsibility to eliminate unfair treatment and exploitation while actively enforcing legal regulations.

From a sociological perspective, the situation of migrant workers is often seen as a reflection of the inequalities inherent in the global class structure. These workers typically come from economically weaker countries and thus occupy a marginalized position within the social

hierarchy of their host countries. This class difference not only affects their economic conditions but also impacts their rights and protections in the workplace. The basic rights of migrant workers encompass not only wages and job security but also improvements in their quality of life. Employers should provide reasonable accommodation, health insurance, and living support to alleviate the pressures faced by migrant workers in a foreign land, which not only benefits the mental and physical health of the laborers but also enhances overall work efficiency.

In terms of labor relations, businesses, as the core units of employment relationships, play a crucial role. Employers should take concrete actions to eliminate discrimination in the workplace, reform traditional recruitment models, establish transparent and fair hiring processes, reduce reliance on intermediary agencies, and eliminate differential treatment based on nationality, gender, or cultural background. Additionally, employers should provide clear and equitable labor contracts to ensure that migrant workers understand their rights, avoiding exploitation due to information asymmetry. Companies must also foster a diverse and inclusive culture in the workplace, promoting regular anti-discrimination training and management education to raise awareness of the importance of workplace equality, bridge cultural gaps, and enhance team cohesion. Moreover, employers and businesses should proactively accept third-party oversight to ensure that company policies align with international labor standards. By undergoing external audits and certifications, businesses can demonstrate their commitment to labor rights and establish a credible image within the global supply chain, achieving a dual balance of economic efficiency and human rights protection.

In conclusion, the issue of migrant workers' basic rights is not only a legal matter but also a reflection of human rights and social justice in the context of globalization. The calls from international organizations and the actions of businesses together form the key elements in addressing this issue. Only through coordinated efforts among governments, businesses, and the international community to completely eliminate structural discrimination and exploitation can we truly safeguard the dignity of migrant workers and achieve fairness and sustainable development in the global labor market. In such efforts, migrant workers are no longer merely marginalized groups in global economic development but are integral to achieving common prosperity and equality for humanity. All in all, while the discussion on human rights protection and discrimination for Southeast Asians working abroad is growing, it will take time and sustained efforts to make real changes. And it needs to be done in a variety of aspects, from international conventions to national policies and social consensus.

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