

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5. 1. Conclusion

This study aimed to understand how the socio-economic factors help and hinder the reintegration of Thai female returnees into community of origin. To respond the research questions, living condition of Thai female returnees and their integration into Japanese society were first analyzed to examine as how their experiences in Japan affect the reintegration process. It was revealed that Thai women in Japan were socially and economically vulnerable because of their working conditions. In terms of their integration into Japanese society, it was revealed that a relationship with a Japanese male is one of the ways to assisting them to prolong their stay and integrate into Japanese society. However, by involving with Japanese men, the women tended to rely heavily on the relationship which made them less independent and more subjected to their partners influence over their lives. The living condition in Japan has affected their returning decision.

Return process was analyzed later in order to assess the success or failure of their migration experiences. It could be said that their return decisions were made not only by the failure of the migration experience, but also when they achieve the migration goals. Those who economically achieved can be regarded as success, while those who could not secure money were considered as failure.

Accordingly, how socio-economic factors and their migration experiences affected the reintegration process was analyzed. It was found that a number of environmental and social factors contributed to the success or failure in reintegration. Much of these factors could be attributed to the living condition they endured while living in Japan. The research found that Thai female returnees have difficulty in securing employment. However, women who had engaged in the entertainment industry do not always meet difficulty of being accepted by their home community.

The study also found that the women had received financial support from their Japanese partner. Primary research through interviews showed that one of the key reasons for women to be accepted by their home community is the remittances they received from their Japanese partners, though the women brought their children to Thailand without husbands. Many of women interviewed in this research believe that the remittances assisted them to early reintegrate into their home community.

Analyzing the data collected during the field study, it could be concluded that economic assistance through remittances sent by the Japanese partner play a vital role in the women's reintegration while they were pregnant and in the early stages of child-bearing. The women interviewed in this research were not able to work actively during their pregnancy period. However, the women could rely on the remittances from their Japanese partners and by using this financial means they could survive without securing employment. This financial support assisted the women to take a first step of resettlement and helped them to reintegrate into their community of origin. The women interviewed also highlighted that the remittance they received had helped them to overcome financial obstacles such as possible debt and of having to migrate again. The women also noted that the remittance helped them not to rely on family handouts or working in unskilled employment.

Although the remittances sent by the Japanese partners did help the women reintegrate in the early stages, problems did arise after the men stop sending the remittance payments. Many women interviewed revealed that their partner stop sending remittances and lost contact once they had rejoined their home community. A number of the women were forced to seek employment once the remittances stopped coming. However, it was difficult for women to obtain productive and sustainable employment due to the lack of education.

Despite the economic assistance from their Japanese partners has positive aspect for returnees, there are also negative aspects. While receiving remittances from their partner, women tend to stop working and just rely on the remittances. This dependency could be viewed as a negative point also since long absence from the labor market could be a limitation when they seek an employment again.

In terms of social position in the community, it was revealed that women who had engaged in the entertainment industry do not always meet difficulty of being accepted by their home community. Women in this study mentioned that they were accepted by the society and also received high recognition because of economic success despite the fact that they were engaging in the entertainment industry in Japan. Although it was considered that entertainer tended to be a target of a gossip in the traditional society in northern Thailand, women in this study did not mention about it except few. Especially the women who married Japanese husband were more respected and accepted by the community. On the other hand, those who failed to bring economic contribution more likely to be stigmatized by the people in the community. As such, the research found that the economic contribution is a influential factor to determine whether they can reintegrate into the community of origin smoothly or not.

Therefore, it could be argued that not many women were able to gain an employment after their return from Japan. Since women had no valued added experience while working in Japan because of the entertainment work, it was difficult for them to find productive employment upon their return. Moreover, employment opportunity available for them was limited due to their poor educational background. Although the cases are differed, it can be argued that some of the women were able to use the remittance they gained to empower themselves economically and that this economic empowerment helps reintegrate the women into their local community.

5. 2. Discussion

According to the conceptual framework elaborated on Chapter I, the possible facilitating factors for successful reintegration are job opportunities, support from NGOs, community and family relationships and individual feelings. My research found that an economic contribution is the most important factor for facilitating successful reintegration. A woman who economically succeeds has received high acceptance by the community. Mii, is the case of establishing small shop from

remittances sent by their Japanese partner, could be best illustrated of how economic factor help them to gain recognition from the community. Part of her success was due to remittances from her Japanese partner. There are also the cases of women who do not engage in any employment after their return because they receive remittances from their Japanese partners. Although these women do not work, they were also accepted by the community. This implies that people's reaction to returnees would depend on their economic contribution, not on the type of job the women had engaged before and after migration.

There are some cases which back up this fact. Women who fail to bring economic contribution to the community were not accepted by the community members. This is because the community members expect women to bring a large amount of economic contribution from the destination country. Therefore, the case of woman who fails to bring economic contribution would not be able to satisfy the expectations. As a result, she would have difficulty of being accepted by people in the community. These three examples indicate that employment is an important factor for successful reintegration. However, a more crucial factor to determine if they can reintegrate or not is their economic success from the migration experience (i.e. remittances). Therefore, considering the fact that women who brought economic contributions were more accepted by the village society than those who did not, one can argue that the success of economic reintegration can be an important facilitating factor for the social reintegration.

Support from NGOs is also a key element in defining how successful the reintegration process has been. According to Macaranas(2004), the support offered by the NGOs helps the women to reintegrate into their local society and help them financially. The study found that financial assistance, vocational training and counseling service provided by SEPOM helped women to decrease their social and economic constraints. For example, scholarship for their children helps to reduce women's financial burden. However, it should be noted that there are some difficulties of providing assistance to returnees. For instance, only a limited number of women could receive these assistances due to the lack of budget. Moreover, although SEPOM

provides vocational training, it does not solve fundamental problems of employment opportunity in that area. In addition, it is difficult to help women who has mental problem to re-gain their self esteem only by counseling service as Wipa's case had shown. Therefore, even though they receive financial assistance or training, it is difficult to empower women to be independent.

As conceptual framework has shown, the reintegration situation in the country of origin will be affected by the experience in Japan. It was revealed that the women in this study engaged in entertainment work, and most of them did not gain any value-added experience in Japan as Ochi (2005) and Macaranas (2004) have argued, and those women who had experienced violence and sexual exploitation had difficulty recovering their self esteem and confidence. This can be explained by the poor living conditions in Japan. Being sent to a snack bar and forced to be an entertainer, some women lost their self-confidence and suffer from mental disorders, because of violence from their boss or customers. As such, the violence and exploitation leave women psychologically scarred.

This exploitation leads to the question of the vulnerability of migrant women. Chantavanich (2001, p262) stated that most women are economically empowered while they are working abroad because they can earn a higher income, while they are socially vulnerable because they sometimes experience exploitation, physical violence or sexual harassment. However, Thai women in this study who entered Japan illegally were economically and socially vulnerable because they were exploited of their wages at the work place because they owed a large amount of debts and they had to work to repay it without receiving wages. Due to the nature of entertainment work which frequently exposed to exploitation such as violence and low wages, women therefore had little opportunity for empowerment (Chen, 2006). However, it should be noted that many of the women in this study who had a Japanese partner and relied on his financial support, thus putting restraints on women's empowerment, tended to be able to adapt into Japanese society.

Chantavanich also argued that the female returnees were economically

vulnerable when they returned because their source of income was not as good as when they were abroad (p263). Similar cases were observed in this study that the women were economically vulnerable because there were not enough jobs in their villages and some women depend on only remittances. In terms of social vulnerability, as Chantavanich found in her study, returnees were respected when they brought an economic contribution and this also leads to successful social reintegration. The job they did in Japan is not a major problem anymore in some villages. This means that stigmatization is not always the case. People tend to see only the wealth of the returnees. This is because the values of people in the community have changed over time, and materialism has become a significant value of the village.

This research has documented the experience of returnees from Japan and their reintegration process. It was found that the experience in the destination country affected their reintegration in various degrees. Those who had faced exploitation in the destination country could suffer from mental illness, and have difficulty reintegrating into their society. The conditions of reintegration which I highlighted in the conceptual framework were also all correlated to the reintegration process. However, since the motive of migration is mainly for economic reasons, the achievement of migrants is being determined by the wealth gain from Japan.

5. 3. Recommendations

The recommendations set out below are drawn from their shared impressions and experiences. Some women encountered the problems in Thailand, some in Japan. Proposals to be considered by national authorities are thus broadly made on a country basis.

Measures to the Japanese government

Japan has chosen to adopt a very strict immigration control to manage foreign workers by means of deporting them once found illegal. Therefore, due to their illegal status, many foreign workers who engaged in unskilled labor could not receive

assistance from the government when they were treated unfairly by employers. For women in this study, many of them were able to enter Japan through international human trafficking networks and became trafficked victims because they do not know about the kind of employment. However, they were treated as criminals by the Japanese government. Recommendations towards the Japanese government are as follow:

- Since illegal migrants have limited access to social services, a mechanism is needed to enable the provision to illegal migrant workers such as providing health care service or other humanitarian assistance.
- The Japanese immigration bureau should take on careful investigation on female migrants reported by the Thai embassy. Japanese government should provide clear definition between criminals and trafficked victims. It is necessary to provide tool for the institution such as Japanese immigration bureau to properly combat human trafficking and provide assistance to trafficked victims with humanitarian approach.
- More protection provision to potential returnees should be made available such as counseling services, safe accommodation and return process assistance. Shelter and necessary financial support for trafficked victims is needed.

Measures to Thai government

Since this research focuses on the reintegration of Thai female returnees, the recommendation will focus on measures for Thai government to assist female migrant in the reintegration process. This research revealed that female returnees face many difficulties finding productive jobs after their return due to lack of job opportunity and poor educational background. Those who cannot secure job tend to choose re-migration again, since they could not earn sufficient income in the community. Therefore, it is important to consider how to help returnees to earn sufficient income.

In order to provide recommendations to Thai government, policy of Philippine government to assist return migrant to integrate into their community could be studied as a guideline. To minimize the difficulties for returnees, the Philippine government established the reintegration center called "National reintegration center for overseas Filipino workers". This center aims to assist returnees by providing various reintegration assistance such as job search assistance, enterprise development, training and re-tooling assistance, psycho-social services and so on. To deliver these services, this center has an Assistance Desk to provide not only face-to-face counseling, but also online services.

This kind of approach by the Philippine government grasps and analyzes the current situation of returnees well. Therefore, similar case should be adopted in Thailand. This study found that economic success would facilitate their social reintegration. Therefore, the suggestions for Thai government should focus on how to economically empower these female returnees.

- Thai government should establish reintegration center to coordinate reintegration programs. The assistant desk should be established in each province with counseling services for reintegration assistance.
- As this research found that economic reintegration facilitated social reintegration, financial assistance for establishing small enterprise is considered to be helpful for returnees to secure the sustainable life.
- Since female returnees did not gain valued-add experience abroad, the improvement of their skill is needed. Therefore, Thai government should provide the training and re-tooling project for returnees to enhance their capability such as vocational education.