

## “Desire” and International Migration of Isan Villagers

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### Abstract

This article examines the desire for transnational migration with a focus on the subjective experiences, expectations, and realities that Isan villagers have encountered, and how their desire is formed. Employing qualitative methodology, this research collected data from in-depth interviews with 26 key informants in Baan Sawang village, whose residents have migrated to work or live overseas in the past 30 years. The key informants include 16 Isan villagers who have worked or lived overseas, four community leaders and local wisdom specialists who have knowledge of their community contexts and the history of international migration in the village, and six household members of the migrants. The analysis employs Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the desiring-machine. We argue that the desires for working/living overseas among villagers have been produced continually through the ongoing social interactions in their lives. The conditions that contributed to the desiring-production of working abroad were economic, political, socio-cultural, and individual. Perspectives on lifestyles, the opportunity to travel, and aspiration for a better life also contributed to the driving forces that constantly steer villagers toward working overseas. Our analyses seek to provide a new approach in migration studies that pays attention to the subjective conditions of migrants.

**Keywords:** desiring-production, desire, international migration, Isan

### Introduction

Major labor migration in Thailand began around the latter half of the 1970s. Most migrant laborers were from Isan the northeastern region of Thailand, the most populous part of the country, where people face more difficulties in agricultural production than do people in other regions (Theerasawat, et al., 2015; Singhanetra-Renard and Prabhudhanitisan, 1992; Mills, 1999). This constraint was one of the conditions that forced Isan villagers to seek jobs overseas. At the same time, the continued growth in the number of international marriages between Isan women and white Western men after the end of the Vietnam War was another reason for the significant increase in international migration overseas from Thailand in the past four decades (Lapanun, 2019; Suppatkul, 2020; Promphakping, et al., 2005). International migration is viewed by many Thais as a social practice that brings economic security to the family and improves the life opportunities of family members. The perceived benefits that accrue to the migrants’ families have continuously constructed the “culture of migration” among Isan villagers.

The “culture of migration” is a social phenomenon that occurs in many regions of the world, especially in less-developed countries, where international migration is considered a survival strategy and a way out of poverty. However, it is often assumed that all returned migrants are successful, while the difficulties of many returned migrants who fail to achieve their goals are neglected (De Haas, 2007). Many Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines, set a target for the number of workers to send abroad in their economic development plans. For example, in the Philippines, outstanding overseas migrants are regarded as “economic heroes” and receive awards on Migrant Workers’ Day (Kaur, 2009; Hickey, Narendra and Rainwater, 2013). Such perspectives and policies maintain the culture of migration, although not all returned migrants receive their expected rewards. There are limitations to understanding the success of migration solely through economic and political factors that are quantitatively measured by

statistics. The quantitative approach often assumes that migrants are free from constraints, have access to information, and aim to maximize their economic life (Carling and Collins, 2018). However, it is difficult to comprehend the complex drivers of migration through these quantitative measurements alone. Thus, we argue that migration studies should broaden their analytical framework to include new multicomplex components of migration, such as the aspirations and desires that migrants subjectively experience in their society. This analytical approach encompasses both individual and structural analyses, since migration has continuously been encouraged by complex components (Carling and Collins, 2018).

This article employs Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) concept of “desire” as a theoretical framework to understand how international migration has been steadily increasing among Isan villagers and elsewhere. According to Deleuze and Guattari, human desire is treated as a productive force that constantly produces reality. The authors offer the metaphor of desire as a machine that continues to produce objects of desire in a given society and changes them over time. Desires are formed through social relationships between individuals and society. Desires change both individuals and society and are changed by them at the same time. Desires are shaped by the social contexts as well as the experiences of individuals who live and interact with other people. Thus, desires come only not from individuals, but they are also produced and connected to various other desiring-machines in a given society (Charoensin-o-larn, 2011; Kitiarsa, 2014). Ongoing experiences, expectations, and constant human needs are the forces that encourage international migration at different periods of time. Recently, desire has become a more common term in migration studies as many scholars acknowledge that individual attitudes towards migration cannot be separated from those that are manifest in the social context (Carling and Collins, 2018). This article examined “desires” that were linked to international migration experiences among Isan villagers in Baan Sawang (pseudonym), Nong Wua So district, Udon Thani province in Thailand. Villagers in Baan Sawang have been migrating overseas for

more than 30 years. Some migrants have failed, and some have prospered. Yet international migration is still considered as an option that villagers employ to improve their economic mobility and security after considering their own constraints. Intrigued by this phenomenon, the researchers analyzed how past experiences, expectations, and realities of Baan Sawang villagers produce their desires in international migration.

### **“Desire” and International Migration**

The concept of desire has its roots in psychoanalysis theory. Early scholars like Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) linked desire to the concept of lack. That is to say, desire is what remains after need is subtracted from demand (Johnston, 2018). However, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari distinguished the concept of desire in sociology from that in psychoanalysis. They argued that desire does not only emerge from the process of thought inside the human mind, but is socially constructed (Pattarakulvanit, 2007). For example, images of goods and products that appear in social media and technology continuously help fuel the human desire to consume (Kozinets, Patterson, and Ashman, 2017).

Deleuze and Guattari (1983) argue that desires are produced constantly in the way that they relate to the experiences and expectations of people. Desires are constructed through historical backgrounds and situations of different people. They are connected to the desires of other people as they interact with each other, producing new desires endlessly. The desiring-production is dynamic and linked to a situation or reality in a given social context. Deleuze and Guattari compared desire to a factory system of productive machines connected to other machines. They argued that a desiring-machine is ceaselessly connected to other desiring-machines, and they keep multiplying (Kitirianglarp, 2020).

The connection between desire and international migration has also been discussed recently among migration scholars. A special issue

of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2018) specifically addresses aspiration and desire as drivers of migration. The articles in this issue explore different ways in which aspiration and desire stimulate and make migration possible. Also, these works emphasize a growing theoretical interest in emotions and temporalities as the potentiality forces of migrant mobility (Carling and Collins, 2018). In discussing desire as a conceptual framing for migration studies, Collins suggested focusing on *desire as a social force in migration* [emphasis added] and paying attention to how movement is prompted by “the complex interplay between the[se] expressions of desire, between strategic planning and opportunism that manifest in movements to achieve and avoid certain kinds of futures. Migration in this respect is never singular in its temporality, but rather an ongoing process where past, present, and future are folded together in the emergence of migrant lives” (Collins, 2018: 967).

Moreover, Carling and Schewel (2018) discuss a more nuanced view of aspiration as consisting of thoughts and feelings that precede migration outcomes. They argue that some people might very much want to migrate, but do not have the ability to do so. Yet, their desire to move can have a major impact on others who are able to do so. This idea is linked to Deleuze and Guattari’s desiring-machine concept which we will elaborate later in this article. Among the works by Thai scholars, there are only a few that link desire with migration. For example, Kitiarsa (2014) employed Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of desire, and proposed that social changes in Isan, including frequent international migration among Isan villagers, were constructed through internal mental processes that produced desires, encouraging Isan people to seek life changes and deal with changing social circumstances. Kitiarsa’s work came from his study of Isan migrant labor in Singapore. Another work, Teekantikun (2016), employed the concept of desire to explain why Vietnamese migrants come to work in Thailand if not for economic gains. He concluded that they were persuaded by various forms of desire such as the opportunity to travel and see the world, to become an entrepreneur in Thailand, and to marry a Thai. These desires are linked to social

contexts both in their community and overseas. People change as their social contexts change, and after migrating to a new social context, their desires change as well.

As we examined the desire to migrate overseas among Baan Sawang villagers, we observed that their desires did not come from a sole condition or situation. Rather, they were constituted from multiple circumstances that could not be distinguished separately as just one structural, cultural, emotional, or personal factor. The desire to migrate overseas can be produced through the combination of individuals’ social relations, social networks, environments, family backgrounds, and personal aspirations. While acknowledging the multiplicity of factors that shape migration, in this study we focus primarily on the conditions shaped by the context of the Isan village.

## Methods

This study consists of qualitative research which employed the life history method in data collection. We aimed to explain desires which became embedded at both the individual and the societal level and how they constantly drove international migration in the village. We examined the dynamics of desires which occurred during different periods of the life history of the returned migrants. We focused on how desires were linked to structural contexts, such as economic, socio-political, and cultural aspects. We examined desires through the stories from villagers’ past experiences, viewpoints, and life expectations – the realities they had encountered both in Baan Sawang and in their destinations overseas. The first author employed in-depth interviews and observation (both participatory and non-participatory) with villagers in Baan Sawang during the fieldwork to learn about the community’s contexts and returned migrants’ lives. The first author stayed and spent time with villagers for three months from January to March 2020. There were 16 returned migrants who were primary key informants. Applying the concept of desire, we did not focus on migrant experience at a single moment in their lives, but rather on their experience of multiple

migrations which allowed us to explore the dynamics of desires both in the contexts of home and destination societies and analyze how past experiences shaped their desire to (re)migrate. Furthermore, this study includes four community leaders who provided background information on Baan Sawang, especially historical information on international migration, as well as six family members of the migrants. The total number of key informants was 26.

The first author employed the snowball technique to get introductions from community leaders to know other key informants, and then established rapport with them so that they would tell their experiences in migrating overseas on their own terms. The first author asked for their consent to participate in the research and explained the objectives of the research before interviewing. Personal information of the key informants was protected according to ethical standards and procedures in human research as all names of persons and places mentioned in this article are pseudonyms. Data analysis involves typology, comparison of information for further investigation, proving information through the triangulation technique, constructing the life stories of key informants, and a conclusion with reference to the concept of desire.

## Findings

The findings are presented in terms of two major issues: 1) community contexts from the field research and 2) the analysis of “desire” related to the phenomenon of international migration among Baan Sawang villagers.

### Community Contexts

Baan Sawang (pseudonym) is a rural village located in Nong-O sub-district, Nong Wua So district about 30 kilometers from Udon Thani city. In 2019, there were approximately 161 households for a total population of 430, with 215 men and 214 women. Most villagers work in agriculture, especially rice farming. Other villagers work outside

the agricultural sector as day-laborers, factory workers, government civil servants, and migrant labor outside Udon Thani both domestic and international (Community Development Department, 2019). Both domestic and international labor migration is very popular among Baan Sawang villagers. While the first author was conducting fieldwork in the area, she found that most villagers were elders and children because the working-age population had migrated to work outside the village. In the past, Baan Sawang had an abundance of resources. Water resources were sufficient for annual rice farming. However, in recent years, workers in the agricultural sector have decreased in number and started looking for non-agricultural occupations. One of the most popular choices is to go work abroad. We did not have the exact number of how many of the villagers were international labor migrants, perhaps because they were lumped into the group of day laborers on the government official registration. However, based on the village household registration and informal interviews with the community leaders, the first author concluded that there were at least 40 villagers working/living overseas. Moreover, there were more than 90 villagers who were returned migrants.

The popularity and development of international migration among Baan Sawang villagers began around the 1980s, when several brokerage agencies came to the village to find construction workers to fill in the jobs in Saudi Arabia amidst the construction boom in the Gulf States. Recruitment became widespread throughout the Isan region. Some male villagers who decided to take these jobs could earn around 10,000-20,000 Thai baht (approximately 314 to 628 US dollars) a month, which was considered a high income in the 1980s. The first wave of international labor migrants could return with a large amount of money and use it to renovate or repair their houses, invest in farming, and buy the property and home appliances for their families. These experiences have imprinted and reproduced the embedded imagination about the success of working abroad among the villagers.

The destination of international migration among Isan villagers changed around 1985, when there was a high demand for construction

workers in Libya, but only for male workers. During 1976–1989, there was a steady increase in the number of Thai workers leaving the country in search of work abroad. However, in the early 1990s, labor migration from Thailand to Saudi Arabia was halted after the Blue Diamond Affair, in which a Thai worker allegedly stole jewelry from the palace of a Saudi prince where he was employed as a servant (Patta, 2007). Therefore, the destinations of labor migrants changed to Asian countries, such as South Korea and Taiwan, in 1992. In 1997, the popularity of labor migration to South Korea increased rapidly due to the high demand and lucrative pay. However, there were many illegal Thai workers, both men and women, who worked as unskilled laborers in South Korea. These Thai migrants, like migrant workers in other countries (e.g., Cambodia), engaged in illegal migration because formal/legal procedures for migration are relatively expensive, complex, and time-consuming (Sakulsri, et al., 2020).

During this time, more women migrated overseas than before because there were high demands to be filled in the garment and electronic industries in the destination countries. Thai women in rural areas gradually changed their roles from family caregivers and agricultural workers to labor migrants in the industrial sector. Female workers were in high demand in industries that required a great deal of thoroughness and patience. Moreover, there were sexist stereotypical images that women were docile and easy to control. Thus, female migrant workers were in high demand. When Thai female migrant workers had the opportunity to earn money from paid jobs, they became independent and were able to send remittances home to support their parents and family members. According to Kunopakarn (1999), rural Thai families have higher expectations of remittances from female migrant workers than from male workers. This attitude allows women to have more power at home even when they are far away and perform the role of breadwinner which is opposite to the traditional role of women. The international labor migration co-occurred with the phenomenon of cross-national marriage between local women and foreign nationals, both sides of which were facilitated by brokerage agencies.

The ongoing international migration among Baan Sawang villagers proves that migration has become “culture.” Regardless of their success or failure, the idea of going abroad has been passed on from one generation to another. While the first author was in the field, she found that at least one family member in every household had gone to work overseas. Villagers viewed and talked about going overseas with high regard. The youths in the village dreamed of going to work abroad. They grew up during the “golden era” when many villagers went abroad and returned with success and money, allowing them to have nice housing, cars, and home appliances. Some of them could buy more land. However, we argue that what has caused international migration in Baan Sawang for the past 30 years is not only the material success in economic aspects as the villagers told us. As we employed the concept of desire to understand their thoughts and feelings about going abroad, we illustrated in our analysis that there were manifestations of thoughts and feelings that constituted ongoing patterns of international migration.

#### **How “Desire” for International Migration Was Constructed**

Migration scholarship has long been a studied area in many fields, and migration studies have employed different approaches and theoretical concepts. There are studies relating migration to agrarian transformations and development studies, both in Asia and other regions (Riggs, 2019; De Haas, 2007). Some works focus on the historical roots and characteristics of contemporary migration (Kaur, 2009), others explore migration policy in Southeast Asia (Hickey, Narendra and Rainwater, 2013; Yamanaka and Piper, 2005). Some scholars investigate social networks as a key mechanism facilitating migration (Chamaratana, et al., 2010). Most of these works emphasize structural/material factors/conditions influencing causes and effects of migration as well as the interplay between structure and agency, rather than unpacking motive forces involved in migration. This study, by exploring the connection between “desire” and international migration, contributes to both theoretical and empirical studies to understand the subjective forces

through which migration comes about. We emphasize in our analyses the life stories and experiences of two returned migrants – Noi and Pit – whose stories and experiences of international migration are shared by many returned migrants in Baan Sawang. Noi and Pit had different reasons to go abroad at different times. They had different backgrounds and life stories which allow us to observe their desires in different contexts.

### **1. Desiring machine and international migration**

Deleuze and Guattari (1983) used the concept known as “desiring-machine” to describe the emergence and reproduction of human desire that continues endlessly with no fixed patterns. We drew on the narrative account from Noi, a 53-year-old woman who was a labor migrant working abroad on three occasions in the past ten years, to illustrate how her desire to work overseas was shaped and saturated throughout her life in an Isan village. Noi, who grew up in a family with four brothers and nine sisters, had a high school education. Five of her siblings went to work abroad. At the age of 26, she went to work as a contract worker in a factory in Taiwan. When her four-year contract had ended, she had a short break in Thailand before she was offered a new contract for another four years. However, during her second time in Taiwan, she married a Taiwanese man and continued working in Taiwan for another five years. Now, she is back in Thailand with her children. Noi grew up in a modest family with no economic hardship. Her parents supported her until she graduated from high school. She took a job as an assembly line worker at a factory in Udon Thani. The salary was not high, but she was happy because she had good colleagues and the workplace was close to her house. It was her father’s idea that she should go to work abroad like her siblings. Looking back, she recalls that she was “forced” to go.

At first, I didn’t want to go. It was my father who forced me to do it. He wanted me to work abroad so that I could earn more money. He said that my siblings were doing great working abroad. I did not want to go. I thought that working here in Udon Thani was good enough (Noi [Pseudonym], 2020).

Going to work abroad was the family’s decision and not Noi’s. Although she had learned from her siblings about their experiences, they were not conditions that produced in her the desire of working abroad. Thus, in her first international journey, it was a desire constructed by her family rather than by herself. The desire which came from her family was constructed and reproduced in the community context where many villagers went to work overseas and returned with a large amount of money. Noi emphasized that her father desired her to have a successful and well-paid job. He expected that she would send a large sum of remittance back home, which is considered a dutiful practice for a Thai daughter, and his desire has become Noi’s desire too. As Theravada Buddhism is practiced in most Isan villages, people believe that they need to repay their parents for having been born and raised. While a son can become a monk to repay his parents spiritually, a daughter cannot do so (Rabibhadana, 1984; Lapanun, 2019). Thus, the major way to repay their parents is by taking care of them and providing them with material support; the latter is particularly relevant for migrant daughters. Thus, the expectation of parents to have their daughter work overseas is intertwined with the gender arrangements within the family. For example, in a study of female labor migrants in Laos (Chaiyalath, 2009), it was shown that even in a matrilineal society like that of Thailand in which the kinship is traced through the mother’s lineage, men, as the household head, still hold power in most decision making. Daughters, especially those who were single, were “pushed” to find jobs outside the home and were expected to do domestic work if they did not go abroad.

Although Noi’s first journey occurred because of her family’s decision, it allowed her to enjoy new life experiences and freedoms at the destination country without family control. In Deleuze-Guattari’s term, the desiring-machine ceaselessly produces new desires from individuals’ changing conditions and new experiences. Although Noi did not desire to go to work abroad at first, her new experiences and the supportive environment in Taiwan shaped her desire about working overseas. She could earn more money and send it home to fulfil her desire to be a good daughter. She recalled that when she returned to

Thailand after her first contract ended, she wanted to go back on her own. She said:

...When I first arrived, I was lonely. I had no friends. I wanted to go back every day. But as time passed, I was able to adjust to life in Taiwan. I had friends and learned the language and started hanging out with colleagues. Living there became more comfortable and I started to like it there. When my first contract ended, I sought the extension myself when I came back. I spent my own money on the application, and I knew that the factory needed workers...(Noi [Pseudonym], 2020).

Her second journey to Taiwan was a turning point of her life as she met her Taiwanese future husband at the factory. They started dating and after a year they got married. After she was married, her working conditions abroad changed. Her social relationships with people changed as well. The couple came back to Thailand to arrange a wedding ceremony in Baan Sawang and spent a short break in Thailand to change her Taiwanese visa from a working visa to a spousal visa. On her third visit to Taiwan, she was no longer a labor migrant, but the wife of a Taiwanese man. She quit her job at the factory, and they had two children. Several years later, however, she and her husband separated and she returned to Thailand with the children.

Noi's life story illustrates changes in both the countries of origin and destination. These changes continually constructed and shaped her desire to work overseas. Amidst social relationships with other people in a new and changing context, a desire is produced as a driving force that encourages a new journey. At the same time, the desire is connected to social relationships that an individual has, and it can be reproduced and reconstructed. For Noi, her status changed from a labor migrant who sought to fulfil a desire as a good daughter to the wife of a Taiwanese national who desired to live with the person she loved before they separated. Thus, desiring-production is not only an endless ongoing mechanism within an individual's thought, but it also is linked to external social contexts and relationships.

## 2. Migration assemblage

The narrative of Pit, a 50-year-old woman from Surin province, offers another perspective. She came from a poor family with nine siblings and recalled economic hardship during her childhood. For Pit, life as a migrant worker began at the age of just 14 when she had to go to work at an electronic manufacturing factory in Bangkok to support her parents' home expenses. She met her husband who was also a labor migrant from Baan Sawang and followed him to live there.

Traditionally, Isan culture is matrilineal, whereby after marriage the husband goes to live in the wife's community. Thus, what Pit did was uncommon and she had to prove herself and seek acceptance from her husband's family. She tried to find a way to improve their lives and avoid poverty. In 1997, working overseas was a very popular practice. Pit saw it as an opportunity to improve her family's economic security. She talked her husband into working abroad by mentioning other villagers who had done so and returned with a large amount of money. However, her husband was reluctant to go abroad. He was concerned about safety, the hardship of living overseas, and fraud. These ideas came from hearing about the experiences of returned migrants in the village who had failed. However, Pit did not see these concerns as obstacles. She decided to go to work abroad by herself. She found a job through a brokerage agency and got a three-year contract. She travelled alone. She was excited to live in a new environment in terms of language, weather, work, life, and culture. She had to learn and adjust to new social contexts, and she did well. Pit valued her company's benefits, such as three free meals a day, a room with an air-conditioner, free laundry service, and free company outings on holidays. With these positive reviews, her husband followed her to work in Taiwan in a different factory. Together they could earn a large amount of money to send back home. She said:

My husband followed me to Taiwan in two months because I showed him that it was a great deal for us. The work was not difficult. The payment was accurate and on time. So, he promptly followed me (Pit [Pseudonym], 2020).

During the time and Pit and her husband were working in Taiwan, they sent remittances to her father- and mother-in-law at Baan Sawang to take care of her children, use for everyday expenses, and invest in agricultural supplies, including hiring labor. She had enough money to send to her own parents in Surin as well. After her contract ended, she had it extended for two years. She expected higher pay and easier work because she was already been familiar with working at the same factory. However, she had to return to Thailand suddenly when her father-in-law died. She came back to take care of her children and mother-in-law, while her husband stayed in Taiwan to work for another three years. He came back for four or five months when the contract ended and signed a new contract to go to a new place. Now, he has been working in Israel for three years and sending home remittances of around 10,000-20,000 baht a month. Pit said that her husband intends to work overseas for as long as he can.

Pit's life story reflects a migration assemblage – the various social conditions that constitute a desire for migration. Deleuze and Guattari defined assemblage as a “mode of thinking.” They argued that desire was not produced merely by a stand-alone subject. Rather, it was linked or connected to diverse multiple systems of knowledge-formation. Assemblage is about how human subjects and objects are “understood in terms of the intensive environment in which they emerge” (Dewsbury, 2011). Pit's desire to go abroad was linked to her unconventional cohabitation with her husband. In traditional Isan culture, the son-in-law is supposed to be a free laborer for the wife's parents' farmland, while the daughter is expected to take care of her parents at home. Pit could not fulfil this obligation. At the same time, she sought acceptance from her husband's family and wanted to improve their opportunities. Her desire to go abroad was also intertwined with her husband's lack of leadership. He was afraid to go abroad and was satisfied with his low-income agricultural production, but Pit saw that their household expenses were increasing every day. All these conditions helped shape an assemblage of desire for Pit to seek a job abroad. It was hard to pinpoint one single cause of her desire. All conditions, whether structural

or individual, were connected to each other. Opportunities and life prospects, childhood experiences, unconventional cohabitation, family insecurity, and the obligation to be a good daughter simultaneously constituted an assemblage of desire for Pit to find a job abroad in the beginning. Moreover, post-migratory conditions, including a good working environment, the feeling of freedom when living overseas, a chance to get away from daily care responsibilities as mother and daughter at home, good pay, and increased self-esteem from her capability to send remittances to both families in Surin and Udon Thani helped shaped a varied assemblage of desire for her second trip to Taiwan until it was halted by the unexpected death of her father-in-law.

What is interesting about gender dynamics is that we found that the narrative accounts about “the feeling of freedom when living overseas” and “a chance to get away from daily care responsibilities at home” of the male respondents were different from those of the female respondents. For example, Thorn, a 50-year-old man who had been to three different countries, recalled that when he was working abroad, he could spend all the money he earned however he liked, whether it was on drinking or gambling. He rarely mentioned his responsibilities at home. Thus, the gender dynamics and power relationships between men and women workers could be an important condition in a varied assemblage of desire among Thai labor migrants.

When Pit had to return home, her desire did not stop. Rather, it was passed on to her husband, who is still working abroad as of today. Pit contemplated going abroad again, but her responsibilities as a mother and daughter-in-law did not allow her to do as she desired. She was excited to talk about her past experiences.

...Of course, I would go again. If I had one more chance to go abroad, I would not hesitate. The money was good. The work was good. I could never find fund such a good deal in Thailand. But it is impossible now. So, I leave it to my husband to carry on. He needs to earn more money. If he stayed here, we would not have this life we have today (Pit [Pseudonym], 2020).



Pit’s story shows a varied assemblage of desires for going abroad. Collins (2018), in his work on migrants from Southeast Asia to South Korea, argued that their desire is tied to the transformations in the places they move through and the people they move with. The conditions that shape their desires to move abroad could be individual, subjective, or family ones – all of which reproduce the “culture of international migration” (De Haas, 2007). Working abroad is regarded as an appealing option for villagers to pursue even when they are aware of the risk of failure that others had experienced. There were also other external conditions which helped facilitate the mobility of migrants, including brokerage agency companies, migrants’ social networks, and the enticing influence of the “pop culture” in the destination country. The combinations of these assemblages brought out the expressions of desire, which was never a singular moment in time, but rather a never-ending transformative process that was ceaselessly produced in different spaces and times and could be passed on to other family members.

## Conclusion

The phenomenon of international migration among Baan Sawang villagers began in the 1980s and continues today. This article proposed that the desire for migration which shaped the continuity of this phenomenon was constructed through various social contexts and background conditions in different periods of time. They were linked to contexts and social interactions which had changed individuals’ driving forces of desire over time. The significant conditions that shaped villagers’ desires included their experiences abroad, social relations with new people, and lifestyles both in their hometown and at the destination. Desires were constantly produced through these changes in their lives. As Deleuze and Guattari argued, desire is not a subjective and individual need, rather it is constructed from various elements, both individually and socially, that come into people’s lives and shape each other. Individuals’ desires exist when they interact with other individuals

within a society, and when they do, they change according to the new social contexts they interact with. Deleuze and Guattari called this process a desiring-machine, which ceaselessly produces endless desires through various social and material interactions, or the assemblage that constitutes a desire for migration as a norm. Moreover, the desire can be reproduced by the driving force, which is the internal mental process within individuals that keeps the desire alive. These core concepts were introduced by and Collins (2018) who argued that migration is a multifaceted reality that involves the interplay among desires, aspirations, and drivers. The term ‘driver’ is reserved for the more external material forces that influence mobility. But drivers alone cannot explain migration; rather, they facilitate or constrain individual agency. Desires are as significant as other material and structural factors that stimulate international migration.

We agree with Carling and Collins (2018) and Collins (2018) that the concept of desire (and aspiration) engaging with subjective and individual conditions could provide a more nuanced explanation of migration alongside the macro structural/material explanation, for example, the classical push and pull factors by Lee (1966). It is what Van Hear and his colleagues refer to as the “push-pull plus” framework. That is the way in which combinations of individual conditions and external environments shape the nature of movement (Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long, 2018). Previous studies on international migration focused on structural/material factors that affected individuals and forced them to migrate at a single moment in their lives. However, we propose that both structural forces and individual forces can shape the desire for migration throughout an individual’s life history and past experiences from various social relationships that they have had. Therefore, the desire for migration is ceaselessly produced over time at both individual and societal levels. Further study should explore how the desire to go abroad is transmitted and sustained across generations and among family members and social networks without being diminished.

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