

# Gender-Differentiated Patterns of Migrant Network: The Case Of *Nayu* Migrant Workers in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines how gender relations influence and are influenced by migrant networks. It argues that within migration networks, there are differences between men and women in terms of their position in the networks and their access to networks on the basis of sexual difference. It draws on the ethnographic fieldwork at Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia with in-depth interviews and participant and non-participant observations. The paper concludes by discussing the existence of separate men's and women's networks. This study found that men and women are likely to access different forms of networks when they first migrate from the border southern provinces of Thailand to Malaysia. Within Malaysia, female migrant workers do not move as frequently as male workers from their increasing networks in Malaysia. Migrant women differ from their male counterparts in that they do not use their networks to seek available jobs and social contacts with restaurant owners, no matter how many connections they have. Women were thought to be at higher risk, therefore, they needed to establish close ties to protect themselves which takes time. As a consequence, moving within Malaysia is not easy for women.

**Keywords:** migrant network, gender, migrant worker, southern border provinces of Thailand, Malaysia

## บทอัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่ออธิบายความสัมพันธ์ทางเพศสภาพที่มีอิทธิพลต่อเครือข่ายการซ้ายถันตลอดจนความสัมพันธ์ทางเพศสภาพที่ได้รับอิทธิพลจากเครือข่ายดังกล่าว เป็นที่ถกเถียงกันว่าภายในเครือข่ายการซ้ายถันมีความแตกต่างระหว่างชายและหญิงในเรื่องตำแหน่งของหัวส่องเพศสภาพรวมถึงความแตกต่างในการเข้าถึงเครือข่ายเหล่านั้นบนพื้นฐานของความแตกต่างทางเพศสภาพ การศึกษานี้อ้างอิงข้อมูลภาคสนามชาติพันธุ์วรรณนา ที่เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก การ

สังเกตแบบมีส่วนร่วมและ ไม่มีส่วนร่วมจากแรงงาน  
มาลยูที่เข้ามายื่นเข้าไปทำงานในร้านอาหารตั้มยำที่  
กรุงวัวลาลัมเปอร์ ประเทศมาเลเซีย ผลการศึกษา<sup>1</sup>  
พบว่าแรงงานชายและหญิงมีแนวโน้มที่จะเข้าถึง<sup>2</sup>  
รูปแบบของเครื่องอุปกรณ์ที่ต่างกันในการข้ามถิ่นครั้งแรก  
จากจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ของประเทศไทยสู่  
ประเทศมาเลเซีย ทั้งนี้แรงงานหญิงอาชญาเครื่องอุปกรณ์  
เพื่อยกน้ำมากกว่าผู้ชายในการข้ามถิ่นครั้งแรก การ  
ข้ามถิ่นภายในประเทศมาเลเซียทั้งแรงงานชายและ  
หญิงอาชญาเครื่องอุปกรณ์เพื่อยกน้ำเหมือนกัน แต่  
แรงงานหญิงข้ามถิ่นภายในประเทศมาเลเซีย ไม่มาก  
เท่ากับแรงงานชาย การข้ามถิ่นของชายและหญิงจะ

ด่างกันตรงที่แรงงานหญิงจะไม่ใช้เครื่อข่ายของตนในการทำงานที่มีอยู่และติดต่อกันเจ้าของร้านอาหารเอง แม้ว่าพวกเขายังมีเครื่อข่ายมากแค่ไหนก็ตาม เนื่องจากแรงงานหญิงคิดว่าตนมีความเสี่ยงในการข้ายถิ่น พวกเขายังสร้างความสัมพันธ์อย่างใกล้ชิดกับเครื่อข่ายของตนก่อน เพื่อปักป้องตนเองซึ่งเป็นเรื่องที่ต้องใช้เวลา ดังนั้นการข้ายกถิ่นในมาเลเซียจึงไม่ใช่เรื่องง่ายเลยสำหรับผู้หญิง

**คำสำคัญ:** เครื่อข่ายการข้ายกถิ่น เพศสภาพ แรงงานข้ายถิ่น จังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ของไทย มาเลเซีย

## INTRODUCTION

*Nayu* migrant worker flows to Malaysia are not a new phenomenon. *Nayu* in Malay dialect means a Malay who speaks the Malay dialect and who has been living in the border southern provinces of Thailand. There has been cross border mobility of families and relatives throughout history, both before British colonialism and after Malaysian independence (Suwannathat-Pian, 1993). In 1940, during the British period, there was an agreement that allowed traffic between British Malaya and Thailand (Bunmak, 2011). Since Malaysian independence and the increase in economic growth in Malaysia, there have been flows of low-skilled workers from border southern Thailand to meet Malaysia's labor demands, especially in the low paid service sectors of the economy which in turn has led to an increase in *Nayu* irregular migration (Klanarong, 2005; Bunmak, 2011). This study involved an investigation of *Nayu* irregular migrant workers from border southern Thailand and of the process of border crossing to Malaysia that shapes their experiences as temporary migrant workers.

Although international migrants are still predominantly male, the number of female workers who work outside their countries is growing as migration becomes increasingly feminized (Pedraza, 1991; Honagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 1999). Studying the gendered nature of international

migration is already a feature of migration studies and understanding of the pattern, causes, and impacts of the feminisation of migration is deepening. But while some studies focus on females who migrate freely without a husband or their families, the main body of literature on international migration still sheds little light on the gendered nature of migration networks or on women's experiences. This paper provides an in-depth examination of the role gender plays in the various stages of the migration process and in the experiences of *Nayu* men and women workers. It provides greater insight into how gender relations influence and are influenced by migrant networks. It demonstrates that there are gender differences between men and women in terms of their use and maintenance of migrant networks.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last several decades, in a variety of ways, scholars have paid increasing attention to the concept of migrant networks in order to understand migration (Choldin, 1973; Lindquist, 1993). This includes: the decision to migrate (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991); the direction and persistence of migration flows (Massey, Alarco'n, Durand, & Gona'lez, 1987; Bagchi, 2001); and the process of adaptation and patterns of settlement (Massey et al., 1987; Boyd, 1989; Hagan, 1998). Migrants pass their knowledge to newly arrived migrants through social ties which assist migration in several ways. Members of migrant networks provide information about jobs and accommodation and migrant networks reduce the costs of transportation and of living (Massey et al., 1987). These networks provide finance, accommodation, meals, and transportation. The literature shows that networks link sending and destination countries and ease the newly arrived migrants into their new ways of life (Massey et al., 1987; Boyd, 1989; Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991; Gurak & Caces, 1992; Lindquist, 1993; Bagchi, 2001).

In migration studies, 'a migrant network' is defined as a set of cross-border interpersonal ties connecting migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in places of origin and destination through the bonds of kinship, friendship, and a shared community of origin (Massey et al., 1987; Gurak & Caces, 1992). Thus, this definition refers to the personal relationships based on kin, family, friends, and community that connect people between and within two or more areas. These relationships establish mutual trust among network members. Migrant networks are important in facilitating migration and, more significantly in the beginning stages, in encouraging potential migrant workers. The study of migrant networks provides greater insight into why and how people move. This study used a migrant network approach to study unauthorised *Nayu* migrant workers in Malaysia in order to understand the social and cultural factors shaping migration.

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

Globally, the number of female migrant workers has increased significantly and has begun to exceed the number of male migrant workers in some areas (Pedraza, 1991; Honagneu-Sotelo & Cranford,

1999; Klanarong, 2005; Rudnick, 2009). Previous research has demonstrated that gender relations are influenced by and also influence migration (Morokvasic, 1984; Honagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 1999; Mahler & Pessar, 2006). There are important differences between men and women in patterns of migration, and the impact of the labour market on social life is mediated through gender relations (Sassen, 1995; Greenwell, Burciaga & Da Vanzo, 1997). Hagan (1998) has also explored the different forms of migration undertaken by men and women and has examined the differences in settlement outcomes, particularly in the opportunities to become legal. He found that migrant networks operate differently for women compared to men, that women have fewer opportunities for employment compared to men, and women earn lower wages. The current paper focuses on the differences between the migration networks for men compared to women and how gender relations in Thailand and Malaysia affect the form and function of migrant networks. Incorporating gender into migration studies helps to clarify the differences in the migration experiences of men and women and the gender inequality that are reflected by and that emerge in migration processes.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used an ethnographic approach to understand social reality on its own terms, based on the understanding of people themselves and on observations of their interactions in natural settings (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Ethnographic methods allow access to the inner reality of human experience because they emphasize the importance of examining social phenomena from the point of view of participants; however, Berg (2004) recommends using a variety of methods to gather data because it encourages rigour. Research methodologies each have their limitations, but by using a variety of methods, the negative effects of each can be minimized. Accordingly, this study

obtained primary data via in-depth interviews but also studied documents and used direct observation.

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

Snowball sampling is a sampling procedure that engages a few respondents who meet the criteria and who accidentally come into contact with the researcher and provide different perspectives (Sarantakos, 2005). The snowballing interview technique was important because a large majority of the *Nayu* workers were working irregularly and, hence, were unauthorised. Given that there were no records on irregular workers to be used as a sampling frame, snowball sampling was used. Snowballing was considered to also help to uncover and effectively delineate the networks of which these workers were a part. Five key characteristics were identified and used to select the purposive sample. Respondents must: 1) have lived and worked in Malaysia for one year or more, to exclude seasonal workers; 2) come from the deep southern provinces of Thailand (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun, & Songkhla); 3) be *Nayu* who speak the

Malay dialect; 4) currently work in Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur, the main occupation of Thai workers (Muhammed & Chantavanich, 2001); and 5) be irregular workers, as the aim was to specifically study networks of irregular workers, not of documented workers and employers. These respondents were asked to recommend further people who met the purposive criteria. Finally, interviews were conducted with 60 workers and their employees based on Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In summary, the purposive sample consisted of people with the following characteristics:

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

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In Thailand, as elsewhere, patriarchy dominates social relations, restricting women to the household and limiting their access to the public sphere (Lertrit, 1992; Klanarong 2009). Of the women in the household, single daughters in particular are not independent from the rule of their fathers. The fathers' traditional system of authority in the household rules more over single women than over young men. As patriarchal relations predominate personal life, single daughters are not free to decide whether they would like to migrate or not. Unlike single men, the migration decision of women occurs within the traditional patriarchal system of gender roles that dictate that women should stay in the household with their parents. As a

result, men have access to the public sphere and women are restricted to the private realm, and men also control women's access to the migration process and to paid work in Malaysia. Studies of international migrant workers have established that making the decision to migrate to work overseas is different between men and women, with male migrants making their own decision to migrate to work overseas whereas female migrants are not as independent when it comes to making decisions to migrate due to their family's restrictions on their movements (Klanarong, 2005; Rudnick, 2009).

### Gender-differentiated patterns of migrant networks

Migrant networks play an important role in migration to Malaysia, and men are likely to access different networks to women when they first migrate. Men are offered help for their trip through their multiple social ties, from men and women who are family members, from relatives, friends, villagers, and restaurant owners. In contrast, almost all women receive help only from very close contacts in Thailand, such as family members and relatives, who have work experience in Malaysia. Although all women make their own decision to migrate, they need permission from their parents, because the migration journey and social life in Malaysia are regarded as risky for women. Non-migrants often take a risk when making the decision to become international migrant workers. They do not know much about working and living in Malaysia. Normally, parents allow them to migrate only with people with whom they have close ties and in whom they have a high level of trust.

Experienced migrants must agree to accompany and take responsibility for new women migrants during migration so that the parents of the potential migrants place their daughters in the care of someone they trust. In addition, those who offer them work sometimes allow the women's parents to travel to Malaysia with them in order to protect them from risks during migration such as unreliable

information, guile, or sexual harassment. However, a few women receive help to cross the border from people who are not close relatives, such as friends and restaurant owners from their villages. This is an important issue for these women, for they risk refusal from their parents. In this respect, someone who has power and respect in the village has to ask permission from their parents. Mostly, this is done by *Nayu* female restaurant owners who, while asking for permission, have to guarantee the safety of the daughters as their prospective employees in Malaysia. The more trustworthy the person is, the higher are the chances that the parents will allow their daughters to migrate with non-relatives.

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

Male migrants, in contrast, can receive help from a variety of social contacts in the migrant networks. They enter the migration process through any social tie that can offer them help when they need it. Consequently, male workers have more opportunities to enter the labour market in Malaysia when jobs are available. It is easier to persuade men to become migrant workers than women. There is no need for a third person to ask permission from their parents as men themselves tend to ask permission

from their families when they receive an offer to cross the border. The male migrants' networks include friends, villagers, and restaurant owners who do not necessarily have close or strong relationships with their families. Usually their parents are not worried about the person with whom their sons are going to migrate because of the greater freedom men enjoy in both Malaysia and Thailand. Unlike women, they are not controlled and restricted by social norms and traditions.

*I was invited to work here by my friend. He thought that I just stayed at home and didn't do any work. So, it was better for me to work in Malaysia. My friend had worked at the shop before. Later, there was a vacancy and the owner wanted a worker to work there. He was a friend living in the same village . . . After I decided to work with my friend here, I told my father by myself alone. He said that it was my own decision. He didn't make any comment about whether I should stay at home or go there. (Married male interviewed in the study)*

Male migrants can receive help from a variety of social contacts in their villages. This may be because men take part in activities outside the home. They meet up with friends at local coffee shops in the village and socialize in town, but women's activities are more confined to the household and its neighbourhood as women are not allowed to be far away from their guardians. As Lerlit (1992, p. 22) notes, "Malay Muslim women often stay at their homes but men have more chance to go into the public realm within and outside the villages".

This means that *Nayu* women receive less help from social contacts than men do, as men have a greater number of social contacts among friends and villagers than women. In addition, the roles and status of women limit them to the home and they are subordinate to family members, in particular to the father and husband. Nevertheless women have developed strategies to work in Malaysia. They use

social contacts with whom they have close relationships and who are more trusted by their families.

### **Women's networks and female subordination**

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

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

Young non-migrant men, however, are not dependent only on male migrant networks for their first migration to Malaysia. Any former migrants of any gender are able to offer them help to work in Malaysia. Non-migrant men have multiple options to access the labour market in Malaysia. In addition, the people who offer them help can be the same age or even younger. Their opportunities are greater

because according to the perceptions of people in their culture, they face fewer risks by migrating and living far away from home. The multiple ties available to young men mean that a greater number of male than female migrants work in Malaysia.

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

Although the traditional *Nayu* social and cultural norms control women within the household and village, the high demand for *Nayu* workers encourages female *Nayu* to obtain work away from their households. Almost all *Nayu* migrant workers are invited to work, in particular *Nayu* female workers. Young women are more dependent on gender-based migrant networks than their male counterparts. They rely almost exclusively on other women with whom they are closely connected. Female *Nayu* workers use these migrant networks strategically to seek work in Thai *Halal* restaurants away from their villages where they are unemployed or work as unpaid labour in the home. Social ties to migrant networks through close relatives and ties to *Nayu* women who are powerful and trustworthy help them to negotiate the traditional social and cultural norms which restrict them to the household and block their access to the labour market and to public life. Although both men and women *Nayu* use migrant networks for their first migration to Malaysia, female migrant networks are more significant for them because they are usually accompanied to Malaysia by close personal contacts and are more dependent on gender-based migrant networks when they arrive in Malaysia.

### Gender and physical mobility

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

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

However, female migrant workers do not move as frequently as male workers despite their access to labour market opportunities through their networks in Malaysia. Migrant women differ from their male counterparts in that they do not use their networks to seek information about available jobs and contacts with restaurant owners no matter how many connections they have. Migrant women usually stay in their workplaces for a long time before they consider moving to a new workplace. Having close contacts in new workplaces is more important for migrant women. Almost all female migrants have their established contacts whom they trust and workers they are familiar with in new

workplaces. Women are likely to think that they would be at higher risk, therefore, they need to establish close ties to protect themselves, which takes some time. As a consequence, moving within Malaysia is not easy for women. Despite the labour market opportunities available to them, *Nayu* female migrant workers are less prone to transfer to new workplaces than their male counterparts.

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

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

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

*I worked with my relative for two years . . . Anyway, I didn't want to work there as in my opinion I was not independent. I needed to be independent and didn't want to be under anyone's control. I just wanted to do whatever I wanted. Being with my relative, it was quite uncomfortable for me to do anything. (Single female interviewed in the study)*

*Nayu* workers' gender-based peer ties are mostly built in Malaysia. After they have received a job offer from another restaurant through these networks, women are likely to move to find freedom and to escape from the control of their close kin. After moving to work with their peers, they have more freedom in Malaysia as they are far away from their relatives, who have controlled their daily life. Men have more freedom in Malaysia even when they work with their close kin. After work, male *Nayu* are able to socialize with their friends overnight without having to ask permission from their kin. Men are thought to face less risk in the way they behave and live.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on the gender, migrant networks, and processes of *Nayu* workers who temporarily move from border southern

Thailand to and within Malaysia for paid work in Malaysia. Migrant networks play a vital role in migration to Malaysia. Men and women migrant workers have their own distinct networks and obtain help from their migrant network in different ways. Because of patriarchy in the home village and household, unlike men, women are less free to move and work away from their parents. Numbers of young single women migrate by using a migrant network with close women-based ties to find work in Malaysia. Moreover, they also use a female migrant network to move within Malaysia to have a more independent life and to improve their working conditions and wages. They follow their trusted female peer contacts to move to seek freedom and to escape from the control of their close kin. Single *Nayu* female workers in Malaysia protect themselves from malicious talk at home by not offering help to non-migrants from their village to work with them.

On the other hand, *Nayu* men are offered help for their first migration through a variety of social contacts, from both men and women in their migrant networks. Consequently, new male workers have more opportunities to enter the labour market in Malaysia. Moreover, male workers move more frequently to find new workplaces within Malaysia by using male peer networks quite often based on the contacts they have established.

This study has demonstrated the importance of gender issues and migrant networks in the irregular international migration process for *Nayu* workers. The migrant network approach has its own limits. This approach frequently is blind to the agency of gender in the creation and use of migrant networks. As this study has clearly shown, there are important differences between how and why men and women become involved in the migration process, produce and operate migrant networks, and engage in social life. By incorporating gender into migrant network analysis, this study has identified and clarified the similarities and differences in the networks of men and women and has identified

some of their differential positive and negative effects in terms of job opportunities, career advancement, and geographical mobility among irregular *Nayu* migrant workers.

Whatever their gender, migrant networks are an efficient social technology facilitating international migration and encouraging potential migrant workers, particularly irregular ones. These networks exist with the complicity of and beyond the effective control of governments in both the original and destination countries. As this study has shown, there is no need for *Nayu* to use regulated migration or the formal recruitment industry, Potential irregular migrant workers can migrate more easily and more cheaply, even relatively safely, can evade detection, and can adjust to a new job in a new land, all by successfully using existing migrant networks based on and accessed through interpersonal social ties.

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