

**SOCIOECONOMIC LIFE AND WORK  
BEHAVIOUR OF MIGRANT CONTINGENT  
WORKERS: A STUDY AT A MULTINATIONAL  
COMPANY IN PENANG, MALAYSIA**

By

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**May 2016**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am a part-time Ph.D. student and a full time employee in an American Multinational Corporation in Penang. It would have been impossible for me to have completed this thesis if not for the close guidance and strong support from several people who had contributed to my research. In particular, I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Chin Yee Whah from the School of Anthropology and Sociology, Universiti Sains Malaysia for his invaluable supervision of this research. Dr. Chin had rendered me counsel, guidance and assistance throughout my research for the past six and a half years. He had patiently read my draft chapters many times over and provided critical and useful comments for all the drafts, beginning from my research proposal to the final chapter of my thesis. Besides Dr. Chin, I would like to thank my second supervisor Dr. Ong Beng Kok, Senior Lecturer from the same school for his early comments on my research proposal and input on Structuration Theory which subsequently helped to re-shape the analytical framework of my research. I also would like to express my gratitude to my colleague, Ahmad Fuad Hashim, a Principal Quality Engineer for his guidance and knowledge on statistics. My gratitude also goes to the three translators (Mohammed and Jahangir from Bangladesh, Issac from Myanmar and Ah Hui from Vietnam) who had provided me full support during the in-depth interviewing sessions with migrant contingent workers. Finally, I am deeply grateful to my wife Tan Siew Hoon and my daughter Koh Evien. Both of them had provided me invaluable support and encouragement throughout the duration of my research.

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**KEHIDUPAN SOSIOEKONOMI DAN TINGKAH LAKU KERJA  
PEKERJA ASING KONTINJEN: SATU KAJIAN DALAM SYARIKAT  
MULTINASIONAL DI PULAU PINANG, MALAYSIA**

**ABSTRAK**

Tesis ini adalah satu kajian terhadap kehidupan sosio-ekonomi dan tingkah laku kerja pekerja asing kontinjen (Bangladesh, Myanmar dan Vietnam) dalam konteks pembahagian buruh global di sebuah syarikat elektrik dan elektronik multinasional moden di Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan kerangka teori *structuration* dan teori ekuiti untuk menerangkan faktor-faktor yang mendorong pekerja asing meninggalkan negara asal mereka dan memahami sebab-sebab yang menarik mereka untuk datang bekerja di Malaysia. Kajian ini memberi kefahaman tentang bagaimana pekerja asing kontinjen menyesuaikan diri dengan persekitaran kerja baharu dengan peraturan-peraturan pengurusan yang ketat. Ia menerangkan tingkah laku kerja pekerja-pekerja asing. Kajian ini menerangkan perubahan taraf hidup pekerja asing di negara tuan rumah dan keluarga mereka di negara asal. Kajian ini menggunakan gabungan kaedah penyelidikan yang berbeza (*longitudinal, unobtrusive experimental design* dan *comparative*) yang mengumpul data mengikut persepektif *structuration* dan motivasi. Pengkaji mengambil pendekatan ‘insider’ sebagai seorang pengkaji berautoriti kerana kedudukannya sebagai seorang penyelia. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pekerja asing kontinjen mempunyai tahap pencapaian pendidikan rendah yang menghadkan mobiliti sosial mereka dalam persekitaran kadar pengangguran yang tinggi dan dengan upah yang rendah di negara asal mereka. Sebaliknya, yuran ejen yang rendah untuk bekerja di Malaysia

berbanding dengan bekerja di negara-negara lain adalah sebab utama yang menjelaskan mengapa pendatang ini berakhir di Malaysia. Melalui kerajinan, pekerja asing dapat 'mengumpul kekayaan' yang membantu mengubah taraf hidup mereka di negara tuan rumah dan juga keluarga mereka di negara asal. Kami mendapati bahawa tingkah laku kerja pekerja asing kontinjen dibentuk oleh beberapa faktor seperti komitmen keluarga, takut kehilangan pekerjaan, dan untuk mendapatkan lebih banyak wang bagi mencapai kehendak mereka. Ia adalah satu proses dualiti kerana permintaan bekerja lebih hari dan masa oleh pekerja asing telah mengubah dasar pengurusan syarikat untuk memenuhi permintaan pekerja asing. Pekerja asing yang telah berkahwin adalah cenderung untuk bekerja lebih hari dan konsisten bekerja lebih hari berbanding dengan pekerja yang mempunyai kurang anak dan mereka yang bujang. Pekerja asing yang masih bujang adalah lebih fleksibel, mereka boleh bekerja lebih atau kurang hari. Pekerja asing wanita yang cenderung untuk bekerja lebih hari adalah lebih konsisten berbanding pekerja lelaki. Pekerja Vietnam lebih banyak berehat dan berjaya 'meningkatkan gaya hidup' mencari keseronokan semasa hari cuti. Pekerja Bangladesh dan Vietnam mempunyai rekod cuti sakit yang lebih baik, rekod ketidakhadiran dan jumlah hari bekerja berbanding dengan responden Myanmar. Walau bagaimanapun, dari segi perbandingan produktiviti, responden Myanmar dan Vietnam menghasilkan lebih unit produk dan mencapai kualiti yang tinggi berbanding dengan responden Bangladesh. Responden Myanmar dan Vietnam didapati lebih berdisiplin berbanding dengan responden Bangladesh tetapi mereka tidak menerima semangat kerja berpasukan dalam pengeluaran produk berbanding dengan responden Bangladesh. Strategi ganjaran yang diusahakan oleh syarikat untuk meningkatkan produktiviti mempunyai had untuk memberi motivasi kepada pekerja asing kontinjen untuk membina lebih banyak unit di luar matlamat yang disasarkan.

**SOCIOECONOMIC LIFE AND WORK BEHAVIOUR OF MIGRANT  
CONTINGENT WORKERS: A STUDY AT A MULTINATIONAL  
COMPANY IN PENANG, MALAYSIA**

**ABSTRACT**

The thesis is a study of socioeconomic life and work behaviour of migrant contingent workers (Bangladeshi, Myanmar and Vietnamese) in the context of the global division of labour in an advanced multinational electrical and electronic company in Penang, Malaysia. The study utilizes the notion of structuration and equity theory to describe factors that push migrant workers to leave their home countries and to understand reasons that attract them to come to work in Malaysia. The study provides understanding on how migrant contingent workers adapt themselves to the new work environment with stringent management regulations and rules. It explains the work behaviour of these migrant workers. The study describes the transformation of the standard of living of migrant workers in the host country and their families in their home countries. The study uses a combination of different research methods (longitudinal, unobtrusive experimental design and comparative) which collects data within the structuration and motivational perspectives. The researcher takes an insider approach with authority because of his position as a supervisor. The research findings show that migrant contingent workers have low education level attainment that limit their social mobility in an environment of high unemployment and with low wages in their home countries. On the other hand, the relatively low agent fees of working in Malaysia compared to working in other countries was the main reason that explains why these migrants ended up in Malaysia. Through their hard work, migrant workers



were able to ‘accumulate wealth’ which helped to transform their standard of living in the host country and also their families’ in their home countries. We discovered that migrant contingent workers’ work behaviour is shaped by several factors such as family commitments, fear of losing their job, and to earn more money to achieve their wants. It is a duality process because the demand of working more days and longer hours by the migrant workers have shaped the management policy of the company that hires them. Migrant workers who are married tend to work more days and are consistent in working more days compare to workers who have fewer children and those who are singles. On the other hand, migrant workers who are single have more flexibility to either work more or less days. Female migrant workers tend to work more days and are more consistent in working more days than male workers. Of the three different nationalities, Vietnamese workers are more relaxed and manage to ‘upgrade’ their life style and have some leisure during off days. Bangladeshi and Vietnamese respondents have better medical leave records, absenteeism records and total working days compared to Myanmar respondents. However, in terms of productivity comparison, the Myanmar and Vietnamese respondents produced more units of product and achieved the highest quality compare to Bangladeshi respondents. Myanmar and Vietnamese respondents are found to be more disciplined compare to Bangladeshi respondents but they do not embrace teamwork spirit in the production line compared to Bangladeshi respondents. The rewards strategy initiated by the company to increase productivity has limitation to motivate migrant contingent workers to build more units beyond the targeted goal.



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The world system has experienced periodic crises throughout its history (Frank, 1983: 323). The most recent economic crisis started with housing mortgage calamity in the United States in 2007 and spiralled into financial meltdown in 2008 that later involved insolvency of European banks and car assembling industries (Aleksashenko, 2009; Hodson and Quaglia, 2009; Jackson, 2010; Welch, 2012). Asian countries were affected by this crisis as well but recovered soon after. However, both United States and Europe are experiencing great recession due to the prolonged financial crisis that has resulted in the collapse in assets and equity markets, high unemployment and increasing real value of government debts. The United States throughout its economic history had experienced eight financial panics in two centuries, whereas European countries are tasked in taking extra strategies and measurements to avoid insolvency of their banking sectors (Jackson, 2010; Martin and Martin, 2011; Shachmurove, 2011; Stanton, 2010) as well as having to cope with high inflation rates which have been partly contributed by the rise of global prices for foodstuffs and energy. Parallel to this, the significant reduction of foreign direct investment in European countries did not improve the already worsening economic climate (Ionescu, 2012). The advancement of technology as well as outsourcing and off-shoring of manufacturing jobs to peripheral countries caused the loss of job

opportunities in home countries. Exporting manufacturing jobs to peripheral countries over a long period and the shift towards the service sector also resulted in the loss of manufacturing skills. Moreover, the lack of infrastructures that support a competitive manufacturing environment should be the focus instead of just creating jobs (Scott, 1987; Welch, 2012).

A revisit of the World System Theory, Andrew Gunder Frank, a prominent sociologist, in his article, *Global Crisis and Transformation* argues that “In order to survive world economic crises, it is necessary for the system to undergo vast economic, social, political, and cultural transformations, including technological change” (Frank, 1983: 323-324). Frank contended that the world economic crises of the 1960s and 1970s had resulted in reduction for costs of production. According to Frank, a very significant way to reduce costs of production has been the partial relocation of the production processes from areas where labour costs are high to areas where they are lower. The policy was to relocate particularly labour-intensive industrial processes such as textile, apparel, shoe, toy and electronic components industries. At the later stage, capital-intensive crisis-driven industries such as automobiles, shipbuilding, steel and petrochemicals were also being moved increasingly to Third World and socialist countries. Following this new policy, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore emerged as new industrialised countries (NIEs), started to export labour-intensive commodities to the world market. The deepening economic crisis of the 1970s had resulted in more industrial relocation that had spread to Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and other Asian countries and also to Latin America (Frank, 1983: 327). Frank continues, “to reduce costs of production and to make room for more technologically-advanced development elsewhere, a part of the labour (and some-

capital) intensive production is relocated to the NICs and the ‘socialist countries’” (1983: 332).

Other World System theories argue that the gap between core and periphery in the world economy had been narrowing since the 1950s, and by 1980 the semi-periphery not only caught up with but also overtook the core countries in their degree of industrialisation (Arrighi and Dragel, 1986: 54-55; Arrighi, Silver and Brewer, 2003). The assembly-oriented export production in the newly industrialising countries was merely an early stage in the transformation of the global economy into a highly complex, kaleidoscopic structure involving the fragmentation of many production processes, and their geographical relocation on a global scale in ways which slice through national boundaries (Dicken, 2003:9). A study on the international division of labour (IDL) by Scott (1987) deals with the functional and geographical organisation of the semiconductor industry in South-East Asia show that there is an emerging international division of labour in the semiconductor industry within South-East Asia. Scott claims that the industry in Southeast Asia has become more highly-developed and territorially differentiated than before. The industry has started to evolve along different lines in different countries, and this has been accompanied by the formation of a new international division of labour (NIDL) internal to the regional and entwined with the broader division of labour at the world scale. Scott classified the intra-regional division in Southeast Asia into ‘core’ of high wages countries (Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan) and a ‘periphery’ of low-wage countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand (1986: 153). Such deployment of capital means an interplay of conjunctural (technological, social, cultural and political) and structural factors in

the continuing evolution of the NIDL. Central to these factors is the role of transnational capital and of the state in the periphery (Kamal, at el., 1988: 375-376).

Scholars that examine the IDL in the context of globalisation such as James Mittelman argues that “The familiar imagery of a core, semi-periphery, and periphery no longer applies to a new structure that envelopes both vertically integrated regional divisions of labour based on the distinctive comparative advantages of different locations, and horizontally diversified networks which extend their activities into neighbouring countries as part of corporate strategies of diversification and globalisation” (1995: 273). With new technologies, time and space are compressed and manufacturing sites are increasingly independent of geographical distance such as the integrated world assembly line of electronic industry. He proposed a new perspective, the global division of labour (GDL). This perspective involves the argument of a restructuring of world economy that focuses on the interpretation of global processes, regional dynamics and local conditions. Mittelman argues that one aspect of reordering the international division of labour (IDL) is massive transfer of population from the Third World, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union to the advance capitalist countries. He reasons that varied regional divisions of labour are emerging and they are dynamic, change rapidly, reflecting expansion and contradiction in production in different locales, the instantaneous movement of finance, the coalescence of production and trade networks, as well as the consolidation of production and distribution systems. In this process, the state facilitates the reorganisation of production, and the interstate system remains an important point of reference in an integrated world society. The state has also taken a hand in reconfiguring labour

processes, sometimes through repression, partly to keep down cost of labour (Mittelman, 1995: 279, 280).

Mittelman points out that micro-patterns rooted in culture such as family, communal, and ethnic ties are some important elements arbitrating among the macro-political and economic structures. The impact of culture is perhaps the most neglected factor in division of labour theory (Munck, 1988: 101). Mittelman asserts that lives are shaped and meanings are formed in distinctive cultural context. Thus, from the GDL perspective, cultural responses to the expansion of the market provide inter-subjective meanings and intermediate inequalities arising from a changing division of labour (1995: 286). Mittelman claims that classical authors (Durkheim, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill), “though not silent about the role of culture ... said relatively little about the attitudes, beliefs and habits of different strata in the international division of labour (1995: 277).

Other focus on the international division of labour such as on gender issue has been explored. Maria Mies (1998) in her study of women’s work in the Free Production Zones (FPZs) in Maquiladoras, Mexico argues that the concept of patriarchy preceded capitalism and that patriarchy is remains in the structure of the new international division of labour. She contends that the exploitation and oppression of women are not just accidental phenomena but are intrinsic parts of a system, existed for at least five thousand years. She tries to show the connections between the prevailing sexual division of labour and international division of labour in the global economy.

## **1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Recent changes of the global division of labour had led the researcher to observe of the division of labour in the electrical and electronic (EE) sector in Malaysia as it is the most globally integrated sector and Malaysia's major export sector (see Malaysia, 2010: 357-397). Malaysia was in the low-wage 'periphery', which is part of the regional division of labour. The state had successfully attracted foreign direct investment (FDI) through various incentive policies. In the late 1960s, Malaysia had become a destination for FDI because of its cheap labour and state incentives, especially for electrical and electronic multinational companies (MNCs). At the earlier stage, local labourers were employed but as time went by, the demand of wages by local labourers increased and investors had to look for substitutions to keep their operations competitive. In response to this, the state successfully facilitated the continuous supply of cheap labour by changing its migration policy to allow migrant contingent workers from neighbouring countries to work in Malaysia (Tham and Liew, 2004). In regard to this, we began to see the re-ordering of labour supply and a group of new labour force working in MNCs on Malaysian shore. The current GDL is different from the time Frank studied the international division of labour. Off-shore plants where MNCs build in a foreign country may not be filled with indigenous labourers of that country but with migrant contingent workers from other Third World countries who are paid with lower salary compared to indigenous workers. Another aspect that arises from the huge migration of foreign workers is transnationalism, which has not received much attention in the context of the global division of labour.



In this study the researcher focuses on three aspects that relate to the GDL in the context of Malaysia, in the EE sector in Penang, Malaysia. These three aspects have been identified as neglected in previous studies. First, the social aspects of the GDL which was mentioned by Mittelman (1995) that includes reasons why migrant workers leave their home countries and choose to work in Malaysia. Second, is their work behaviour in the host country where they work and live. Finally, the study examines the transformation of the migrant workers' families' socioeconomic life in their home countries as a result of remittances sent by migrant workers. This third aspect is an avenue of capital identified in the concept of transnationalism.

## **1.2 MOTIVE AND GOAL**

From the perspective of applied research, by understanding the socioeconomic life and work behaviour of migrant contingent workers, this research aims to fully integrate migrant contingent workers of different nationalities in the EE sector to achieve an optimum level of productivity. This research is pivotal as EE sector is considered as the largest employer in the manufacturing industry because it accounted for 56 percent of total manufacturing employment in Penang (Chin, 2007). Hence, this research will benefit policy makers, MNCs and local SMEs employers in decision making to employ and manage migrant contingent workers.

From the perspective of basic research, the study aims to contribute to the theory of global division of labour sociologically. It is anticipated that the findings from this research will contribute to the existing corpus of knowledge, especially to industrial sociology.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this research are to explore, describe, explain and understand the socioeconomic life and work behaviour of migrant contingent workers in the EE sector in Penang. By describing and explaining, the study refers to an outsider approach to gather and analyse data that are accessible through the company's records. Through understanding, an insider approach is employed whereby the researcher has close contact with the respondents. This allows the researcher to observe them directly for an extended period of time during their work hours, and to talking with them to find out the nuances in greater detail

At the micro level, this research aims to explore and describe migrant contingent workers' socioeconomic life and work behaviour. Their work behaviour comprises of their attitude towards their work, their commitment towards productivity and quality of the company they worked for, their attendance and tardiness records, their stability in working with the company for a predicted period and the impact of reward system towards their work behaviour. Other than exploring their work behaviour, this study also aims to understand their reasons for working abroad. In this regard, the analysis involves various aspects of socioeconomic life, among which are such as relationship with family members, financial support towards family members, residency conditions, job satisfaction, relationship with peers, safe and conducive work environment, happiness at work place, leisure during off days, fear of losing job, and the support from peers.

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study primarily focuses on the socioeconomic life and work behaviour of migrant contingent workers from Bangladesh, Myanmar and Vietnam working in Company M, Penang. Three research questions are constructed to set the direction of the research:

1. What pushes migrant contingent workers to leave their home countries to look for employment abroad and why they choose to come to Malaysia?
2. What is the work behaviour of migrant contingent workers?
  - 2.1 Do migrant contingent workers from different cultural backgrounds share similar or different work behaviour?
  - 2.2 How do migrant contingent workers adapt themselves to the work cultures in high technology-based MNCs in Malaysia?
3. What are their lifestyles like at work place and during non-working days living in a host country like Malaysia?

To answer the first research question, data were collected through literature review and in-depth interviewing methods. For in-depth interviewing, the Company M's migrant interpreters helped the researcher to understand migrant contingent workers' reasons for working in Malaysia. To answer the second research question, the researcher adopted quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data in order to describe the work behaviour of migrant contingent workers at work place and compare the work behaviour of the three different nationalities. A systematic quantitative data collection method was used to collect data related to productivity attainment, quality

achievement and attendance records. Qualitative data collection through in-depth interviewing was conducted among migrant contingent workers and their group leaders to explore and understand the migrant contingent workers' tardiness, turnover, work attitude, feeling at work and expectation for rewards. To answer the third research question, in-depth interviewing was used to collect data regarding what is the migrant contingent workers' working life, daily life and family life in their respective home countries. Of equal importance was the question of how they adapted their lives in Penang and their relationship with their own families in their respective home countries.

## **1.5 CONCEPTS**

Concepts are building blocks of theory, defining the scope of research and link empirical data to theory. There are a few important concepts in this research that formed the theoretical framework of the research.

### **1.5.1 Contingent Workers**

Generally there are several versions to describe contingent workers; they have been recognised as temporary workers, non-permanent workers, non-core workers, part-time workers, just-in-time workers, flexible workers, contract workers, guest workers, casual workers or peripheral workers. The term "contingent" was first used in 1985 to describe the non-permanent working circumstances; a worker will be employed when there is a need for their services and the relationship within employee and employer exist for limited period of time (General Accounting Office, 2000). Palef (2000) argues that due to the non-permanent relationship and non-detachment to a company, contingent workers are not entitled to several company benefits such as

medical, dental, pension contributions, stock option and optical sponsorship program. Contingent employment tenure is predetermined upfront in the agreement and subjected to renewability. As such, contingent workers will not receive any compensation such as a voluntary separation scheme if the employer decides to terminate the contract at any point of time.

During the 85<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference in 1997, leadership teams from Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Cote d'Ivoire, India, Italy, Germany, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, Sweden, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States and Venezuela had acknowledged that there is no explicit internationally accepted definition of the term "contract labour" (International Labour Office Geneva, 1997). Contingent workers are also defined as individuals who do not have an implicit or explicit contract for long-term employment (Polivka, 1996). Houseman (2001) defines contract workers as individuals who are employed by another organisation to perform tasks or duties as specifically contracted by the organisation. Contract workers may be used for carrying out administrative duties or providing business support such as security, engineering, maintenance, sales, data processing, and food service. Contractors may also be used to perform activities that are core to the business's operations. The definition provided by the International Labour Office Geneva (1997) regarding contract workers is "...Contract labour (or contract workers) means, generally, workers employed by a firm or individual employer (referred to as a contracting firm or contractor), which or who is assigned work by, or supplied workers to do work for a principal employer, on a contract basis...". Morse (1969; quoted in Devi 1996) defines contingent workers as those who (for the most part), have had work experience of any kind, other than full-time work,

for a full year. Under this rather broad definition, Morse includes casual workers of all kinds. Casual work can also be said to be intermittent in character, and casual labour has been defined as daily paid workers employed on a temporary basis for work of a short-term nature. They can be employed either by the principal employer, a contractor or by a sub-contractor (Devi, 1996).

In Malaysia's legislation constitution context, there is no specific definition for contingent workers. The workers on contract are subjected to normal labour law legislative provision. Contingent workers in Malaysia consist of two categories, indigenous and migrant. The indigenous are those who hold Malaysian citizenship and comprise of Malay, Chinese, Indian and others such as defined in the Constitution of Malaysia whereas migrant contingent workers in this study specifically refer to those who hold nationalities from Bangladesh, Myanmar and Vietnam. According to Vijayakumari (2006), migrant contingent workers accounted for approximately 22 percent of the Malaysian labour force. From the total migrant contingent workers in Malaysia, 98 percent of them are occupying jobs in the sectors that require little skills. The majority of migrant contingent workers are from Indonesia (68.9 percent), followed by Nepal (9.9 percent), India (6.9 percent) and Myanmar (4.6 percent).

### **1.5.2 Work Behaviour**

Work behaviour can be linked to organisational commitment<sup>1</sup> and covers variables such as attendance, job performance and citizenship behaviour (Ricketta,

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<sup>1</sup> Porter, P. et al (1974) defined organisational commitment as 'the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation. Such commitment can generally be characterised by at least three factors: (a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the

2008); turnover, work quality and work productivity (Steenbergen and Ellemers, 2009) and tardiness elements (Sidle, 2010). In this research, elements used to measure work behaviour include annual leave, sick leave, absenteeism, annual actual working day, termination, work quality, work productivity, flexibility, disciplinary, hardworking, team work, over- time support, personal initiative, obedient to instruction and mutual respect.

#### a) Productivity

In United States, the Bureau of Labour Statistics (BLS) defines labour productivity as output per hour of labour input (Norsworthy and Fulco, 1976). Some researchers' measurement of productivity means aggregate figures of man hours, capital investment and mail delivery (U.S. Postal Service study) (Williamson and Alexander, 1986). Stein (1983) defines productivity as combination of sources such as capital investment, innovation, learning (skill and competence), motivation and commitment. For this research, productivity measurement is defined as output produced by one employee in a one-hour time frame. The employer will determine the productivity goal that has to be achieved by each employee. To measure productivity, shift output in 12 hours is compiled from the system data based on a daily basis.

#### b) Work Quality

Work quality refers to the outcome of product produced. Some researchers clarify work quality as producing a product that is durable or have long product life

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organisation's goals and values; (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation; (c) a definite desire to maintain organisational membership.

(Seawright and Young, 1996). In this research, the measurement for the work quality is total defect divided by total output produced during a particular shift. Types of defect comprise both mechanical and electrical. Data on shift quality was obtained from the system data base.

#### c) Absenteeism

In simpler understanding, an employee who fails to be present on duty day without any approval from his supervisor is considered as absent, regardless of reasons. Chadwick-Jones et al (1982) have defined absenteeism as the non-attendance of employees for scheduled work. Some researchers defined absenteeism in a wider scope which comprised of sick leave, annual leave (earned vacation leave), failed to turn up for work due to attending union duties, work accident and even mourning (Williamson and Alexander, 1986). For this study, absenteeism is based on Company M's policy which means that failure of employees to turn up for work without informing their supervisor on the same working day or without a valid reason. Data on absenteeism were obtained from absent hour's data base.

#### d) Tardiness

Tardiness is negative work behaviour as it will impact company cost and delivery. Tardiness elements (Sidle, 2010) comprised of attendance issues, disobedient to work instruction and company rule and regulations. Tardiness records were captured in quantitative and qualitative data through emails, server data and in-depth interviewing.



#### e) Overtime Support

Overtime support is employee's desire or demand initiative to work longer hours after their normal working hours. There are few types of overtime support. For example, extended four hours after normal working hours, return to work during public holiday, off day or rest day. Overtime support is positive work behaviour as directly contributing to company's performance.

#### f) Turnover

Turnover is related to employee's satisfaction towards their jobs. When employees are dissatisfied with their jobs, they will try ways to stay away from their jobs (Greenberg and Baron, 1997). Turnover is the permanent withdrawal of an employee from the employing organisation (Jennifer and Gareth, 2008). Polivka's (1996) study found that approximately 22 to 26 percent of contingent employees had looked for new jobs in the 3 months since they started their existing contingent job. When turnover happens, an employer must find a way to replace. The process of replacement consumes time and resources. Factors that cause turnover include wages, company benefits, employee performance and opportunity for future prospects.

#### g) Flexibility

Flexibility means easy adaptation to new environment and ready to change. The concept of flexibility was commonly applied in manufacturing environment because employers need to be flexible in order to survive stiff competition in the business world. Piore and Sabel (1984) argued that companies will become more responsive to business environment through the flexible workforce that is free of rigid job specification and excessive regulation and control. Atkinson (1984) as quoted in

Broadbent (2003) added that flexibility is the greater use of adjustable contingent in the company. Contingency provides the management numerical flexibility in adjusting the size of its workforce in accordance to its current economic situation.

#### h) Teamwork

In general, the term “teamwork” has been commonly understood as a group of people working towards a common goal. The teamwork concept has been widely accepted and applied in multi-disciplines such as sports (Gibson and Bruhn, 2001), healthcare services (Cott, 1998; Xyrichis and Ream, 2008), social work services (Samardzic et al, 2011), education sector (Woodley and Armatas, 2010; Woodfield and Kennie, 2008), software development (Hoegl and Gemuenden, 2001) and non-agriculture sector like industrial (Benders et al, 2001). According to Gibson and Bruhn (2001) the concept of teamwork comprises different understanding, depending on individual interpretation and further influenced by individual values, orientation and practices.

### **1.5.3 Socioeconomic Life**

There is no consensus on the definition of the concept of life (Farquhar, 1995; Gerard, 2010; Stein, 1983; Yigael, 2010). With references to Oxford Dictionary (2012) the meaning of life is classified into five dimensions. First is the condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter, including the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity and continual change preceding death. Second is the existence of an individual human being or animal. Third is the period between the birth and death of a living thing especially a human being. Fourth is vitality, vigour or energy and fifth is the depiction of a subject from a real model, rather

than from an artist's imagination. Stein (1983) views quality of life as comprised of five key components ranging from control of autonomy, recognition, belonging, progress and development to external rewards. Whilst Yigael (2010) redefined the concept of life in the Oxford Dictionary by emphasizing on the meaning characters of life. Life in this study refers to the migrant contingent workers' socioeconomic life at work and after work. At work, their life as a worker includes their work relationship with fellow colleagues, superiors, their meaning of work, job satisfaction, meaning of money and motivation to work. Life after work refers to living with other migrant contingent workers, local communities, leisure activities, residency conditions, their communication and commitment of financial support towards family members in home countries.

#### **1.5.4 Transnationalism**

Migrants' identity and activities are related to the concept of transnationalism. Broadly defined, 'transnationalism' refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states. Activities of contemporary transmigrants "... maintain, build, and reinforce multiple linkages with their countries of origins" (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc 1995: 52) which expanding the social connections of the sending countries (homes/there) to receiving countries (here) (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004: 1180) are analysed in this study. Transnationalism describes a condition in which "despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common – however virtual – arena of activity" (Vertovec, 1999: 2).

The meaning of transnationalism can be broadly classified into six categories, namely social morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, site of political engagement, and (re)construction of 'place' or locality (Vertovec, 1999: 3-13).

This study looks into their consciousness, particularly 'diaspora consciousness' which is characterised by the show of an individuals' awareness of decentred attachments of working in Malaysia hence he assumes a solidarity and connection with their own nationality and family in home countries via tele and virtual communication. Secondly, the study examines the dimension of cultural reproduction. Transnationalism is often associated with a fluidity of constructed styles, social institutions and everyday practices. In this study, the researcher shows how migrant workers imitate lifestyle of local people and hence elevating their lifestyle. Thirdly, the study focuses on migrant workers who accumulate their monthly salaries and transfer as remittances to their places of origin which eventually result in making great impact in their home countries, especially in the transformation of their families' socioeconomic life as discussed in this study. Remittances that migrant workers sent home was at a time seen as an effective means of reducing poverty and a form of self-help. In Kapur's (2005) term, this remittance is "new development mantra" for development.

## **1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

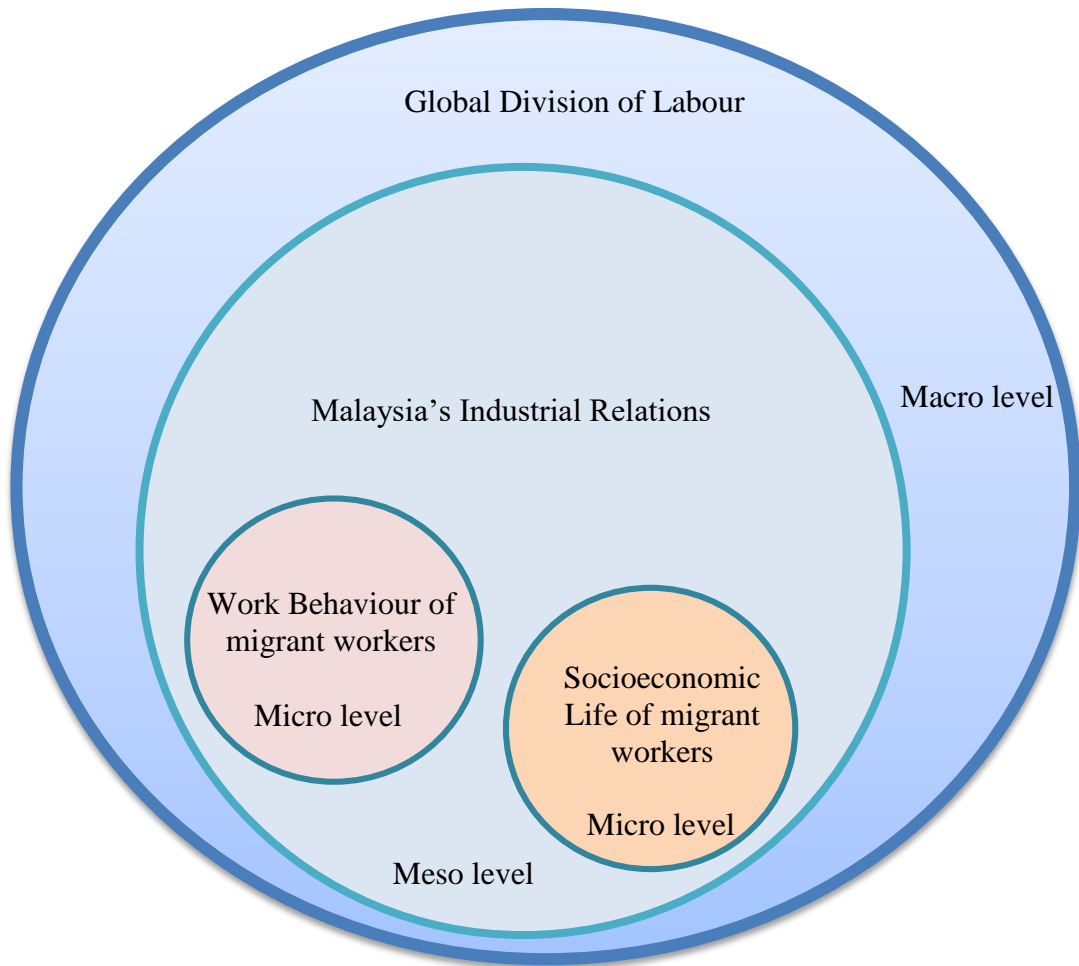
The reordering of labour force in the EE sector that largely involved migrant contingent workers from neighbouring countries led us to think of them leaving their

previous work, family, community and country then readapt to a totally new job, work environment, wage system, community and a different cultural context. Under such a complete different environment, their psychology, emotion, motivation, their work behaviour, strategy to achieve success, their struggle at work, and meaning of life are shaped and formed in where they work and live. In this context, Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory (1984) is most appropriate to be used to study migrant contingent workers in Malaysia. Structuration Theory takes into consideration the different social structures where the migrant contingent workers move out from their homeland to travel thousands of miles to work in Malaysia. At the macro level, the movement of migrant workers from their home countries to working abroad is due to the forces of globalization, where capital search for the best return of their investment created job opportunities. One of the global phenomenon is the result of the global division of labour.

At the meso level, in the context of a national economy, most of the migrant contingent workers from poor developing countries were originally working in the agriculture sector in their respective home countries. They migrated to Malaysia, an advance developing country with plenty of job opportunities and decent salaries. Malaysia's economic policy which was dependent of foreign direct investment and labour intensive had created vast opportunities for migrant workers. At the micro level, the respondents in this study were working in an advanced technology-based company in Malaysia. Besides adapting to a new working environment, they are also required to relearn new skills, culture, norms and practices. While working in Malaysia they interact with their peers, superiors and the local community, which shape and reshape their work behaviour (at work place), life and meaning of life (socioeconomic life)

(see Figure 1). These social interaction activities are the pathway towards the formation of a new social structure. As quoted in Giddens: “All social life has a recursive quality to it, derived from the fact that actors reproduce the conditions of their social existence by means of the very activities that – in contexts of time-space – constitute that existence” (Giddens, 1987; page 221).

The social actors (migrant contingent workers) and social structures (new work environment in an advanced technology-based company and the local societies in Malaysia) are not two independent identities but exist and function in a duality reciprocal relationship. This social structure is not static but dynamic that is being shaped and reshaped by social actors (which include immediate team leaders, supervisors, managers, human resource management (HRM), recruiting agents, surrounding MNCs and communities living around them) during the social interaction and practices. In the case of Company M, the management had changed the company’s work policy in order to fulfil certain requests from migrant contingent workers. For instance, core workers in Company M have to work eight hours per day according to the company policy. However, the requests from Bangladeshi, Myanmar and Vietnamese contingent workers to work extra hours in order to earn more money subsequently resulted in the management allowing migrant contingent workers to work 12 hours per day. This is consistent in a study done in Malaysia’s garment industry where foreign workers were being allocated most of the overtime compared to Malaysian workers. Even though foreign workers worked four hours overtime per shift and despite the long hours, feelings of fatigue and loss of weight, they were happy to work overtime in order to earn extra money to send home to their respective families and to pay back the debts that they had incurred (Crisis, 2010: 603).



**Figure 1** Research Framework

Following this demand, the management had to change the company's policy to lure more migrant contingent workers to work in Company M because many other MNCs surrounding Company M such as Western Digital were offering 12 hours of work per day to their migrant contingent workers. Besides this, existing migrant contingent workers had also expressed resistance in renewing their contract and had planned to return to their home countries if they were not allowed to work for 12 hours per day. In the minds of these migrant contingent workers, the former work schedule and structure resulted them being on the losing end, being deprived of the four

additional hours of overtime. In summary, the surrounding MNCs (social structure) and migrant contingent workers (social actor) had shaped Company M's work structure such as shifts to accommodate their demand. As quoted from Giddens: "Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves as actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible" (Giddens, 1984: 2).

The Equity Theory developed by J. Stacy Adams is used to complement the Structuration Theory. Adams's Equity Theory is a theory about work motivation that focuses on the worker's perceptions of the fairness of their work inputs and outcomes. Work inputs include education level, experience and the extent of hard work whereas outcomes elements could be in the form of wages, fringe benefits and status. The amount of equity and inequity attained depending on discrepant level between inputs and outcomes. Equity achieved when there is no discrepancy between inputs and outcomes whereas greater inequity takes place when both inputs and outcomes are significantly discrepant. Adams contended that social comparison was the determinant workers will use to judge whether their outcome is equitable when compared with other worker's inputs and outcomes. Equity Theory stresses that the emerging of inequity will motivate an individual to achieve equity or to reduce inequity through the adjustment mechanism of inputs and outcomes (Adams, 1963; Adams and Rosenbaum, 1962; Adams and Jacobsen, 1964).



Equity Theory has been refined by recent scholars who study human motivation and job satisfaction. Among others, Holdford and Elmore (2001) adopted equity theory in the study of Pharmaceutical Education; Temnitskii (2007) applied it to study Russia workers' perception on salary fairness; and Brockner et al (1988) discovered that factory layoff activity had impact on the workers' perception on equity and actually posed positive attitude towards job performance in the remaining workers as to avoid becoming the next candidate of a subsequent layoff. Conversely, Lawler (1968) explored the impact of Equity Theory on overpayment and underpayment of wages matters towards worker productivity and work quality; Greenberg and Ornstem (1983) revealed that by providing a high status job title as compensation for underpayment, workers still feeling equity sensation and subsequently increasing workers' motivation to hold additional job responsibilities; and Martin and Peterson (1987) studied the impact of two-tier wage structure by comparing low-tier and high-tier retail stores workers. The outcome of the study was consistent with Equity Theory prediction that low-tier workers perceived significant low pay equity. On the aspect of workers' management, Bell and Martin (2012) encouraged managers to adopt the Equity Theory in managing workers who were dissatisfied with wages. On the aspect of work behaviour, Carrell and Dittrich's (1978) laboratory research disclosed that workers will exhibit negative work behaviour such as absenteeism, quitting and transferring or lower job performance to alleviate perceived inequity in an organisation. Other than the above, Griffeth et al (1989) contended that university students will adjust the input of quantity and quality of work in order to achieve equity and work satisfaction; Neumann (1980) examined equity theory as a predictor of pay satisfaction among managers from a multiple industrial discipline. In this study, equity

theory serves to analyse factors that motivate migrant contingent workers to work hard and excel in their work.

## **1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The researcher was in the position of authority as a supervisor (later manager) and had the privilege to take an insider approach. The researcher overcame the ethical issue and objectivity by avoiding studying the respondents directly. Data validation had been carried out to verify sets of data where there was direct involvement with the researcher. This research adopts a combination of methods of data collection that were conducted at three different stages. In the first stage, an unobtrusive experimental design was created and assigned migrant contingent workers (respondents) according to their respective nationalities into five different production lines. A computer aided system was used to collect data of the migrant contingent workers in the three production lines. Data was collected on a daily basis. The data comprised of the respondents' productivity attainment, quality of the product produced, daily attendance records (inclusive records of medical leave, records of annual leave and records of absenteeism) and disciplinary cases over an extended period of one year. The computerized data of productivity and quality were stored in Company M's server data base which was acquired for analysis by the researcher on a periodical basis. On average, the researcher checked and analysed the data twice a week. The server stores all the data of the production lines' productivity and quality on an hourly basis. This enabled the researcher to track the individual production line's productivity and quality accurately according to the workers' nationalities.