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Introduction

Supang Chantavanich, AKM Ahsan Ullah, and Min Ma

This issue of Asian Review contains a collection of research articles that examine current issues on cross-border migration in Southeast Asia. Human mobility in the region is driven by a diverse range of actors and occurs on a spectrum that covers voluntary migration on one end to forced displacement on the other. An abundance of research exists on many of these groups, such as refugees and migrant workers, who have been migrating for decades due to ever-changing political and economic dynamics in the region. Others, such as individuals who are trafficked for labor, are part of lesser-known migration patterns that involve illicit, hidden networks of traffickers. The clandestine nature of human trafficking challenges emerging efforts to research, investigate, and expose these patterns of migration.

The authors of this issue bring into focus several types of mobility from various disciplinary backgrounds. The issue begins with a broad examination of the migration and development nexus in which Thanh-Dam Truong reflects on the interface between migration studies and border studies. She suggests that a human-centered approach to migration is direly needed in order to identify appropriate responses to the processes of people on the move. She adds that, while the concern for border security is universal as inscribed in international law, practices of border security differ given historical and geopolitical contexts of drawing and redrawing borders as well as resources allocated for control. She argues that the two areas of study (migration and border) should be united in order to produce a coherent body of knowledge about cross-border flows and to remove or at least temper aspects of structural violence embedded in them. She suggests that a comprehensive understanding of the complex issues concerning borders and human migration may guide the policy process in addressing the injustices embedded in the creation of flexible border regimes for some groups, and harsh ones for others.

To map the complex and multiple understandings of protracted refugee situations, most literature in the study of forced migration describes protracted refugee situations as displacement in which long-term solutions seem untenable due to long-lasting conflicts and restrictive government policies towards refugees in countries of asylum. Refugees in protracted displacement may not face immediate risks to physical security, but may find their basic economic and social rights unfulfilled for extended periods. The UN agency for refugees (UNHCR) has recently introduced a framework of durable solutions to propose concrete ways in which refugees in protracted situations can rebuild their lives in dignity. Aungkana Kamonpetch, in her article "Envisaging the contemporary Thai government’s measures and interventions toward a refugee repatriation plan: Impacts on durable solutions and protection issues" illustrates how possible durable solutions can occur in the case of refugees along the Thai-Myanmar border. Along these borders, Karen and Karenni refugees, who are ethnic minorities from Myanmar fleeing armed conflict since the 1990s, are able to access opportunities to be resettled in third countries. In addition, the prospect of voluntary repatriation for some is not impossible as peace talks between the new Myanmar civilian government and the various ethnic minorities are ongoing. The article displays how cooperation from the international community under the efforts of UNHCR and the Royal Thai Government can lead to resolution for refugees in the twenty-five year protracted situation at the border. Durable solutions are possible.

The voluntary economic migration of millions of migrant workers in Southeast Asia is a phenomenon that is expected to increase in years to come. Economic theories of international migration point to push factors such as poverty, economic deprivation, and unemployment in places of origin, as well as pull factors such as higher wages and employment opportunities in destination countries (Massey et al., 1993). As flows of economic migrants continue and options for their temporary or permanent settlement in destination countries become more viable, it has become apparent that the social networks of migrant populations play a key role in supporting their mobility, as described by Castles and Miller (2009). In this volume, the different roles of social networks are examined by Kristine Stenbeck in "Reaching the unreached: The role of civil society in providing access to education for migrant chil-
In 2008, it was estimated that over 128,000 migrant children resided in Thailand, many of whom had accompanied their parents from Myanmar or were born in Thailand. The availability, accessibility, and affordability of education for these migrant youth depend on the management of civil society groups who provide education services to these children. Using the United Nation's 4As framework on education, Stenbeck highlights the significant role of civil society in making access to education possible for these children, many of whom are undocumented. Indeed, education for migrant children is distinct from that offered to the mainstream Thai population as it takes into consideration the different language skills, the legal and economic status of children and their families, and most importantly, state political will to support their opportunities.

At the same time, research has also revealed the exploitation of various groups as they migrate to seek wage-earning opportunities. Two examples are offered in this volume in the articles by AKM Ahsan Ullah and Sustarum Thammaboosadee. In ‘Replacement migration and governance: migrant domestic workers in Egypt,’ AKM Ahsan Ullah paints a picture of the exploitative conditions of migrant domestic workers from Southeast Asia in Egypt. Ullah examines the international legal instruments that constitute the international legal framework governing migration and trafficking to draw connections between these legal instruments and the status of migrant domestic workers in Egypt. He introduces the concept of replacement migration by which migrant domestic workers replace the role of "others" in a family setting. Ullah offers a comparative picture between freelancers and live-in migrant domestic workers, where the former usually stay in Egypt without legal papers, and the later face conditions that are akin to slavery. The paper examines relevant laws in Egypt that prohibit the exploitation of children in prostitution, pornography, begging, and forced labor and highlights their constraints given their failure to recognize domestic labor as productive labor in the first place. As a result, recruitment of underage girls as domestic workers continues unabated.

Sustarum Thammaboosadee in his paper ‘Failure of development under neoliberalism: Involution of migrant towns in Thailand’ observes the failures of the neoliberal economy using case studies of three migrant towns in Thailand. He suggests that inequality is not a
market failure but rather has been constructed. In neoliberal involu-
tion, the low end of the economy consists of a desperate workforce
labeled as the “precariat.” Due to the lack of political power to bargain,
the precariat contains workers who are forced to accept whatever risks
are involved in the neoliberal economy. His paper aims to dispel the
“neoliberal myth” that “a rising tide lifts all boats” because only a
minority of elites benefit from economic evolution. Instead, he argues
that the majority are “involuted” into an unreachable gap.

Finally, this volume turns to efforts of labor-sending countries to
stem the risks of labor migration. We look at the Philippines as an
eexample of a labor-sending country that has set up formal structures
to protect its workers abroad. As one of the top labor-sending coun-
tries in the world, the Philippines is regarded by some as “a global
model for managing international labor migration” (Center for Migra-
tion Advocacy, 2009). In ‘A study of skilled labor migration from the
Philippines,’ Gamolporn Sonsri examines the policies and regula-
tions enacted by the Filipino government over the span of 40 years
to manage labor migration abroad. Sonsri also looks at formal and
informal mechanisms for protecting workers’ rights abroad, focusing
on a small case study of Filipino workers in Thailand.

Together, the articles in this volume offer contrasting perspec-
tives of migration. The volume illustrates some of the ways in which
informal and formal mechanisms work to protect the rights of migrants
abroad. Meanwhile, they illuminate areas in which stronger devices
are clearly needed to minimize the vulnerability of migrants abroad
and to prevent their exploitation. With growing trends of cross-border
migration and economic integration in the region, the governments
and joint bodies in Southeast Asia must continue to work together to
examine and address these issues for greater economic, political, and
cultural prosperity in years to come.
References

