

PREFACE

Myanmar's ethnic rich history has been synonymous with migration for thousands of years. Similarly, over the past six to seven decades, the country's reputation is one of constant internal strife and insecurity. Once poised to be the most promising and economically well to do southeast Asian nation, after gaining its independence from Britain, Myanmar has been weighed down with coup d'états, military rule, longstanding sanctions, political and ethnic discord, impoverished population and high rates of unemployment. Simply put, Myanmar has not been "peaceful". In fact, it is an arduous task for the Myanmar to define what "peace" exactly means for them and how they can realize their "peaceful nation". What is unmistakable is that migration, both internal and international, offers large components of the Myanmar society a more suitable outlet towards achieving their survival and possible aspirations. This study has been impressed with the migrant workers (and refugees) in Japan. Most have left "unpeaceful" Myanmar so they could work independently towards materializing democracy and peace in their mother country. Large portions of their lives had been spent under endless armed conflicts between the military and their ethnic armed groups, mainly Mon, Karen, Shan and Kachin. This thesis embodies analyses of the intriguing irregular movement of Mon migrant workers. They move across the borders clandestinely with the help of their social networks in search of their human security. The study examined the role of key players in their journeys, "Pwe-sars", migrant brokers from their inner circle. The synthesis of the survey results lead to the discovery of why many Mon people would choose to remain illegal and continue irregular migration even though legal alternative are available. The gaps and recommendations in this thesis reflect governments' policies and agendas that impact Myanmar migrant workers directly.

ABSTRACT

This thesis reveals the unique relationship between Mon migrant workers and their brokers known as Pwe-sars who smuggled them in and out of Myanmar. It focuses around Mon irregular migrant workers in Thailand and their families in Mon state, the impact of migration in their daily lives and the prospect of legalization in advocating human security. Mon people are currently divided between Myanmar and Thailand by international border line, in the place where they have been residing since 15th BC. They are considered as the earliest people in the continental Southeast Asia. To understand the underlying problems associated with irregular migration, the study conducted five field surveys between 2009 and 2011, interviewed 50 Pwe-sars, 20 licensed Overseas Employment Companies, and 200 households. Survey results showed that migration from Myanmar, including irregular, occurred through social networks. Interviews lead to the analyses that the bonds between Pwe-sars and migrant workers are difficult to break since they are relatives or family members. Chain migration has continued to take place with the help of Pwe-sars in particular. Mon people have built networks through close-knit ties that connect their destinations with their place of origin. These ties influenced the volume and direction of migration flows, the making of immigrant niches, the educational performance of immigrant children, and so on. Pwe-sars' illegal nature has jeopardized the mobility of many people in Mon state that considered migration to Thailand as "local commute". Migration is an ongoing process and Pwe-sars are crucial to solving problems relating to irregular migration. Social networks, founded by both migrant workers and Pwe-sars, are the cores of Mon's current migration to Thailand and can be utilized properly to pursue human security for the irregular migrant workers.