

Regained and Lost: A Case Study of Refugee Reproduction in the Cross- Border Migration Network of Myanmar's Highland Ethnic Groups

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Abstract

Existing academic perceptions of "highland peoples descending to lowlands" mainly refer to the resettlement campaign of northern Thai highland peoples launched by the Thai royal family in the second half of the 20th century. The practice of these ethnic groups acquiring national citizenship was largely passive. Since the 21st century, a cross-border migration network of Myanmar's highland peoples has taken shape, stretching from Myanmar through Thailand and Malaysia to refugee-receiving Western countries. Notably, many highland ethnic groups who have already obtained Myanmar citizenship have voluntarily renounced their nationality. This trend not only inherits the historical migration tradition of ethnic groups along the Sino-Tibetan Corridor from highlands to flatlands but also represents a new upsurge of migration driven by the push of protracted armed conflicts in northern Myanmar and the pull of livelihood opportunities in destination countries. The continuous inflow of low-skilled Myanmar highland migrants has reshaped the ethnic and demographic structure of relevant countries. Meanwhile, the subjectivity of ethnic refugees embodied in the process of refugee reproduction reveals that the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind can only be realized through equal, reciprocal and symbiotic ethnic relations.