

Invisible Migration and Incredible Mobility: Rethinking Chain Migration Among Minority Migrants Across China, Laos, and Myanmar

Tian Shi

Abstract

This research explores the dynamics of chain migration among minority migrant populations in the contexts of China, Laos, and Myanmar. China's rapid development in the 21st century presents significant opportunities for ethnic minorities both within the country and beyond. These groups have seized this moment to achieve upward mobility through inter-ethnic collaboration and trans-border migration. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the borderlands between China, Laos, and Myanmar, this article examines how Chinese Hmong, Lao Akha, and Burmese Wa minority migrants have engaged in inter-ethnic collaboration in Wa Special Region 2 of Northern Shan State. It delves into the factors contributing to the often-overlooked phenomenon of invisible migration, emphasizing the complex social, economic, and political forces that facilitate mobility among marginalized communities. The analysis critiques traditional migration theories, proposing a re-evaluation of the motivations and experiences of these minority groups. By examining the interconnections and flows between these three nations, this study aims to shed light on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by these migrants, contributing to a broader understanding of transnational mobility in the region.