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Irregular Migration and Human Security in East Asia

Edited by
Jiyoung Song and Alistair D. B. Cook



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Alistair D. B. Cook**

First published 2015
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Irregular migration and human security in East Asia/edited by
Jiyoung Song and Alistair D.B. Cook.

pages cm – (Routledge contemporary Asia series; 49)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Refugees – Asia. 2. Illegal aliens – Asia. 3. Foreign workers – Asia. I. Song, Jiyoung, editor of compilation. II. Cook, Alistair D. B., editor of compilation. III. Series: Routledge contemporary Asia series; 49.

HV640.4.A68177 2014

364.1'37094 – dc23

2014000660

ISBN: 978-0-415-73299-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-84872-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon, UK



Printed and bound in Great Britain by
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

Irregular Migration and Human Security in East Asia

Across East Asia, intra-regional migration is more prevalent than inter-regional movements, and the region's diverse histories, geopolitics, economic development, ethnic communities and natural environments make it an excellent case study for examining the relationship between irregular migration and human security. Irregular migration can be broadly defined as people's mobility that is unauthorised or forced, and this book expands on the existing migration-security nexus by moving away from the traditional state security lens, instead shifting the focus to human security.

With in-depth empirical country case studies from the region, including China, Japan, North Korea, the Philippines, Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand and Singapore, the contributors to this book develop a human security approach to the study of irregular migration. In cases of irregular migration, such as undocumented labour migrants, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, trafficked persons and smuggled people, human security is the cause and/or effect of migration in both sending and receiving countries. By adopting a human security lens, the chapters provide striking insights into the motivations, vulnerabilities and insecurities of migrants; the risks, dangers and illegality they are exposed to during their journeys; and the potential or imagined threats they pose to the new host countries.

This multidisciplinary book is based on extensive fieldwork and interviews with migrants, aid workers, NGO activists and immigration officers. As such, it will appeal to students and scholars of Asian politics and security, as well as those with interests in international relations, social policy, law, geography and migration.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank all our contributors for this volume. It started from a collegial conversation with Sachi Takaya at the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore in 2011, when we were both precarious post-doc research associates working on studies looking at trafficking in persons. We share the multidisciplinary nature of trafficking research, not just from our own fields of sociology and politics, but also from human geography, demography, law, economy, anthropology and social work. The interdisciplinary aspect of trafficking research and migration studies, more generally, remains the centrepiece of this collaborative work.

I am very thankful for Tom Temprosa and Phalla Chea; in particular that they share the same interests and provide me with ample local knowledge and perspectives that I do not normally hear from ‘alien’ experts who come and conduct fieldwork. Both Tom and Phalla had been exposed to the international community by working with international organisations (inter-governmental and non-governmental), but they also offer unique narratives and landscapes that the existing theories of migration cannot hear and see.

This does not mean foreign scholars or practitioners cannot hear or see the migration phenomena of the country of his or her concern. Much ground-breaking ethnographic research has been carried out by conducting rigorous observations, interactions and from participation by outside experts. Kathryn Baer is one of those rigorous independent scholars who is fully committed to capturing what is happening on the ground by engaging with local activists as well as the governments. Her social work background and critical thinking have been great assets for this interdisciplinary collaborative work.

My special thanks goes to Alistair Cook, who so kindly volunteered to help edit the volume in the second half of the process. Without him, this book would not have been possible; he saved the project. I also thank Elaine Ho for her invaluable comments and feedback on conceptually framing my introduction, and for working as an editor, which I had not done before. Elaine has also been kind enough to show an interest in my ‘immature work’ on the application of complexity theory to irregular migration and human security.

Finding Huong Le Thu at the very last minute of this project was pure luck through my better half, Euan Graham. Huong and Euan met to discuss another

important area of studies in international relations: maritime security in Asia. Knowing all too well (from my daily grumbling) my struggle to find a case from Vietnam, and a local scholar, Euan immediately spotted Huong as a perfect contributor for this volume and 'e-introduced' her to me. Huong was extraordinarily kind and professional and sent me the draft within a week. I feel so lucky to have her on board.

There are so many people who have helped me through this meaningful work, both administratively and financially. I thank Marion Yong Lifen and Alson Tay Ming Quan for spending their precious December break on instrumental research assistance for referencing, the initial typeset and spell checks. I feel so grateful to the School of Social Sciences of Singapore Management University (SMU) for providing me with such a wonderful research environment and for the endless support and encouragement from Professor James Tang, Professor Ann Florini and all the other wonderful colleagues at SMU. Special thanks goes to Stephanie Rogers, Hannah Mack and Vicki Crandley for their continuous encouragement, patient assistance, and kind communications to see this volume through to fruition. I also thank the three anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments and support for publication. I deeply appreciate the financial support from the Korea Foundation and the generous encouragement from its former President, Professor Kim Woo Sang at Yonsei University, to hold the Conference on Korea-ASEAN Migration and Human Security, which took place at Singapore Management University in June 2013, followed by the workshop for the edited volume. I would also like to thank Devin Stewart and the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs for appointing me as one of its Global Ethics Fellows to continue working and teaching to promote ethics and human rights in transnational migration.

Lastly, I would like to thank friends and family who give me constant love and support. Sunkyoung Lee, EJ Kidd, Kelly Then and Jinyoung Park are among these very special friends. I do not know how to properly thank my husband other than by giving him big hugs and kisses. Euan, my one and only love, has been the source of my energy and spirit for the past eight years since we met in Cambridge for a conference on North Korea. My love goes to Sheila and Kenneth, the best parents-in-law in the world, Namsook and Jongsub, Heeyoung and our new family member, Kibum, and last but not least, to my very special brother, Jaehoon, an angel and an inspiration for my commitment to human rights.

*Jiyoung Song
Singapore
April 2014*

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1 Introduction

Jiyoung Song

East Asia¹ provides no fewer cases for migration and security studies than any other regions. It is diverse and vibrant. Intra-regional migration is more frequent than inter-regional. East Asia has high degrees of demographic, political, economic, sociocultural and ethnic diversity. It has the world's biggest population (China, with 1.34 billion) and one of the smallest (Brunei, with only 399,000) (United Nations, 2011). In terms of income, it has the lowest gross national income per capita (Lao People's Democratic Republic [Lao PDR or Laos], USD 1,130) and the highest (Japan, USD 45,180) (World Bank, 2011). In the Golden Triangle, the Balkans of Asia, there are numerous ethnic minorities, sharing the national borders between Thailand, Myanmar and Lao PDR for trade or employment. As the region as a whole provides ample evidence for the nexus between irregular migration and human security, and intra-regional migration becomes more prominent and dynamic, the set of case studies included in this book adds to a fuller understanding of people's mobility when irregular.

International migration has been traditionally an independent research area for human geographers for population movements, economists for trade and development, sociologists for identities and integration, and lawyers for citizenship; therefore, multidisciplinary. It has become highly interdisciplinary over the past few decades, involving many scholars from different training backgrounds and bringing insights together. Limited scopes from one discipline are filled with fresh new perspectives from another to understand and explain such vibrant sociopolitical phenomenon such as transnational migration. This book gathers not just different case studies from East Asia, but also interdisciplinary perspectives, from politics, international relations (IR), sociology, geography, social work, anthropology and law, to a subset of international migration that is irregular. Regionally based scholars and practitioners share their cases and perspectives on the relation between irregular migration and human security.

For this book, we all start from the same premise. States hold the primary responsibilities to guarantee human security of migrants with irregular status. The state is not just an *actor*² that enacts and amends legislation on transnational migration between states and implements policy measures, but it is also a *structure* under which domestic and international, private and public

actors, such as migrants themselves, agents, traffickers, smugglers, non-governmental organisation (NGO) activists or United Nations (UN) agencies, respond to or interact with one another. Mainstream political scientists have looked at cross-border migration from state sovereignty, power relations, transnational crimes and globalisation perspectives. The politicisation of migration, in particular, has received a great deal of scholarly attention (Ong and Nonini, 1997; Castles and Davidson, 2000; Castles and Miller, 2003; Geddes, 2003; Newman and Selm, 2003; Shain and Barth, 2003; Bourdeau, 2011). However, we also share that the state-centric view, focusing mainly on state control or national security (Brettell and Hollifield, 2000; Joppke, 2005; Statham and Geddes, 2006), has fundamental problems by not sufficiently looking at people, their mobilities and their human insecurities. Therefore, our common approach to irregular migration is to start examining the conditions of human insecurities of the migrants' place of origin, transit and destination in each case study and to find correlations between the conditions of human security and their decisions to move to places where they can be more secure, even when their mobility is unauthorised, unregulated or forced by the relevant state authorities.

The securitisation of migration: the English, Copenhagen and Paris schools

There are several useful theories for migration-security analyses to start with. Philippe Bourdeau (2011) introduces three models of securitisation of migration. The first and mainstream model is from the realist tradition of IR. Robert Kaplan (1994) warned that Western states should fear the 'coming anarchy' associated with mass migration, while Samuel Huntington (2004) infamously declared that the persistent flow of Hispanic immigrants would constitute a major potential threat to the cultural and political identity in the US. Myron Weiner (1995) states that 'advanced industrial countries can protect their borders from invading armies but not from hordes of individuals who slip into harbours, crawl under barbed-wire fences and wade across rivers'. Weiner's (1992–1993) migration-security nexus draws the Security Stability Framework on how international migration creates conflict within and between countries from a realist perspective, seeing migration as a potential threat to national security. For realists, international migration affects state sovereignty, the balance of power among states and the nature of violent conflicts in the international system (Adamson, 2006).

For liberals, on the other hand, national borders should be open for free markets, labour mobility and individual liberty, as in the 'client politics model' (Freeman, 1995, 2002, 2006) or the 'embedded liberalism model' (Joppke, 1998a; Guiraudon and Joppke, 2001). In this liberal perspective, international institutions and international laws are supposed to set rules and regulations to respect individual freedom and democracy, and contribute to shaping more cooperative and open-minded state behaviour towards

globalisation and migration. Free movements, however, like trade liberalisation, have made workers' conditions worse in many parts of the world, instead of helping them alleviate poverty, underdevelopment and corruption.

Critical theorists oppose both realist and liberal views, arguing that security is neither about survival nor about urgency and exceptional practices. Rather, security is the 'result of mundane bureaucratic decisions of everyday politics that create a sense of insecurity, fear, danger and unease' (Bigo, 2002a, 2008). Didier Bigo identifies this as the 'governmentality of unease'. According to him, the securitisation process is, above all, 'routinised practices of professionals of security, essentially police and bureaucrats'. This relates to Ole Wæver's securitisation theory to identify existential threats and the agent of speech act. The speech acts are not only done by bureaucrats or security professionals, but more by the conservative media, nationalist politicians or xenophobic individuals who post their opinions on the Internet, spreading over a few minutes across space. The state (or Bigo's security professionals), in this sense, waits until normative equilibrium is reached in the society and belatedly reacts to social demands in democratic society. Threats may not exist, but fear does, endogenously, within individuals living in the system of mass migration. It is not just created by external sources of bureaucrats.

'International Society' is one of the 'theorisable' products of the English School, which claims that there is a society of states that share the same norms and codes of behaviour to be a member of the society. Here, the English School's 'International' is not international enough, but Eurocentric, and therefore it has been little applied to the Asian context (Buzan, 2004; Acharya and Buzan, 2010). The norms and behaviour shared among Southeast Asian states, for example, is non-confrontational, non-interventionist and consensus-based, which may shape a different form of Asian IR from the European one. E. H. Carr (1946) left the self-deprecating comment that 'the English-speaking peoples are past masters in the art of concealing their selfish national interests in the guise of the general good'. This is probably true for those East Asian 'masters' who are in the making of the East Asian Community that pays little attention to irregular migration and human security of migrants.

The Copenhagen School, which is further developed from the English School, gives specific methodological insights to look into the securitisation of irregular migration. Barry Buzan's (1993; see also Buzan *et al.*, 1998) securitisation theory (ST) provides a framework to theorise how East Asian states are securitising irregular migration and which security norms the states are constituting and utilising over the years. As Bourdeau (2011) says, ST is 'the most widely applied and fully developed model of relationships between migration and security', and the 'most creative and productive analytical framework'. Securitisation is, by definition, the 'process of integrating migration discursively and institutionally into security frameworks that emphasise policing and defence' (Bourdeau, 2011). Like social constructivism (Wendt, 1999), one of the greatest strengths of ST is that it shifts the focus of analysis away from merely material factors to sociocultural ones.