

【Summary】

**Expansion of Myanmar Migrant Workers into Malaysia:
Intersecting Legal Statuses and Migrant Networks**

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This paper examines the increasing number of Myanmar migrant workers in Malaysia, focusing on the institutional and social factors behind this trend, as well as the processes through which migrants with diverse legal statuses have settled and become embedded in local contexts. Since the 2000s, migration from Myanmar to Malaysia has grown rapidly, driven by economic growth and chronic labour shortages. A notable characteristic of this migration is not only the rise in regular temporary workers (under the PL(KS) scheme) but also the substantial presence of irregular migrants and refugees.

To examine this complex situation, the study adopts an integrated framework that combines migration systems theory and migration infrastructure theory. It analyses the interaction of state institutions, intermediaries, support organisations, and migrant networks from a cross-border perspective, encompassing both Myanmar and Malaysia. The analysis is based on extensive fieldwork conducted in both countries, including interviews with migrants, returnees, brokers, and support organisations.

On the Myanmar side, an overly centralised labour export regime and inadequate information provision have contributed to irregular migration. On the Malaysian side, restrictive employment systems and repeated regularisation measures have produced structural ambiguity and driven many migrants into irregular status.

Despite lacking formal legal status, many refugees in urban areas are engaged in employment. Mutual aid organisations formed by migrants and refugee associations offer differentiated yet complementary forms of support, thereby forming a network that bridges institutional gaps. These networks function as common resources within migrant communities and encompass individuals with varied legal statuses and ethnic backgrounds.

This study demonstrates that the Myanmar migrant population in Malaysia has expanded through the coevolution of a market-mediated migration system and mutual aid social networks. It argues that, despite policy constraints and changes in external conditions, migration is likely to continue owing to the resilient feedback mechanisms embedded within the migration infrastructure. Finally, the study underscores the importance of policy approaches that treat regular, irregular migrants and refugees as part of an interconnected migrant community, rather than separating them into distinct categories.