

Book Review

Migration in East and Southeast Asia, by Ku, S.C.Y and Kironska, K., (eds.) 2017, World Scientific: Singapore, 287 pp.

This book is a collection of 10 chapters that deal with patterns of human mobility in two geographical areas, East Asia (with emphasis on Greater China) and Southeast Asia. It addresses the scope (breadth), complexity and impact of international migration from the perspective of these two regions.

Given the importance of migration flows for both regions, the first chapter sets the background for understanding the present-day effective participation in society through a comparative study on citizenship education in the “three Chinas” (Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan). An important and relevant extension to the discussion on citizenship education in the context of global migration, though not considered in this chapter, is to go beyond society and inform the conversation on education for global citizenship. In any case, this chapter lays the foundation for further research on global migration and the development of citizenship education.

The subsequent chapters in this book tackle various types of migration flows: student migration (Chapter 2), return migration (Chapter 3), cross-strait and cross-border migration (Chapter 4), unskilled and skilled migration (Chapters 5, 6 and 9), asylum seekers (Chapter 8) and marriage migration (Chapter 10). Specifically, migration for the purposes of marriage discussed in Chapter 10 offers an interesting read as it differs from the usual patterns of migration settlement of spouses. The author investigates a growing trend in Asia involving the role of matchmaking agencies that prepare women from Mainland China and Southeast Asia to become appropriate candidates (wives) for Taiwanese men. The findings of this chapter lend support to the mainstream discourse that strongly criticises international (commercial) matchmaking enterprises for treating women as mere commodities. While not considered in this chapter, the findings are important for raising the awareness on governments’ role in regulating the flow of marriage migrants and addressing the vulnerabilities of these women in the context of their settlement and adjustment in the host country.

An unresolved problem related to refugees is the Rohingya migrant crisis. The author of Chapter 8 uses the narrative of the exodus of Rohingyas from Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia to present a convincing argument that there are no decisive solutions to this complex problem. The answer does not lie solely on the granting of citizenship to Rakhine Muslims. The complicated migratory patterns in Asia are also referenced by migration across the Taiwan Strait in Chapter 4. The long-standing political struggle

between Taiwan and China lends this cross-strait migration as also difficult and complex relative to other cross-strait relationships.

In addition to breadth of scope of migration categories, Chapter 5 further details the impact of migrant workers on the socio-politico-economic environment in four Asian tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan), while Chapter 7 examines the influence of return migrants (talents) on the transformation of China. The comparative analysis adopted in Chapter 5 puts Hong Kong as the most favourable host economy in terms of life/work environment conditions for migrant workers. Consequently, the authors of Chapters 5 and 6 draw important conclusions pertaining to governance of migration in the host and home economies respectively. In Chapter 5, the author explains the importance of the provision of equal treatment and protection for migrant workers under domestic labour laws and the rights of association, organisation and gathering. In Chapter 6, the author relates the importance of developing a favourable environment for returnees to utilise their talents.

Likewise, Chapters 6 and 7 also account for policy dimensions following from migrant flows in the context of regional integration within Southeast Asia. Chapter 6 concludes that intra-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) migration can create tensions between bureaucracy (government and international organisations) and capitalism (class and market). Alternatively, Chapter 7 highlights some important policy lessons for facilitating skilled labour mobility within ASEAN, with specific recommendations for Vietnam.

Worth mentioning here is that the volume comprises a topic less explored in Asia due to data limitations; international migration and occupational mobility. With a specific focus on occupational and spatial mobility of overseas Filipino workers, the author, in Chapter 7, forwards the importance of collecting national-level data on migration histories. The author also highlights the importance of quality data to track motivations for international migration, suggesting again the role of government and non-government agencies in spatial data collection.

This book will appeal to scholars and students of transnational studies migration. The migration patterns considered in this book provide useful insights for further in-depth academic exploration of the topics presented. The book also engages practitioners and policymakers by shedding light into the role of state policies and law, and thereby contributing to knowledge on migration policy.

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