

Migration and development in Asia: knowledge frameworks

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1. Introduction

In the past decade there has been increasing interest in international migration leading to a spate in research on the topic. One of the key regions around which academic and policy interest has centered is Asia, as the importance of Asian countries in contributing to the rise in global migration has come to be recognized. Thus, 53.3 million (or 28 per cent) of the worldwide estimate of 191 million international migrants, were in Asia as of 2005 (UN, 2006: 29). A large number of these are labor migrants and the ILO estimates that from among the 86 million migrant workers globally (excluding refugees), about 22.1 million were economically active in the Asian region (ILO, 2004:7). Labor migrants have been accompanied by family migrants while student migration and forced migration also continue to play a part within the continent so that the total number of people who cross international boundaries was high.

During that decade the potential of migration in enlivening the development landscape also came to be increasingly realized. The Global Development Finance report of 2003

(World Bank, 2003) reported on the value of remittances for the first time and their finding that the transfer of finances achieved through remittances exceeded that through foreign aid did much to focus world attention on remittances as a driver of development. Many Asian countries were seen to be important beneficiaries from remittance flows with China and India topping the list of recipients in terms of volume, while the significance of remittance for the economies of small countries such as Bangladesh and the Philippines was seen as pivotal. The economic potential of migrants thus moved on to the development agenda with renewed force (ADB, 2006; World Bank, 2006).

As the extent of migration and its developmental significance increases, the commentaries on such migration have also grown in number. A range of studies, research centers and networks and publications have emerged both within the continent and without. Governments have funded research into their own countries but have also become involved in bilateral negotiations which have led to their own 'paper trail'. National and international NGOs have also sprung up around issues of migration as they pertain to development.

This paper outlines some of the ways in which knowledge about migration and development is being produced in Asia in order to map out areas for future investigations, outputs and co-operation. It draws heavily on a survey of migration research outputs and of migration centers conducted by Asis and Piper (forthcoming) but it does so in order to map out existing links to development in terms of empirical questions, theoretical or conceptual approaches, and methodologies. Before we begin, a few parameters of this

research are also worth mentioning. First, in this paper we have taken a broad view of the links between migration and development, seeing migration as a process that is inherently embedded in multiple personal, social and institutional frameworks. However, we try to pin down how this literature configures notions of development in implicit and explicit ways and the lacunae in the resulting literature. Second, the paper primarily (but not exclusively) focuses on studies and publications by scholars within Asia. Thus it largely surveys literature published in the *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, an academic quarterly produced by the Scalabrini Migration Center, other regional journals that publish articles on migration, and the list of publications provided by migration scholars based in Asia. This is because as the literature on migration in Asia is vast some process of selectivity became essential but also because this focus would enable us to establish a sense of how migration has been approached from an “Asian” perspective by Asia-based experts. Third, our discussion of Asia mostly refers to East, South and Southeast Asia as well as migrants from these areas who are in other parts of the world. Although there is a significant amount of migration in the newly independent post-soviet countries of Central Asia, their proximity to Eastern Europe and their historical links with that region has meant that they are perhaps best considered separately. As such we primarily focus on the eastern and southern parts of Asia.

The paper is divided into five sections. The second section, which follows this first introductory section, provides a brief overview of existing patterns of migration in Asia while the third offers an outline of the key areas of knowledge that are being generated and the limitations of this literature. The fourth section provides an outline of the places

and spaces through which such knowledge is generated and how these can be strengthened. The fifth and final section concludes the paper.

But before we begin there is one important caveat that needs mention - the issue of language. The influence of British colonialism on much of the region alongside the impact of American hegemony in the twentieth century has meant that English remains the language of research in both academic and policy circles in many countries. However, this dominance is variable both by country and by topic. Thus, some topics such as the internal effects of migration, and forms of output such as micro-studies and case studies may well be published in local languages even in countries where English is the dominant language for research. Internal academic hierarchies may also be reflected in the language of output. Thus, academics and researchers in smaller centers in small provinces may publish material in local languages while national research centers and those institutions with international connections will largely publish in English. Moreover, there are also differences between countries in the extent to which local language publication of academic material is common. For example, China and Japan have a much larger publishing industry based on their own language than many other countries in the region and may have themes which are not easily accessible to the non-English speaking world. For the purposes of this review many studies published in other languages – Korean, Japanese, Thai, Bahasa Indonesia, or Bahasa Malaysia, among others – were missed out because of our own linguistic shortcomings. The linguistic diversity of Asia is a challenge in the dissemination and access to research not reported or published in English.

As a result of these two factors the research centers and institutions that come to be recognized in this and other studies of research infrastructure in Asia may have their own bias.

2. International migration in Asia – a brief overview

Historically migration has been a central part of the development of Asia even in the pre-colonial period. South East Asia was a crucible where trading links between East and South Asia were played out and similar links also existed between South and West Asia. However, colonialism changed the nature and quality of migration with large scale redistribution of populations within the region through practices such as indentured labor. Colonialism also laid the seeds for migration from Asia to Europe and in the Philippine case, the US, a trajectory that has continued into the postcolonial period.

It was not only the mobility of people but also of notions of development that were shaped by colonialism. For newly independent nations, the idea of development was being drawn from universalist traditions emanating from the West, significantly influenced by the migration and mobility of anti-colonial thinkers and freedom fighters who had been educated in the ‘mother countries’ (Raghuram, 2007). As such, migration was inherent to the fostering of particular notions of development in Asia (Kapur, 2005). Additionally, migrants who sought to develop the knowledge and skills which were part of professional occupations spawned through colonial development (professions like western medicine, scientists etc.) continued to travel to Europe and the US through the

late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, arguably with a significant effect on post-colonial nation-building and reconstruction. This outflow of skilled migrants led to the first round of literature on the brain drain (Bhagwati, 1976). Although the number of migrants was smaller than that of lesser skilled workers moving from areas like Punjab, India, to the UK, the effects of this migration were felt to be significant enough to lead to a range of interventions such as the UNESCO's TOKTEN program, which helped to ease the return of such professionals to help in the development efforts of the origin countries.

However, it was the migration of Asian workers *en masse* to the Middle East from the 1970s that really brought international migration on to the development radar. The Middle East provided opportunities to work for those who were unemployed within the sluggish economic contexts of their own countries. Labor migration later diversified, with prosperous East and Southeast Asian countries becoming magnets for migrant workers by the 1980s. By the late 1980s, well over two million persons were leaving their countries of origin every year; today, the number has grown to some three million, according to the International Labor Organization. However, as a percentage of the region's 3.1 billion-population, the migrant population represents a small share. Also, given the selectivity of the phenomenon, some parts of the region were more affected by migration than others (Skeldon, 1992:3).

Asia currently has origin, transit and destination countries with regard to migration; in reality, these classifications are not mutually exclusive. This region hosts the world's largest labor exporting country, the Philippines, which has overtaken Mexico in the top

spot. The overseas Filipino population is among the most widely distributed diasporas.¹ Filipino migration is gender equitable as both men and women are equally likely to migrate. Among land-based workers, women have been the majority after 1992 – from 1998, women comprised between 61 percent and 72 percent of the new hires deployed every year.² Filipino migrants range from the less skilled to the highly skilled, although on the whole, reflecting the demands of the labor market, the proportion of those who take up less skilled jobs is larger than the highly skilled.³ Another major source country is Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. International labor migration from Indonesia presents interesting contrasts. Official labor migration is mostly towards the Middle East (mainly, Saudi Arabia) and is highly feminized, while the larger unofficial labor migration is directed towards neighboring Malaysia and is heavily male. Other countries of origin include South Asian countries – Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Bangladeshi and Nepali migration is largely intra-regional, towards India but most of this is irregular. The other main destination is the Middle East. A relative newcomer, Vietnam is fast catching up with the more established countries of origin. Burma, Cambodia and Laos are sources of migrants as well, but out-migration from these countries is primarily directed towards Thailand and most of it is unauthorized⁴. China has allowed labor export, mostly in connection with state-contracted projects overseas since the 1978 market reform, but in general, international

¹Some references quote the figure of 184, others 192 and other some odd numbers approximating 200.

² If seafarers and rehires were included, the gender distribution would be about balanced.

³ Filipino migrants tend to have more human capital than other Asian migrants. Given the demand for less skilled workers, Filipino migrants who take up less skilled work experience “de-skilling” or downward mobility relative to their education or training. In this regard, the category “less skilled” is often not a reflection of migrants’ actual level of education and skills.

⁴ Registration exercises have been conducted since the 1990s. The 2004 registration paid some attention to protection and health issues.

migration has been eclipsed by the much bigger and more pressing rural-to-urban migration, presently estimated at 200 million (ref.?).

Labor importing countries in the region include the oil-rich Gulf countries, the sub-region that started massive labor recruitment in the 1970s. They were joined in the 1980s by the newly industrialized countries or territories in East and Southeast Asia – Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore. Other high performing economies, Brunei, Malaysia and Thailand, also had to draw workers from the less developed countries in the region. In the case of Malaysia and Thailand, they are also countries of origin – Malaysia is a traditional source country of workers for Singapore, and Thailand has resumed its labor export program after the economic crisis in 1997, with Taiwan being one of the major destinations of Thai workers. After more than 30 years of “temporary” labor migration, it is clear that labor migration has a structural role to play in the region’s economy. Labor migration has not only persisted. In some countries of destination, migrants are an important component of the population or the workforce. In the Gulf states, about a quarter of their population (and much higher, 68 percent for Kuwait and 71 percent for the UAE) are foreigners. Close to 20 percent of Malaysia’s and 30 percent of Singapore’s workforce are made up of foreigners.

Population redistribution due to environmental disasters and political conflict have not been as significant as in some continents although Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal may all be seen as senders within this context as economic impacts of flooding, deforestation and political instability have led to migration. The labile nature of categories such as

forced migration and labor migration are well illustrated in this context. For instance, over half of the 100,000 people affected by the submergence of several villages in Mirpur in Northwest Pakistan after the building of the Mangala Dam in the 1960s moved to the UK as they lost their primary sources of income with the loss of agricultural land. Thus, the decision to move to the UK was primarily an economic one brought on by environmental change eroding the boundaries of categories such as labor migration and forced migration.

Several features have come to characterize Asian labor migration. Firstly, all destination countries in the region have a policy to keep it temporary. Secondly, much of international migration in Asia is intraregional although path dependency, i.e. a tendency to follow migration routes and patterns that already exist, also plays an important role in migration outside the region. Thirdly, although there are legal frameworks to regulate the movement of workers, the numbers of undocumented migrants is relatively high. Fourthly, the migration industry is well-developed and well-connected in the region; with recruitment being largely left to private agencies, this process is replete with abusive practices (see Verité 2005 for a detailed discussion). Fifthly, the share of women participating in labor migration has increased sharply since the late 1970s (ILO, 2003: 9). In some countries the feminization of migration has been notable – in the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, women outnumber men among those legally deployed every year.⁵

⁵ For a more detailed overview of the quantitative and qualitative evolution of labor migration in Asia since the 1970s, see Asis (2005).

Up until the 1990s, labor migration in Asia largely involved workers moving to take up posts in the less skilled sectors of the labor market. Highly skilled and professional migration has increased since then in response to rising demand in the more developed economies, particularly the demand for ICT workers and health care workers (especially nurses). Non-settlement countries, such as the NICs in Asia, are also now vying for highly skilled migrants. All the receiving countries in Asia welcome these migrants, offering them permanent residence and family reunification among other benefits and privileges.⁶ Countries of origin are aspiring to send more highly skilled workers in the future – presumably because they are better protected than workers in less-skilled occupations. Moreover, their higher earnings translate into larger remittances within the context of a temporary migration scenario. For this very reason, it is in the interest of sending governments to keep out-migration temporary.

Migration is likely to continue in the foreseeable future. However, the increased demand and preference for highly skilled workers will not diminish the need for less-skilled workers. In the more developed economies, certain jobs have become identified as migrants' jobs, typically 3-D jobs. It will require more than just a hefty pay to entice more educated nationals to accept jobs in these sectors. Governments are playing the nationalism card, in the hopes of persuading their nationals to take up jobs in the lower skilled sectors to reduce their dependence on foreigners (as, e.g. in Malaysia and

⁶ It has to be noted, however, that permanent residence and citizenship is often linked to ethnicity (and maintaining the existing balance between the main ethnic groups, such as in Singapore). In addition, countries like Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, China and Taiwan have programs and policies to win back their overseas-based highly skilled/trained and professional nationals.

Singapore). Thus far, the experience of the GCC and the receiving countries of Asia seem to show that this is a tough idea to sell.

3. Migration and development research

Within the Asian context most migration literature has a particular programmatic quality – a desired set of outcomes that are strongly oriented by a development discourse. The need for information for practical purposes such as policymaking and pro-migrant (rights) advocacy provided a strong push to know and to understand migration and its ramifications but this has been done towards improving outcomes at individual, regional and national levels. As such all the literature on migration may be assumed to have some concerns over development, although they may not necessarily be explicitly framed in this way. In this section we outline some aspects of existing literature before discussing the characteristics and limits to such work.

3.1 International Migration and development in the Regional Literature

One important vehicle for discussions of issues of migration in Asia is the peer reviewed *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* (APMJ) which was launched in 1992. The journal's rationale was to provide a forum for the dissemination of migration research in the region, particularly research by emerging scholars. This section draws on a survey of the articles, research notes and discussion notes published in APMJ between 1992 and 2006, a review of other region-based journals (*Asia-Pacific Population Journal*⁷, *Sojourn*, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, and *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*) as well as other recent publications. Although the focus of

⁷ Vol. 20, no. 3 (2005) was a special issue devoted to migration.

specific journals has varied somewhat certain overarching tendencies that mark the literature on migration and development elsewhere may be noted in the Asian case too. These are summarized below.

3.1.1 Calculative processes:

Numerical knowledge seems to be central to both migration and development, so that arguments about migration and its possible role in development are enumerated, calculated and marshaled for a range of different arguments. The availability of macro-level data (e.g., censuses and surveys conducted by governments) has resulted in quantitative analyses of migration, with a number of descriptions of levels, trends, and patterns, and some basic analyses of factors associated with the determinants and consequences of migration. This predominance of quantitative articles was also reflected in the early years of the journal APMJ. This tendency to depend on and resort to numbers is at least partially rooted in the importance of economics in defining development, or at least the version of development that has been adopted in much of the migration literature. In the Asian context a large number of articles looked into migration transition, attempting to identify factors that influence how and when a country changes from being a labor-sending country to a labor-receiving country. Development studies also has a teleology based on numerical targets and goals and has brought its own forms of numeracy into the nexus between migration and development. Thus the importance of the Millennium Development Goals as identifiable development targets has led to the linkage of migration and development to particular outcomes, particularly health and gender equity producing a particular slant to research (IOM, 2005). Demography, with its

emphasis on population studies has provided another lens for such quantitative research. Although sociology, anthropology and geography are making some important contributions to the field this research is less well integrated into the field. Political science figures quite prominently, particularly in topics dealing with migration policies and human rights but inevitably, empirical work on this topic has been primarily generated in specific countries where such research is politically possible – as the Philippines. What seems to be lacking is a political economy approach at the national and regional levels, which would probe political and economic processes of dominant states, local class relations and the dynamics of regional entities. Although they constituted a small number, the few articles that examined historical aspects were enlightening, particularly in indicating continuities or discontinuities between old and new migrations and the determinants and consequences associated with them.

The spatial focus of these numerical exercises is also specific - most of the literature on migration and development also focuses on those areas of Asia which are large senders or receivers. Thus, although the geographic coverage of the journal such as APMJ is rather extensive, there are significant gaps. Many articles have a region-wide scope, with several offering comparative overviews of different countries or sub-regions in Asia. However, most research on migration in Asia focuses on Southeast Asia, and especially the Philippines which is, by far, the most researched country.⁸ Aside from being a major country of origin, the relative freedom to conduct research in the Philippines and the

⁸ There are at least two publications on the research literature on the international migration from the Philippines, namely, *Migration from the Philippines, 1975-1995: An Annotated Bibliography* (Scalabrini Migration Center, 1996), and *Philippine Migration Studies: An Annotated Bibliography* (Perez and Patacsil, 1998). See also (Asis, 2002).

accessibility of Filipino migrants (knowing English render them accessible to non-Filipino researchers) are other contributing factors. Other countries of interest are Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand. Burma is usually mentioned in relation to the flows of migrants to Thailand as forced migrants and/or economic migrants. The Pacific islands have received some coverage both because of the importance of inter-island flows and because of the importance of New Zealand and Australia as destination countries for these islands. South Asia has received some academic attention, although this is less than that received by South East Asia. India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh in particular have received much attention. Interestingly, in the case of India and China, many of the articles pertain to internal migration, showing the importance of internal migration for development especially in the larger countries.

3.1.2 Investigative nodes

The three main nodes around which the migration development literature has focused are remittances, brain drain and diaspora development (see for instance, Hugo, 2007).

As the most quantifiable of the impacts of migration on development, and also most closely tied to the resurgent economy as growth perspective remittances have become a huge object of academic research and policy discussions (World Bank, 2006; Ratha and Shaw, 2007). The uses of remittances in addressing inequalities and or poverty within households (Rajan, 2003), localities (Walton-Roberts, 2001) and for nations (World Bank, 2006) have all been debated. In particular, it is noted that remittances increase when there are disasters at the time as was conclusively shown by Rehman and Kalra

(2007) in the case of Pakistan. Moreover, the chimeral quality of remittances, acting as breakers in poverty for low income households but as drivers of growth during better times means that it in effect is economically sensitive to be able to fill in for both (either) Foreign Direct Investments and aid. In the Asian context there has been some interest in the intersection between gender, generation and remittances, much of it through detailed case studies (Gamburd, 2000). Although remittances play a part in development critical voices claim that the sum of remittances from the South to the North is negative and hence remittances should not be seen as developmental. Some researchers argue that the migration of skilled people in particular leads to a withdrawal of resources from the poorest countries (Khadria, 1999). There has also been some interest in the social remittances of migrants. This argument has been particularly developed in the Asian case by Kapur (2004) in his arguments around the ideational effects of mobility on development.

Brain drain is another common topic of research for migration specialists – arguably it has occupied almost all of the intellectual landscape on migration of the highly skilled from Asia. Skilling and reskilling have been important rationales for migration, especially to the OECD countries although as Ono and Piper (2004) shows us complex gender arrangements can sometimes be the main reason for this form of migration. However, as noted in much of the literature deskilling is a common consequence of migration (Man, 2004; Ho, 2007).

The least quantifiable of the three key topics in migration and development is that on diaspora. However, this is an area where, on the other hand, more sophisticated cultural and social analyses have occurred. Thus, Prema Kurien's detailed study of three villages in Kerala (2002) - a Muslim village in Mallapuram district, a Hindu village in north Thiruvananthapuram district and a Christian village in south-central Kerala - suggests that for Muslims, emigration to the Gulf has led to a heightened awareness of their linkages with Muslim cultures elsewhere and thus encouraged them to distinguish themselves from other groups in Kerala. The lower caste Hindu Ezhava migrants were able to utilize the economic benefits of migration to challenge their caste status while the Syrian Christians who have a higher educational profile and are connected to missionary groups in other countries were able to utilize the migration experience to enhance these networks and to maximize the benefits of migration. Diaspora development has been primarily explored by sociologists and anthropologists, and these outputs are often seen as full-length monographs or as chapters in edited collections. Sociological journals have also carried special issues where this form of migration has been studied. Contributions to *Indian Sociology*'s special issue 'Migration, modernity and social transformation in South Asia' is a good example of such an endeavor (Osella and Gardner, 2003).

Conceptually this approach has shifted focus from theories of modernization that often underpin the literature on development to that of modernity, locating people's desires for development in individual subjectivities and local social and cultural configurations. They thus posit development as a mode of being that influences migrants both in countries of origin and in destination countries where migrant realities are seen as constructed through texts and contexts. The methods of analyses adopted in the volume

move away from the familiar territory of push-pull analysis of migration or readings that seek to explain migration in the language of causes and consequences towards understanding development as a multi-factorial process of change. Development is therefore neither read simply as instigated through migration nor resulting in migration. Rather migration is placed alongside a range of other social transformations that shape people's lives in contemporary South Asia.

A second strand of diaspora literature has an altogether different focus. Thus a range of studies have been commissioned by diaspora organizations and by institutes for diaspora studies in order to explore the nitty gritty of how and where diaspora development could focus, the effect of governance structures in reducing the efficacy of diaspora philanthropy and the steps required to give confidence to members of the diasporic population who are interested in investing in their countries of origin (Viswanath, 2000). These materials include government publications and grey literature of various kinds but have on the whole focused on economic development.

3.1.3 Crosscutting analytical themes

Since the launch of APMJ coincided with the start of the third decade of large scale migration in and from the region, female migration and migration impacts (particularly, family-related impacts of migration) are relatively well-covered. Several special issues of APMJ, Women's Studies International Forum and other journals have been devoted to women's migration in Asia. The bulk of these articles on female migration focused on domestic workers. A region-wide tome on Asian women as transnational domestic

workers by Huang, Yeoh and Abdul Rahman (2005) provides an update on an earlier work by Heyzer et al. (1994). Entertainers are another category of female migrants who have been widely researched. It has been argued that their migration has typically been subsumed under trafficking rather than migration for work (e.g., see Piper, 2005), which is another large area of interest. International interest in trafficking has clearly led to the availability of funding for research on this field, and trafficking, particularly in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, and in South Asia has been of particular interest (Piper, 2005; Lee, 2005, Yea, 2006, APMJ 2006, vol. 16, no.4). There has also been much interest in migrant women nurses, especially within the context of brain drain and brain waste through the deskilling of nurses who are employed as carers and domestic workers. Gender and migration conferences in Asia, such as that in New Delhi in 2003, and the 5 volumes that followed as a result have provided an outlet for discussion of these topics. Oishi's (2005) work on 10 countries, both sending and receiving with its multi-level analysis (globalization, state policies, social legitimacy and individual autonomy) also provides an integrative and comparative perspective on female migration in the region and offers a significant step towards theory-building.

This kind of multi-country study offers another useful crosscutting analytical and methodological lens on migration. It has yielded rich insights into transnational migration processes, well before the recent growth in discussions of this aspect of migration. For instance the United Nations University conducted a study in the 1980s which examined all phases of international labor migration to the Middle East in seven countries of origin

– Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand;⁹ and in the 1990s, several members of APMRN secured funding to conduct multi-country studies on unauthorized migration in Southeast Asia (two countries of origin, Indonesia and the Philippines, and two countries of destination, Malaysia and Thailand), female migration in Southeast Asia (the focus was on four countries of origin, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Yunnan, China), and return migration in the Asia-Pacific (Bangladesh, China, Taiwan and Vietnam).¹⁰ A study on the health and well-being of children and carers left behind in four countries – Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand – has just been launched in 2007, with the National University of Singapore and St. Andrews University as the proponents, with cooperators in the different countries (Gadjah Mada University in Indonesia, the Scalabrini Migration Center in the Philippines, Mahidol University in Thailand, and the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences in Vietnam). Funding was essential in making these multi-country studies possible.

3.1.4 Political models and policy imperatives

Another way of thinking about outputs with regard to migration and development is through the political models that are adopted in this work. Broadly speaking the literature above may also be divided up on the basis of studies that are pro-migration and see a

⁹ Three publications came out of this study: Godfrey Gunatilleke, ed. (1986), *Migration of Asian Workers to the Arab World*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press; Godfrey Gunatilleke, ed., (1991), *Migration to the Arab World: Experience of Returning Migrants*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press, and Godfrey Gunatilleke, ed. (1992), *The Impact of Labour Migration in Households: A Comparative Study in Seven Asian Countries*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press.

¹⁰ Three publications came out of these research projects: Graziano Battistella and Maruja MB Asis, eds. (2003), *Unauthorized Migration in Southeast Asia*, Quezon City: Scalabrini Migration Center; Christina Wille and Basia Passl, eds., (2001), *Female Migration in South-East Asia: Change and Continuity*, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University; and Robyn Iredale, Fei Guo and Santi Rozario, eds. (2003), *Return Migration in the Asia-Pacific*, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

positive developmental effect of migration on development, those that are negative and those which are less clear-cut in predicting outcomes (de Haas 2007). For de Haas the positive stories are most likely to emanate from those who are wedded to neoclassical theories of development while he sees structural inequalities produced and fostered by migration as much more resonant in work by political economists from a world systems tradition. Although these broad generalizations are true, it is important to state that an underlying similarity between both these groups is some identifiable set of outcomes that mark development, i.e. a more-or-less clear vision of what development should look like. This is much less likely amongst those who are less prescriptive of the possible outcomes of migration on development (or indeed vice versa). Rather, what we see in this literature is less faith in the teleology of development and a deep questioning of the role that the interconnections that migration generates may play in shaping contemporary society in countries of origin.

A whole body of literature on migration and development is being fostered by those who work at the cutting edge of policy nongovernmental organizations and advocacy bodies lobbying policymakers, government officials who draft memoranda of understanding between nations, bringing their own vision of development to fore, diaspora organizations who argue for and push towards particular developmental outcomes and supra and international organizations that are producing some of the frameworks within which issues of migration and development come to be debated.

3.2 *Limitations*

Although there is an excellent body of work on migration and development, inevitably there are important lacunae too.

3.2.1 Empirical lacunae

First, there are significant *temporal* gaps in the literature which takes at least three forms. Thus, there is an overall amnesia about the long history of discussions on migration and development, much of which was produced within the context of internal migration especially from rural to urban areas, and concerns over the urban bias in development. Similarly, domestic work was a key area of research in some countries in the 1970s but this seems to have faded away from sight in current discussions on migration and development. Some of this may be attributed to the disjuncture between discussions of internal migration and those on international migration. The former is written by ‘native’ researchers, largely for an internal audience of researchers and policy makers and much of this fails to make the international research circuit. The latter, on the other hand, appears almost to have discovered the relation between migration and development anew as a result of ignoring these internal circuits of knowledge production.

There are also few studies that have offered generational and intergenerational perspectives, outside of the Philippines. The richness of the analysis in the Filipina case with emphasis on the importance of migration in affecting the life chances of children shows the need to widen such studies to other areas. There is still very little on the impact

of migration on the development of the older people but this is likely to take off soon as many of these countries too see rising numbers of older people within their populations.

Also absent is research on the fate of migrants over a period of time as longitudinal studies are costly and difficult to fund, they are often a rarity. The reuse of interview material and repeat interviewing of migrants can both reduce the costs of such study but can offer in-depth understanding of the temporal qualities of developmental change at a personal, societal and national level.

There are also important *spatial* lacunae in our empirical understanding of migration and development with certain parts of Asia receiving much less attention than others. In particular, there is very little research on Pakistan and Afghanistan, and although there is some research on Sri Lanka this is less than may be anticipated by the importance of migration to household development within the country. There have also been few articles in APMJ about Cambodia, Laos and East Timor, despite the journal's regional focus.

3.1.2 Categorical lacunae

Alongside the spatial and temporal gaps is the inadequate interrogation of certain categories through which migration is studied. First, certain *types of migration* have received less attention than they deserve: the migration of the highly skilled (including the participation of women in this kind of migration), student migration and return migration, among others. The young adult model is particularly resonant in current

studies of migration so issue of children and older people are often seen only as those of the 'left behind'. However, these forms of migration have varied developmental effects that deserve further study.

Second, a particular *favoured optic* is often adopted when researching particular categories of migrants. For instance, research on women in migration is often restricted to sectors such as domestic work and entertainment, i.e. categories where women perform tasks that are usually ascribed to or done by women. There are virtually no studies of women in male-dominated sectors of the labor market (Raghuram, 2008) so that even the limited research on highly skilled migration (e.g., Raghuram, 2000) has focused primarily on nurses, a female dominated sector. There is little on women ICT workers or women entrepreneurs and the developmental impacts of their migration. In particular, there is also no recognition of the challenges they may pose to gendered societal arrangements on their return and to expand the range of ways in which women's role in development is then imagined.

Similarly, men's migration too tends to be seen in very particular ways. In the East and Southeast Asian context, already known are trends and working and living conditions of Bangladeshis (Rahman, 2003) and Thais in the construction sector in Singapore (Prompam, 1996), Indonesians in Malaysia's construction sector, Thais in Taiwan, Burmese migrants in Thailand, Nepalis in Hong Kong and Japan, and the *Nikkeijin* (descendants of Japanese who emigrated to Latin America) in Japan. However, although

men are visible in labor migration, they are notably absent in trafficking, giving rise to the comment that “men migrate while women are trafficked” (Piper, 2005).

Thirdly, the *blurring of boundaries between different categories* of migrants has received very little attention. One exception is the work of Roces and Piper (2003) which links labor migration with international marriage involving Southeast Asian women and East Asian men and sheds light on how “temporary” female labor migration is transformed into permanent migration and thus gives the impetus for governments’ to revisit immigration and citizenship policies. The links to trafficking have also been made with respect to marriage migration. The increasing numbers and the growing share of international marriages in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea are raising questions about integration and possible inroads to multiculturalism (or its possible variants) in these societies.

There have also been few attempts to *study simultaneously* the impacts of migration to development as they relate across different categories. For instance, despite critiques of the WID and WAD approaches to development within the Development Studies literature and a recognition of the importance of the relational nature of gender identities and their importance in development (summarized by the GAD approach), there have been few attempts to apply this to migration. Female migration and male migration tend to be analyzed separately. Yeoh and Huang’s (2003) analysis of the impact of Singapore’s policies on foreign male construction workers and foreign female domestic workers is an example of how gender analysis can sharpen the differential impacts of policies on men

and women. A comparison of the impacts of female migration vs. male migration on well-being indicators of young children left in the Philippines shows how left-behind families cope in the countries of origin (e.g., ECMI/AOS-Manila, SMC and OWWA, 2004).¹¹

3.2.3 Theoretical limitations¹²

There is an *implicit* conceptual framework that underpins many of the articles with its own developmental perspectives but these have often been inadequately explored. For example, articles on levels and trends often tend to subscribe to the neoclassical perspective without explicitly stating it. Research exploring migration transitions (mostly undertaken by economists)¹³ may have different theoretical bases but they may be seen as atheoretical because of their implicit theoretical formulations.

However, it would be appropriate to say that there is on the whole a theoretical lag between migration and development literatures. For example, the notion of social development has been central to development studies for at least ten years but it is only now being adopted and adapted within that part of the literature that is marked as migration and development. Similarly, many of the useful insights of postdevelopment thinking that draws on poststructural theories have not yet been taken on board by those theorising migration and development. The spatial and temporal limits of development

¹¹ The new study on the health and well-being of young children and carers in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam will provide more data on the impacts of male vs. female migration on left behind families. Furthermore, the inclusion of four countries will allow a comparative analysis.

¹² It is difficult to differentiate between categorical and theoretical limitations but some attempt has been made in order to make a stepped analysis.

¹³ See, for example, the special issues in APMJ on “Turning Points in Labor Migration” (1994, vol. 3, no. 1), “The Dynamics of Labor Migration in Asia” (1996, vol. 5, nos. 2-3) and “International Migration and Structural Change in the APEC Member Economies” (2001, vol. 10, nos. 3-4)

thinking as well as the nature of knowledge production about what and where is development have both come to be questioned in productive ways that are yet to be taken on board by migration specialists entering the field of development.

As a result the version of development that has been adopted within literature on the migration-development nexus imagines development as relatively place-based activity, locating development in situ within particular origin countries. The development of migrants, irrespective of their location may sometimes be jeopardised. This risk is particularly apparent in the drive to increase remittances without adequate cognisance of the kinds of sacrifices migrants may make in playing their part in homeland development and the impact this may have in their ability to skill up, to save for pensions or to simply live a little more comfortably. Moreover, linking migration and development through mechanisms of causality (migration causes development or development causes migration) both assume a pre-figured nation or community and a commitment to a modernizing developmentalism with migrants mediating the relationship between the two. In actuality, a place may be undergoing a range of transformations of which migration is only one small part. There is not enough work that looks at migration as just one factor in a range of developmental changes.

Secondly, the spatial relationships between spaces in existing theorisations of migration and development are often inherently comparative, i.e. differentiating between less developed and more developed indicating the power of modernisation theory in understanding development. However, the long ongoing critique of modernisation

theories are yet to be taken on board by much of the existing literature on migration and development.

Thirdly, although there is an overall euphoria about the possibilities offered by transnational development, how we think about transnationalism is very much influenced by where we are thinking and writing this discourse. For instance, for many Asian migrants who are facing increased border controls and strengthening of borders the need for transnationalism may well speak of the failure of receiving countries to provide for and secure the rights of migrants. Regulations on who can or cannot enter a state have become crucial in shaping migration as immigration issues occupy greater and greater prominence in local political agendas. In this context, transnationalism may be the tactic of the dispossessed. This is particularly clear in the case of temporary labor migration and all attempts to script temporary labor schemes as offering possibilities for transnational development and the theoretical apparatuses that facilitate such policies must therefore be thoroughly interrogated.

Fourthly, the relative neglect of cultural aspects of development has also led to gaps in knowledge about cultures of migration and their influence on who migrates. These cultures are produced through stories sent back, through transnational linkages, discourses of migration in a number of media, such as newspapers, film, in government policies among others. Cultures of migration influence and include not only those who move but also those who have been excluded by the borders and those who have not (yet) moved. Together they shape what Mala Pandurang calls pre-migration experiences (Pandurang 2003) and

more work on the relationship between these experiences and development outcomes is required.

3.2.4 Methodological limitations

A transnational approach to data collection and analysis is still rare. For the most part, studies are conducted either at the origin or destination. There have been attempts to adopt a more transnational framework in studying various topics (e.g., transnational families, transnational advocacy, and recently, transnational practices, diaspora and homeland politics, among others), but as noted this has been hampered by funding constraints. Aside from funding constraints, the approach also entails some “unbounding” on the part of researchers, who otherwise may be bounded by their “national” perspective, cultural perspectives, as well as practical constraints, such as language and access to respondents and institutions in the other country (e.g., a Filipino researcher wanting to study employers of Filipino domestic workers in Singapore will face more hurdles than a Singaporean researcher). Collaboration, dialogue and exchange between researchers across borders and across disciplines will help bridge some of these difficulties.

4. The Migration Research Infrastructure in Asia

According to Wickramasekara (2006), migration research in Asia is undertaken in various settings, i.e., at specialized research institutes on migration, demographic research institutes, government research centers, cells/units/divisions in government

agencies, socio-economic or development research centers affiliated to universities, NGOs or individual researchers. In Asia, there are few centers specializing in international migration. Examples are the Scalabrini Migration Center (Manila), the Asian Research Center for Migration (Bangkok), and the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) at the University of Dhaka (Bangladesh). In addition, there is a region-wide research network – the Asian and Pacific Migration Research Network (APMRN).

Migration Research Centers

The oldest among the centers is the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC) which was founded in Manila, Philippines, in 1987. SMC was established to promote the systematic, holistic and interdisciplinary study of international migration in the region, to advance the use of research-based evidence in the discussion of migration issues and formulation of policies, to contribute to the development of informed policies that will ensure respect for the rights and dignity of migrants, and to promote greater solidarity with migrants and with institutions and individuals working for migrants' welfare. At the time of SMC's founding, international migration from and within Asia was accelerating and there was no center in the region specifically devoted to monitoring and studying the evolution of international migration and its manifold and multi-level consequences.

Research with a regional focus has been a core program of SMC since 1987. Its physical location in the Philippines where migration is a huge phenomenon has meant that the Philippines has been an important focus of the center's work. In addition to research,

SMC produces the academic quarterly, APMJ, and SMC publishes books and monographs on selected migration issues. Through its website, www.smc.org.ph, SMC provides other information services online namely, the Asian Migration News (AMN), a biweekly Internet posting which summarizes current news and events related to Asian migration, and the Asian Migration Atlas, a compilation of socio-economic profiles and migration data of various Asian countries.

SMC is the secretariat of the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch, an umbrella organization of migrant NGOs promoting the rights of migrants in the Philippines and internationally. SMC is a member of the Federation of Centers for Migration Studies, a global network of research centers dedicated to the holistic study of migration (the other centers are in Rome, Paris, New York, Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo) and the International Migration Network (based in Brussels). SMC has cooperated in projects with IOM, ILO, UNESCO, ESCAP, UNDP, ICMC, UNFPA, government agencies, various research centers and many NGOs in the field of migration.

The Asian Research Center for Migration (ARCM) in Bangkok came into being in 1995, growing out of the former Indochina Refugee Information Center established in 1987. ARCM's objectives are as follows: (1) to conduct research studies on migration covering migrant workers, refugees and other cross-border movements of people; (2) to be a resource center of migration-related information for the region on regional migratory movements and their impacts; (3) to develop a computerized database of books, journals, data sets, video tapes, maps and other materials available at ARCM; (4) to participate in

the policy process on migration related issues at the national and regional levels; (5) to establish a network with other academic institutes, governments, NGOs and international organizations to protect displaced people.

ARCM conducts commissioned studies for the government (in the form of consultancies) regarding population movements into and out of Thailand. While its objectives are regional in scope, in practice, its research focus has been geared towards policy matters in Thailand; most of their research is written in Thai. In this sense, ARCM may be described as a “think tank” for the Thai government rather than an independent research institute which looks into broader migration questions. The links with the government also define what is publishable; it is said that findings contrary to the government line do not see print (Iredale et al., 2002). Being part of the university and being located in Bangkok, where many international organizations have their regional headquarters, may provide ARCM with some advantages compared to other research centers.

The Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), an affiliate of the University of Dhaka, was launched in 1996, with a focus on migration, refugee, displacement and governance issues. Bangladesh’s experience with migration in the last 30 years prompted the need to understand these different migration flows, an essential building block for formulating effective policies. RMMRU was established to study population movements both within and across national borders. Over the years, advocacy, awareness campaign, advocacy and training also became part of RMMRU’s core activities.

Other Research Centers

Other institutes in the region may not be migration-specific, but they have demonstrated an interest in migration issues. In Kerala, India, the Centre for Development Studies (CDS), established in 1971, promotes interdisciplinary research, teaching and training relevant to development. Migration is one of the six research themes at CDS and is one topic that has engaged researchers in CDS since Kerala's participation in international migration 30 years ago. As mentioned earlier, the Union Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs established a research unit on international migration at CDS on 12 June 2006. The unit was established to undertake migration research in the next five years: dynamics of migration, impact assessment, remittances, investment and development, not just in the state of Kerala but in different States of India (see <http://www.cids.edu>). In Sri Lanka, the research thrust of the Marga Institute is on development processes in the country, and migration is one of its research areas (see <http://www.margasrilanka.org>).

The Asia Research Institute (ARI) of the National University of Singapore has a long-term interest in migration research comparable to a 'program' in the form of a migration cluster. Also in Singapore is the AsianMetaCentre, an institute devoted to broader population issues. Furthermore, there is the Southeast Asian Research Centre (SEARC) which is affiliated with at the City University of Hong Kong. SEARC carries out independent research on migration but with sub-regional focus on Southeast Asia.

Apart from these research centers, there are also research networks at the national, sub-regional and region-wide level. RMMRU set up the South Asian Migration Resource Network (SAMReN), which aims to foster exchange of migration-related data among South Asian countries. As a group, it also aims to lobby for the observance of labor standards in the region and to cooperate in undertaking research, policy advocacy and the development of a resource specializing on migration literature focusing on South Asia by South Asians and others. The network also aspires to develop the capacity of young academics, professionals and NGOs through training, fellowships and other means to better analyze and manage migration.” The only region-wide network, the Asia Pacific Migration Research Network, deserves special mention here as it seems quite unique.

The Asia Pacific Migration Research Network (APMRN)

The APMRN is funded by from the UNESCO-MOST (Management of Social Transformations) Programme, especially UNESCO’s Bangkok office. It is an international research network that carries out interdisciplinary research on social and political aspects of international migration. One important reason for forming the network was the growing realization among Asian and Pacific academics that official perceptions of migration as a purely economic phenomenon were ideologically-driven and short-sighted. The central focus of APMRN, thus, was the long term role of migration and increased ethno-cultural diversity as major factors of the social transformations of societies in this part of the world. It facilitates research which is driven by the ideas and initiative of researchers, is multi-sited, including researchers in both countries of origin and destination, multi-focal with recognition of the many different types of migration,

such as skilled migration, or trafficking of women. The network also aimed to question the dominance of temporary labor migration as a paradigmatic ‘given’ in discussions of migration in Asia.

APRMN has currently 17 member countries covering the various sub-regions of the Asia Pacific, that is Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Pacific (inclusive of Australia and New Zealand). Eight conferences have been held thus far, where the country coordinators have presented overviews and up-dates of trends and issues in migration research (E-mail communication with Robyn Iredale, May 2007). The aim to pursue theoretical objectives encountered practical limitations in terms of funding priorities. In some countries, it has also not easy to parry government interference.

After the initial phase, UNESCO changed its funding format away from core funding to project-based funding with several projects on promoting ratification and implementation of the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families (which translated into a number of concrete projects carried out by APRMN) and on the relationship between migration, research and policy being undertaken. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been another source of funding for small projects. The latter is reflected in the contributions of APRMN members to the IOM’s annual *World Migration Report* and papers on issues such as “management of migration,” “return migration” and “skilled migration.” The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP Delhi office) also funded a project on migration and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

which involved seven member-countries of the APMRN.¹⁴ As much as such projects provide opportunities, they also constitute obstacles to the workings of any network: without core funding, regular conferences/meetings are not possible and the network members are not as independent in their choice of topics as possibly before.

While the APMRN has been instrumental in initiating national migration research networks (such as in Korea and the Philippines) it has proven difficult to get members to initiate APRMN activities. Both the successes and the difficulties in establishing and sustaining international networks are exemplified here.

NGOs as Research Producers

Migration-oriented NGOs are typically associated with advocacy, lobbying and provision of services. Several NGOs, however, also carry out research-related activities to support their other programs, particularly advocacy and lobbying with governments. Some NGOs are, in fact, primarily research centers.

The *Directory of NGOs for Migrants in Asia* (Scalabrini Migration Center, 1994, 1997) provides some data on the programs and activities of NGOs, including research. In the absence of a more exhaustive list and more recent material, we drew on data from the directory describing their research-related involvement. Data were culled from the information on services and major activities provided by NGOs. In a survey of NGO programs and activities, “research and publications” were grouped into one category; it is one of 16 major activities listed (Asis, 1999). Of the 147 migration-oriented NGOs

¹⁴ The final report is entitled *No Safety Signs Here* (2004).

named in the directory, 53 reported that they engaged in research and publications (in general, more were engaged in publications than research): “The realities and milieu that NGOs work in have popularized action research and participatory of research, modes of research that have broadened and enriched the range of different ways of social enquiry. However, unless NGOs are primarily research centers, research is one area where NGOs are generally lacking in resources and technical training” (Asis, 1999:5). This limitation has been offset by the partnership between NGOs and academics and/or academic institutions.

An example of an NGO that has successfully combined advocacy and research is the Asian Migrant Center (AMC). Founded in 1989 in Hong Kong, AMC’s primary goal is “to promote the human rights, dignity and empowerment of migrant workers and their families in Asia, so that they are able to assert and defend their rights and interests, and become partners in sustainable, just and gender-fair social development.” In addition to political empowerment, AMC’s advocacy has expanded to empowering migrants socially and economically by promoting migrants’ savings to support alternative investments in their home countries. AMC’s research and publication program is geared towards monitoring the current situation of migrants throughout the Asian region. AMC is behind the publication, *Asian Migrant Yearbook*, an annual publication describing the migration situation in 20 countries, including thematic reports on special issues and a list of organizations working on migrants’ issues in the region and in Hong Kong.

Aside from working transnationally to promote the rights of migrants, NGOs have also banded transnationally to produce research-cum-intervention projects. One such example is the formation of CARAM Asia (Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility) in 1997. The regional network of 23 organizations in 15 countries, with a research partnership with the Vrije University Medical Center, based in The Netherlands, works on migration and health issues. Research is integral to the network's existences: "CARAM Asia partners' key thrust is to develop continuous information through Participatory Action Research (PAR) with migrants and their communities at all stages of migration to strengthen the migrant perspective" (http://www.caramasia.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=301&Itemid=338#about, accessed on 12 April 2007).

In some parts of the region, migrants' issues, particularly those dealing with migrants' rights, are politically sensitive topics. Getting funding for independent research on such topics can be fraught with difficulties. Several scholars have commented on the limits of pursuing independent research in general and migrants' issues in specific in Malaysia and Singapore (Piper and Uhlin, 2004; Weiss, 2004; Lyons, 2005; Piper, 2006). In such settings, there tends to be little exchange or link between university-based academics and NGOs. According to one key informant, where researchers are employed by state-run universities and research centers, they have to be very cautious when it comes to taking a critical stance to socio-cultural and political issues and government policies.

In other parts of the region marked by more democratic space, the research undertaken by NGOs has contributed to the enterprise of producing knowledge about migration-related matters. This has been noted in the Philippines, where NGO-based research, which is usually linked to advocacy issues, provides information to complement the policy-oriented and academic-oriented inclinations of government and academic institutions, respectively (Asis, 1999; 2002; 2006).

V. Concluding Remarks

In this paper we have attempted to provide a brief overview of the nature of migration within and from Asia, of the literature on migration and some lacunae therein and of the networks of knowledge making that have produced our current understanding on migration. Throughout this paper we have held that migration is only one part of social change and that a broad definition of development would include the many types of social and cultural transformation that are accompanying migration. We have therefore not focused exclusively on the literature that is marked up as migration and development but have tried to look at the migration literature in a more holistic way. We have also attempted to map the knowledges and networks that have emanated from Asia, or at least by Asian scholars who have migrated to other countries. In this way we have tried to move away from the Western centric literature on migration and development.

In mapping the field of knowledge on migration and development in Asia, we identified some notable developments in the field as well as equally notable gaps. The strides in

migration research are quite remarkable considering the odds and constraints in undertaking such work. Insufficient data and funding limitations may have forced researchers to work under less than ideal situations, but these have not hindered attempts to understand international migration, its likely trajectories, and its multi-level and multidimensional consequences. In general, migration research has been preoccupied with capturing bits and pieces of the phenomenon as it unfolds, a task that has limited most research to descriptive analyses.

At the same time development research has also had its limitations with an overarching emphasis on economic development and as Saith (2006) has convincingly argued, a shift towards research agendas that marry up with the agendas identified by funding bodies. We would argue that rather than jettisoning the good work done thus far by migrant organizations in Asia, the next phases of migration research should concentrate on building on the body of knowledge, the research infrastructure and the research networks that have been established. Programmatic funding that allows Asian researchers to identify and follow up research questions that are important within Asia is definitely called for.

We would also argue that cross country and cross continental conversations between countries of the global South be encouraged and funded. Recognizing the growing role of Asian economies in global economic growth should provide some impetus to such research. For instance, the growing importance of China in African development can open our eyes to the need for research on the forms of migration that may be

accompanying such forms of 'development'. It should lead us to look at the new and emerging shape of structural development and inequalities and the role of migration therein.

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