

Dynamics of Migration; Past, Present, and Future Movements of Peoples in the Asia Pacific¹

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Introduction

With the changes in transport and communications in recent years it is clear that not only is the world economy becoming globalized, but there are concomitant changes in the movements of people and the way they communicate with each other. These changes in turn are having a profound impact on the way we think about migration and the social processes which accompany it.

Some years ago, I edited a book (Eades 1987), in which a number of papers dealt with these issues at a time which was, in hindsight, the beginning of a period of rapid globalization. A number of papers in that book dealt with the ways in which migrants in the post-war period were establishing international networks, thereby opening up a range of strategies and opportunities which had not existed in previous periods of capitalist development. Examples included the Pakistanis in Europe and the Middle East (Ballard 1987), the Mexicans from Guadalajara both in the U.S. and elsewhere in Mexico (Escobar et al. 1987), and the Goanese who had spread far beyond their colonial base in India and East Africa to the rest of the world (Mascarehnas-Keyes 1987). By the early 1990s, when full-blown globalization appeared to be upon us, Ulf Hannerz took some of these issues further, in a section entitled “Perspectives of the footloose,” in his book *Cultural Complexity* (Hannerz 1992). This provides a convenient starting point for the present paper. Hannerz’ argument may be briefly paraphrased as follows.

(i) Old assumptions about migration and assimilation have to be modified, because people are moving back and forth more quickly and more often than before, and many of them plan to return to their countries of origin eventually.

(ii) Migrant labourers are only one of a number of classes of people on the move and having an impact on contemporary culture. The others Hannerz lists include “diplomats, businessmen, bureaucrats, academics, tourists, veterans of foreign wars, overseas volunteers, artists, refugees, [and] youths on an intercontinental

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walk about.” (Hannerz 1992: 246).

(iii) As with the Ballard and Escobar papers mentioned above, Hannerz observes that some countries have become nations of migrants, in which outmigration and remittances are of fundamental importance to the national economy. The classic example in East Asia is that of the Philippines, but Indonesia, China and Vietnam partially fit the model as well, as do Turkey and Pakistan further west.

(iv) For labour migrants, the psychological costs of adapting to their new locations are considerable, and their perspectives are likely to be altered, even if there are also pressures on them to maintain ways of thinking and behaving derived from home: as Hannerz observes, “often the involvement with another culture is not a fringe benefit but a necessary cost,” but it is one which can be overcome with the help of a network of friends, mainly fellow-ethnics. This helps explain the tendency of migrants from the same region to cluster together.

(v) A factor of importance is how migrants are regarded by the state in the areas in which they settle: whether they are given special treatment, simply ignored, or actively discouraged from settlement except within very specific limits and constraints.

(vi) As a result of these movements of people, “transnational cultures, structures of meaning carried by social networks which are not wholly based in any single territory” are developing rapidly. Despite ethnic support networks, migrants may still experience culture shock, leading to the growth of a “culture-shock prevention industry.” In the case of Japan, this includes a vast network of language schools and authors of guidebooks aimed not only at tourists, but also at businessmen, academics and more general job-seekers (cf. Eades 1998: 26-37 for examples). Those that absorb these transnational cultures become “cosmopolitans,” able to move even more freely between countries and cultures using the transnational culture as their point of entry. And the international media, of course, enable and encourage people to develop cosmopolitan skills.

Hannerz also discusses the resulting “global ecumene,” spelling out the cultural consequences of these processes for the transnational cultural flow, within the parameters established by the market and the state. Underlying his approach is a framework which involves four distinct levels of analysis: (a) the gradual emergence of national, regional and finally global economic structures; (b) the increasing mobility of people within these structures, and their varied patterns of social interaction and networks; (c) the cultural and ideological forms which result from these movements; and (d) the regulation (or attempted regulation) of these flows of people and cultural processes by the state.

In this paper, I build on this framework. In the first part I discuss historically the main flows of people within the region; in the second I abstract the major ideal types, narratives and discourses emerging from these flows; and in the final part I consider possible future trends in migration, social group formation and ideologies of identity. I will be concerned mainly with migrant labour: tourists, intellectuals and business

persons have their own special characteristics which have been described at length elsewhere. But in terms of population flows migrant labourers of one type or another are still probably the majority, and even if they lack the power, wealth, and influence of these other groups, their social and cultural impact may be equally profound in the long term.

Asians on the Move in Historical Perspective.

Asians on the move are hardly a new phenomenon: in Pacific Asia, China was always a country with one of the most mobile populations, partly because it had the largest and most crowded population, and partly because the boundaries of China kept expanding and contracting over the centuries. As they expanded, the Han Chinese moved outwards, as they contracted they either retreated back to the Chinese heartland, or were left as minorities, either separate or assimilated, in the surrounding areas. As a result, the category of "Chinese" is itself historically constituted, with the long process of the movement of the Han Chinese outwards from their historical heartland between the Yellow and Yangtze rivers (e.g. Segawa 1995, Yokoyama 1995), and these divisions and contradictions are also reflected among the "Chinese" groups resident abroad.

This population of "external China" as the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of China* (Hook 1995) puts it is very considerable, even if it is difficult to count because of local variations in both citizenship requirements and census classifications. By the 1970s, people who could be broadly classified as Chinese, either as ethnic citizens or aliens, included 1.4 million in Vietnam, nearly 6 million in Thailand, 4 million in Malaysia, 2 million in Singapore, 3.5 million in Indonesia, between 1 and 2 million in the Philippines, and 0.8m in the United States, to mention only the largest communities. Chinese also had substantial presences in most of the other countries of East and Southeast Asia, as well as Oceania, the West Indies and Mauritius (Wang 1991: 86-87).

Much of this movement was because of the advent of Western influence and colonialism in the 19th Century, which led to both an increased demand for labour and increased economic opportunities throughout Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific region. Much of the labour of course came from the two largest labour reservoirs, China and India. To take the example of Malaysia, the main influx of Chinese migrants took place from the second half of the late 19th Century onwards, as the tin industry expanded and created a demand for labour (Lian 1995). By the early 20th Century, the Chinese were concentrated in the tin mining areas and ports. They also became involved in mining, the rice trade, and cash crop farming. Indians also began to arrive as a result of the development of the rubber industry, for which they provided much of the labour on the plantations. By the 1930s, only a minority of the population of the Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements was Malay, and the Chinese predominated in the latter. They already formed 70 percent of the population of Singapore by the 1930s. In the 20th Century political conditions in India were generally better than those in China, and as a result whereas the Indians (many of them single men) moved back and forth between Malaysia and their homelands, the Chinese tended to stay put. After the 1949 revolution, the option of going "home" disappeared almost completely. There was also a significant stream of Indonesian migrants into Malaya, but for cultural and linguistic reasons they obviously found it easier to assimilate and become invisible.

The politics of decolonization coupled with cultural and religious differences made it more difficult for the Chinese to assimilate in Malaysia than in countries like Thailand or the Philippines. The policies of the various governments in the region towards the Chinese were very different, despite the fact that Chinese migrants and merchants had been a feature of the local economic scene in many of them long before the colonial period, and despite the fact that many of the earliest arrivals had assimilated into the local population. The flow of migrants in the colonial period was so great that it raised some alarm even in regions where relations had been fairly free and easy before. The great majority of colonial migrants came from southern China, especially from groups speaking Hokkien, Teochiu and Cantonese dialects, in Fujian and Guangdong provinces. The Teochiu are especially numerous in Thailand and the Cantonese in Vietnam, with more varied populations from all over the region settling in Malaysia and Singapore. (Chinese in Korea tended to be from Shandong, further to the north, and most of these in Japan are from Taiwan.)

Two of the largest flows of Chinese migration in the 19th Century were to Thailand and Vietnam, but the way in which the migrants were treated by the local government was very different. In Vietnam the French colonial administration treated the Chinese as a separate entity and established "congregations" as the basic administrative unit, with the result that they stayed separate and distinct. In Thailand, however, assimilation was permitted, intermarriage was more common, and people of Chinese origin who assimilated were able to move up the Thai social ladder. Another important variable in more recent years has been the policies of each country towards China: in Burma the Chinese have lived peacefully since the War and the government has remained on reasonably good terms with that of China. Relations between Vietnam and China have been far more troubled, so the position of the Chinese in Vietnam has in many cases remained extremely difficult. In the Philippines, the Chinese suffered from discrimination imposed by the American administration. This was despite the fact that earlier Chinese immigrants had converted to Catholicism, intermarried and assimilated freely with the local population. It is only since 1975 that Chinese have been able to take Philippine citizenship, and many of them have done so.

The most complicated situations for the migrants arose in Malaysia and Indonesia. The huge influx of Chinese labour into Malaysia meant that the migrants constituted a very large minority, or in some cases like Singapore, a majority, of the local population. This gave the Chinese community critical mass. Intermarriage was possible within the community, which lessened the probability of it taking place outside the community, and this in itself tended to reinforce Chinese cultural identities. However, there was also a complex political dimension. Malaya under British rule had been divided into three parts: the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States, and the Unfederated Malay States. The proportion of Chinese was larger in the first two of these, and they controlled many sectors of the economy throughout the area. The British envisaged bringing these separate bits together into a single Malayan Union as part of the process of decolonization, but they encountered serious problems in relation to the issues of citizenship and control. The non-Malay population stood to gain most from the new proposed arrangements in terms of security and citizenship. Those who stood to lose most were the Malayan rulers whose authority would apparently be undermined. The British changed their minds, and negotiated instead a federation in which the Malay rulers would retain much of their influence. Malaysia therefore obtained independence

with the status of the Malays, their identity, their religion and their language written into the constitution. Citizenship requirements were much more stringent and difficult to meet for non-Malays. People born in Singapore were no longer to be automatically Malay citizens. Heated debate between the Chinese and the Malays continued during the early 1950s as negotiations over the terms of independence proceeded. The eventual trade-off was to leave political power in the hands of the Malays in return for allowing Chinese to qualify for citizenship. In the event the structure which resulted did not last long: Singapore became independent in the mid-1960s, and the Chinese elsewhere remained in a disadvantaged position *vis-à-vis* the Malays in the new Federation of Malaysia. The net result of the conflict was to strengthen the boundaries between the Malay and Chinese communities, and to prevent the kind of assimilation which took place in Thailand. Particularly serious communal riots broke out in 1969, but the speed of economic growth from the 1980s meant that the Chinese were also able to reap some of the benefits, despite the discrimination against them built into the Malaysian system.

Indonesia is similar to some of the other countries in that there was a long tradition of migration and assimilation before the colonial period which seems to have been halted with the onset of colonial rule. As in the other countries the 19th and 20th centuries saw a rapid influx of Chinese labor, and also the development of increasing nationalism among both the Chinese and the indigenous communities. The result was the development of two Chinese communities: the locally-born and more assimilated *peranakan*, and the Chinese-born *totok*. However the position of all Chinese became uncomfortable in the new Indonesian post-war state, partly because of worries about their links with mainland China, now under revolutionary Communist rule, and partly because of the tightly knit organisations which the Chinese possessed, which were also politically suspect. As a result, the Chinese suffered particularly heavily in the violence which engulfed the country in 1965-66. Chinese social and political organisations were smashed, overt expressions of Chinese culture and identity were discouraged, and the remaining Chinese adopted a very low profile within the new political order. It took Indonesia 25 years to re-establish diplomatic relations with China, by which time the process of integrating the Chinese into the Indonesian population had, on the surface at least, proceeded a long way, with changes of names and increasing interaction with the host community. Different Chinese groups in different parts of the country had achieved different levels and types of assimilation, and the old divisions between *totok* and *peranakan* were being eroded over time. However, the remaining divisions were shown up at the time of the political disturbances in 1998, with accounts of violent attacks on the Chinese community and against the premises of Chinese businesses. Despite the downplaying of Chinese identity, they still appear to remain in a classic middleman minority situation, as permanent “sojourners” within the Indonesian population, and the targets of resentment and violence at times of economic recession or more general social and political turmoil.

The position of the Koreans in Japan is historically perhaps the most complex of all the major migrant groups in East Asia. Korea's long and troubled relations with its larger neighbours, China and Japan, go back for centuries and can be likened to those between England and Ireland, with armed conflict alternating with conquest and exploitation. After the massive Japanese invasion in the late 16th Century under Hideyoshi, hostilities abated during the long Tokugawa period when Japan was virtually closed to the outside world, only to erupt again once the country opened up

after the Meiji restoration of 1868. Control over Korea was one of prizes disputed by the Japanese, Chinese and Russians in the wars of 1894-95 and 1904-05. Even though the extent of the Japanese victories can be exaggerated, they left the country in control of both Taiwan and Korea, and the Japanese government to see what benefit the country could derive from them. The ideologies of imperialism and race in relation to Korea have been described in great detail by Michael Weiner (1994), so can be summarised briefly here.

Weiner's book revolves around the colonial period in Korea, the development of a Korean community in Japan, and the use of Korean labour during the Pacific War (1994: 4). In the Japanese, as in other colonial orders, political control and economic exploitation were inextricably linked "As disadvantaged workers, Koreans tended to receive lower wages than their Japanese counterparts, enjoyed little security of employment, suffered exploitation and physical intimidation at the hands of labour brokers and employers, were constrained from forming political labour organisations, and received little support from the Japanese trades union movement. In this, the pre-war experience of Korean immigrants differed little from those of other colonial migrants" (Weiner, 1994: 56). At the same time the Koreans were subject to Japanese acculturation rather than indirect rule, but the aim was not assimilation and equal rights of citizenship, but the assumption by Koreans of "their natural and proper place within a racially defined hierarchy of dependent states within the empire." In this respect Japanese colonialism differed from both French assimilation theory on the one hand and British policies of indirect rule using indigenous institutions where possible on the other.

Weiner argues that in order to construct an ideology as a new basis for national unity in the Meiji state, the Meiji leaders consciously promoted the notion of the "Family State," which was the result of a reworking of the concept of nation and citizen in accordance with "powerful images of the purity and homogeneity of the nation, the family and the Japanese way of life" (1994: 19). These concepts fitted well with the notions of social Darwinism that were filtering in from the West and popular during the Meiji period. If the Chinese and Koreans were incapable of exploiting their own resources, then they could only benefit by being subject to domination by the superior Japanese! There were dissident voices against the rising tide of nationalism, but they had little influence.

The occupation of Korea took place in 1910. Compared with the British or French exercises in colonialism, it was on a vast scale, with a quarter of a million Japanese officials involved. Economic development was to be achieved through "complete transformation of Korean agriculture, the immigration of Japanese settlers, the enlistment of indigenous labour and, later, the creation of an outlet for Japanese manufactured goods" (Weiner, 1994: 40). Agricultural productivity increased as the local landlords collaborated with the Japanese and Korea became the main source of rice for Japan until 1945, but the penetration of the market by Japanese capital and systems of exploitation put enormous pressure on large sections of the rural population, which responded by looking for economic opportunities elsewhere. If anything these pressures increased during the depression of the 1930s. However, even though the annexation by Japan allowed Korean labour to flow into Japan itself, it did not guarantee equality once it got there. The flow of labour was also carefully regulated by the state, which regarded Koreans as short-term replacement labour rather than a

permanent part of the labour force. This was particularly useful during sudden economic booms such as that triggered by Japanese entry into the First World War, and the consequent rise in demand shipbuilding, iron and steel and mining industries (Weiner, 1994: 59). Much of the construction which took place in the 1920s was also based on immigrant labour. As usual, migrants were useful for carrying out tasks that the local population avoided, especially as casual labor, but as a result ran into the usual prejudices which casual labourers in many parts of the world encounter. Relations were not helped by the appalling housing conditions the labourers had to live in the day labourer camps (*hamba*). Under these circumstances deviance and marginality were mutually reinforcing. Productivity compared with Japanese workers was also correspondingly low, and labour turnover high, and the Korean workers received little assistance from the Japanese union movement. Prevailing attitudes towards Koreans as the “enemy within” and a potential source of trouble were commonplace, as noted in an official report of 1924:

Immediately before the earthquake, there were in excess of 80,000 Koreans in Japan. Almost all were labourers and were spread throughout the country. They were used collectively as factory labour and in various types of construction work in Fukuoka, Yokohama Osaka, Tokyo and so on. They were of the lowest type of Korean who barely managed to eke out an existence, and were generally poor and uncultured. Many were village scoundrels who often became violent if angered, and fights over gambling were a common occurrence. Aside from labourers, there were also penniless Koreans who would wander from town to town peddling ginseng. Some were known to take advantage of a husband’s absence by applying high-pressure type salesmanship or other questionable practices against women and children. This has resulted in widespread fear of Koreans among many Japanese, and there is a tendency for the Japanese to also be suspicious of Koreans. (Quoted in Weiner, 1994: 49)

These attitudes are uncannily reminiscent of Engel’s observations on the Irish in England in the 1840s (Engels 1969 [1892]: 122-25). They also provided the context for the notorious massacre of Korean residents of Tokyo in the wake of the 1923 earthquakes (Weiner 1994: 78-88). But despite the massacres and Japanese attempts to control the flow by screening out “undesirables” (i.e. potential activists), the influx of Korean labour continued and the population quadrupled between 1925 and 1938, to somewhere between 650,000 and 800,000 (Weiner 1994: 122). The majority were still illiterates from rural areas, and they were heavily concentrated in the industrial areas of Japan, particularly Osaka. Conditions of employment continued to be unequal for Japanese and Korean workers, and the stereotypes of marginality and poverty necessarily persisted. Gradually however the Korean community was transforming itself from a community of transients to one of longer-term residents, and the proportion of women and children was steadily increasing.

In the run-up to the Pacific War, however, the need to mobilize labour meant the emigration of large numbers of additional workers from Korea. At first this was intended to be voluntary, but the shortfall meant that the authorities increasingly resorted to conscription. The number transported to Japan reached a peak of 286,000 in 1944, and those already resident there also became liable to conscription. The workers

were used mainly in mining and heavy industry. A large proportion of the workers in the Nagasaki shipyard was therefore Korean at the time of the atomic bombing in August 1945, and demands for compensation by the surviving Korean workers still continue (Weiner 1997). Working conditions were often appalling, controls were largely ineffective, and cases of desertion were frequent, with severe sanctions often involving torture for those workers who were caught (Weiner 1994: 207). Control broke down completely at the end of the war, and an estimate 800,000 labourers fled back to Korea between August and November 1945. Nevertheless, a substantial number remained to form the basis of the present-day Korean community in Japan. Legislation which followed the separation of Korea from Japan, together with Japanese citizenship requirements, meant that the Koreans took on the status of permanent resident aliens, a status that was further complicated by the division of Korea into North and South Korea after the Korean War (Ryang 1997). Despite sharing in the general prosperity of the Japanese economic miracle, the Korean population remained subject to discrimination, even though many of the younger members speak Japanese as their first language, and rates of assimilation, naturalisation and intermarriage are gradually rising.

To summarise the early periods of Asian migration, therefore, in the precolonial period, as in other parts of the world, boundaries were porous, people moved relatively freely within the constraints of the technology and distances of the period, and groups of foreigners frequently settled and gradually assimilated in the areas to which they moved. This gradually changed with the rise of the world system, capitalism and colonialism. Labour movements became more numerous, migrants began to make up ever larger proportions of local populations, and rulers and colonial administrators alike began to worry about the implications for their ability to control the situation. The classic view of migrant workers as dispensable short-term additions to the local labour force began to develop, even though this was often in sharp contradiction to the migrants' own definitions of the situation. The problems were accentuated in states such as Malaysia and Indonesia by the politics of decolonization and the distribution of power on the one hand, and the ambiguous relations between the "migrants" (even though many of them had now been there for several generations), the new states in which they lived, and the old states to which still they owed (or were perceived to still owe) some allegiance. In the case of Thailand long-standing policies of assimilation and the absence of a colonial regime eased the transition towards assimilation. In the case of Indonesia, the presence of large numbers of both long-established and partially assimilated Chinese and more recent migrants was complicated by internal political tensions, and the Chinese bore the brunt of the "anti-communist" coup of 1965 because of their perceived links with Communist China. As a result they have had to maintain a low profile since, with partial assimilation, but the divisions appear to still run deep under the surface, as shown by the political upheavals of 1998. In the case of Malaysia the problem was much more complex, both because of the sheer numbers and unequal distribution of the Chinese "migrants" and because of the British vacillation between a liberal definition of citizenship and a desire to decolonise on the basis of the political *status quo* resulting from colonial policies of indirect rule. Even though both Malays and Chinese are citizens, there remained a degree of quite open discrimination in constitutional rights and access to state resources, even though possible resentment has been dampened in recent years by the high level of economic growth. Whether, as in

Indonesia, this degree of harmony can withstand severe economic and political instability is probably still an open question. The Koreans in Japan have remained outsiders, even after two or three generations, though in recent years rates of assimilation, naturalization, and intermarriage have increased. Koreans however have continued to flow into Japan during the period of post-war high speed growth and it is to this that I now turn.

Migration and the Asian Economic Miracle

In the post-war period; the economies of East Asia led by that of Japan experienced an unprecedented economic boom, which, even if temporarily halted by the economic crisis of 1997-98, has resulted in a more rapidly rising standard of living for more people than probably any other period in human history. Many writers have likened this to a formation of flying geese, with Japan at the head, followed in approximate order of takeoff by Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, China and Indonesia. Elsewhere I have examined the common conditions which underlay this growth, and its economic and environmental consequences (Eades 1997; 1999). Here I want to consider some of the implications for migration.

I will focus on Japan partly because Japan has been in the game of high speed growth longer than any other country in the region, and partly because the material on post-war migration into Japan is now very rich. In addition to three general studies of what has become known as the *gaikokujin rōdōsha mondai* (foreign workers' issue), there are also detailed recent studies of the (North) Koreans (Ryang, 1997), Chinese (Vasishth 1997), Filipinos (see Dizon in this volume) and return migration of Latin Americans of Japanese origin (Sellek 1997), in addition to a mass of general information now available in Japanese. This has been most usefully summarised for the bubble period by Komai (1995) and it is his analysis I mainly follow here.

Japan has allowed the entry of skilled labour including foreign experts, teachers and businessmen in the post-war period, but has generally tried to exclude unskilled labour. Despite this, Komai estimated that by the early 1990s there were in fact about 600,000 unskilled foreign workers living and working in Japan, mainly illegally. This is of course linked to the demographic situation in the country, with the rapid ageing of the population coupled with a massive decline in the average number of children in a single generation. This problem has attracted the attention of scholars and journalists alike (Sellek and Weiner 1992; Hugo 1995; Loiskandl 1995). The labour shortage has been made all the worse by the restrictive immigration policy which has prevented the rapid injection of the sectors of the economy which most need it. The flow of foreign workers began with the arrival of "trainees" in the 1960s, followed by an influx of overseas women, many from the Philippines and Thailand, into the entertainment and sex industries in the 1970s. In the 1980s male labour migrants started to appear in larger numbers, from new countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran, in addition to the continuing and much longer-established flows from Korea and China. Visa requirements between Japan, Pakistan, Iran and Bangladesh were suspended briefly in the late 1980s but they were soon reintroduced after a large influx of labour from these countries and as the Japanese economy itself began to slow down. In fact, the migrant influx was startlingly international, with illegal migrants from 75 countries being apprehended in 1991. There was also the return flow of Latin Americans of Japanese

descent, whose influx was legalised in 1990, but whose Japanese language skills are often limited to the point at which they can be considered a new group of “foreign” migrant workers. Many of these migrants entered the country legally, but became illegally involved in work other than that permitted by their visas. “Language schools” for migrants ostensibly studying Japanese often provided a front for immigrants who were actually working full time elsewhere in the economy. Others migrants coming in illegally included groups of Chinese, some of whom claimed to be Vietnamese refugees (Chan 1995). New legislation in 1990 tightened up the regulations by allowing the employers of these workers to be prosecuted, though it also made concessions to the *Nikkeijin* from Latin America, allowing them to carry out unskilled work (Sellek 1997). However it was also very clear that a large proportion of these migrants were employed by smaller and more marginal firms, many of which had come to rely on migrants because of the lack of local recruits willing to do the jobs. They included firms in more polluting industries (many connected with metal work) and/or inconvenient locations. They were often suppliers and subcontractors to major companies which were putting pressure on them to cut costs and reduce prices in the face of the general economic slowdown. Despite the language difficulties involved, foreign workers were often more willing than the Japanese to take on unskilled or dirty work, they were less prone to absenteeism, they could be hired without prolonged paperwork and social insurance, and they often introduced replacement workers from among friends and relatives when it came time for them to leave. Many of the migrants were ostensibly hired as technical “trainees,” though in fact they were *de facto* labourers. In one survey quoted by Komai, 30 percent of firms had hired foreign workers in the previous year, about 17 percent of them probably illegally: given the nature of the subject, the real figures were almost certainly higher than this. As is often the case with migrant workers, some migrants from countries like Pakistan had relatively high levels of education, so that they work they did in Japan involved “downward mobility,” compensated for by larger earnings than were possible at home.

Needless to say, illegal foreign workers in Japan during the 1990s came in for more than their fair share of exploitation and abuse by both employers and the authorities, given the probability that they would not want to draw attention to themselves by complaining. Some of the labour markets in which they worked such as the construction industry were controlled largely by *yakuza*. Debts to relatives who have put up the money for transport had to be repaid, and there were a number of informal middlemen and brokers providing entry to Japan and employment who also had to be paid off. Wages were often lower than for local workers, and the foreign workers were often over-taxed. They were also subject to police harassment and raids, even though it is also that the police often know all about the migrants’ presence but took no action. The early 1990s saw a series of well-publicized raids by the police on Iranians who met in Yoyogi Park in Tokyo every Sunday to exchange information on jobs, news from home, foreign currency and to buy magazines and videos from Iran. The pretext was usually a crackdown on crime, though many migrants kept well away from criminal activities that might lead to exposure. (One of the few exceptions was the involvement of Iranians in a forged telephone card racket at Ueno and other main Tokyo stations.) Undocumented workers often had inadequate medical coverage and insurance, which was important given that many of them were working in dangerous industrial jobs where serious injuries are possible, and there were a number of press

reports of badly injured workers taking their claims for compensation to the courts.

Another problematic area was housing, with many landlords unwilling to let to foreign tenants under any circumstances, and those that were overcharging for the accommodation which is available. As a result a quasi-ghetto appeared in Western Tokyo between Shinjuku and Ikebukuro, near to the entertainment district of Kabukicho where apparently half or more of the employees were foreign.

However, despite all the discrimination and the dangers of working, the wages received by many migrants still enabled a substantial flow of remittances to be sent back to their families and home countries, and it is clear that an increasing number were establishing roots in Japan, either through intermarriage in the case of Thai and Filipina women, or by simply staying longer and longer. Numbers of new entrants tailed off somewhat as with the prolonged economic recession of the 1990s, while homelessness also increased. As a result, foreign workers gradually moved into a wider range of industries, including agriculture, fishing, forestry, shipping, and, for skilled "trainees," computer software. There were occasional booms in the construction industry, as with the rebuilding of Kobe after the 1995 earthquake or the construction of the facilities for the Nagano Winter Olympic Games in 1998, but in the case of the latter there were also well-publicised deportations of foreign workers as soon as the buildings were finished.

Japan has to some extent provided a pattern which other countries of the region have followed as they have experienced their own periods of high speed growth. Foreign migrants have become a valuable adjunct to the labour force, providing cheap, instant reinforcement which can be equally instantly laid off in times of recession. Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, and to a lesser extent Thailand have all moved from being labour exporting to labour importing economies. The movement of labour is now global, with for instance Korean construction companies hiring South Asian labour for construction sites in the Middle East. Korea itself used to be a major exporter of labour in the early post-war period as it was in the colonial period, but the increasing prosperity of the country in the 1980s and the labour needed for the construction sites for the 1988 Olympics meant that the outflow fell off. Meanwhile the country attracted its own share of migrants from the main labour exporting countries.

Meanwhile, the Philippines has continued to rely on the export of labour and migrant remittances as one of the major pillars of its economy. Particularly striking has been the export of Filipina labour to the Middle East and the wealthier countries and territories of East Asia such as Singapore and Hong Kong.

One final feature of the Japanese case which also seems to be general is the generally cautious and restrictive attitude of the authorities to any relaxation of the immigration laws to meet the labour shortage, even though economically and demographically it would clearly be in the country's longer term economic and demographic interests. The other main labour-importing economies, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore have generally followed, suit, and in the case of Malaysia the government was taking vigorous steps to reduce the number of foreign workers, even before the economic crisis of late 1997 hit the region.

Shutting the Door? The Asian Economic Crisis and Beyond

Increasingly concerned with the number of illegal foreign workers in the country, the Malaysian government announced an amnesty in mid-1996. Workers with valid travel

documents would be able to legalise their position, but those without would be deported, together with the unemployed. The measure was aimed at the main groups usually allowed to work in Malaysia, i.e. Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines, but the position of Indian migrants in the country was also to be regularised.² The amnesty was to end at the end of the year. Estimates of the number of workers in Malaysia during this period varied between two and three million. Legal action was also promised against the employers once the amnesty expired. 300,000 workers actually registered, and it was generally assumed that there were about 700,000 who remained undocumented.

At the start of 1997, the government took swift action against the illegal migrants, their first target being the Indonesians. Over a thousand of them were swiftly rounded up, and taken under armed escort to be repatriated by an Indonesian naval vessel.³ Threats by the Malaysian government to deport up to 700,000 people during the exercise alarmed the neighbouring countries, especially Thailand, which was worried that the migrants would attempt to enter Thailand instead, complicating its efforts to deal with its own illegal immigrant problem. Thailand had an estimated 700,000 illegal migrants of its own, around 85 percent of them from Myanmar.⁴ The Malaysian Indian Congress, the main Indian political party in the country, took the issue seriously enough to distribute leaflets warning Malaysian women of Indian origin against marriages of convenience to allow migrants to stay. Many of the Bangladeshi workers wishing to marry Malaysian women, they warned, already had wives and children back in Bangladesh.⁵ New immigration regulations were tabled bringing in heavy fines, whipping and jail sentences for people bringing illegal aliens into the country. However, perhaps in response to accusations of xenophobia from its neighbours,⁶ the Malaysian line softened somewhat in the weeks that followed, and it was later announced that the illegals were being given until the end of the month to leave for home.⁷

The navy was ready to assist their repatriation if necessary, and the military and police had stepped up their control of the borders.⁸ At the end of the month, police raids began to check on foreign maids despite protests from immigrant activists who had already been complaining for some time about conditions in Malaysian internment camps for illegal migrants.⁹ For some time after this, things appeared to have become relatively quiet, but in May, the government announced that repatriations of Filipino workers would begin again.¹⁰

² "Indian Nationals Working Illegally in Malaysia to Be Legalised", Xinhua News Agency, 12-19-1996.

³ "Malaysia deports illegal Indonesian workers", Reuters, 01-03-1997.

⁴ "Thailand Watches Malaysia's Action on Illegal Workers," Xinhua News Agency, 01-04-1997; "Malaysian crackdown drives illegal workers," Xinhua News Agency, 02-02-1997.

⁵ "Malaysia: problems over influx of foreign workers," Inter Press Service English News Wire, 01-06-1997.

⁶ Teena Amrit Gill, "Malaysia - labor: illegal foreign workers bitter over crackdown," Inter Press Service English News Wire, 01-13-1997.

⁷ "Malaysia allows illegal workers to leave by Jan 31," Reuters, 01-16-1997.

⁸ "Malaysian navy ready to help deport illegals," Xinhua News Agency, 01-23-1997.

⁹ "Malaysia launches House-to-house checks for Illegal Foreign Maids," Xinhua News Agency, 01-29-1997; Anil Noel Netto, "Malaysia: crackdown on illegal migrant workers worries activists," Inter Press Service English News Wire, 01-30-1997; see also Pratap Chatterjee, "Malaysia -- human rights: Bangladeshis starve in Malaysian camps," Inter Press Service English News Wire, 07-28-1995.

¹⁰ "Some Filipino Workers in Malaysia to be Sent Home," Xinhua News Agency, 05-11-1997.

Predictably, once the full force of the economic crisis hit the region later in the year, talk of repatriating foreign workers began once again, as it was assumed that they would be among those worst hit by it.¹¹ Meanwhile of course a political crisis was also boiling up in Indonesia, and there were fears in Malaysia and Singapore that there would be an influx of the 7 million or so ethnic Chinese resident there.¹² Not long after, reports of waves of boat people heading for Malaysia did start to appear at the same time as the Malaysian government was sending back to Indonesia political separatists from Indonesia who had been interned in Malaysia.¹³

In August 1998, the Malaysian government was still hoping to persuade up to 300,000 illegal workers to consider leaving, by granting another two month amnesty to expire at the end of October. This was not much of a concession: all it meant was that workers could leave the country without being harassed by Malaysian border guards, but the threat of sterner action to follow after was there yet again.¹⁴ Moves would also be taken against employers who used illegal labour. However, at the same time government spokesmen were anxious to point out that Indonesian labour was still important in certain sectors of the Malaysian economy with labour shortages, such as the palm oil industry, and it was still hoped to recruit a quota of workers in Indonesia for this.¹⁵

The Singapore experience was similar to that of Malaysia. Even before the economic crisis hit, it had been attempting to cut down on illegal immigration from Bangladesh and Myanmar by imposing visa requirements.¹⁶ Later on, in the wake of the crisis, it announced its own tougher penalties for violation of the immigration laws not dissimilar to those earlier announced in Malaysia.¹⁷ The government imposed heavier penalties for a wider range of offences, including caning. Some of the provisions were aimed at employers of migrant labour. As for the migrants themselves, the onus was on suspects to satisfy the courts that they were not attempting to enter the country illegally, and anyone without valid entry documents would be treated as an illegal immigrant. The government also made it clear that periodic raids to find illegal immigrants would continue.

Against this troubled economic background, therefore, the future of the labour migrants in the region looked increasingly uncertain. Even before the crisis, the more prosperous countries of the region such as Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore were trying to reach a balance. It was realised that migrant workers were badly needed in some sectors of the economy, such as construction and the older plantation industries. This was reflected in for instance the Malaysian government's willingness to regularize the position of the undocumented workers in 1997. However, the general trend seems to be for the wealthier countries of the region to adopt ever more stringent immigration

¹¹ Anil Noel Netto, "Malaysia: gloom hovers over lunar new year, end of Ramadan," *Inter Press Service English News Wire*, 01-15-1998.

¹² Michael Richardson, "Indonesia's Neighbors Fear Wave of Refugees Singapore and Malaysia Watch With Alarm," *International Herald Tribune*, 02-11-1998.

¹³ Ron Moreau, "Malaysia. Grief by the Shipload. What can anyone do about the wave of Indonesian boat people looking for nonexistent jobs as illegal laborers?" *Newsweek* 04-13-1998.

¹⁴ "Malaysia grants 2-month amnesty to foreign workers," Reuters, 08-29-1998; "Malaysia says not extending amnesty for migrants," Reuters, 10-05-1998.

¹⁵ "Malaysia says it still needs 160,000 Indonesian workers," *Jakarta Post*, 10-27-1998.

¹⁶ "Singapore requires visas for Bangladeshi, Myanmar," Xinhua News Agency, 11-28-1997.

¹⁷ "Singapore toughens penalty for immigration offenders," Xinhua News Agency, 10-05-1998.

regulations to cut down the flow of refugees and migrant workers from their poorer neighbours, especially in times of economic crisis.

The Future of East Asian Migration

In this brief survey I have divided the history of migration in the region effectively into four periods, which might be described as “precolonial,” “colonial,” “high-speed growth,” and (in the case of Japan) “post-bubble.”

Linking together these periods are the economic, political and social dynamics of the region, and their resulting impact on the lives of the migrants. The economic history of the region consists of the increasing incorporation of what was mainly a regional economy into the world-system under colonial domination from the 17th Century onwards. By the late 19th Century, this had generated heavy flows of migrants within the region, as production was reorganised by the colonial powers including Japan, France and Britain. The result was the influx of the overseas Chinese into Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia, the influx of Indians into Malaya, and the influx of Koreans into Japan. After 1945, the high rates of economic growth, beginning in Japan and continuing more recently with the smaller countries, generated new flows of migrants, both within the region, and from South Asia, particularly Pakistan and Bangladesh.

There have also been marked shifts in the political sphere as well. The relatively easy processes of settlement and assimilation which marked the precolonial periods gave way to much more rigid administration during the colonial period, as the colonial authorities attempted to control flows of labour in line with their own economic interests rather than those of the migrants themselves. Despite the rhetoric of colonialism as a civilizing mission, the bottom line was usually the need for cheap labor and raw materials.

In the post-war period, the process of decolonization also entered the picture as colonial administrations withdrew. A range of political choices by the successor states produced a variety of outcomes for communities of migrants, from the relatively high degrees of assimilation in Thailand and the Philippines to ethnically segmented communities in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Japan with its chronically disenfranchised Korean minority.

At the present day the East and Southeast Asian regions are badly divided on economic lines. At one pole are the poorest economies like the Philippines which still rely on labour exportation to generate foreign exchange and alleviate the effects of rapid population growth. At the other pole are countries like Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong, in which certain sectors of the economy have come to rely on migrant labour in face of the demographic transition and the rapid ageing of their own populations. In between are places like Taiwan, Korea, Malaysia and Thailand, which used to be substantial exporters of labour, but which are now turning into net labour importers. The wealthier regions of China are experiencing a similar trend (Overholt 1993).

In the new globalized world, therefore, the following flows of people can be expected to dominate the migration scene for the next few years:

- (1) With the continued growth of the state, the concentration of capital in the major urban centers, and increasing stagnation in the rural areas, as they come

increasingly under pressure from cheap agricultural exports from countries with industrial agriculture, rural urban migration will continue in the poorer countries.

- (2) This will consist largely of chain migration, using links of kinship and ethnicity, leading to the formation of substantial ethnic minorities and ethnic ghettos in the larger cities. Many of these migrants will continue to live and work in the informal sector
- (3) The state will make sporadic attempts to control this migration, through demolition of illegal settlements, control of the informal sector in the name of social order, etc. but some political parties and regimes may take advantage of the support from these settlements and attempt to shore up their political support within them through more accommodative policies.
- (4) In the richer countries, the urbanization process will approach the limit already reached in Japan, where the great majority of the population already live in urban settlements.
- (5) The rural population left behind will consist largely of the aged and the unmarried, leading to phenomena such as the *Japayuki* in Japan, with men unable to find local wives looking further afield, to marginal parts of the country as in China (Han and Eades 1995), or overseas, as in the case of Philippine brides in Japan (see Dizon in this volume).
- (6) In terms of overseas migration, at the higher levels of business, industry and academe, there will be a substantial international flow of the most talented personnel, as the larger companies globalise and draw on the world market for employees.
- (7) There will also be an increasing international flow of students, mostly from middle-class backgrounds, as the higher education industry also globalises.
- (8) There will also be increasing flows of tourists, though the tourist industry is generally susceptible to events such as epidemics, conflicts, terrorist incidents, and natural disasters.
- (9) The future of labor migration from the poorer to the richer countries is likely to be complex. Generally the richer countries with their buoyant economies and declining birth rates will continue to require supplies of migrant labor to do jobs rejected by local workers as the local labor force becomes more highly educated and skilled. However, the richer countries will continue to resist permanent settlement by migrants, for a number of reasons. First, economically, migrants provide a cheap labor force and a buffer between the local population and unemployment. As we have seen in the case of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98, it was the migrant workers who were the first to be laid off, protecting the local labor force from the full effects of the crisis. Secondly, family reunification if allowed to occur may cost the host country considerable sums in providing welfare services, health services, housing, education etc. Maintaining a labor force of male migrants without dependents is much cheaper. Third, fears over the cost and social impact of the migrants are easily exploited by the media and nationalist politicians, turning migration into a major political issue in many countries.
- (10) Given the unwillingness of many countries to allow migrants to come in, coupled with an increasing shortage of casual labor in the richer countries of the

region, the gap is most likely to be filled by illegal brokers operating in the informal sector. Human trafficking is already a major concern for international human rights groups, and the problem can only become worse if the polarization between rich and poor countries within particular regions intensifies.

- (11) Some groups will assimilate more or less completely in the host countries, as has happened for many European groups in the Anglophone countries of the Pacific rim. However, physical and cultural differences, particularly religion, may mean that migrant groups remain culturally isolated and endogamous, and this isolation will be reinforced by the kinds of ethnic based support networks which they rely on. Where such groups acquire citizenship, the result is likely to be a multicultural society, but where they do not, they are likely to be economically and socially marginal to the host population, and the subject of continued exploitation and discrimination.
- (12) The terms in this equation could be changed by the formation of transnational groupings, as has happened in the case of the European Union, where citizens of member countries have substantial economic and political rights in other countries within the Union. There has been considerable discussion of the feasibility of supranational groupings, either based on existing groupings such as ASEAN and APEC, or new arrangements yet to be negotiated. One problem for such a union would be the overwhelming size of China: the smaller and wealthier countries of the region might well resist opening up their labor markets to mass migration from China. There will be special cases, for instance the growing economic integration of China and Taiwan, but these will be exceptions to the general rule.
- (13) However, the flow of peoples will contribute to cultural hybridity and the development of new cultural forms, in the transnational space created by migration.
- (14) How far it is possible for all the countries of the region to reach a similar standard of living, in order to reduce the tendency to migrate, is an open question. But given the present environmentally unsustainable nature of economic development as currently practiced, there are clear constraints in relation to energy supplies. So the chances are that present forms of inequality, and therefore migration, will continue, even if countries of origin and destinations change over time, in response to continued high-speed economic growth.

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