Transnational Migration : Some Comparative Considerations

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This volume provides a much-needed opportunity to think about transnational movement to and from Japan and to consider some of its comparative lessons. In providing an introduction, my main purpose will be to outline some of the comparative issues this volume will be raising regarding the potential and limits of comparing migrant groups in different countries, the way cross-national comparison illuminates the divergent meanings of multicultural, and the multiple ways that international migration issues overlap with national population issues. However, some introductory comments on the overall dimensions of contemporary transnational migration may be helpful in complementing the more detailed comments on Japan provided in the prior paper by Shinji Yamashita.

Contemporary Transnational Migration

The number of international migrants is growing in absolute numbers and also in percentages. There are more people in motion and there are also more borders to cross. The world's number of "people out of place" (defined as foreign stock in receiving countries) increased from 81.9 million in 1970 to 174.9 million in 2000, and increased proportionally from 2.2 percent to 2.9 percent of the world's total population. This growth was not uniform. Asia, for example, saw an increase from 26.1 million to 43.8 million migrants during that same period, but this was actually a slight proportional decline from 1.3 to 1.2 percent of the total Asian population. By contrast, there were very sharp gains in numbers and percentages for Europe (from 4.1 to 6.4 percent) and especially North America (5.6 to 12.9 percent).[2]

These numbers mask many different migration streams. There are, for example, humanitarian migrants (both invited convention refugees and individual asylum seekers). In Europe and North America, the numbers of humanitarian migrants are often large, while in East Asia they are generally lower. But even in East Asia, the number of refugees is significant now in Korea, and possibly far higher in the future. In Japan, the numbers are very low, but the political and moral importance of refugees still suggest the need to consider them separately (Iwasaki 2006a; 2006b). There are also low wage labor migrants—both legal and illegal—who seem to capture most of the public's attention. For them, the numbers are higher and the social and economic implications rather similar across East Asia and North America (Komai 2001; Iguchi 2004).[3] There are also skilled labor migrants who are sought competitively by virtually all countries and vari-

ous kinds of family migrants—both new spouses and old relatives—who are significant migrant streams in both North America and East Asia, especially as spouses in Taiwan, Korea, and, to a lesser extent, Japan. Finally there are a variety of presumably more temporary migrants such as students and tourists, who are also increasing in numbers but whose significance is often overlooked in favor of longer-staying migrants.

Each of these migrant streams requires its own analysis in economic, political, social, and humanitarian terms. That analysis, precisely because migration crosses borders, requires attention at two distinct levels. One is the receiving country itself, involving both immediate effects and longer-term issues of the future, including a government's responsibilities to its own citizens, the ability to formulate and implement public policy toward future goals, and the ability to actually carry out such broad public policy. Migration is thus a test of a country's capacity for vision, policy, and management. The other level is the international one. Here countries must consider a number of factors. Their image in the wider world is often at stake, particularly in the case of humanitarian admissions. They also have some collective responsibility for global development. For example, migrant remittances often function as a kind of "foreign aid," so how migrant workers are paid is tied directly to efforts to reduce global inequality. The logic of "trainee" programs (despite their practical problems) is relevant as well. Such programs aim to promote transfer of skills to developing countries.[4] The individual destinies of migrant workers can thus help create enduring and positive global networks of people, knowledge, goods, and good will.

Migration is more complicated than the overall numbers suggest, and more consequential. It is not, however, always an easy process for either the migrants or the hosts. For migrants who are relatively well off and with good education, the future is often bright. Ability to speak the language of the host country will help greatly, as will cultural and religious traditions that are similar to those of the host society. On the other hand, migrants with limited education, few financial resources, and limited host-country language ability face serious difficulties. Their children may fare better because of education and host-country language ability. Yet those children are nevertheless often trapped in secondary status. Since migrants are unlikely to return home even if such problems exist, the problems can linger and reproduce themselves over the generations. Furthermore, the problems faced by migrants are often mirrored on the host society side. There is frequently some initial support for migrants, yet there is also frequent cultural misunderstanding that leads to aggravation and hostility. Press reports on migrant crime are a telling barometer. Even a single migrant crime can shift host society attitudes.[5] Problems in the adjustment of migrants and negative response by the host society can be further aggravated by inconsistency and ineffectiveness in migration policies and programs. Perhaps the weakest point of most migration policy efforts is the ambivalence about whether immigration is indeed temporary or long-term. That policy ambivalence is often reflected in public uncertainty about immigration.

A Comparative Framework

Given the extent of transnational migration, its multiplying effects, and its variability in outcomes, the need for comparative research is obvious. Since so much of migrant adjustment and host society response hinges on national migration policies, comparison across countries and across regions is crucial. East Asia is an especially important comparative region because it represents a major cultural and historical alternative to North America and Europe, and one that is also fully developed economically and politically—and fully incorporated into global economic and political institutions. Japan, in particular,[6] provides an invaluable comparison for several reasons (many discussed in the prior chapter by Shinji Yamashita):

- A broad range of migrants in terms of geographical origins and types of migration.
- Strong border control that stands in sharp contrast to countries in Europe and North America that have more porous borders and more extensive illegal immigration.
- Relatively low levels of long-term migration, permitting a better sense of the relative effects of scale of migration.
- Relatively high proportions of short-term migration (tourists, students), thus permitting a better analysis of migration as general flow rather than long-term settlement.
- Concurrent existence of significant immigration and emigration flows, providing the kind of simultaneous consideration of emigration and immigration that is needed in a world characterized by increasing—and increasingly varied—transnational flows of people.
- Explicit public attention to broad social policy issues, such as the interaction between migration and population policy and the connections among migration, internal cultural diversity, and internationalization.

This is thus a very rich comparative potential. One way to take advantage of this potential is to focus on similar kinds of migration. For example, both Japan and the United States have very similar problems with low-wage labor migration (including overstays). Though one country is very much an "immigration" country and the other is very much not one, still both countries have experienced many of the same challenges regarding these immigrants: public reaction is often volatile and negative, language and cultural differences make the workplace and services arena (e.g., healthcare) difficult, diversity of migrants raises complex and sometimes annoying questions about the future, and both the entry and return of these migrants is notoriously difficult to control. As another example, both countries also have significant numbers of international mar-

riages. Both must thus face the issues of how future children with dual legacies will be treated, perhaps most crucially in the educational system.

Such parallels in kinds of migration become even more interesting since the two countries have many migrants from the same countries of origin. This volume, for example, includes chapters on Koreans, Chinese, Brazilians, Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Nepalis. All of these country-of-origin groups provide interesting comparisons with similar-origin migrants in the United States. The fact that the groups do not exactly match (that the Brazilians who come to Japan are not quite the same as the Brazilians who go to the United States) only makes this kind of comparison more intriguing. In the Vietnamese case, for example, Japan has Vietnamese as refugees and more recently as labor migrants, while the United States is largely refugee-based. So there are differences. But both countries now also have Vietnamese as students and as international marriage partners. Combining the Japan and U.S. experience yields good comparative information on immigration in the two countries. It also provides a more comprehensive sense of the extent of the Vietnamese diaspora and the way it reflects a common national history but diverging social and political trajectories in different destination countries. This is good global learning, three vectors of analysis for the price of one: the social and political economy of Japan as evidenced by Vietnamese immigrants, the social and political economy of the United States as evidenced by Vietnamese immigrants, and the social and political economy of Vietnam as evidenced by its emigrants to both countries.

Consider, for example, what we might be able to find out about marriage and migration. Both Japan and the United States have significant numbers of international marriages. How are they the same? How do they differ? Do migrant groups actually have distinctive marriage patterns? In the Vietnamese case, marriage and household formation patterns can be traced over many decades and through sharply shifting social circumstances—of peace and war, of stability of residence and extensive internal and international migration (Haines 2006). Looking at Vietnamese compared to other Asian-origin groups in the United States, for example, yields a very distinctive pattern of delayed marriage and continued co-residence with parents. That, in turn, yields households that have considerable adaptive advantage in migration. With co-residing adult children, there can be flexible allocation of wage employment, household responsibilities, childcare, and education.[7] There can also be pooling of income for capital accumulation for joint goals, such as homeownership. It is very tempting to contemplate a similar analysis in Japan. Do such adaptive advantages of household structure also appear among Vietnamese in Japan and are such potential advantages actually even advantages in the Japanese context? The answers would say much about Vietnamese kinship, but also much about Japan and the options and constraints that Japanese families also face.

Migration and Diversity

One major topic that is often associated with migration is diversity, particularly diversity in the sense of multiculturalism. There is a fundamental dilemma in considering this relationship between diversity and migration. On the one hand, most countries want to "globalize" in the sense of knowing how to function effectively beyond their borders. Most understand that to do so requires some measure of acceptance of diversity within their borders. On the other hand, countries very much want to be able to trust—and to control—the people within their borders. That control is easier when they know exactly what type of people they have, and easiest yet when there is only one set of people (and they are you). One symbol of this dilemma is the simultaneous fortification and disassembly of borders. Consider, for example, how the United States is simultaneously building a wall on its border with Mexico but also developing programs to move people across the border more quickly and efficiently. There are, after all, some one million border crossings into the United States each day, but only about three thousand apprehensions for illegal crossing (CPB 2007).

The desire to move across borders has many reasons, although economic gain clearly has prominence of place. Crossing borders is advantageous and, when they cross borders, migrants often create links along which people, goods, and money can then flow more easily. Migrants themselves become one of those links when they continue to move back and forth across borders. Despite the dangers to national security and national identity, there is often benefit in having those links amplified rather than reduced. Being both Brazilian and Japanese, or both Mexican and American, can be advantageous to the host country and the sending country, spurring the kind of "virtuous cycles" of work, remittances, and returns of which economists of migration are fond (Martin *et al.* 2006; Haines 2007a). Diversity itself thus seeps across borders; dealing with a diverse world and dealing with diversity at home begin to blend.

In the United States this kind of dual diversity is seen in the way local public and private agencies use a "United Nations" metaphor to discuss the diversity brought by immigrants. Church organizations often make an analogous connection between the people "out there" whom they have worked to convert and those "right here" who are the result of such conversion (for example, Christian refugees from Africa). Similar interplays are seen in Japan when local governments have recognized the connection between internationalization and local immigrants (Tsuda 2006), and when issues of international refugee law have affected the way minorities are treated (Mukai 2001).

The experience in the United States suggests that these issues of multiculturalism are particularly linked with language and religion, both for migrants and for the host society's assumptions about how much diversity is acceptable.[8] One especially interesting place to look at this issue involves schools. Schools are crucial places at which skills are developed and identities reconfigured. If schools can not deal with diversity, any

larger social effort at incorporating diversity is probably doomed. Schools are essential at all levels, but colleges have a special place in the education sequence and deserve particular attention. They provide not only skill development and identity configuration but do so with relative freedom from the social controls that apply more strongly both before and after. Colleges are thus a very good setting within which to consider diversity.

My own university may serve as an example. It is a rather young university in a rapidly growing—and very international—region just across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. The school has about 30,000 students. About 20 percent of the entering freshmen are foreign-born and 40 percent have at least one foreign parent. Immigrants are thus very well represented and with very diverse origins. "Hispanic" immigrants, for example, are a broad range of Latin Americans rather than the concentrations of Mexicans found in the West and Southwest. There are also many foreign students, representing some 130 countries. This is thus a diverse university in terms of internal (national) diversity and external (international) diversity. Indeed the *Princeton Review*, based on student comments, has rated it the most diverse college in the United States.

As we began a research project at George Mason on this diversity, we realized we lacked the answer to one crucial question: what did students actually think diversity was. So we embarked on a series of pilot projects trying to answer that question. Projects to date include a set of focus group interviews (very helpful in showing that students were aware of the indoctrination quality of much discourse on diversity); examination of the writing problems of foreign students (very helpful in showing the effects of language and of different educational systems); follow-up interviews with children of the foreign-born (very helpful in illuminating how cultural diversity often becomes hidden but still salient in the second and third generations); and free-form essays by students concerning their views of diversity (very helpful for illuminating the cognitive structures and categories regarding diversity).[9] The logic of these free form essays—which I wish to discuss in a little more detail—was that emergent issues of identity and identity categories require an open-ended approach that avoids reimposing the very categories that are to be questioned. That open-ended approach permitted considerable fluidity and subtlety in the essays that the students wrote. Students indicated that diversity is indeed accepted (more so than at the high school level), that exposure to diversity itself has value, that the result is some interaction mixed with continued segregation, and that George Mason benefited from not having any single group or category achieving overall prominence.

Although the original focus of this essay project had been on national origins and "multiculturalism" in the usual sense, the students themselves developed a far broader range of diversity categories: age, sex, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, personal opinion, and disability. Some of these seemed to be relatively

easily bridged in day-to-day interaction (ethnicity, sexual orientation), while others were harder (religion, sometimes nationality). The students were also quick to note that diversity needs to be understood in various different contexts: it is both a marketing ploy for the university and a reality of campus life; different kinds of diversity have very different effects (age is positive; language very limiting); and diversity needs to be mapped onto the physical and temporal structure of the university (some days of the week, for example, are effectively more diverse than others).

Overall, these student accounts suggest that contemporary identity categories at the university level are multiple and fluid. Multiculturalism (and diversity more generally) seem to have a certain creative quality, rather than simply being predictable, defined, unitary, or stable. There is some research that suggests similar openness and fluidity may be developing in Japan. Research by Masamichi Sasaki (2004), for example, indicates that younger people have a much more open attitude toward foreigners, including the rights of foreigners to keep their own customs, to have equal access to Japanese jobs, and to be talked to in their own language. Hudson and Aoyama (2006), as another example, indicate considerable confusion among Hokkaido students about ethnic self-identity. Only a third of the students thought they were solely Japanese, and alternative answers ranged from Ainu to Yayoi, Chinese, Mongoloid, and German. That confusion is a very hopeful sign that existing identity categories are loosening their hold in Japan as in the United States. As that hold is loosened, the future opens up to alternative, more culturally expansive possibilities. The university may be the best place to see an alternative future as it is being created by the people who will live it. If we can see that alternative future as the students do, with a more genuine and fluid multiculturalism, we may be better able to contribute to it and make it a reality.

Migration and Population

Another topic with which migration is often linked is demography. Later in this volume, for example, there will be discussion of some of the specific aspects of migration that relate to an aging society, including aging and migration to Asia and Oceania, long stay and retirement migration to Malaysia, and the international migration of care workers to support that aging society. However, the broader issues of population itself also deserve some comment.

On the global level, population continues to grow but very high growth in developing countries is partly counter-balanced by very low growth in developed countries. Japan had good news in 2007 of increased births and marriages. Nevertheless, population decline is now a reality. That is not a surprise and is not necessarily bad. Below replacement fertility is a predictable feature of developed societies. The more urban a country is, and the higher its per capita GNI, generally the lower the fertility. Western Europe and East Asia overall have below replacement fertility rates (at 1.6) and the rates

are far lower for some countries. Figures for 2005 indicate, for example, fertility rates of 1.3 for Japan, 1.1 for Korea, 1.1 for Taiwan, and 1.0 for Hong Kong.[10]

Such low fertility rates cause concern. Low fertility challenges conventional economic notions that are largely based on growth both of production and of consumption. Fewer workers and fewer consumers constitute a double concern. On a global level, reduced population growth may seem a laudable and even necessary goal, but the actual effects on individual countries are not well understood. On a broad social planning level, there are few (if any) precedents for managed depopulation. There are also potentially very serious sociological implications. Reduced population inevitably reflects greatly changed relationships between men and women, particularly in less frequent interaction between them as co-parents. Relations between the generations are also changed with more grandparents than grandchildren. The very nature of the household changes, and with it our sense of the cultural schemes of kinship that both create those households and are created through them.

Given such depopulation concerns, and the countervailing examples of very high immigration countries like the United States and Canada, many people have been tempted to look to migration for some solution to population decline. For example, the oft-cited 2000 United Nations report on migration and population (UN 2000; Huguet 2003) suggested that Japan would need 381,000 new immigrants per year to maintain population size, and would need 609,000 per year to maintain workforce size. These are very high and unrealistic numbers. But on a more modest scale, perhaps we can consider how the many different streams of migration (refugees and asylum seekers, low-wage labor, skilled labor, family creation and reunion migrants, students, and even tourists) might relate to national population concerns.[11] In many countries, international adoption provides an alternate source of children, thus creating a future generation immediately. This is not a factor for Japan, but there are other possibilities. One involves returnees. There are, after all, many Japanese overseas and many of these are women. Another involves family reunion of migrants who have already arrived. This is an extremely large source of migrants in the United States, but not insignificant in Japan. Yet another, and perhaps the most important for East Asia, is international marriage (Piper 1997; Burgess 2004). In Taiwan, the proportion of marriages with a foreign spouse is now about 1 in 3, in Korea 1 in 7, and in Japan now more than 1 in 20, and much higher in major cities like Tokyo and Osaka. More marriages generally mean more children, and foreign spouses often have higher fertility.

Overall, international migration is not a "cure" for population decline. It is, however, a useful supplement for all levels of population (including pensioners), a practical alternative for filling in labor gaps (including gaps regarding care of the elderly), and vitally important for family creation. In particular, some migrants do "double-duty" in terms of population: more adults now and more children later. Perhaps the most crucial long-range concern will be how those children fit within Japan. If they are kept at the

fringes, then their contribution as population numbers will be undermined by their lack of social inclusion. The topic of migration and population thus circles back to the topic of migration and diversity. The institution that will bear most responsibility for that process of inclusion will be the school. The nature and effectiveness of the educational system will, in turn, depend on the way Japan's future is envisioned. The range in options for that future has been quite well indicated in Hidenori Sakanaka's notion of the "Small Japan" and "Big Japan" options (Sakanaka 2007).

A Final Comment

I have suggested that the East Asian experience with migration is vital both for the region and as a crucial comparison to the North American experience. Both regions are now fully developed in economic terms (or, in China's case, clearly on the way). Analysis of how migration relates to advanced social and political economies can thus be pursued with more confidence because we can include regions with distinctively different historical and cultural traditions. Furthermore, both regions now have a similar range—if not number—of migrants, facilitating matched comparisons by any number of features: type of migration, country of origin, host-migrant interactions, or national and local policy frameworks.

Equally important, both regions also have their own fully established intellectual traditions, including well-developed disciplines of anthropology. This comparative examination of migration provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the value of what Shinji Yamashita has described as a "world anthropologies project which will make possible the coexistence of anthropologists and enlarge the anthropological horizon beyond the traditional East-West dichotomy" (Yamashita 2006). Such an enlarged horizon is crucial for anthropology on its own terms, but also crucial for anthropology as an integrative discipline. It is anthropologists of migration, after all, who are most likely to grasp the full historical, contemporary, and future implication of migration, who can understand both ends of migration streams (and the many places and times in-between), and who can appreciate the cultural and linguistic ways in which the meaning of migration is created both for migrants and for the societies to which migrants come.[12]

Notes

2) The figures provided are the standard ones from the United Nations as included in IOM (2005). Note that the calculation is of foreign migrants in host countries and is subject to varying national definitions of what a "foreigner" is. Caution is thus needed.

3) The situation of Japanese-origin people from Latin America (especially Brazil) does involve some unique factors of culture and legal status (Tsuda 2003; Lesser 2003; Linger 2001; Roth 2002).

4) Japan is an especially crucial example of the logic, potential, and limitations of trainee programs. For a recent journalistic review of revised policy proposals, see Johnston (2007).

5) One might, as examples, note the public responses to the 2005 murder of a seven-year old girl by a Peruvian migrant worker and the 2007 fatal knifing by a Chinese farm laborer. For more general comments on foreign workers and law enforcement, see Herbert (1996); for a biting discussion of anti-foreigner sentiment in popular comics, see Pollack (2003); and for a discussion of NGO attempts to combat inflated notions of foreign criminality, see Yamamoto (2007).

6) See Cornelius (1993) for an early discussion of this comparative potential which is pursued in a broader way in Cornelius et al. (2004). Akaha and Vassilieva (2005) provide a demonstration of how intriguing comparative work within Northeast Asia can be, and Tsuda (2006) is particularly effective in showing how the local governmental experience with migration in Japan is a very useful addition to the literature. Bartram (2000) provides a reminder that it may also make sense to think of Japan as a negative case—one which expands the range of possibilities rather than one that provides confirmation. Also see Yamanaka (1999; 2004) for useful comments on the effects of legality and illegality of status in Japan. Castles and Miller (1998) provide a broader sketch of Asian migration.

7) The data also suggest an enduring frequency of residence with siblings.

8) Korea has taken what is perhaps the logical next step, creating international zones within its own territory.

9) For these three projects, see respectively: Rosenblum et al. 2007; Zawacki et al. 2007; Haines 2007.

10) These figures come from various sources. For more conservative figures that are more standardized, consider the following 2005-2010 medium variant total fertility rate estimates from the UN World Population 2006 revision: China (1.73), Japan (1.27), South Korea (1.21), Hong Kong (.97), and Singapore (1.26). Figures for Taiwan are not provided in that series.

11) Migrants looking for low-wage labor, for example, are an almost inexhaustible supply, while high skill migrants are more limited in number and actively sought by almost all developed countries—making their supply relatively limited.

12) For useful overviews of migration policy in Japan, see Kashiwazaki and Akaha (2005), Tsuda and Cornelius (2004), Douglass and Roberts (2003), and Roberts (2007).

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