

Linkages between Internal and International Migration

Ronald Skeldon

University of Sussex

1. Introduction

The starting point of the discussion must be the figure of 190 million global migrants in 2005 made by the United Nations in 2006, a figure that has almost taken on a life of its own. This is the number of international migrants in the world. Of course, we realize that this figure is based upon the number of foreign-born in states and territories around the world. It includes some mighty strange figures. In Hong Kong SAR (Special Administrative Region), for example, some 3.0 million “foreign-born” are estimated to be in the city. Of course, the vast majority of these are born in China, so are they not internal migrants? Another 27 million persons became international migrants upon the break-up of the Soviet Union whereas previously they were internal migrants. So internal migrants can become international migrants, and vice versa, through the rearrangement of state boundaries rather than through physically moving from one area to another. However, as professionals in the field of migration studies, we understand the figures and know how to deal with them. The figure remains the “gold standard” and the best that we have.

However, this figure of 190 million, representing about 3 percent of the world’s population, does not include the majority of those who move, the internal migrants. Let us go back 120 years to 1885 and Ravenstein’s first “law” of migration: “the majority of migrants go only a short distance.” By focusing our attention on the 190 million international migrants, does it matter that we only look at a minority of the world’s migrants? After all, we have to draw the line somewhere and perhaps the state is a critical dividing line. The state, as a community that offers citizenship and has the capacity to manage its own borders, surely provides the basis for a clear distinction between those who migrate within the borders of any state and those who move from one state to another. My purpose today is not to question the validity of this distinction but to argue that we need to integrate internal and international population movements within a single framework. I argue that it does matter that our discussions of migration have tended to emphasize international migration only, particularly when

it comes to questions of migration and development. Before going on to look at the possible linkages between internal and international migration, let me briefly consider the division between the two types of migration in the context of the leading concerns that have emerged in discussions about-migration and development in recent years.

Three themes seem to have emerged as critical areas of concern in the current discussions about-migration and development: remittances; the movement of the skilled; and diasporas. The work on remittances has focused almost exclusively on remittances from international migrants. The World Bank estimated that USD\$182 billion in remittances flowed through official channels in 2004, almost 70 percent of which flowed to developing countries from international migrants to the developed world. Vast though this sum seems, the flow comes from a minority of migrants and that minority comes from a relatively small number of specific areas in the countries of origin and is not spread evenly across them. Hence, the remittances, too, tend to flow back to a relatively small number of communities in the source countries. Internal migrants also send or take money and goods back home. Perhaps the amounts sent are not as much per capita as those sent by international migrants, but this is pure speculation. However, and surely more significant from a developmental point of view, the amounts are more important simply because there are more internal migrants, and because these migrants come from a greater range of source areas than international migrants. Data on flows of goods and money from internal migrants are much more difficult to obtain than from international migrants, even though the data on the latter, too, are fraught with difficulties. Recently, I have seen some work carried out by the World Bank that includes remittances from internal sources. I am thinking specifically about the work of Richard Adams, who uses data from Guatemala, so I think that we are moving in the right direction, although much more needs to be done on the developmental impact of remittances, material and non-material, from internal migrants.

The debate on the so-called “brain drain,” the second major theme, remains focused almost exclusively on the international movement of the skilled from the developing to the developed world. Yet, we know that the better-educated tend to move internally as well as internationally, even if “better-educated” is a relative term. In an area where most of the population only has basic education, the “better-educated” are those with a few years of secondary education, and so on. Clearly, such an approach takes us away from a discussion of the highly skilled, but the exodus of the relatively better educated can have profound repercussions on community structures at the local level and on institutions that are central to local development and the

alleviation of poverty. Again, some of the ideas developed for international migration are being applied in the context of internal movements. Oded Stark and his colleagues have tested the model that argues that the number of the skilled in origin areas actually increases with the emigration of the skilled, paradoxical though this might at first seem. Despite the impeccable logic of the model, I do have concerns. If the levels of education rise in a village or a country, what does this imply for future migration? I also think that, given the importance of education policies in promoting national levels of education, we are in danger of confusing association between migration and education change with direct causation.

The third of the major themes and one that is clearly linked to both remittances and to the movement of the highly skilled is diaspora. Again, the focus has been solely on international migration, and I, for one, would certainly wince if we start to look at village-based diasporas. However, one area of linkage might seem appropriate: the role of home-town or migrant associations. We know that clubs of migrants exist at the level of provincial cities and national capital for internal migrants and they also exist in destination areas of international migration. Are these clubs linked together in any way to achieve certain specific goals either in the interests of the home-town or for the migrants in the various destinations? While this is a working hypothesis only, such a hierarchical system of associations might be one way in which internal and international migrants could cooperate to achieve particular development objectives.

In essence, what I am suggesting is that we need to bring studies of internal and international migration together in order more fully to understand the impact of migration on development. We know that the poorest tend not to migrate internationally. However, the poor do move, usually locally and for short periods of time and, overwhelmingly, they move internally. Hence, any focus of migration and its impact on poverty, and vice versa, needs to consider internal migration first and foremost. Unfortunately, the mandate of the recent United Nations Global Commission was on international migration. Thus, by diktat, the majority of the world's migrants were excluded. This approach reinforces that of much recent work on migration. Robin Cohen's magisterial *Cambridge Survey of Migration* was a survey of international migration; Myron Weiner's, *Global Migration Crisis* was a crisis of international migration; Stephen Castles and Mark Miller's *Age of Migration* was an age of international migration, and so on. The word "migration" has come to imply "international migration," leaving the majority of the world's migrants to be considered under "population redistribution" or "urbanization". A "great schism" has characterized the study of population migration. Perhaps there never was a time when

internal and international migrations were brought together, although a few – Wilbur Zelinsky, Robin Pryor, and Brinley Thomas, and I suppose, myself – have attempted to construct more integrated frameworks. It is perhaps time to bring them together, and I am particularly pleased that this volume is attempting to do just that.

Before moving on to more conceptual issues, a few more words on data are required. Simply put, our data are inadequate. Interestingly, when we look at the basic data to analyze international migration we are going back some 30 to 40 years in terms of data on internal migration. We are using simple stocks of foreign born in destination areas. At the Sussex-based Development Research Center (DRC) on Globalization, Migration and Poverty, with Richard Black as director, we have put together a 226 x 226 matrix of bilateral flows. However, even this approach is based essentially on birthplace, or lifetime migration. Anyone who studies internal migration would not be satisfied with lifetime data, place of last residence, or place of usual residence five years ago, or one of the other variants of the direct questions on migration, is considered essential for any basic study of internal population movement. Of course, how many of you can remember back to the days when we had only indirect methods to estimate net migration? Census survival ratios, life table survivorship measures and projecting populations were all part of such attempts to identify areas where out-migration and in-migration were prevalent. We have come a long way in improving the types of migration data around the world, even if there is still a long way to go. Traditionally, those studying international migration worked primarily from flow data from immigration records, while those working on internal migration used census data – the differences in data and methodology reinforcing differences in substantive areas of concern. Today, students of international migration, too, are looking increasingly at what can be gleaned from census and survey materials.

When I use the terms “internal migration” and “international migration” I do not mean to imply that these are homogeneous categories. I am using the terms, initially at least, simply as a heuristic device that I hope will facilitate discussion about if, and how, internal and international systems of population movement might be linked. Let me look at whether internal migration can give rise to international migration and then I will look at whether international migration can give rise to internal migration.

2. Internal Migration Leading to International Migration¹

Here we start with the question of whether the large numbers of rural-to-urban migrants to the largest cities in the developing world spill over to international destinations. Saskia Sassen, in her work on the Caribbean, argued that urban migrants lived in tenuous conditions in the cities and when made redundant either through a downturn in the local economy or through turnover of personnel in a transnational corporation (she looked specifically at women) would look for alternative opportunities overseas. Their employment in the cities would have given them the resources to move internationally and thus internal migration led to international migration. In a Ravenstein-type model we have the larger cities in the developing world acting as a “step” in the migration process. Looking at Asian countries, I think that I can point to similar cases, but the evidence is weak and it also points to other kinds of scenarios. The critical weakness is that of data as, although we can tell how many people from India, China or the Philippines might be in New York City or Toronto or Sydney, rarely can we tell where they come from in those countries. In studies of Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong, however, we can see that about 28 percent came from the capital Manila, or the immediate surrounding area, but of the balance, we do not know how many might have migrated first to Manila and then, after a period of time, moved on to Hong Kong. Anecdotal evidence suggests that such a pathway existed but the data are hardly definitive.

Looking more broadly, however, we can see evidence for quite different types of patterns: of migration from isolated rural areas directly to overseas destinations, for example. Over two-thirds of the Pakistani migrants in the United Kingdom come from one small area in northern Pakistan, Azad Kashmir, and even from one district within that small area: Mirpur. Over 90 percent of the Bangladeshi migrants, again in the UK as Katy Gardner has shown, come from the district of Sylhet. The question clearly is how did long-distance international migration develop from these districts quite distant from the largest cities. In the case of Mirpur, Roger Ballard has shown that Mirpuris were traditionally involved in boat construction and river trade to the Indian Ocean. With the coming of the British and the construction of railways, the river trade declined and the Mirpuris lost their livelihoods. Alternative jobs were sought on British ships, in engine rooms and as deckhands. Thus, although the Mirpuris were migrants before engaging in migration to Britain, they did not appear to move through

¹ The following sections are extracted and modified from Ronald Skeldon, “Interlinkages between internal and international migration and development in the Asian region,” *Population, Space and Place*, 12, 2006: 15-30.

the larger cities. British ships were also involved in the development of migration from Sylhet in Bangladesh. It looks likely, although research currently supported under the Sussex-based Development Research Center may throw further light on this, that ships involved in the tea trade went directly up to Sylhet and there some Sylhetis were recruited as workers eventually to end up in London. The role of the recruitment of laborers for work on ships in establishing a direct link between origins and destinations is a fairly common theme in the development of international migration to the United Kingdom. Another example is from the villages around Hong Kong from where, in the late nineteenth century, Chinese jumping ship in Liverpool and London established Chinese communities in those cities.

Moving on from the importance of colonial penetration in establishing linkages between specific origins and destinations of migration and trying to bring the story up to date, we can look at Sri Lanka. Until the late 1970s, some three quarters of the international migration from Sri Lanka came from the capital Colombo and the two surrounding urbanized districts. By the 1990s, this proportion had declined to about one third as more and more came from areas in the interior and eastern coast. The role of recruitment agencies, labor brokers, if you like, is critical to an understanding of how the process of diffusion of origin areas out from the capital developed. Michelle Ruth Gamburd has shown how it would be unseemly for women to be seen going into town to look for work overseas. In one area they relied on an ex-military gentleman, in whom they had complete trust, to complete all the formalities that would allow them to leave Sri Lanka for work overseas. Thus, migration to the capital was short-circuited by this process of labor recruitment. Transnational corporations can also facilitate the movement of labor from specific areas of origin to overseas destinations without prior internal migration. American companies building facilities in Northeast Thailand later took their Thai workers with them when they were allocated contracts in the Middle East during the construction boom of the 1970s.

The last example that I will give in this section is from the southern Indian state of Kerala. Kerala has long been known for its internal migrants within India and particularly for its supply of nurses to various parts of the country. As much today, however, Kerala is noted for its supply of men as workers in the Gulf states. However, there appears to be little evidence that the latter built upon the former. The internal migration was primarily of better-educated Hindus and Christians from the southern part of the state, while the international migration was of less-educated Muslims from northern Kerala. Thus, two quite different migration systems appear to have evolved

at different times, each dependent upon the opportunities available to each group at the particular time.

The evidence that I have from Asia shows that the central issues revolve around how both internal and international migration evolve as a response to the penetration of outside forces. Clearly, the national capital city is a key node in this penetration but it is not the only point of intrusion. What we have in the development of internal and international migration is different spatial responses to the penetration of similar forces. Internal migration is not a necessary precondition for international migration. They both reflect the “modernization” of economies or, ultimately, development itself.

Before leaving this question of whether internal migration can lead to international migration, one pathway through which this does appear to occur is through international migration substituting for internal migration. That is, once the supply of internal migrants becomes exhausted, a country will turn to an external source as a replacement area of origin. My colleague at the University of Sussex, Tony Fielding, has shown, initially for the countries of southern Europe and more recently for Japan, that after a period of massive rural-to-urban migration that has led to the depopulation or very slow growth of large parts of the rural sector, domestic labor costs rise and cheaper labor is brought in from overseas. This model needs to be linked with the idea of a migration transition developed by Manolo Abella and Gary Fields where they tried to show that the rapidly developing East Asian economies moved from being economies of emigration to economies of immigration. How the patterns of mass rural-to-urban migration related to those of emigration needs to be assessed as does the linkage between the model and the demographic transition to very low levels of fertility that accounts for the slow or even negative growth of particular age cohorts.

3. International Migration Leading to Internal Migration

While any argument that internal migration might lead to international migration has been shown to be an oversimplification of a complex issue, the case of international migration leading to internal migration is on much more solid ground. Emigration from such areas as Kerala, Mirpur and Sylhet has been such as to create either a vacuum or a demand for labor that has been met by an inflow of internal migrants from surrounding areas. Remittances sent back by the international migrants – some \$3 billion to Kerala alone in 2000 – have generated a construction boom. Local labor has not been able to satisfy the demand and skilled migrants in the form of carpenters and plumbers have migrated in from surrounding

states. At present, as part of our DRC work at Sussex, we have a project to examine the immigration to Sylhet that is looking at the changing use of land, land that has been left idle upon the departure of the owners to the UK. In the New Territories of Hong Kong in the 1960s we know that rice paddy land that had been left unused after the owners left for Britain was rented out to specialist vegetable farmers who came in from adjacent Guangdong Province in China: one type of international migration giving rise to another type of international migration. Also, in the case of Mirpur in northern Pakistan, we know that among the internal migrants drawn into the area by the construction boom brought about by remittances are a number of Afghans who had come into Pakistan as refugees.

Another case is that of villages in Fujian Province in China where the average rate of emigration of the registered population is around 50 percent, although specific rates can range as high as 80 to 85 percent. What is happening in those villages? The data could be wrong. Or the villages could be depopulating. Or immigration from surrounding areas could be filling the vacuum. What we may be seeing in these examples is a Ravenstein movement in stages up a spatial hierarchy. An intriguing research question is whether the internal migrants moving into these emigration-supported islands of prosperity will become linked to the existing networks of overseas migration and whether they too will begin to move overseas, perhaps as employees in a company set up by the original group of emigrants. If this occurs, we have established a direct link between the overseas destination and the origins of the internal migrants, showing how international migration gives rise to internal movements that, in turn, lead to international migration in a complex matrix of mobility.

Policy, too, can be important in directing migration. At Sussex, a Doctor of Philosophy student currently working in southeast Albania is examining a situation where, until a few years ago, the main pattern of migration appeared to be irregular movement across the border into neighbouring Greece. Migrants simply walked across the mountain passes. With international pressure, or when Albania saw that it was in its interest to control this kind of migration, it built a fence and maintained border patrols. The migration then switched to internal movements towards the capital Tirana. Whether, once there, the migrants are satisfied with their position in Tirana or will seek to move overseas through a legal channel will, I assume, be one of the research questions to be pursued.

My final example comes from the return, either on a short-term or longer-term basis, of a small group of wealthy international migrants to their home

country; the overseas Chinese or the Viet Kieu are excellent examples. By establishing business interests in their home country, they can generate the kinds of opportunities that will draw in migrants from the countryside or other parts of the country, international migration again contributing to internal movements.

The examples I have taken come from countries of origin of migration. We could seek linkages, too, in countries of destination. In Asia, immigration did not appear to have developed far enough to have led to any clear linkages between internal and international migration in Japan, Korea or Taiwan, for example. However, in the developed countries of North America and Australasia, linkages have been sought. The successive waves of migrant groups passing from the center of major North American cities to the suburbs has been observed: from white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, through Catholic Irish and Italians, and also Jewish groups, to the new immigrants. As one immigrant group becomes established, it tends to move out of the centers towards the suburbs, freeing up inner-city housing for the next immigrant group to occupy. As more of the later group of immigrants concentrate in the inner city, they may help to push the previous group out, so that we have a self-reinforcing process of international migration leading to the internal migration of the previous group. Here again we appear to have a stage-type sequence of movement involving different migrant groups.

4. Conclusion

My principal purpose in presenting this range of cases has been to show how internal and international migrations can be linked. I am in no way arguing for a simplistic internal-leads-to-international-migration kind of explanation, or vice versa. What we need to do is to look at the whole range of potential destinations available to migrants. Again, I am not arguing that internal and international migrations are the same thing. I still accept that crossing a boundary between one state and another is different from that of moving within the confines of a single state, although in certain cases I think that the differences are blurred and are diminishing. Increasing irregular migration and the creation of areas of “open borders,” as in much of Europe, are contributing to such blurring of any hard and fast distinction between internal and international migration in practical if not in legal terms. By focusing so much of our attention only on international migration we are truncating a unified migration space. The two types are, as I have tried to show, inextricably linked in a great variety of ways. I am pleased to see this meeting considering international and internal migration together, although I also see that we have one paper on internal

and one on international migration in each session. I hope that we can bring these together. It is time to bring both internal and international migration within a single mobility framework. I hope that, in this presentation, I have provided a few pointers to do just this.