Chapter 1
Migration in Asia: In Search of a Theoretical Framework

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Research on migration has increased with the rise in international migration since the early 1960s, highlighting new migration patterns and their impacts. However, the expanding stock of migration research has not made it easier to govern migration or solve the problems of migrants. Instead, more complex migration relationships have outpaced the capacity of research to offer suggestions on how best to manage new flows of people over national borders. This chapter tackles the fundamental question of what is known about migration; in particular, it examines the characteristics of migration in Asia and the issues generated by migration flows in a continent with 60 % of the world's people and some of the most complex migration relationships. It will then introduce the contributions in this volume, which were presented at an international dialogue on some aspects of migration and conclude with questions for further research.

1.1 A Synthetic Overview

The formulation of a theoretical approach to migration began a long time ago. Ravenstein's laws on migration appeared in 1885, at the time of the great migration from Europe to the Americas, although the laws were formulated to explain internal migration in the United Kingdom (Ravenstein 1985). The application of Ravenstein's laws to international migration (Ravenstein 1889) inspired theorizing about migration, and neoclassical economics were developed in the 1950s (Lewis 1954) and refined in the 1970s by Harris and Todaro (1970). The push-pull model advanced by Lee (1966) came to dominate the explanation of the origin and development of migration for many years.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, scholars reviewed various migration theories in response to social and economic changes that led to new forms and

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trends of migration. A cursory overview was provided in 1981 by De Jong and Fawcett, as a premise to the analysis of a micro-level decision making process. Massey and colleagues reviewed the extant theories (Massey et al. 1993) and evaluated them against the North American context (Massey et al. 1994) and the global context (Massey et al. 1998). Further reviews were undertaken by Portes and Böröcz (1996), Arango (2004), Cooke and Bélanger (2006), Bijak (2006), Fussell (2012), King (2012) and Piguet (2013). In 1996 Cohen edited a selection of articles on migration theories, from the classic to the more recent ones. Hammar et al. (1997) looked at theories within the development and interdisciplinary perspective, and Brettell and Hollifield (2000) focused on the interdisciplinary approach to the study of migration. In 2010 an issue of the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (vol. 36, issue 10) was devoted to migration theories and social change. The reviews had different objectives but ultimately agreed that each theory is limited and yet has something to offer for the understanding of migration.

Following Massey, the first part of this chapter intends to provide a general understanding of migration processes from origin to end by making use of the insights offered by the various theories. The purpose of this synthesis is to suggest that in spite of the limitations in the various theories some knowledge on how migration originates, develops and ends has been accumulated through the years. It also intends to suggest that additional questions arise and theoretical developments are necessary when the specificities of a migration system, like that of Asia, are examined.

Some caveats should be mentioned before proceeding: the synthesis is limited to labor migration; not all migration questions are addressed; and the theories will be utilized for what they can contribute, although such contribution is not without limitations or criticisms. There are two assumptions: migration theories are complementary, not antithetical, in the sense that one theory does not necessarily invalidate another, rather it brings light to a different aspect of the migration process (Massey et al. 1993; Portes 1999); and each theory has something to contribute to the knowledge of migration. Needless to say, the synthetic overview fully supports what many have said about the impossibility and probably the undesirability to come up with a unified theory on migration. In the words of Robin Cohen (1996, p. xvi): "There is no definitive theory in migration although there is a clear sense in which some agreed positions are emerging." Portes (1999) agrees with this and adds that "the different areas that compose this field are so disparate that they can be unified only at a highly abstract and probably vacuous level" (p. 27). The synthesis will draw knowledge from various disciplines, in response to the demand that a proper understanding of migration requires an interdisciplinary approach (Hammar et al. 1997). Brettell and Hollifield (2000, p. vii) put it eloquently when they said that "Migration is a subject that cries out for an interdisciplinary approach." It remains a modest synthetic overview, with no ambition to fill observed gaps, such as the limited anchoring of the analysis of human mobility in the theoretical development of the social sciences (Castles 2009, p. 454), or to indicate new theoretical or methodological directions. It simply says that to understand the migration process we must know the background context, the structural factors, the personal motivations, the role of intermediaries, the incorporation of migration, and the reasons why migration continues and at some point ends.

1.1.1 The Background Context for the Migration Process

International labor migration involves people moving over national borders for a certain period of time in search of better opportunities, so the reasons for unequal development must be understood to comprehend migration. Prebisch (1950) envisaged a world organized into two types of states: those at the center import raw materials and export finished products, and states on the periphery export raw materials and import finished products. Such an unequal trading relationship keeps developing nations in a peripheral condition, prompting Prebisch to suggest import substitution so that developing countries can develop their manufacturing sectors.

The center-periphery concept was adopted by dependency theory (Franch 1969; Cardoso and Faletto 1979), which posited that the center-periphery relation was an integral component of the capitalist model of development. The world systems theory (Wallerstein 1975) introduced a third type, the semi-periphery, to describe countries that depend on the center but also have some control over countries at the periphery. These broad theories contribute to the understanding of the origins of migration by illustrating the ways that capitalist nations penetrate the markets of the countries at the periphery, displacing workers and turning some into migrants who move to the more developed countries. The linkages established by political and economic dependency tend to favor migration flows. More specifically, Sassen (1988) argued that migration to the US was a byproduct of the internationalization of production, as the outflow of capital generates an inflow of labor.

In addition to the economic, the demographic, political and social contexts lay the premise for possible migration movements. The linkage with the demographic factor was best theorized by Zelinsky (1971) who argued that migration develops according to regularities which are modeled on the modernization process and are structured in correlation with the demographic transition. The weaknesses of that correlation, particularly when applied to a specific region like Asia, were underscored by Skeldon (1992). Nevertheless, the importance of the demographic differentials among countries as a premise to labor movements remains patent. The political and social factors were emphasized particularly by historians who observed that political ties functioned as facilitators of migration movements. The European colonialism stands out as the macroscopic example of such ties, with people moving first toward the colonial states, workers being transferred to the colonies and among colonies as indentured labor and migrants moving toward the colonizing countries during and after the colonial period (Emmer 1986).

1.1.2 Structural Economic Factors at the Origin and the Destination

After understanding the broad causes of migration with the help of the dependency theory and world systems theory, the structural economic factors at the origin and the destination must be clarified. Neoclassical economists emphasized macro-level variables such as differences in endowments of capital and labor that encourage

workers to move from labor-abundant to capital-abundant countries with higher wages. Capital moves in the opposite direction, and migration of labor and capital falls as wage and interest rate differences decrease. Harris and Todaro (1970) emphasized that both wage differences and the probability of finding a job affect the expected return to migration, and that noneconomic costs can also factor into calculations of whether to stay or move.

Neoclassical economics relies heavily on the assumption that people make rational decisions to maximize their economic well-being. Simon (1955, p. 104) had already warned that there is no evidence that persons facing complex decisions might perform all the calculations required by rational choice. He spoke of "approximate" rationality (1955, p. 114) or bounded rationality, in which persons, because of the limited information and limited capacity and time to analyze such information, look for satisfactory choices, rather than the optimal choices. With the idea of bounded rationality, maximizing wages cannot be the exclusive factor motivating a decision to migrate.

Instead of focusing on the differences among countries, Piore (1979) looked at the labor market in the country of destination and concluded that migration is generated by the demand for migrant labor in that country. Also, the labor market will necessarily become segmented, as people tend to move from occupations with low wages and social prestige to occupations with higher wages and prestige. The secondary labor market remains in need of workers willing to accept 3-D (dirty, dangerous and difficult) jobs. Since the segmentation of the labor market is structural, there will always be a demand for new migrants to replace those who return or move up the job ladder, so the dual market theory argues that the supply of local workers changes faster than demand, creating a structural demand for migrants.

If Piore focused on the structural aspects of the country of destination, Stark (1984; 1991) examined the structural elements in the country of origin that offer few protections against various risks, including insurance against crop failures, unemployment subsidies, and access to credit. Migration is thus a response to such inadequate protection. A crop failure, for example, can trigger a decision to migrate abroad. Moreover, households rather than individuals are the key unit of analysis, as they allocate members to maximize income and minimize risk. It is the household rather than the individual which decides to send a son from rural Mexico to the US and a daughter to a factory in Mexico.

The new economics of labor migration (NELM) explores other reasons to migrate as well. The return of successful migrants can motivate others to go abroad so that they do not suffer relative deprivation. The NELM emphasizes factors other than income maximization as reasons for migration.

1.1.3 Personal Factors

Understanding the background context and the structural factors at the origin and the destination illustrates the propensity to migrate but is not sufficient to explain why people migrate. In fact, although factors are similar for a specific population,

those who decide to migrate are a minority within the population. Globally, they constitute about three percent of the world's population (UN-DESA 2013). In some countries of origin this proportion is higher, but still a minority. Therefore, in addition to structural and family factors influencing the decision to migrate, personal factors must also be considered.

At the personal level, it is always observed that migrant workers are mostly young adults, persons in the prime of their productive life. In this regard, the propensity to migrate was considered at different stages of a person's and family's life: young single adults are more mobile than married persons and married persons are more mobile before children go to school, etc. (De Jong and Gardner, 1981). While criticized for its limitation to the nuclear type of family, the idea remains that demographic characteristics of migrants have a role in the decision to migrate.

In looking at the micro-level motivational approach to the decision to migrate, De Jong and Fawcett (1981) found the previous theories incapable of explaining most of all why some people do not migrate. In that regard, in contrast with the excessive role given to economic reasons, they emphasized that migration should be considered as the result of many motives. They proposed to apply to migration the value-expectancy model, which consists in viewing migration as the result of a cost-benefit analysis between values and expectancies (1981, p. 47). Values can be classified in seven categories: wealth, status, comfort, stimulation, autonomy, affiliation, morality, while expectancy refers to the belief that a particular behavior will attain a certain value. On the basis of the value-expectancy model, some hypotheses can be made concerning the probability of mobility by specific groups of people. A further study analyzing migration from the Philippines examined the discrepancies between the intention to migrate and the actual implementation. The study explained the discrepancies "in terms of unanticipated constraints and facilitators, as well as changes in the conditions that precipitated the migration intention in the first place" (Gardner et al. 1986, p. 63).

1.1.4 The Role of Intermediaries

The final component for the initiation and continuation (*see* later) of migration is characterized by the role of intermediaries (labor recruiters, brokers, transport agencies, etc.). Direct hiring—a process in which employers hire migrants without the intermediation of recruitment and placement agencies—or hiring through government-to-government agreements apply only to a minority of workers. For the majority, employers utilize the service of intermediaries and migrants secure a visa and employment abroad through labor recruiters. Intermediaries charge employers for their services, but in many countries, they also earn by exacting a fee from the migrants, although this practice is barred by the ILO Private Employment Agency Convention, 1997 (No. 181). The profitable activity of labor recruitment has generated a proliferation of agencies, compelling governments to regulate it. Goss and Lindquist (1995) emphasized the importance of intermediaries in what they called the migrant institution, suggesting the application of the

structuration theory to migration as the best way to unify the knowledge of the migration process. Others have focused on the role of intermediaries as merchants of labor (Martin 2005) who tend to prolong migration beyond its necessity because of its profitability; they also contribute to the commodification of labor migration. Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen (2013) have further elaborated on the role of intermediaries by adding to their facilitating role (performed by labor recruiters) the control role (performed by private security agencies which act on behalf of governments) and the rescue role (performed by non-government organizations or NGOs, migrant associations and civil society groups). Regardless of the different angles, and barring a major overhaul of the migration systems, it is clear that for the majority of workers migration cannot occur without the intervention of intermediaries.

1.1.5 The Incorporation of Migrants

Migration implies that migrants live and work in a country where they were not born or different from their usual country of residence. How migrants can successfully incorporate in the society of destination has long interested sociologists, particularly in countries of permanent migration. The Chicago School, which specialized in the social analysis of life in an urban context, formulated the assimilation theory. Robert Park (1924) theorized the race relations cycle, which goes from contact to competition to accommodation and finally, assimilation, in a sequence considered normative and irreversible. A less normative approach was taken by W.I. Thomas, who recommended a wise policy of assimilation that does not destroy the memories of migrants, but builds on them. The assimilation theory dominated the debate until the early 1960s, when it was comprehensively formulated by Milton Gordon (1964). In theorizing the nature of assimilation he distinguished the various types or stages of assimilation: from the initial stage of cultural or behavioral assimilation to the final one of civic assimilation (1964, p. 71). Of the three major theories of the assimilationist process, he considered Anglo-conformity as the most successful. The competitive theory of the melting pot did not see a practical implementation, as in fact, many melting pots were created within the American society (*see* also Glazer and Moynihan 1963). As for cultural pluralism, he considered it a minor key for the understanding of ethnic America, while his preference was for structural pluralism.

Ironically, the ultimate theorization of assimilation came at the time of its demise due to the emergence of a strong movement for the discovery of ethnic origins. Instead of assimilation, integration was considered the most appropriate term. Its main characteristic is that while assimilation is considered a unidirectional process, integration is considered a bidirectional one, in the sense that migrants have something to contribute to the local society and that successful incorporation requires for the receiving society to provide the opportunities for it. However, integration was never formulated in a coherent theoretical model (Favell 2001) and assimilationism did not die. In studying the more recent generations of migrants to the US, Portes

and Zhou (1994) spoke of segmented assimilation, as some of the new migrants assimilate to the lower echelons of society. Alba and Nee (2003) supported a return to assimilationism, but devoid of ethnocentrism and determinism and in which the process of assimilation as boundary crossing is substituted with that of boundary blurring.

While integration was formally defined by the Commission of the European Union (C2003/336), multiculturalism was debated as a different form of organizing societies with migrants. Philosophically, the debate was polarized around the communitarian and liberal positions. Charles Taylor's sharp criticism of the false neutrality of liberalism on values—i.e., hiding the intent to impose the hegemony of western culture—and the emphasis on equality which is only procedural equality, led him to advocate for a public recognition of the collective rights of minority cultures (Taylor 1992). Habermas (1993) thinks that autonomy requires participation (civic autonomy) to be real autonomy, therefore, democracy must be deliberative, a process in which all participate, including migrants. Migrants should not be required to attain cultural integration, but political integration, the adhesion to the constitutional values (constitutional patriotism). Diversities must be respected, but rights remain individual in nature. Kymlicka (1995) takes a middle position when he rejects the procedural neutrality of liberals as discriminating and the uncritical recognition of the collective rights of minorities. He makes a distinction between internal and external restrictions that minority cultures impose. He considers external restrictions acceptable, while internal restrictions are against liberal principles. "Liberals should seek to ensure that there is equality between groups, and freedom and equality within groups" (Kymlicka 1995, p. 194). Recently, Murray (2012) has taken some distance from the misconception that, in multicultural policies, anything goes, but also from attributing an excessive role to multicultural policies, which "represent only one small part of the legislative toolkit available to decision-makers engaged in the business of maintaining unity and social solidarity in conditions of diversity" (p. 150). He advocated for civic multiculturalism, where both majority and minorities respect differences and contribute to social cohesion.

Politically, multiculturalism has remained publicly recognized in Canada and Australia, while it underwent some crisis in Europe. However, the discussion on the plurality of cultures and the need for social cohesion within societies continues. The issue was the object of the Human Development Report in 2004 (UNDP 2004), with emphasis on cultural freedom. In some circles, to overcome the major deficiency of multiculturalism, which is the lack of dialogue among the various cultures which potentially leads to cultural ghettos and an erosion of social cohesion, it is important to go beyond multiculturalism in favor of intercultural dialogue. The UNESCO report of 2009 emphasized that there must be an educational effort to acquire the competencies in intercultural dialogue, which include listening, understanding and wonder (UNESCO 2009, p. 46).

The realization that migrants in traditional countries of settlement were not availing of the possibility to acquire citizenship and the irruption of the globalization discourse demanded new perspectives on the belonging of migrants. Some authors advanced the notion of transnationalism as a condition in which migrants belong

and interact with different spaces at the same time (Basch et al. 1994). Although it is acknowledged that the transnational condition might apply only to a minority of migrants (Portes 2003), the concept has challenged the static approach to migration as a one-time, definitive movement, so typical, and yet also so partially true, of the nineteenth century migration to the Americas.

1.1.6 The Continuation of Migration

Migration in general, as well as labor migration in particular, has increased in the past decades. Oft quoted figures produced by the UN Population Commission say that migrants were about 154 million in 1990 and are estimated to be 232 million in 2013 (UN-DESA 2013). The growth of migration is attributed to the same factors that originate it, in addition to other factors that have been observed for quite some time.

Chain migration is an expression that was already used during the great migration from Europe to the Americas. The distinctive feature of chain migration is that it differs from impersonally organized migration, because the arrangements for the migrants are made "*by means of primary social relationship with previous migrants*" (Macdonald and Macdonald 1964, p. 82, italics in the original text). The concept of chain migration, which during the years of the great migration was symbolized by entire villages that moved from Europe to the Americas, was reformulated in the more comprehensive notion of migration networks. These networks are characterized primarily by interpersonal connections that link migrants, former migrants and non-migrants through family, friendship and acquaintance ties. As the scarcity of information is one of the biggest challenges that migrants face, obtaining information from personal and social networks facilitates the migration process and increases the probability to migrate. In broad terms, the linkages that one can find within a migration network constitute social capital, the value of which is proportional to its possibility to be converted into real capital (Massey et al. 1987). The role of migration networks, particularly in decreasing the cost of migration, also explains why migration movements tend to last longer than the structural factors would require. To further explain the tendency of migration to expand and continue, Massey et al. (1998, pp. 45–50) also borrowed the notion of cumulative causation from Gunnar Myrdal (1957), to indicate that, since an act of migration modifies the context in which it takes place, successive migration acts become easier and more probable for others. Cumulative causation will ultimately limit itself because of the process of saturation, when decreasing migration costs are no longer significant in the decision to migrate.

1.1.7 The End of Migration

If migration is initiated by certain structural differences between the origin and the destination, the closing of those differences is expected to end migration. At the macro level, while the demand for migrant labor might continue in the country of

destination, the availability of workers willing to migrate from a specific country of origin which has experienced economic and social growth will decrease and migrants will be sourced from a different developing country. Since World War II, countries that were destinations of migrant labor have continued to receive foreign workers, while some previous countries of origin (like Italy and Spain in Southern Europe, or South Korea in Asia) have become new destinations of migrants. The insights of various theoretical perspectives concur in understanding the end of migration, i.e., the moment in which a country arrives at zero net migration. The additional theoretical challenge consists in predicting when a country would undergo the so-called migration transition and from a country of origin become a country of destination. Studies conducted on some Asian countries (APMJ 1994) concluded that the prediction cannot respond solely to abstract econometric models since national social and political factors lead to different results.

In the understanding of the development of migration in connection with economic growth, Martin (1993) has observed that the situation will be different for low skilled and highly skilled migrants. While low skilled migration will grow initially and decrease after some years in response to economic growth generated by freer trade and investment (the so-called migration hump), the migration of highly skilled workers will continue as it is compatible with decreased wage differentials between the origin and the destination.

The end of migration also has a micro dimension, which consists in the decision of migrants to return to the country of origin. Return can be structurally embedded in the migration process, as in the case of contract labor migration to the Gulf countries or other destination countries in Asia, or it can be the result of adverse circumstances in the case of migrants with permanent or long-term status in the countries of destination. Initial studies of return migration focused on presenting typologies on the possibilities for the decision to return (Rogers 1984) or the impact of return migration on the place of origin (Cerase 1974). The articulation of return within the various migration theories was put forward by Cassarino (2004) although no unified model was constructed. Battistella (2004) has suggested a matrix of four types of return, which can be addressed by four types of policies (*see* IOM 2013, p. 135). In general, it is observed that return might occur even if conventional theories on migration would suggest that it is more profitable for the migrant to remain abroad. Stark (2003), while emphasizing that migration can occur even in conditions of no wage differentials, also suggested that return might occur even if salary differentials remain high, because the migrant might want to utilize the higher purchasing power of his or her savings in the rural area. Studies tend to conclude that while economic factors might have been preponderant (although not exclusive) in the decision to migrate, non-economic factors, of which family relations are the most important, are salient in the decision to return.

1.1.8 Some Missing Components

In this synthesis, migration has been considered in its various aspects as a process which begins, continues and ends because of structural and personal factors. The

various theories have contributed to the understanding of the remote causes (the background context); the proximate determinants (the structural factors at the origin and the destination); the role of intermediaries; the personal motivations for leaving, for staying abroad and for returning; and the different ways in which a society with migrants can respect differences while attaining social cohesion.

Various aspects of the migration process were not considered. Among them: the impact of migration on the countries of origin, the countries of destination and the migrants themselves; the social consequences of migration; the nexus between migration and development; and the gender perspective on migration. Most of all, the synthesis did not address the fact that the movement of workers across borders does not take place freely. It is heavily regulated by each state, sometimes in the exiting process, to ensure protection to nationals going abroad, and always in the admission process, because every state considers the policy on admission of migrants as an expression of its sovereignty. Zolberg (1999) advocated the need to "bring the state back in" as an essential component for the understanding of migration. In this regard, the interpretative and predictive power of theories has to contend with political decisions, which do not cohere with theoretical formulations. It is not possible to expand on each of the aforementioned missing components in this chapter. However, in regard to the policy aspects it is worthwhile to observe that research on migration policies has established some regularities, which include:

- absolute control of migration is not possible or not desired;
- excessively restrictive migration policies generate irregular migration;
- admission policies are more open during times of economic growth and more restricted in time of economic recession;
- migration policies tend to be more in favor of migrants than the prevailing public opinion;
- the inefficiency of migration policies depends often on the lack of coherence with policies in other sectors;
- sectors that might be at the opposite side in other issues, can find themselves on the same side when it comes to migration (the "strange bedfellows" of Zolberg (1999)).

Trying to represent the whole synthesis in an abstract formulation might remain difficult because of too many components. The most comprehensive formulation was proposed by the systemic approach. Mabogunje (1970) attempted it in regard to rural-urban migration in Nigeria and Kritz et al. (1992) applied it to international migration. While the systemic approach helps us understand that it is not possible to look at migration simply as a movement from country A to country B while ignoring all the other relevant dimensions, it does not sufficiently address all the elements of the synthesis and it remains difficult to validate through research.

In spite of the missing components, the synthetic overview has helped us understand that many questions have been addressed in migration research and have received partial explanations. Most of the questions and the research looking for answers have been elaborated in North America and Western Europe, with the permanent, long-term or guest workers migration models as the object of analysis.

Asia has come more recently into the picture, as labor migration within the region took off only in the early 1970s. International migration in the Asian context merits the question whether it might challenge some aspects of the general theoretical formulation. In migration within Asia the role of the state is preponderant and leads to a migration system which is much more rigid than in other regions of the world. This has resulted in some out-of-the-box patterns, such as the development of labor migration to the Gulf countries from countries with which they did not have previous political or social ties, or Japan's insistence not to import less skilled migrant workers despite the decades-long demand for such workers, or the by-passing of intermediaries with South Korea's government-to-government arrangements with selected countries of origin. Irregular migration, which is widespread in the region, does not appear to be an anomaly but a component embedded in the system. The incorporation of migrants into society is unforeseen, to the point that in some places, like the Gulf countries, migrants are maintained separately from the local population. One could say that those points do not invalidate theory, as they pertain to the governance of migration. If it is true that the governance of migration cannot be effective when it clashes with fundamental dynamics illustrated by theories, then it remains difficult to explain why the migration system in Asia has persisted for over four decades. Regardless of the stance on this matter, this chapter argues that the specificities of migration in Asia should be examined to verify the theoretical questions they raise.

1.2 Migration in Asia[1]

Asia is the origin of large flows of migrants toward countries of traditional settlement in North America and Oceania and of long-term migration in Europe. In 2012, 41% of immigrants receiving permanent status in the US were from Asia (in particular China, India and the Philippines) (US DHS 2012); the top three source countries of permanent residence in Canada were again China, the Philippines and India, which account for 36% of the total (Government of Canada 2012); the same three countries were among the top four countries of origin for Australia in 2012–2013. In particular, the Indian sub-continent contributed 29% to Australia's total migration program and North Asia, 23% (Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2013).[2] Our focus, however, is on labor migration, of which we provide a very cursory overview of flows and characteristics.

[1] This brief overview will not include Central Asia. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and/or Middle East countries are also referred to as West Asia.

[2] Asia is also a region of vast internal migration. Perhaps the most renowned internal movement concerns migrants from the rural to the coastal provinces of China, involving 221 million people (AMO 2012 (2013)).

1.2.1 Flows and Trends[3]

All regions in the Asian continent are both origin and destination of migrants. However, the Middle East and East Asia are prevalently destination of flows originating mainly from South and Southeast Asia. Migrants from the Indian subcontinent are almost exclusively absorbed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The percentage is particularly high (over 90%) for Indians and Pakistanis. Of the Indians, however, the count is limited to those migrants who need the exit clearance (Exit Check Required), which applies only to workers in less-skilled occupations and working in 17 specific countries. They reached 747,041 in 2012 and worked mostly in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman (Government of India, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs 2013). The same Gulf countries were the main destinations of Pakistani workers, 456,893 in 2011. Migrants from Bangladesh numbered over half a million in 2011, after a decline in 2010 because of the 2008–2009 recession, and reached 607,798 in 2012, but declined again to 409,253 in 2013.[4] Large numbers of Bangladeshis also migrate to India, although in a mostly irregular way. Nepal has become more prominent as a country of origin (354,716 in 2011) and in addition to the Gulf countries, it deploys many migrants to Malaysia. The flow from Sri Lanka has been stable for some years (262,960 in 2011), of which over 90% were directed to the Gulf countries. Apart from South Asia, migrants in the Gulf countries originate from the Philippines and Indonesia. The Gulf countries are distinctive in terms of the overwhelming percentage of foreign labor force (from 21% in Saudi Arabia to 88% in the UAE), which is a cause for concern across the region. All GCC countries have embarked on specific programs to reduce dependence on foreign workers and provide more jobs for their nationals. Aside from the Gulf countries, Jordan and Lebanon are also destinations of migrant labor, particularly from the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Jordan has become a country of temporary resettlement for a large number of asylees from Syria since the civil war erupted in 2011.

In East Asia, the main destinations for migrant labor are Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. The number of foreigners registered in Japan, which does not admit unskilled foreigners as workers, has been declining because of the global crisis, but surpassed two million, mainly from China, South Korea, Brazil, the Philippines, Peru and the US. Foreign workers in South Korea (which has a country-to-country admission scheme) numbered 595,098 in Dec 2011, 529,690 in Dec 2012, and 547,590 in Dec 2013. Of them, 203,473, about 37.2% in Dec. 2013, were ethnic Koreans from China according to the Korea Immigration Service statistics.[5] Migrants in Taiwan were 489,134 at the end of 2013, mostly from Indonesia, Vietnam,

[3] Unless otherwise specified, figures in this section are taken from the Asian Migration Outlook 2012 (AMO 2012 (2013)).

[4] http://www.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=18. Accessed 21 Mar 2014.

[5] I am grateful to Ki-seon Chung, senior researcher at Migration Research and Training Center of the International Organization for Migration (IOM MRTC) in Korea for this information.

the Philippines and Thailand (ROC (Taiwan), Ministry of Labor 2014). In addition to migrant labor, all three countries have a considerable number of foreigners—mostly women—married to their nationals. This has ignited a great deal of attention in South Korea, which has instituted a multicultural program to provide foreign spouses with the necessary acculturation to adapt in Korean society.

In addition to being the main sources of migrant labor for the Middle East and East Asia, South and Southeast Asia are also destinations of migrants, mainly from countries within their respective regions. In South Asia, India is the main destination of migrants from Nepal and Bangladesh. While Nepalese can freely enter India because of the open border agreement, Bangladeshis cross the border and enter the state of Assam mostly without authorization. In Southeast Asia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand are destinations of labor flows from within and outside the region. Statistics on the origin of foreigners in Singapore are not known, but the share of the foreign population to the total population reached 37% in 2011. The foreign workforce was approximately 1.2 million, mostly unskilled migrants, particularly domestic workers and construction workers. In Malaysia, registered foreign workers were 1.8 million in 2011, over 50% of whom came from Indonesia. The legalization program in 2011–2012 registered 2.5 million foreigners, of whom 1.3 million were in an irregular situation. Thailand is the destination of migrants from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. The actual number of foreign workers is not known, as the registered ones (1.3 million in 2011) represent only a portion of the total foreign workforce. Annual registrations yield different results, making it difficult to trace the trend of the foreign population in the country.

Among the countries of origin in Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Myanmar are the countries that deploy the largest number of migrants within the region: Indonesia to Malaysia and Myanmar to Thailand. Both corridors are largely unauthorized. The Philippines is the most important country of origin in terms of worker deployment and policies designed to facilitate and protect overseas labor. In 2012, a total of 1,802,031 Filipino workers went abroad, of whom 458,575 left as new hires, 976,591 as re-hires and 366,865 as seafarers (POEA 2013). Among the various countries of origin, only the Philippines includes seafarers in its count of overseas workers, also because it is the highest deploying country in that sector. While largely going to the Gulf countries, the Philippines deploys workers in many other destinations, but particularly to Hong Kong, Singapore and East Asian countries.

1.2.2 Characteristics

The annual flow of migrants within Asia approaches four million people. The dominant model of employment is largely temporary labor migration with the following characteristics:

- *Temporary low-skill employment*. In general, migrants are hired with a short-term contract (mostly two years), which is not renewable onsite. Migrants must return to their country of origin and can be rehired, and those who do, cannot

accumulate social benefits because of the limited length of employment. The system is designed to minimize the social costs for the country of employment and to avoid the establishment of ethnic minorities with residence rights. Consequently, migrants are provided lodging in dormitories or labor camps, have minimal interaction with the local society and family reunification is not allowed. Those social rights are limited to highly skilled workers or for specific categories of foreigners, such as the *Nikkeijin* (migrants of Japanese origin) in Japan. The length of employment is longer in South Korea, where the Employment Permit System (EPS) allows for 5–9 years of work, or in Taiwan, where contracts can be renewed up to 12 years.

Migrants are employed mostly in semi-skilled or low-skilled occupations. India and the Philippines have a considerable number of highly skilled migrants, particularly in the health sector, but the majority of workers from the other countries are considered unskilled. The profile of workers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Indonesia are rather similar: three-quarters of the workers are in low-skilled occupations. Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines provide most of the domestic workers to Hong Kong, Singapore and the Middle East. Workers from Vietnam to the Middle East are mostly low skilled, while the flow to Taiwan is more balanced. Most Indonesians in Taiwan are women working as caregivers. The profile of migrants from the Philippines is not based on skills but on categories: 45 % are production workers and 41 % service workers, of which the largest numbers are domestic workers (IOM 2011).

- *Private intermediation*. The vast majority of migrants in Asia are hired and deployed through the intermediation of the private recruitment industry. The industry has a component in the countries of destination, where recruiters are contracted by employers to provide them foreign workers, and a component in the country of origin, where recruiters are contacted by migrants looking to work abroad. The intermediation is organized in the Middle East as a system which maintains the workers under the control of the recruiter or sponsor (called *kafeel*), who holds the visa for the worker and must grant the exit clearance for the worker to leave the country. In other countries, the recruiter only functions as a placement agency. The competition among recruiters in countries of origin has increased the cost of migration, as they charge recruitment fees to the migrants.[6] The cost of migration is a major area of rights violations, as practices are poorly monitored. In many cases, migrants who cannot afford to pay the fees upfront are allowed to migrate and fees are deducted monthly from their salary. Changes are occurring in the sector, particularly in Saudi Arabia, with the establishment of the Mega Recruitment Agencies or MRAs (Royal Decree no. 51 of 2013) which should phase out the small recruiters (*kafeels*). Many questions surround this change, as the MRAs can function both as recruiters and employers and workers hired by MRAs may be transferred from employer to employer. The only exception to private intermediation is the Employment Permit System in South Korea,

[6] In the Philippines it is equivalent to one month salary. However, domestic workers should not be charged any fee.

which relies on country-to-country agreements for the employment of foreign workers.

- *Female migration*. Because of the high demand for migrants in jobs traditionally attributed to women (nurses, domestic workers, caregivers, workers in hotels and restaurants, sales, assembly of electronic components) the number of women hired to work abroad has increased. This is particularly evident in some countries, like the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. For various reasons, including values and policies concerning women, migrants from other countries, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, are almost exclusively male (for details, *see* Oishi (2005)).
- *Irregular migration*. All areas of destination in Asia include a number of irregular migrants. In East Asian countries, irregular migrants are mostly overstayers, i.e., migrants who entered the country with proper documentation but remained longer than their visa or contract allows. In South and Southeast Asia, irregular migration occurs mostly in the form of border crossing. This is happening because countries of origin and destination share long land borders which are difficult to police (such as those between Myanmar and Thailand or Bangladesh and India) or sometimes long-established ethnic and economic links tend to ignore more recently drawn political boundaries (such as between the Sulu Archipelago in the Philippines and Sabah in Malaysia). In the case of the Gulf countries, irregular migration is the result of unscrupulous hiring practices or, in the case of Saudi Arabia, one major form of irregular migration is overstaying in the country following the traditional pilgrimage to Mecca. Irregular migration is mostly dealt with through registrations or amnesty programs, which allow for a temporary stay before repatriation. But the problem seems intractable.
- *International cooperation*. Migration policies in the region are set by countries of destination and countries of origin try to adapt to them, seeking to maximize the opportunities offered by the different destinations. Increasingly, however, countries of origin have become assertive and countries of destination have engaged in dialogues and agreements to improve the conditions of migrant workers. The clearest example of intergovernmental cooperation is the EPS in South Korea, which is based on intergovernmental agreements. However, bilateral agreements have increasingly been signed by countries of origin and the Gulf countries. Often such agreements intend to facilitate labor deployment and are short of conditions for protection (Battistella 2012). The willingness to engage in such a process, which was shunned years ago, is indicative of a changing trend. In addition to the bilateral approach, the multilateral dialogue has been pursued through consultation processes, such as the Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue. More binding cooperation through the ratification of international instruments on the rights of migrants is still limited.

1.3 Theoretical Questions on Migration in Asia

The theoretical propositions advanced by migration theories formulated in countries with mature migration flows also apply to labor migration in Asia.[7] Between regions of origin and destination there are noticeable differences in economic development and specifically in expected salaries. On the other hand, the demographics of the continent are also vastly different, with regions of origin including some of the most populated countries in the world, where the propensity to migrate is well established by years of experience and an organized recruiting industry to facilitate the transfer of the labor force. Even countries that are less involved in migration fall within the theoretical framework, such as Mongolia, which is sparsely populated, or the Lao People's Democratic Republic whose per capita income is below that of the typical countries of origin (between US$ 1500 and 8000, according to Olsen (2002)), or China, which has a huge internal labor market to absorb its own labor force (although some immigration is already happening also toward China in recent years).

At the same time, migration in Asia presents specificities which demand further theoretical introspection. The first aspect concerns the fact that some unskilled migration is taking place without much difference in the salaries earned abroad compared to salaries available at home. This is particularly the case with migration to the Middle East, where salaries had declined over the years, to the point that the Philippines decided to demand a minimum salary of US$ 400 for domestic workers, causing a temporary decrease of deployment for a couple of years (2007–2008). Theory already considered the possibility of migration without salary differentials (Stark 2003). However, specific research is needed to determine the motivating factors in case of movement without economic gains: is it because of unemployment, or the desire for adventure, or in general, the result of the so-called migration culture?

As had been mentioned, migration in Asia is largely mediated by the private sector. The role of institutions, both public and private, in facilitating and furthering migration has been documented (Abella 1997, 2004). Nevertheless, the actual impact of the recruiting industry has not been properly studied in existing theoretical frameworks. Hugo (1998) considers the recruiting industry as a form of social capital. Since they are providing a paid service, it is difficult to consider intermediary agents as capital. For many migrants, dealing with recruitment industry is less of a social capital than a liability since migrants can be saddled with debts, which tie them to the migration project.

An aspect which is not much studied in migration theory is the tendency of many migrants to be involved in repeat migration or re-migration. Countries of destination seem to occupy a place in a hierarchy, which migrants aspire to move to after an initial migration. How that hierarchy is established, how it differs from country to country, and which migrants are likely to engage in repeat migration are some questions which have not received adequate attention.

[7] Hugo (1998) had arrived at the same conclusion in his overview of the applicability of theories to Asian migration.

In regard to the migration process, there seems to be a disconnect between the migration project and its implementation. Most migrants become migrants with some objectives to be achieved but end up remaining migrants for much longer than initially planned. Theoretical studies have looked into the optimal time migrants should stay abroad (Dustmann and Kirchkamp 2002), but adequate research is needed to explore the factors that prolong the time abroad and measure the gaps between the planned, the optimal and the actual time in migration.

A peculiar factor of migration in Asia consists in the disproportionate and growing number of women involved in domestic work from particular countries, including the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, but not from other countries. Similarly, some countries employ large numbers of domestic workers (like Hong Kong, Singapore and the Gulf countries), while others do not (e.g., Japan and South Korea). In addition to economic factors, what other factors determine the involvement of countries in domestic work migration and the hiring of domestic workers?

The resilience of migrants in time of crisis is well documented. The general wisdom is that migrants tend to maintain their jobs or to remain abroad even in times of crisis, because the alternative (returning home) is less advantageous and because of obligations already incurred at the destination (Battistella 1999). Nevertheless, the actual behavior of migrants during crisis requires better theoretical understanding.

Irregular migration is present all over the world. At the same time, irregular migration is widespread in Asia; in some countries (like Malaysia and Thailand), the scale of irregular migration is beyond the proportions found elsewhere. Some easy answers could be provided, but the feeling is that not enough is known in this regard; in particular, irregular migration has been relegated as an anomalous aspect when in fact, it can be under the purview of theoretical considerations.

Since the 1990s, remittances have grown considerably in all countries, but particularly in Asian countries that figure at the top of the list. Such growth cannot be explained solely by the increase in the number of migrants or by the increase in salaries. Of course, remittances were underreported before and much of the increase can be explained by better methods of reporting and better use of official channels. Still, some gray areas remain and the growth of remittances in times of crisis requires better explanations to be uncovered by future research.

The whole labor migration system in Asia is constructed around the temporariness of contracts and stay. Castles (2009 and elsewhere) argued that temporary migration will inevitably lead to the formation of minority communities. Although some elements of it can be traced in some countries (Asis and Battistella 2013), it is difficult to generalize. In many respects, the temporary system in Asia seems to hold (Seol and Skrentny 2009). Additional research is needed to understand whether temporary migration can function properly without introducing the possibility for migrants to settle in Asian countries.

Finally, Asia has been the site of the expansion of skilled migration. This type of migration is needed by developed economies and it is pursued by developing countries, which appreciate its higher returns and less problematic situations. The different treatment of skilled and unskilled migrants is creating a class divide, with various repercussions. Migration, ultimately, is the attempt by individuals to over-

come disparities vis-à-vis those in other countries. When differential treatment is simply replicated in the international scenario, the benefits of migration are severely dampened. Will the skilled-unskilled divide go unchallenged or will the preferred treatment of skilled migrants ultimately benefit also unskilled workers? Moreover, how will migrants be provided with more agency, increasing their participation in the negotiation of their protection standards?

1.4 The International Dialogue

As Hugo (1998, p. 170) has already observed, in Asia, "much of the literature on international migration is predominantly descriptive and atheoretical." The focus of many studies has been on policies and consequences of migration programs, less on the theoretical explanations for the various dynamics that drive migration. The international attention to the nexus between migration and development has further directed research on the impact of migration on development, less on theoretical concerns (Asis et al. 2010). Even when theoretical frameworks were presented, it was observed that they were developed mostly in the fields of economics, sociology, geography, and demography, much less in other disciplines; that the micro level analysis was less common; and that some phases of the migration cycle, like return, had received little attention compared to the rest.

The international dialogue which took place in Manila in April 2013 intended to solicit a deeper theoretical understanding of some aspects of migration in Asia by juxtaposing them with an analysis of similar aspects in a more international setting, particularly North America and Europe. Considering the interrelations of the global society at all levels, the divide is somehow artificial or arbitrary. The intent was to begin a conversation on possible theoretical developments that can continue in different settings and circumstances.

1.4.1 Temporary Migration or Circular Migration?

As noted earlier, labor migration in Asia is characterized by short duration of work and stay in countries of destination. In this respect, it reproduces the guestworker migration system in Europe, without family reunification. Temporary migration has been the most common term to refer to such short-term flows in the region, including the Middle East. Because workers normally engage in many departures and returns, other expressions were used, such as revolving door migration. Recently, the term circular migration has gained currency, both with descriptive as well as normative implications. The issue is discussed by Stephen Castles and Derya Ozkul on the North American/European side, and Piyasiri Wickramasekara on the Asian side. They agree that the term does not have sufficient theoretical and empirical background to be applied to a specific form of migration which should yield triple win results (i.e., resulting in benefits to the country of origin, country of destina-

tion, and to the migrant). In particular, it cannot be applied to the large majority of migrant workers in Asia, who do not have the freedom of movement connected with the concept of circular migration. On the other hand, the migration of highly skilled workers and professionals toward the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries also might not result in circular mobility, as both workers and employers look for stable working relations.

1.4.2 What Multiculturalism?

Because of the strict temporary nature of migration in Asia, it is commonly believed that migrants will not establish ethnic minorities within countries of destination. At the same time, some forms of migration, in particular marriage migration, are establishing communities of foreigners with permanent or long-term residence rights, prompting some Asian countries to describe this new reality as multiculturalism. Christian Joppke, reflecting on the disappointment of European countries with the experience of multiculturalism, advocates for the return to the concept of integration and the importance that institutions, such as schools, play in facilitating integration. He also makes the case for the relevance of the majority culture and migrant selection and the importance of policies that strike at discriminatory practices. In-Jin Yoon, on the other hand, presents the case of multiculturalism in South Korea, where the concept and the policy are rather recent, and explains the various facets embraced by the term multiculturalism in the Korean context. In particular, it is a program directed at a small portion of the foreign population, i.e., the foreign spouses (overwhelmingly women) of Korean citizens, and it is a program of acculturation, if not outright assimilation. In that respect, multiculturalism is a misnomer. On the other hand, because of its relevance in western societies, the term can have political relevance, as it can be utilized to enhance the quality of migration policies.

1.4.3 Gender, a Perspective of Growing Relevance

The conversation between Eleonore Kofman and Brenda S.A. Yeoh on the gender perspective of migration was thoughtful since both scholars on both sides of the globe have been dialoguing for some time in raising the relevance of women in migration flows, their role in the productive and reproductive sectors, the impact of migration on gender roles within family and society, and the broader implications of female migration for societies in the destination and the origin. Concepts like the global care chain is one of the contributions of feminist and gender scholars which has contributed to understanding the division of reproductive labor between countries at various stages of development. Building on transnational theory, some gender dimensions are posited in the specific way men and women shape or are shaped by their transnational experience. In addition, the Asian experience of growing female migration has invited more scrutiny on the nature of the family while

growing marriage migration has raised questions on gender specificities in the access to citizenship. Both authors advocate for additional research to deepen the gender perspective in the understanding of migration.

1.4.4 Return: The End of Migration or the Beginning of a New Understanding?

As return is embedded in the labor migration system prevalent in Asia, the typical concern is when return will be final and how migrants will reintegrate in their home countries. The analysis of the western experience, where migration policies are encouraging return, has brought Jean-Pierre Cassarino to emphasize the importance of return preparedness. On the other hand, Biao Xiang, reflecting on the various experiences of return in Asia, takes the conversation to a different level, where return is considered for its hermeneutic valence if migration is not understood as the behavior of some people but an event co-constituted by many participants. In that respect, return contributes to the understanding of the complex elements in the notions of nationality and transnationality and Asia becomes not just a site for a different experience of return migration but an anticipation of social transformation for the rest of the world.

1.4.5 Regional Integration: The Most Promising Context for the Governance of Migration?

Until recently, the governance of migration was dominated by the national approach, with each country formulating its own migration policy. However, the need for cooperation was long understood and regional agreements have been established in many parts of the world, mostly with the objective to facilitate the circulation of workers within the region, while maintaining control over migrants from other regions. The integration of the movement of migrants has been gradual and commensurate to the political and economic integration of the countries participating in the agreement. Reflecting on the European Union, the most advanced experiment with freedom of circulation for migrants within a region, Rinus Penninx concludes that the regional governance of migration is possible if the economic conditions and the political will for it converge. Examining the scenario of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community, to be established in 2015, Fernando Aldaba concludes that at this moment, neither the economic conditions nor the political will of the states are converging for the free circulation of migrants within the region. Demographic and economic conditions are still too great to expect such freedom. Thus, as an initial step, such freedom will be limited to seven professional categories. However, the process has started and it is expected that, sometime in the future, migrants will move freely within the ASEAN.

1.4.6 Migration Transition: The Result of Virtuous Cycles

Policymakers, scholars, and civil society leaders in countries of origin in Asia are asking how long it will take before workers are no longer forced to look for jobs abroad. Philip Martin has concluded that it is difficult to predict the turning points in the migration transition because they depend on whether migration sets in motion virtuous or vicious cycles. The three determining factors are recruitment, remittances and return. Manolo Abella and Geoffrey Ducanes have taken a different approach. In their view, turning points occur when economic welfare has reached a sustainable level. Economic factors only explain a small portion of what happens in the migration reality. In fact, full employment and migration can coexist. Moving away from the use of GDP growth as a predictor of migration flows, they have utilized the Human Development Index (HDI) elaborated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a more comprehensive measure of social and economic change within a country. Among their conclusions are the following: a rise in the HDI of countries of medium development will lead to an increase of emigration; with the rise of HDI, a lower number of college graduates migrate; a transition point occurs when the per capita income of a country goes beyond US$ 8000. In that respect, many countries will still include people with a propensity to migrate, as they are below that threshold.

1.5 Conclusion

There is a general consensus that research on migration needs to be based on better theoretical frameworks and be grounded on multi-method analysis. The intent of the international dialogue was to strengthen a conversation among scholars on specific aspects of the migration process which have particular relevance for migration in Asia and to suggest that the Asian experience might have some peculiarities which can contribute to migration theories.

Many themes were discussed in the dialogue, raising questions for further research, including:

- To what extent is the temporary migration system prevalent in Asia sustainable? Will minorities develop within Asian societies as a result of migration, and how will countries address them?
- The cultural aspect has played an important role in forging migration policies in Asian countries. Some forms of migration, particularly marriage migration, call for a reconsideration of cultural homogeneity. How can societies that have traditionally considered themselves to be culturally homogeneous deal with cultural diversity? As multicultural policies did not encounter the same support in countries of North America, Oceania and Europe, can Asian societies learn from previous experiences or will they repeat the same journey from assimilation to integration? Or will they tread an intercultural pathway?

- Should the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) expand the free movement of professionals? Will professionals support circularity within AEC or will they expect the right to settle?
- How can the rights-gap between less skilled and more skilled migrant workers be closed?
- In working towards making migration as a choice rather than a necessity, how can virtuous cycles be implemented in the countries of origin of the continent? In what ways can regional and international dialogues contribute to it?
- How does irregular migration fall within a migration theory? Is it simply a deviant behavior from defective policies or is it an integral component of the migration process? What is the threshold of irregularity that can be considered tolerable by countries?

There is a long road ahead and arriving at sound theoretical propositions can be elusive. In reviewing migration theories, Arango observed that "most would still not qualify as a theory… Existing migration theories are mainly useful for providing explanations ex-post" (Arango 2004, p. 32). In that respect, it might be wiser to speak of regularities as Zelinsky (1971, pp. 221–222) had suggested. Establishing the regularities of migration in Asia is an initial contribution to the theorization of migration that can draw migration scholars from Asia and beyond.

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