

HUMAN FLOWS ACROSS NATIONAL BORDERS IN NORTHEAST ASIA

An Introduction

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On November 2-3, 2001, the Center for East Asian Studies hosted an international seminar, "Human Flows across National Borders in Northeast Asia." Eight presentations were made on the preliminary studies, conducted in 2001, of the migration situation in each of the Northeast Asian countries. "Northeast Asia" was defined narrowly, to include Japan, northeast China, the Korean Peninsula, Mongolia, and the Russian Far East.

The papers that follow are revised and edited versions of the full papers presented at the seminar and all represent "works in progress." The presenters are members of a research team that was assembled in the spring of 2001. Most of them will continue in the multi-year research project, "Globalization, Regionalism, and Local Capacity Building: Human Flows across National Borders in Northeast Asia." In this introduction, I will discuss the rationale, objectives, and focus of our collaborative project and provide the background to the papers presented here and the direction of our collective effort in the next two years.

The topic—cross-border human flows in Northeast Asia—deserves a special attention from the perspective of human security. The growing scale of migration and other types of people flows we see today in this region are a recent—a post-Cold War—phenomenon, and it is catching most host communities unprepared. The historical and contemporary context of the phenomenon makes it a particularly salient issue that has important policy implications.

Contemporary international relations in Northeast Asia are seriously affected by the prewar, wartime, and postwar histories of imperialism, war, and ideological conflict. Despite the end of the Cold War and growing economic ties within the region, reconciliation between the peoples of this region has been excruciatingly slow. While globalization, internationalization, and regionalization in the economic, social, and technological fields are expanding people-to-people contacts, nationalism and localism remain powerful forces in each country.¹ Within this context, the growing volume of human flows across national borders represents both an opportunity for human contacts and mutual learning and a major challenge to the communities that are not accustomed to having large numbers of foreign nationals in their midst. If mismanaged, the human flows could become a major source of conflict between nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, and governments.

Seen from the perspective of the individual citizens that are affected by the growing tides of cross-border migration, the phenomenon represents a potential threat to their sense of well-being. The sense of impending trouble can be captured by the concept of "human security."

"Human security" relates to questions of livelihoods and human development.² It focuses our attention on those problems that threaten the individual's well-being, be

they problems of a physical, material, mental, or spiritual nature, and forces us to look for non-military means of alleviating such threats. Some countries—most notably Japan and Canada—have embraced the concept of human security as part of their diplomacy, while other countries remain weary toward the inclusion of human security as a legitimate concern of public policy.³ Although the broadening of the definition of security to include human security has its own problems,⁴ it adds an important dimension both to our knowledge of contemporary security problems and to our understanding of the expanding human dimension of globalization and internationalization.

The movement of individuals within their own countries has long been established as one of the fundamental, if not fully exercised or protected, human rights in modern society, but the control of human flows at the national border is recognized as a legitimate exercise of sovereignty, as well as a responsibility of the modern nation-state. However, the growing interdependence of national economies and the internationalization of political, social, and cultural lives of our world have facilitated and been affected by increasing volumes of cross-border migration and other human flows around the world. Northeast Asia is no longer an exception.

The papers presented here suggest that there is an expanding list of problems involving individuals crossing national borders in Northeast Asia, for various purposes—in search of better economic opportunities than available in their home country, for citizen exchanges through organized programs between municipalities, for purposes of obtaining technical training or educational opportunities, and for purchasing better quality merchandise than found in their home markets. The concerns include illegal entry and settlement of foreign nationals; illegal smuggling of guns, drugs, and humans, sometimes involving local partners; petty thefts, murders, and other violent crimes; prostitution; gaps in the standard of living between the foreign and local communities; and exploitation, discrimination, and violation of human rights of foreign workers. Foreign residents and visitors also have many concerns, including racial-ethnic profiling, scapegoating, discrimination, exploitation, abuse, and segregation by members of the host communities.

There are visible signs of strain, tension, and even conflict in some provinces. Local responses have been mostly reactive, ad-hoc, and even contradictory. For example, provincial and local leaders are promoting economic, cultural, and social contacts with foreign partners, while many local citizens are skeptical about the benefits of such ties and weary of what they view as a disruption of their traditional way of life. Moreover, national, provincial, and local perspectives and interests vis-à-vis the growing foreign presence at the local level have often conflicted.

There is a growing literature on internal and international migration in Asia-Pacific, but most works are focused on individual countries of origin or destination, or on the broader Asia-Pacific region.⁵ Currently, there is virtually no systematic research into the growing human flows within Northeast Asia and the challenges it presents to the individual citizens, both migrants and local residents, and the host communities. (For a bibliography of relevant works, see **Appendix A**.) There is currently no international research project focused specifically on cross-border migration within Northeast Asia from an explicitly human security perspective. The project for which the present papers have been prepared is an effort to fill that void.

The existing literature informs us that migration in the Asia Pacific region has substantially grown in the last decade and that the growth will continue. It tells us that there are economic, political, and technological reasons behind the growth, with the economic push and pull factors becoming the most important.⁶ The current literature also reveals that national responses have varied significantly from country to country, with selective control being the prevalent pattern among the receiving countries, e.g., Japan and South Korea, and relatively free emigration policies adopted in most sending countries, e.g., Malaysia, the Philippines, and China.⁷ There is also a growing literature focused on the formation in Asia-Pacific and elsewhere of “transnational communities,” composed of networks of ethnic communities in the sending and receiving countries.⁸ Existing studies note many important consequences of these trends. Some of the most important ones are: the trends toward double (or multiple) citizenship and the challenge this poses to the traditional notion of citizenship based on nationality and ethnic homogeneity;⁹ discriminatory immigration policies and human rights violations;¹⁰ and illegal emigration and immigration and the resulting erosion of sovereignty or national control.

The existing studies pay inadequate attention to important differences between the political and cultural context of the migrant communities in Southeast Asia and those in Northeast Asia. Our project, with its clearly defined focus on intra-regional human flows within Northeast Asia, take into consideration the peculiarities of the regional context and the impact of historical and cultural factors on the interaction between the migrant populations and the local communities.

The nation-state and its institutions in Northeast Asian countries are far stronger than those in Southeast Asia and they have, until fairly recently, been able to control trans-border migration strictly and fairly effectively, on the part of both home and host countries. The state-dominant modernization of the Northeast Asian countries in the previous century and the state-centric policy agenda in each country of the region clearly affect the way issues of human flows are discussed domestically.

Unlike their Southeast Asian counterparts, most Northeast Asian governments have long promoted the idea (myth) of ethnic homogeneity among their populations and this heavily influences the popular views of migrants in their communities today. An important exception is the case of Russia, where ethnicity played only a minor role in defining the Soviet popular identity. In the Russian Far East, as a consequence, ethnic Koreans of Soviet heritage are well assimilated. However, Chinese migrants and visitors, including Chinese citizens of Korean ethnicity, are met with suspicion and apprehension in the Far Eastern communities. Moreover, there are some cultural differences among the long-term migrants and short-term visitors. For example, there are some marked differences between Chinese, Korean, and Russian migrants in Japan in terms of identity formation and retention. The differences, we hypothesize, result not only from the different local attitudes the migrants encounter in the host communities but also from the way their identity has been formed in the context of their home culture. There is a striking contrast, for example, between the individualistic identity formation in Russia and the communitarian identity formation in Korea, China, Mongolia, and Japan. We need to take these differences into account in analyzing the relationship between migrant and host communities in Northeast Asia. There are different political, social, and cultural orientations just among Korean migrants. Some are Korean minorities in northeast China

and are Chinese citizens; some are the Soviet-Chinese who were forced by Stalin to move from the Soviet Far East to Central Asia and are returning to the Far East; and some belong to the Korean community that remained in the Far East. Additionally, there are the South Koreans who have come to the Russian Far East in the last decade. We cannot assume that the local Russians view them in the same light, and there is some evidence that they do not.

Moreover, demographic and population patterns differ very widely among the Northeast Asian countries, the push and pull factors presenting a very complex set of issues in the region. China is the most important emigration country and the Chinese constitute the largest migrant communities in the neighboring countries. Russia is both a receiving and increasingly a sending country. Japan is largely a receiving country. South Korea has long been a sending country but has begun to receive foreign migrants in recent years as well. Mongolia is also a sending and receiving country, but problems associated with migration in that country relate mostly to the receiving end, namely the Mongolians' concerns about the Chinese and Russian presence in their communities. North Korea receives virtually no foreign migrants but sends its citizens to both China and Russia.

Many generalizations found in the literature on transnational communities need to be critically reviewed against the complex realities in Northeast Asia. For example, much of the literature on migration in Asia Pacific is focused on long-term residency or permanent settlement. However, the current cross-border migration among Northeast Asian countries includes large numbers of short-term visitors, and we need to analyze the impact of long-term and short-term human flows separately, as the latter is unlikely to become part of "transnational communities" and yet may have important effects on the host communities' views toward foreign nationals in general. We should also be mindful of likely differences in local response to a foreign presence between those areas that have experienced earlier waves of foreign immigration and those that are more recent destinations of foreign migration or sojourn? Additionally, we need to see if differences from community to community are found with respect to different foreign nationalities. We may very well find such attitudinal signals as racism, jingoism, superiority, and inferiority complex appear in different intensities depending on the general level of familiarity and experience with a foreign presence, the particular mix of foreign and local nationalities and cultures, and the economic status of the foreign migrants relative to that of the host population.

Our initial studies of cross-border human flows between the Northeast Asian countries reveal many areas of real and potential problems from the perspective of human security.

Out of the 4,901,317 foreign nationals that entered Japan in 1999, the largest number came from South Korea (1,160,034, or 23.7% of the total number of foreign visitors in Japan), followed by Chinese from Taiwan (ROC) (963,701, or 19.7%), Chinese from PRC (327,005, or 6.7%), and Filipinos (144,305, or 2.9%). In comparison, far fewer Russian nationals—23,064, or 0.5%—entered Japan. Our studies in Japan have so far examined the Russian and Chinese presence. In Niigata and Hokkaido, local anxieties are growing about foreigners' involvement in thefts and other petty crimes, murder and other violent crimes, drug and gun smuggling, and prostitution. Many Russian residents feel isolated or even resented by some local Japanese. There are clear

signs of a cultural clash between the Russians and the Japanese in these provinces. The local reaction is not uniform, however, many provincial and city administrators, businessmen, and private citizens individuals are showing much more favorable attitudes than others who have had little or no contact with Russians.¹¹ If the Russian presence is a fairly recent phenomenon in Japan, Chinese and Koreans represent more established and larger communities in the country, presenting a different set of issues for the Japanese provinces. In addition, there are growing numbers of Chinese workers and visitors from the People's Republic of China. There are daily press coverage and annual government reports on crimes committed by Chinese in Japan. There are also allegations of exploitation of unskilled Chinese workers who come to Japan as trainees in Japanese companies through a complex regime involving sending and hiring agents, host Japanese businesses, and the Chinese and Japanese governments. Although sympathetic lawyers and human rights activists in Japan are slowly bringing these cases to the public's attention, the welfare and rights of many Chinese laborers remain unprotected.¹²

In the Russian Far East, where the local population has been dwindling at an alarming rate in the last decade (currently around 7.2 million), the presence of an estimated 250,000 Chinese in the region has alarmed many people to what they call China's "demographic expansion," "peaceful invasion," and "threat."¹³ This is reminiscent of the fear of "yellow peril" in the 19th century Russia. The contemporary Chinese migration into the Russian Far East has triggered ethnic and nationalist backlashes among the local communities.¹⁴ On the other hand, Moscow and Beijing have been promoting closer ties based on mutual strategic interests in the post-Cold War world. Conflicting perspectives and interests between the Russian Federation government and the Far Eastern provinces are a main cause of the often-contradictory responses at the two levels. The local residents in the Russian Far East hold mixed views on the ethnic Koreans repatriated from Central Asia, the North Korean timber and agricultural workers, and the businessmen from South Korea.¹⁵

For South Koreans, the issue of migration is posing serious challenges to their understanding of nation, nationality, citizenship, ethnicity, and identity. It involves legal, political, economic, social, cultural, and industrial issues. There are over 5.6 million overseas Koreans (Chaewoe tongpo) in the world. Of these, over 90% are in Japan, China, Russia, and the United States. There are almost 2 million ethnic Koreans (Chosonjok) in China, mostly in the Yanbian Autonomous Region of Jilin Province, as well as half million ethnic Koreans (Koryoin) in the former Soviet Union. Of the former group, 150,000 reside in South Korea, legally or illegally. The 1,600 North Korean defectors (Talbukja) and the 2,500 former Soviet Koreans who live in South Korea constitute distinct categories of Koreans in South Korea. An estimated 26,500 Han Chinese also constitute an important part of the growing foreign presence in South Korea, followed by 16,700 Filipinos, and 15,000 Vietnamese.¹⁶ Of particular interest to the proposed project is the status of ethnic Koreans in China and the Russian Far East. It will be interesting, for example, to find out if the Russians living in the areas bordering China hold differentiated views and attitudes between the Han Chinese and the Korean Chinese in their communities.

Mongolia represents but a small element in the cross-border human flows in Northeast Asia, but for the country of a little over 2 million people, the growing presence of foreigners, particularly Chinese, poses some difficult policy choices. A landlocked

country, sandwiched between China and Russia, Mongolia has historically been very sensitive to the influence of its giant neighbors. The political liberalization in Mongolia since 1990 has brought forth unprecedented freedoms of travel for its citizens, and a dramatic increase in the number of foreign residents and visitors. The 1,520 Chinese permanent residents represent the largest segment of the 10,000-11,000 officially registered foreign permanent residents in the country. In addition, 150,000-160,000 foreigners enter and leave Mongolia each year, with Chinese and Russians being by far the largest groups. Although the Chinese presence represents joint venture and other business opportunities for Mongolia, the local authorities and citizens are concerned about illegal entry, overstay, and narcotics production and trafficking involving Chinese nationals. For the 1,493 Russians who live in Mongolia, unemployment is the biggest problem. The Mongolian government is keen on developing border cooperation with Russian Far Eastern provinces.¹⁷

In conclusion, our preliminary studies point to a very complex and diverse set of issues and problems that face the national and local authorities and private citizens in the Northeast Asian countries.

Notes

¹ For a comprehensive study of regionalism and nationalism in Northeast Asia, see T. Akaha, ed., *Politics and Economics in Northeast Asia: Nationalism and Regionalism in Contention*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

² For a comprehensive review of competing approaches to security and advocacy of "human security" to overcome the conceptual and empirical limitations of national security, see R. Thakur, "From National to Human Security," in S. Harris and A. Mack, eds., *Asia-Pacific Security: The Economics-Politics Nexus*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1997, pp. 52-80. For a succinct discussion of the promises, premises, and limits of human security as a focus of international relations research, and E. Newman, "Human Security and Constructivism," *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (August 2001), pp. 239-251.

³ R. Thakur, "From National to Human Security." For an explanation of Japan's human security diplomacy, see T. Yamamoto, "Human Security: What It Means, and What It Entails," a paper presented at the 14th Asia-Pacific Roundtable, 3-7 June 2000, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

⁴ Curley points out, for example, that Barry Buzan a noted IR scholar in Britain, has argued that the use of "human security" causes confusion rather than clarity of discussion on security issues in the IR community. (M. Curley, "The Role of NGOs in Non-traditional Security in Northeast Asia," 2001, unpublished paper, p. 8.)

⁵ See, for example, S. Castles, *Migration as a Factor in Social Transformation in East Asia*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2000; W. A. Cornelius, "Japan: The Illusion of Immigration Control." In P.L. Martin, W.A. Cornelius, and J.F. Hollifield, eds., *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994, pp. 375-410; A. Davidson, and K. Weekley, eds., *Globalization and Citizenship in the Asia-Pacific*, London: Macmillan, 1999; D. Ip, *The Chinese Diaspora and Mainland China: An Emerging Economic Synergy*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996; Y. Katsuo, "Movement for Residence Rights of Undocumented Workers Begins." *The Japan Observer: Japan's Alternative Monthly*, 1999 <http://www.twics.com/~anzu/archive/1999/9911-undocumented.html>; H. Komai, *Migrant Workers in Japan*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1995; C. Lever-Tracy, D.F.K. Ip, and N. Tracy, *The Chinese Diaspora and Mainland China: An Emerging Economic Synergy*, Basingstoke: St Martin's Press, 1996; P. Martin, A. Mason, and T. Nagayama, "Introduction to Special Issue on the Dynamics of Labor Migration in Asia," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, Vol. 5, Nos. 2-3, (1996); H. Mori, *Immigration Policy and Foreign Workers in Japan*, London: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997; N.G. Schiller, "Citizens in Transnational Nation-States: The Asian Experience," in K. Olds, P. Dicken, P.F. Kelly, L. Kong, and H.W. Yeung, eds., *Globalization and the Asia-Pacific: Contested Territories*, London: Routledge, 1999; E. Sinn, ed., *The Last Half Century of Chinese Overseas*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998; R. Skeldon, "Urbanization and Migration in the ESCAP Region," *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (12998), pp. 3-24; G. Wang, "Among non-Chinese," *Daedalus*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (1991), pp. 135-158; M. Weidenbaum and S. Hughes, *The Bamboo Network: How Expatriate Chinese Entrepreneurs Are Creating a New Economic Superpower in Asia*, New York: The Free Press, 1996.

⁶ S. Castles, "The Myth of the Controllability of Difference: Labour Migration, Transnational Communities, and State Strategies in East Asia," paper presented at the International Conference on Transnational Communities in the Asia-Pacific Region: Comparative Perspectives, Singapore, August 7-8, 2000

⁷ See, for example, S. Castles, "The Myth of the Controllability of Difference."

⁸ For discussions of transnational communities in general and in other parts of the world, see, for example, T. Faist, "Transnationalization in International Migration: Implications for the Study of Citizenship and Culture," Working Paper Series for the ESRC Transnational Communities Programme at Oxford University, WPTC-99-08, 1999; P. Kennedy and V. Roudometof, "Communities Across Borders under Localizing Conditions: New Immigrants and Transnational Cultures," Working Paper Series for the ESRC Transnational Communities Programme at Oxford University, WPTC-01-17, 2001; A. Portes,

“Globalization from Below: The Rise of Transnational Communities,” in D. Kalb, M. Van der Land, R. Staring, B. van Steenbergen, and N. Wilterdink, eds., *The Ends of Globalization: Bringing Society Back In*, Boulder and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, pp. 253-270; A. Portes, L.E. Guarnizo, and P. Landolt, “Introduction”, Special Issue: Transnational Communities, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 217-237; M.P. Smith and L.E. Guarnizo, eds., *Transnationalism from Below*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998; L. Pries, ed., *Migration and Transnational Social Space*, Ashgate: Aldershot, 1999; and S. Vertovec and R. Cohen, eds., *Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1999.

⁹ See, for example, S. Castles, “New Migrations, Ethnicity, and Nationalism in Southeast and East Asia,” in A. Rogers, ed., *Transnational Communities Program: Working Paper Series*, Economic and Social Research Council, <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/castles.pdf>.

¹⁰ See, for example, H. Mori, *Immigration Policy and Foreign Workers in Japan*, London: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997; H. Komai, “The Cases of a New Receiving Country in the Developed World: Japan,” paper for UN Technical Symposium on International Migration and Development, The Hague, July 1998; D. Zha, “Chinese Migrant Workers in Japan.”

¹¹ T. Akaha and A. Vassilieva, “The Russian Presence in Niigata and Hokkaido: Preliminary Analysis of Interviews and Surveys” (in this collection).

¹² D. Zha, “Chinese Migrant Workers in Japan: Policies, Institutions, and Civil Society” (in this collection).

¹³ V. Karlusov, “Chinese Presence in the Russian Far East: An Economist’s Perspective” (in this collection). See also, E. Motrich, “Reaction of the Population of the Russian Far East to the Presence of Chinese People” (in this collection).

¹⁴ E. Wishnick, “Migration Issues and Russia’s Economic Integration in Asia” (in this collection). See also M. Alexseev, “Chinese Migration in the Russian Far East: Security Threats and Incentives for Cooperation in Primorskii Krai, ” in J. Thornton and C. Ziegler, eds., *The Russian Far East: A Region at Risk?* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001.

¹⁵ E. Wishnick, “Migration Issues and Russia’s Economic Integration in Asia.”

¹⁶ For a preliminary analysis of various ethnic Korean communities in South Korea, see J. Lee, “Ethnic Korean Migration in Northeast Asia” (in this collection).

¹⁷ T. Batbayar, “Foreign Presence in Mongolia: Current Status and Problems” (in this collection).