

Cross National Comparisons of Internal Migration in Asia-Pacific Region¹

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Extended Abstract

Population mobility extends in the spatial domain from local travel to international migration, and in the temporal dimension from short-term stays to permanent relocations. Classification and measurement of such phenomena is inevitably complex. Nevertheless, given the significance of mobility, it is surprising that such little progress has been made in codification. In other fields of demography, such as fertility and mortality, common standards for data collection and computation of key measures have been developed - for example, the international classification of diseases was developed to ensure comparability in the collection of deaths data and there are universally agreed measures for analysis and reporting.

Cross-national comparisons of internal migration can contribute significantly to understanding of mobility, but are hampered by differences in measurement and definition. Apart from the considerable technical challenges involved, one of the fundamental impediments to cross-national comparisons of internal migration has been the dearth of available data. Indeed, not only is there no central repository for such data, no comprehensive source exists identifying what migration statistics are collected by countries around the world. Few nations make internal migration statistics readily available in standard reports, and none of the major transnational agencies include population mobility among their list of statistical indicators.

Only two attempts appear to have been made to establish a global inventory of internal migration data collections. The first derived from a United Nations survey published in 1978 (United Nations 1978), identifying 121 countries that collected internal migration data. As well as documenting how migration was defined and the type of data collected, the report also attempted to establish the geography of the 'migration defining regions', and identify the uses to which the data were put. Some three decades later Bell (2005) prepared a new inventory based around the then 191 member states of the United Nations. Both collections underline the immense diversity in data collection practice worldwide.

Despite the lack of readily available data, interest in cross-national comparisons of internal migration has been widely apparent and has taken a number of forms. There

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are several collections which describe sources of migration data or compare the patterns and processes in different countries. A prominent example is the 'Handbook' assembled by Nam *et al.* (1990), which methodically described the sources of migration data, patterns of movement, selectivity, causes and consequences of migration in 21 countries dispersed widely around the world. Rees and Kupiszewski (1999a, 1999b) presented a similar analysis focusing on 28 European countries. There are also specialized studies that compare particular aspects of internal migration, such as counter-urbanization (e.g. Champion, 1989), return migration (Newbold and Bell 2001) and the leaving home process among young adults (Holdsworth 2000).

Attempts have also been made to draw direct comparisons between countries with regard to overall levels of mobility (Long, 1991), migration distance (Long *et al.*, 1988), age structures (Rogers *et al.*, 1978) and other demographic characteristics (Long, 1992). An early pioneer in the field was Long (1991) who published what appears to be the first international 'league table' comparing countries with respect to mobility. Drawing on data from the 1980 round of Censuses, Long (1991) analysed crude migration intensities across fifteen nations, revealing wide variations in the propensity to move, with high mobility in four new world countries (Australia, New Zealand, United States and Canada) and relatively low mobility prevalent across Europe. Earlier work by Rogers and Castro (1981) demonstrated that behind these variations lies remarkable similarity in the age profiles of migration, irrespective of aggregate mobility.

More recently, the 1999 United Nations World Monitoring Report (United Nations 2000) drew directly on country-level documents to compare internal migration propensities and trends across 15 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The assembled data included both lifetime and fixed interval measures at widely differing levels of spatial resolution which hinders interpretation, and reporting was confined primarily to aggregate counts of migrants and sex ratios. The World Bank 2009 Development Report focuses on the role of migration in agglomeration, arguing forcefully that mobility, especially migration to cities, is a crucial concomitant of economic prosperity (World Bank 2008). In this case, however, the comparative statistics are drawn from unspecified household surveys for 35 countries for a range of dates between 1992 and 2005. Details are sparse and the number of regions in each country is not defined so interpretation is difficult.

If cross-national comparisons to be made, Bell *et al.* (2002) argue that considerations should be given to five dimensions of mobility. First, measures for individual countries become more meaningful when placed in a comparative context. Second, by drawing attention to similarities and differences, cross-national comparisons provide a more rigorous test-bed for migration theory. Third, such analyses have the potential to provide new insights into the dynamics of migration within individual countries. Fourth, much can be learnt from such comparisons about the link between migration and public policy. Finally, it is arguable that a more structured approach to migration will lead to greater rigour and consistency in research on individual countries.

This paper provides the foundation for wider cross-national comparisons by analysing a comprehensive inventory of the internal migration data derived from censuses data in Asia-Pacific regions compiled by the International Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) Minnesota Population Centre and Regional Statistics offices. The paper applies selected measures from the battery of indicators proposed by Bell *et al.* (2002). In the analysis, we focus particularly on migration intensities, age selectivity, the effect of migration on settlement patterns, and temporal trends. To set the scene for this analysis, the paper first review the obstacles to comparative analysis of migration data, summarise previous comparative work, and define the measures to be used and introduce the IPUMS data. The paper reports key findings from the cross-national comparisons of internal migration in the countries under studied, including Australia, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam. The study also identifies commonalities and differences in practice between these regions. Explanations for the differences we find are set out in the conclusions.

Early Conclusions: Explaining Cross-National Differences

Long (1991) argued that the higher migration intensities he observed in the four New World countries (Canada, USA, New Zealand and Australia) were inherited from the peripatetic traditions of immigrant forebears. High mobility in these countries has also been ascribed to the open nature of labour and housing markets, and the relatively low transaction costs involved in changing residence and employment. Similar factors influence movement propensities in developing countries, and variations commonly reflect differences in cultural norms with respect to key life course transitions or events, such as age at marriage or partnership formation, entry and exit from further education, and entry to the labour force. These transitions, in turn, are commonly mediated by the state and stage of economic development and by the social structure of individual countries.

From the evidence assembled here, there are clear differences between countries, not only in aggregate migration intensity, but in the age at which migration occurs, and in the impact of migration on the settlement pattern, and in its trajectory over time. Asian countries generally display lower migration intensities and its mobility peaks at an earlier age. There is no evidence of systematic differences between regions with respect to the impacts of migration: levels of migration efficiency vary widely and interact with migration intensity in such a way as to generate quite variable impacts on the settlement pattern. Compared with longer established nations such as Great Britain, however, it is clear that migration is bringing about much greater change in the pattern of human settlement.

Coupling the models from theoreticians such as Gibbs (1973) and Zelinsky (1971), migration is seen to play an integral, but changing role in the process of regional development. According to these theoretical constructs, the propensity to migrate undergoes a subtle but steady transition as economic development unfolds, transportation improves and nations become progressively more urbanised. Specifically, rural to urban movements are expected to fall as urbanisation proceeds, to be replaced progressively by inter-urban migration, circular mobility and a closer

balance between migration streams and counter-streams, as the settlement pattern matures. The evidence assembled in this paper is consistent with these prospects, characterised by falling levels of interregional mobility. Nevertheless, widespread variations remain and explanation calls for closer analysis of individual differences in economic development, social structure and local contingency if these variations are to be fully understood.

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