



Crossing

National Borders

Human Migration Issues
in Northeast Asia

Edited by

Tsuneo Akaha

and

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Crossing national borders: Human migration issues in Northeast Asia

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Introduction: Crossing national borders

Tsuneo Akaha and Anna Vassilieva

The landscape of international relations in Northeast Asia is changing, and migration and other types of human flow within and between the countries of the region are becoming an important part of it. The state-centric approach to and view of international relations that prevailed in this part of the world during the Cold War can no longer describe or explain the logic and shape of emerging realities. The Cold War, as the ideological order of the state-centric world, has become a thing of the past, although its remnants can still be seen on the divided Korean peninsula. Old and new manifestations of nationalism are interacting with expressions of nascent regionalism.¹ Non-state actors such as multinational corporations and environmental NGOs that have transformed global politics have become important agents of change in this region as well. They are giving rise to new issues, new perspectives and new identities among the peoples of Northeast Asia, although resistance to the forces of change is also visible. Topics such as human security, labour migration, human trafficking and refugees are emerging as a focus of political debate and policy discussion in the region.

It is time for scholars in Northeast Asia to understand the above changes according to a new analytical paradigm, to explain their dynamic and to discuss their consequences for the future of the region. This book is a first step in meeting the challenge. The shared goal of its contributors is to lay bare the challenges that cross-border human flows pose. The book will illuminate the cases of Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East; Russians, Chinese and Koreans in rural Japan; North Koreans in

China; and migration issues in South Korea and Mongolia. These cases give us a glimpse of the dynamic changes under way in the relationships between peoples who have long been separated by national borders.

More specifically, the authors are concerned with several basic questions. What issues does cross-border migration raise in each of the Northeast Asian countries, and how are their governments and societies responding to them? Is cross-border migration contributing to the development of a regional identity among the peoples of Northeast Asia – a sense that they share a common future? How likely is it that the Northeast Asian countries will move beyond their current unilateral (internal) responses and bilateral adjustments and engage in serious multilateral cooperation? What is the impact of international migration on the security concerns of the governments and peoples of Northeast Asia?

At the end of the twentieth century, there were an estimated 175 million international migrants, nearly 3 per cent of the world's population and twice the number of 1975. Some 60 per cent of them, about 104 million, were in developed countries, and the remaining 71 million were in developing countries.² In 2000, about 1,627 million people, approximately 28 per cent of the world's population, were living in the Northeast Asian countries of China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia and Russia. There were 19,029,000 migrants living in these countries, which was only 11.7 per cent of the global migrant stock.³ This relatively small number of migrants reflects the tight control that the Northeast Asian governments have traditionally maintained over the movement of people across their national borders, and it suggests the potential for substantial future growth in cross-border migration in the region. Indeed, Northeast Asia has lagged behind other regions of the world in the voluntary movement of individual citizens across state borders.

However, there are signs throughout the region that a major change is afoot. Increasing numbers of ordinary citizens in all Northeast Asian countries are finding it necessary, desirable and indeed possible to travel to neighbouring countries. Some of them decide to settle permanently in the host society, others find temporary employment as migrant workers and still others travel simply as tourists.

In Northeast Asia's modern history, the interests of central governments have long dictated the substance and pattern of international relations.⁴ As the most powerful political institutions in the nation-states of the region, the central governments controlled political relations, commercial ties and human contacts across national boundaries. Accidental or unintended border crossings by individual citizens were exceptions, such as in times of war or crisis when state control of borders was weak. In the post-Cold War period, however, the voluntary movement of individual citizens across national borders has become a visible aspect of the

region's international relations, and it is growing. This development is challenging national authorities' power to control their frontier areas, exposing their inability to limit the impact of migrant communities on their societies and even threatening the host countries' ethnic and national identities.

The growing cross-border human flows in Northeast Asia have far-reaching implications at various levels. First, they have the potential to change the nature of the region's international relations. On the one hand, the cross-border movements of people may promote the development of a regional identity among the countries' leaders: they may create opportunities for international cooperation to address migration-related challenges such as migrant labour, transnational human resources development, human rights violations against migrants, infrastructure development for international education and tourism, international crime, trafficking in people, drugs and weapons, and the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. On the other hand, regional governments' inability to forge effective international cooperation in addressing these problems may highlight disagreements, contradictions and conflicts between their perspectives and interests. In addition, the movement of people across national borders has the potential to exacerbate the enmity and suspicion that have long characterized state-to-state relations in the region.⁵ The absence of a global framework for the management of movements of people across national borders is well recognized.⁶ What is the likelihood that the opportunities and challenges associated with cross-border human flows will give rise to multilateral cooperation? The authors in this volume directly or indirectly address this question not at the global level but within the regional context of Northeast Asia.

Second, cross-border human flows in Northeast Asia present both opportunities and challenges to individual citizens, be they the people crossing borders or members of the host communities. As the final report of the Commission on Human Security states, "For many people ... migration is vital to protect and attain human security, although their human security may also be at risk while they are migrating."⁷ Migrants and other people crossing borders are known to expand opportunities for economic exchange between businesses and individuals, to enlarge social networks between different nationalities and to promote the development of transnational communities made up of people of the same ethnic and cultural heritage living in separate countries. The cross-border movement of people may also contribute to the development of transnational identities that are based not on nationality or ethnicity but on shared professional interests and practices.⁸

On the other hand, international human flows can also threaten the material well-being of members of host communities, by, for example,

putting stress on their natural and social environment or displacing local workers. The influx of foreigners can heighten social tension at the community level by threatening or being perceived as threatening the communal identity and social order of the host societies; and, in addition, emigration reduces the pool of human resources and disrupts social networks in the sending communities.⁹ The welfare of migrants and other individuals crossing borders may be endangered too by outright violation of their human rights or by more subtle forms of injustice and discrimination.

This volume is the product of an international research project – “Cross-border human flows in Northeast Asia: A human security perspective”.¹⁰ The case studies from it presented here show the diversity of issues that the cross-border movement of people presents to migrants and other individuals and to affected communities and also national policy-makers in Northeast Asia.

The authors’ emphases vary depending on the nature of the case they analyse and the methodology of their analysis. Chapter 1 gives a brief overview of the population trends and migration patterns in each of the Northeast Asian countries and in the region as a whole. The studies of Chinese migration to the Russian Far East in chapters 2 and 3 highlight perceptions of the costs and benefits among the Chinese migrants and members of the host community and also the policy implications for the Chinese, Russian and other regional governments. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the interaction between Russian and Chinese residents respectively and provincial communities in Japan and the cultural and social challenges it presents, as well as the implications for Japan’s relations with Russia and China. Chapter 6 deals with the well-established Korean communities in Japan and Shimane Prefecture and discusses the issues of cultural identity, social assimilation and generational change. The analysis of North Koreans in China in chapter 7 is concerned principally with the acute human security problems facing them, and calls for solutions that require a national and international policy response. Chapter 8 examines immigration and emigration issues in South Korea and highlights the difficulty of balancing the interests of South Korea’s national identity with the demands of the international community regarding the rights of migrants. Chapter 9 is a study of immigration policy issues in Mongolia; it describes the evolution of Mongolian policy and key concerns regarding in-migration and out-migration.

The gravity of problems and the criticality of concern regarding migration issues also vary from case to case. Concern for national security is most pronounced in the case of Chinese migration to the economically fragile Russian Far East, although the analyses by Larin and Wishnick

expose some of the exaggerated fears there about the consequences of the influx of Chinese migrants. In contrast, the case of Russians in Japan examined by Akaha and Vassilieva, the situation of Koreans in Japan studied by Merviö and the circumstances of Chinese in Japan analysed by Zha present not security questions but cultural and social issues regarding negative stereotypes about and discrimination against foreign residents in provincial areas of Japan. The same can be said about the ill treatment of foreign migrants in South Korea examined by Lee and about Mongolian women, who are vulnerable to human trafficking, as noted by Batbayar. The most serious human security problems are found in the case of North Koreans in China, analysed by Smith.

Before presenting the cases, we should describe the boundaries of this collective endeavour. First, “migration” refers in this volume only to voluntary migration; it does not include forced migration. The exclusion of forced migration makes sense because migration within Northeast Asia is mostly of a voluntary nature – largely a result of the gradual opening of national borders to foreign travel and the growing number of ordinary citizens searching for economic opportunities in neighbouring countries. There is one important exception. It could be argued that the North Korean migration to China and elsewhere in the past several years has not been entirely “voluntary”. As Smith notes, there may indeed be some cases of defection for fear of political persecution. However, it is clearly not the case that all North Korean migrants in China are subject to political persecution. Indeed, as also noted by Smith, the overwhelming majority of North Koreans moving into north-eastern China have left their country voluntarily, and there is also an undetermined number of North Koreans who move back and forth between North Korea and China. Another case that has attracted much international attention of late is that of North Korean abduction of South Koreans and Japanese citizens during the Korean War and in the 1970s and 1980s respectively. These cases of the forced movement of people are not included in this volume.

Second, with the exception of some references to South Koreans outside Northeast Asia in chapter 8, the studies in this book are focused on the cross-border movement of people within the region. The geographical boundaries are justified by our central concern with the impact of international human flows on the countries and communities of Northeast Asia.

Also, most case studies in this book discuss both conventionally defined “migrants”, i.e. individuals who have established or plan to establish a long-term or permanent residence in a foreign country, and those who establish temporary residence there but plan to return to their

home country after a certain period of time or who are short-term visitors as tourists or for business, educational or other purposes. The inclusion of short-term visitors is justified by the fact that in many cases, they have as much, if not more, impact than long-term migrants on host countries or communities and on host nationals' perceptions of and attitudes towards foreigners in their areas. Local residents also often fail to differentiate between long-term residents and short-term visitors from neighbouring countries.

In his 2002 report *Strengthening of the United Nations: An Agenda for Further Change*, Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, called for a comprehensive examination of the different dimensions of migration, as well as of the causes of population movements and their impact on development.¹¹ We hope that the analyses in this book will encourage discussion and further investigation of the growing cross-border human flows in Northeast Asia and their implications for the region's governments and peoples, for the relations between its countries and also for the interests of individuals crossing borders and members of host communities.

Notes

1. Tsuneo Akaha, ed., *Politics and Economics in Northeast Asia: Nationalism and Regionalism in Contention*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1999.
2. Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now*, New York: Commission on Human Security, 2003, p. 41, available at <http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/finalreport/> (retrieved 12 August 2004).
3. See Maurice D. Van Arsdol, Jr., Stephen Lam, Brian Etkin and Glenn Guarin, chap. 1, in this volume.
4. See Akaha, ed., *Politics and Economics in Northeast Asia* and Samuel Kim, ed., *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.
5. For a comprehensive examination of factors stunting the development of regional cooperation, see Gilbert Rozman, *Northeast Asia's Stunted Regionalism: Bilateral Distrust in the Shadow of Globalization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
6. World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, *A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All*, Geneva: World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, 2004, p. 95.
7. Commission on Human Security, p. 41, available at <http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/finalreport/> (retrieved 12 August 2004).
8. Peggy Levitt, "Transnational Migrants: When 'Home' Means More Than One Country", Migration Information Source, Washington, DC, 1 October 2004, available at <http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=261> (retrieved 20 January 2005).
9. The World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization cautions that the promotion of international labour migration should be tempered by a recognition of the costs associated with it, for both sending and receiving countries. World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, *A Fair Globalization*, p. 97.

10. The project was jointly sponsored by the Center for East Asian Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, and the Peace and Governance Program, United Nations University (UNU), and supported by grants from UNU, the Freeman Foundation and the US Institute of Peace. Akaha and Vassilieva were co-directors of the project.
11. United Nations, General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, *Strengthening of the United Nations: An Agenda for Further Change, Report of the Secretary-General*, New York, 20 September 2002 (A/57/387), p. 10.

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International migration and other types of cross-border movement of people are becoming an important part of international relations in Northeast Asia. In this pioneering study, experts on China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia and Russia examine the political, economic, social and cultural dimensions of the interaction between border-crossing individuals and host communities, highlighting the challenges that face national and local leaders in each country and suggesting needed changes in national and international policies. The authors analyze population trends and migration patterns in each country: Chinese migration to the Russian Far East, Chinese, Koreans, and Russians in Japan, North Koreans in China, and migration issues in South Korea and Mongolia. The book introduces a wealth of empirical material and insight to both international migration studies and Northeast Asian area studies.

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