

Prolegomenon to the subject of political migration history during the Cold War

Prolegómeno a la historia de la migración política durante la Guerra Fría

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Abstract

This article examines the role of the sending state as part of the determinants of historical migration. It joins the recent literature on the diversity of causes in migratory phenomena and brings to the fore a theoretical perspective to serve the study of historical migration during the Cold War in East Asia. It begins with an analysis of the major trends in the theoretical analysis of international migrations during the twentieth century, and then, it introduces and propose an alternative model (political migration history). By identifying four aspects and considerations in the making of state-led emigration programs (sense of crises, potential benefits, common mechanisms, and dissociations), it contributes with a framework of study for historical migration cases.

Keywords: History, migration theory, East Asia, Cold War, Politics

Resumen

Este trabajo examina el papel que juega el Estado como parte de los factores determinantes en la migración histórica. Es un aporte a la discusión sobre la diversidad de causalidades en los fenómenos migratorios y anticipa una perspectiva teórica que sirve para estudiar la historia de las migraciones en Asia del Este durante la Guerra Fría. Se inicia con un análisis de las principales corrientes teóricas del siglo veinte sobre la migración internacional, y luego, presenta un modelo alternativo (llamada historia migratoria política). Se identifican cuatro aspectos y consideraciones relevantes en los programas estatales de migración (sentido de crisis, beneficios potenciales, mecanismos en común y disociaciones), este esquema contribuye con un marco de estudio para casos de migración histórica.

Palabras claves: Historia, Teórica migratoria, Asia del Este, Guerra Fría, Política

Introduction

Over the course of modern history, trends and patterns of migration have been essentially linked to processes of state formation and decline, economic and territorial imperialism and warfare. And yet, much of the research on the determinants of migration has focused less on the state than on factors such as economic and human development, labour market structure, social stratification and income inequalities in shaping people's capabilities to migrate.

The incorporation of the state into migration research is important and necessary because governments and their policies have attempted to shape migratory flows over history. The relationship between the state and population is fundamental to understand the determinants of emigration. Theorists from different periods and philosophical line, such as Hegel and Foucault, have concurred in the idea that the state is a reality that can only find its political justification in its population (e.g. Foucault, 2007: 106; Hegel, 1988: 46). Since the state is embedded in society, there is an axiomatic interdependence between the state practices and other social practices (Jessop, 2008: 147). In other words, population is a political subject, a fundamental element that enables production and at the same time sustains the state (Taylor, 1994; Mann, 1984). In this close connection between the state and its apparatuses and the population we can find some of the causes that enable international migration flows.

This article examines the concept of “political migration history” which frames the role of the state in both the promotion and organisation of international migration flows. In this model the focus lies on the states, and not economic actors normally connected with free migration, as shaping forces in migratory movement. This study delves into several cases of state-led emigration in post-World War Two East Asia. In particular, it looks at the process of policy making by the sending states, the problems or crises that governments faced before elaborating a migration policy and the benefits sought in emigration.

State-led emigration during the Cold War: a theoretical approximation

During the Cold War, state-led emigration programs involved a great deal of negotiation and persuasion between states and also among people. In Northeast Asia, and indeed in the rest of the world, the Cold War order set barriers between “Communist” and “Capitalist” spheres and between nations within both spheres (Morris-Suzuki, 2010: 14). The ideological differences in the region deepened the abyss between these spheres but also produced unexpected bridges within nations located in the same ideological region. As Tessa Morris-Suzuki has pointed out, the nature of borders and border control was profoundly affected by the historical and political momentum (2010). State-endorsed emigration movements occurred in this Asian context. Koreans (most of them from the southern part of the peninsula) “returned” from Japan to North Korea; Koreans, Japanese and Okinawans migrated to South America and Filipinos began their impressive outward movements, among other examples. In all these cases the sending state chose the policies to control and organise migration. I shall ask then: who was making those decisions and in whose interest? Were these policies made in the interest of the migrants or some other group? In what ways were those policies contributing to the national interest of the state?

Crises and benefits

Anxious and pessimistic views about the state’s future are one of the founding elements in state-led emigration programs. This sense of crisis, in turn, gave place to more rational calculations about the potential benefits that the sending state could obtain from a migration program. By this, I mean that governments acted upon perceived realities and therefore these realities were subject to interpretation. The degree of the perceived crisis could vary from country to country, yet it worked as a trigger for further action. In this sense, governments, following a classic realist perspective, were compelled to protect the national interest and thus controlled the demography of the nations. Overpopulation, or the fear that the population could outstrip the country’s resources, tended to be the most commonly cited crisis. This was the case, for example, in Park Chung-hee’s South Korea (1963–1979), where the increasing population and limited territory strained the local agriculture. The state reacted by promoting migration to South America as an economic valve (Park, 2012: 2).

However, overpopulation is not the only type of crisis that governments encounter. In the 1970s Philippines, the government suffered serious economic constraints due to the national accounts deficits and low domestic labour absorption (Gonzalez III, 1996: 164). In Vietnam, also, the problems caused by the country’s lack of skilled manpower were at the centre of the post-war nation-state reconstruction debate (Hitchcox, 2004). As a result of the brain drain that occurred after the Communist victory, the Vietnamese authorities encouraged young Vietnamese to undertake training overseas. Once the nation’s authorities perceived a sense of crisis in the socio-economic or political conditions in the country, they reacted.

All the above mentioned crises were transformed into an opportunity, a way to obtain a benefit, for the state. The uses of migration and the opportunities that emerge from this sense of crisis are fundamental elements that help to characterise state-led emigration programs. In this sense, emigration can be more than a remedy for the immediate causes of the crisis. Emigration can not only reduce demographic pressure, unemployment or political conflict, but it can also be used to improve human capital, to increase balance of payment through migrants’ remittances, or as a contribution to international trade (Castles, 2000: 47). In the case of the Philippines, the overseas contract migration laws issued by President Ferdinand E. Marcos (1965–1986) helped to reduce underemployment and to increase official remittances (Aguilar, 1996: 111; Castles, 2000: 50). According to Hea-jin Park, the South Korean government used transpacific agricultural emigration in order to:

[G]ain a stable supply of food and raw materials from South America, reinforcing diplomatic ties with the region by actively participating in local agricultural development programs.

The Vietnamese government sought to improve human capital and build an ideologically based nation-state by sending students to the COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) countries to receive training (Hardy, 2002: 470). The Vietnamese government exported labour to the Soviet bloc in partial repayment for the country's national debt as well (471).

Mechanisms

Sending countries usually follow a similar pattern in organising and promoting migration. This involves entrusting a special ministerial department or other institution with the organisation and diffusion of the program's goals and potential benefits waiting for those who enrol in it. It also implies state-to-state negotiations to ensure the continuity of the emigration flow over time. In the case of the former pattern, the creation of an office or department to coordinate emigration allows an expeditious promotion, recruitment and sending of migrants. For example, President Ferdinand Marcos, through Presidential Decree 422, created three new state agencies responsible for the labour export program: the Overseas Employment Development Board, the Bureau of Employment Services and the National Seaman's Board in the Philippines (Rodriguez, 2010: 12; Aguilar, 1996:108). In other cases the tasks pertaining to migration were attached to existing institutions. For instance, in the South Korean emigration program to South America, the government worked mostly through the Ministry of Health and Welfare or the Korean Overseas Development Cooperation (Park). In the Okinawan case, the GRI established a special department to promote the emigration program and to examine potential host countries; and in the case of the repatriation of Koreans from Japan, it involved the joint work of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and non-government associations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (hereafter ICRC) and various national Red Cross societies (Morris-Suzuki, 2007).

The formulation of a discourse to support the emigration programs is another shared pattern to be found in various state-led emigration programs. Sending governments tend to emphasise that emigration contributes to the development of the nation. It is a top-down process which privileges the official narrative on migration. As Eva Østergaard-Nielsen has mentioned, most sending states "seek to incorporate their citizens in their domestic and foreign policy and to appeal to their love, and sense of duty towards their country of origin" (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). This kind of discourse, understood as a mechanism to influence public opinion, has been used by sending states to highlight the potential benefits of the migration plan. In the case of Vietnam, emigration to the USSR was promoted by claiming that emigration serves the ends of security, economic development and proletarian internationalisation (Hitchcox). The discourse on emigration also pointed to the perceived benefits from it as mentioned above.

Finally, the emigration discourse presents a specific rhetoric about the migrants and their agency. For instance, in the Japanese Empire emigration program to the Korean peninsula the official colonial discourse depicted migrants as brokers (and not subjects) of the empire (Uchida, 2011). In the post-war Okinawan migration to Bolivia, the Ryukyu authorities essentialised the Okinawan population as a "migrant people", encouraging them to leave the country (Iacobelli, 2013; 2017). The discourse on emigration tells us more about the nation-state project than about the migrants themselves. Indeed, insofar as the official discourse was a means to achieve a result considered beneficial to the state, it was also a mirror of the nation-building project. Along this line, we can analyse the post-war Japanese national project as one ethnically "purer" (e.g. without a Korean population); or in the case of the Vietnamese emigration, the official discourse shows us the relevance of a Soviet-Communist identity for the ruling class. In the case of the Philippines, as it has been argued, the discourse on labour export reflects a particular element of the "culture of emigration" a characteristic element of the Filipino culture (Castles,

¹ Another example is the sense of crisis among the US military authorities after the crisis in the Suez Channel. The American authorities considered that the British could not secure the area so pushed for higher military control in the British Diego Garcia Island –the gate to the Arabia Sea and the oil routes. This meant the forced displacement the local Changos community (Vine, 2004).

² Indeed, remittances are now considered by the contemporary migration studies literature, the key mechanism for benefiting origin countries (Taylor, 1999; Oishi; Chapter 3).

³ Similarly, the North Korean government —today— sends contract workers to Russia and China, in part, to earn foreign currency.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of state-led emigration is the active role played by the state's apparatuses at both ends of the migratory flow. Indeed, in this type of migration the policies concerning departure and arrival of the migrants are made by two or more nations.

State-to-state negotiations on migration therefore reflect also the struggle for power among self-interested states (Meyers). For instance, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Red Cross-coordinated Korean repatriation program was rejected by Syngman Rhee's government (1948–1960) but accepted by the North Korea government in the late 1950s (Morris-Suzuki, 2006); the South Korean agricultural migration plan was welcomed by Paraguay and Brazil, but did not receive the same response from the Chilean government in the 1970s (Park). Similarly, the post-war Okinawan and American governments in the Ryukyu Islands found it extremely difficult to have their citizens accepted in other Asian countries. The bitter memories of the Japanese imperial rule on the continent played against the Ryukyu emigration program in the 1950s. In a Cold War context, migration-related negotiations were predominantly made between nations from the same sphere. For example, the Communist Vietnamese negotiated with the Eastern bloc countries (Hardy: 471); the South Korean dictatorships with Brazilian right-wing military governments; and the US sponsored Okinawan migration with the US supported Bolivian government. In fact, the exception that proves the rule was the abovementioned negotiation between Japan and North Korea. But in this case, the negotiations were minimised and externalised through the ICRC (Morris-Suzuki, 2006). In this sense, in order to fully understand the rationale behind state-led emigration programs, the focus of the analysis cannot be placed exclusively in the sending nation but also in the inner dynamics of the receiving nation. Another interesting feature in this type of migration process is that migrants do not necessarily migrate to a richer country, as most literature on free migration argues. The connection between states implies that migrants would end in a country that officially accepts them regardless of its macroeconomic situation.

Dissociations

Christopher Davis, in his study of the black British community in Africa, has pointed out that global migration theories have failed to grasp the frictions inscribed in the migratory movements (Davis, 1999). Global economic forces transform migrants into labour power, "only capital travels without passport. Insofar as immigrants are a kind of human capital, there is an element of denigration involved even when as in the case of valued professionals, that denigration is invested and becomes a celebration of talent and worth" (ibid). These frictions were palpable in state-led emigration cases due to the profound dissociation between the micro-level conditions that shape the migrants' decision-making process and the macro-level dimension of the state's rationale to promote migration during the Cold War in Asia. Indeed, state-led emigration programs tend to reflect a certain dissociation between the state's and the migrants' motivation for emigration.

Migrants are not isolated individuals who react to the economic environment or state's policy. As individuals who seek to achieve better outcomes for themselves and their families they also contribute to shape emigration policies. However, state-led emigration programs are chiefly constructed to be part of public policies contributing to the interest of the nation. Thus, the fate of migrants is only a subsidiary element in the top-down rationale behind promoting emigration. In other words, the migrant's agency became a means for the state to achieve its own goals. The disassociation occurs when the reality promoted to the migrants by the state does not match the reality encountered in the country of destination. South Koreans in Paraguay found that the land and assistance promised by their government could not be delivered (Park); similarly, the Koreans who left Japan to receive the benefits offered by North Korean society found only pain and despair: the post-war Okinawan migrants were sent to the inhospitable Bolivian jungle, a location far from what they expected before departing. By the same token, the Vietnamese labourers in the Soviet Union found themselves working in factories located in very remote and inhospitable parts of Siberia and central Russia (Hardy: 472). Along these lines, the migrant's agency was part of a double relation of power. On the one hand migrants were subjects (and agents) of the policies enforced in their home countries. They ultimately freely accepted these policies.

But, on the other hand, state-led migrants were also subject to the receiving state's domestic politics. For example, the North Korea government accepted Korean migrants only after the Chinese volunteers had left. In other words, it was a political move to replace Chinese labour with Korean labour (Morris-Suzuki, 2006). In sum, the disassociation and subsequent frictions between migrants and state was another characteristic of state-led emigration programs during the Cold War.

Conclusion

In the cases discussed above, the state considered the international political context in order to produce its migration policies. Certainly, governments acted based on their local realities but also considering the East Asian Cold War scenario. In this sense, we can conclude that the multidimensionality (or superdiversity) of international migration can be approached from a historical angle without being too narrow or specific. Indeed, international migration can be studied from a political history point of view. From this outlook, the global and historical conditions are brought to the fore to understand specific migration policies. Traditional views that accentuate the micro-level or society-wide dimensions of migration can be complemented from a political migration history perspective. In other words, the policies that make or unmake migration are also part of a country's national history, and as such, their study can benefit from a regional and historical analysis.

In addition, a historical approach can shed light on the theoretical implications in specific migration cases. We find common patterns in the policy-making process among different cases where the state organised and promoted emigration. In this sense, the idea that state-led emigration processes are the result of a strong "sense of crisis" in the states, a sense of crisis that evolves into a sense of opportunity, can be useful for studying and further understanding the nature of different state-led movements in Asia during the Cold War. Similarly, the mechanics of emigration tend to follow a similar pattern. In the cases reviewed, one of the first steps made towards the production of a coherent emigration program was entrusting special departments with organising migration. In some cases, the responsibilities of these departments were shared with non-state actors such as NGOs or even private business, but the connection with the central government remained crucial. Another important feature was the production of a discourse on migration. This was primarily a means to support the state's objectives and tended to instrumentalise the migrant's agency. Also, a fundamental step in state-led migration was negotiation between states. The department or agencies entrusted with the coordination of the emigration program could also take part in these talks, but normally the central government conducted the conversations. It should be stressed that the receiving country had motivations of its own to accept migrants. Thus, the migrant's agency was subject to two different national policies: from both the sending and receiving end of the migratory flow. Finally, due to the mechanics and rationale behind this kind of emigration flow, there was sometimes a deep gap between migrants' and the states' expectations and actual experiences.

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