Asia

Introduction

More than 50% of the world’s population lives in Asia today, a high proportion which might predict large scale migration in this region. Already in 1990, Asia accounted for the largest number of international migrants involving 49.8 millions individuals. Fifteen years later, Asia ranked second, just behind Europe, with 53.3 million international migrants.

But these migrations have not only gained in intensity, they have also been subjected to a qualitative change. Some countries which were formally considered to be countries of emigration have now become countries of immigration (thinking in particular of Malaysia and South Korea). Furthermore, even if the economic factor remains the main driving force for migration in Asia, there are other factors such as forced migration linked to human trafficking, political instability, or natural catastrophes. The high proportion of women in these flows of migrants is another recent tendency.

So faced with the extent and complexity of these movements, there has emerged a certain regional cooperation principally aimed at regulating these flows.

A) The migratory flows in Asia: countries of origin, host countries

A country of origin concentrates its policies on measures linked to emigration and the return of its citizens, whereas a host country mainly deploys policies linked to admission, employment or the time foreigners will stay on their territory. Generally speaking, migration in Asia, especially migration linked to economic factors, operates from less developed countries towards those needing workers and where work is better paid.

1) Countries of Origin

Migrant workers from Asia come mainly from Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka or Vietnam, the numbers of migrants and destinations varying according to the country. At issue are workers with few qualifications (working mainly in construction, fishing or domestic employment) generally not as well paid as local workers, and where the employment is known as the 3Ds: ‘dirty, dangerous and difficult’. There is also a brain-drain affecting India in particular, where a section of qualified, or even highly qualified, migrants work in medicine or engineering, or from the Philippines where nurses and doctors leave their country in numbers increasing by the day (between 1996 and 2002, 3657 nurses have emigrated).

The number of candidates wishing to leave depends on the policies operating in their country of origin. So the promote of the emigrating workers which has been favoured by the policies of the Filipino authorities, has fostered the number of those leaving to go abroad. The Philippines are very great exporters of labour. In

1 Gilles Pison, Populations and Societies. “All the Countries of the World” INED no 414, July-August 2005. In this article, the author gives data with statistics, showing the difference between West Asia (214 million inhabitants), Central and south Asia (1billion, 615 million inhabitants), South East Asia (557million inhabitants) and East Asia (1billion 535 million inhabitants) http://www.ined.fr/fichier/t/publication/505/publ.pdf pop.et.soc.francais.414.pdf
2003, officially 867,969 left the country to work abroad, about 2412 official departures each day. Filipinos mainly go to Saudi Arabia, Japan, Malaysia, or even Hong Kong where they tend to work in construction. Cultural or geographical proximity also influences the choice of destination. So in the Mekong sub-region migration is very marked from Burma, Laos and Cambodia in the direction of Thailand. Moreover, there is an undeniable influence of networks over the establishment of migrant workers in certain countries (for example, strong networks of solidarity exist between the Chinese)

This great degree of emigration facilitates the remittances to the country of origin, which for most of them, is a significant source of money. Whereas there is limited actual statistical data on the quantity of these transfers, certain tendencies are perceptible. Between 2001 and 2004, the remittances of money in Asia increased by 21.3%. More than 40% of these transfers generally concern South Asia, 30% East Asia and 22% South East Asia. In 2003 the main countries involved in these remittances were India (nearly $25 billion), China (more than $20 billion), the Philippines (a little over $10 billion), Pakistan (about $5 billion) and Bangladesh (a little under $5 billion), with these funds coming mainly from the USA, Canada, The United Kingdom, France, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.

2) Host Countries

Countries like Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand, which for a long time were countries of origin, have today become host countries, not only on account of their economic development, but also because of the political instability of their surrounding countries (this applies especially to Thailand with its wide border with Burma). Singapore, Brunei, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong employ a large number of foreign workers, not only in their own production plants but also in the foreign out-sourced plants (mainly Western). In 2004 from the whole corpus of their immigrants, Hong Kong included mainly Filipinos (129,760) and Indonesians (105,710). The same year, in South Korea, there were mainly Chinese (140,435), Indonesians (28,642) and Filipinos (22,787), whereas in Taiwan there were 104,748 Thais and 81,355 Filipinos. Asian workers are also well represented in the Middle East., especially Indians (3,000,000 en 2002), Pakistanis (1,740,000), Bangladeshis (820,000), Filipinos (730,000), Sri Lankans (750,000) and Indonesians (250,000).

B) The Growing number of women among these migrants

In 2005 Asian women represented 44.7% of total migrants in the region. In the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka there were more women women who decided to leave than men. Of those emigrating from their country, in 2002 Sri Lankan women represented 65.3%, in 2003 Filipino women 72.5%.and Indonesian women 72.8%. Mostly these women are employed as domestic or auxiliary health-care workers. What is more, there is a high proportion of women from South East Asia working in manufacturing plants in Taiwan, South Korea or Singapore. All these women suffer from various types of discrimination.

C) The main problems linked to these flows of migrants

1) Discrimination against migrants

Women are not the only ones to suffer the effects of discrimination. All migrant workers experience this. Taking into account the unskilled work they do and also the fact that many of them entered the country by

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2 The extent of the Chinese diaspora in the world favours these networks of solidarity, especially in South East Asia, where massive Chinese migration began in the XIXth century as a consequence of the poverty and social disorganisation of the country. Today the Chinese diaspora is estimated at around 30 to 35million persons, of whom three quarters are concentrated in South East Asia. The Western world only hosts 3 to 5 million, although this has been their principal destination since the 1970-1980s. Thierry Sanjuan (under the direction of) Dictionary of Contemporary China, Armand Colin, 2006, pp160-161.

3 The situation of women workers in factories is analysed in the Asian Migrant Yearbook 2004 of the Asian Migrant Centre, “Women migrant factory workers” 2004. For more information concerning the migration of women, refer to the corresponding note.
some clandestine means, these migrants are often more vulnerable than local workers. The problems encountered by clandestine immigrants (violation of work contract, reduction or non-payment of wages, ill treatment) are widespread in Japan (which has a restrictive immigration policy), South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore as well as in India. Even when these migrations are within the country, discrimination can be experienced. In China the system of “hukou” (certificate of residence established in the 1950s in order to curb the exodus from rural areas, continues today to stigmatise rural populations in relation to city dwellers. Without the granting of this certificate, it is more or less impossible for country folk leaving for the town to find somewhere to live, work, to obtain subsidies or send their children to school. In 2000 at the time of the last national census, 11.6% of the population, that is nearly 145 million persons, had undertaken this internal migration.

2) Human trafficking

In the whole of Asia, human trafficking mainly affects women and young girls who either are married by force or are compelled to become prostitutes. The Mekong sub-region is one of the regions where this trafficking is most prevalent. Vietnamese or Cambodian prostitutes are mainly to be found in the Yunnan province in South West China. Many of them are also sent to South East Asia to be married. So internal and transnational trafficking occurs. In China, internal trafficking mainly affects young girls coming from coastal provinces (Jiangsu, Shandong or Zhejiang) whereas with international trafficking, they are sent mainly to Thailand or Malaysia.

3) Refugees

Out of the total 10 million refugees spread over all the developing countries, 7.8 million are to be found in Asia. The military dictatorship which holds sway in Burma has forced 10% of the population to emigrate in search of refuge. Among these refugees, more than 1.5 million live in Thailand. Burmese belonging to ethnic minorities who are victims of persecution find themselves in this situation. An enormous number of them are in refugee camps (in Thailand, about 100,000 refugees belong to the ethnic minorities (Karen, Rohingya...)). Fleeing the civil war in Sri Lanka, hundreds of thousands of Tamils go to India, where they are crowded into camps in the Tamil Nadu State in the South of the country.

The tsunami of December 2004 which affected the South of Thailand among other places, demonstrated the degree of discrimination suffered by Burmese migrant workers. To this day, no list detailing the number and identity of disappeared Burmese workers has been established by the governmental authorities, and this, in spite of the efforts made by the NGOs to collect information on the premises.

D) Regional co-operation

Cooperation concerning migrants in Asia is somewhat lacking in consistency. It is mainly organisations like APEC (Asia-Pacific economic cooperation) which are involved in this. In November 1996 APEC set up its Business Mobility Group (BMG) to facilitate the movement of qualified workers. Then there is the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) which has recently set up its “Plan of Action on Immigration Matters” (2004) in an attempt to standardise visas as well as making a declaration against human trafficking. On a far larger scale, between 2002 and 2003 there has been the development of the “Bali Process on people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crimes” which resulted from various meetings organised by the Indonesian and Australian Foreign Ministers, who were joined by representatives of all the Asian countries. However these forms of cooperation seem to lack effectiveness. It is to be regretted that there is insufficient cooperation between the host countries and the countries of origin, as this could be advantageous to the recruitment of foreign migrants, remittances or the more effective protection of migrants’ rights.
References


- Asian Migrant Centre, “Statistics by country, 2004


- Asian Migrant Centre, Regional Overview”, 2004

- Thierry Sanjuan (under the direction of), Dictionary of Contemporary China, Armand Colin, 2006, p.158


- For co-operation against human trafficking, you can consult the “Asian declaration against trafficking in persons particularly women and children”, November 2004., [http://www.aseansec.org/16793.htm](http://www.aseansec.org/16793.htm)

- [http://www.baliprocess.net/](http://www.baliprocess.net/)