Economic Migration within Asia: Transfer of Knowledge or Redistribution of Wealth

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グローバル化の進展によりアジア域内での出稼ぎ・移民労働者が増え、なかには現地で起業する人もいる。アジア域内の出稼ぎ・移民労働が技術移転や富の再分配につながるのかを検証した。

Abstract

A measurable feature of a globalising Asia is the flow of migrants who move between Asian countries in search of employment. The theory on decentralised income redistribution and immigration suggests that it is possible to promote wealth inequality in a country by means of adopting policies, which favour the immigration of workers who have a negative net contribution to the hosting fiscal system. The theory however fails to explain the positive externality that derive from the arrival of a migrant into the hosting country, with the subsequent transfer of knowledge and skills that, even for low-skilled workers, is however still present. It has been noted that immigrants tend to be particularly active entrepreneurs in certain contexts, which in turn suggests that migration can under certain conditions promote economic development. The question we study in our paper is whether the emigration of citizens from South East Asian developing countries towards developed Asian countries favours the emergence of wealth inequalities. Or, instead, whether it is an engine of economic development by means of the transfer of knowledge as embodied by the migrants, and by means of the entrepreneurship of the same migrants in the hosting communities. This research question is tackled by comparative analysis of the rate of entrepreneurship, in relation to immigration from South East Asia into developed Asian economies such as China, Japan, and South Korea.

Keywords Asian migration, globalisation, redistribution of wealth, wealth inequality.

Introduction

The literature on globalisation suggests that the increased volume of international migration streams that we observe recently is evidence for the emergence of a larger, global society (Fertig & Schmidt, 2001; Wickramasekara, 2008). In this sense, we can discuss migration as an observable phenomenon that corresponds to an unobservable, but nonetheless real, process of transformation that leads several disaggregated societies to merge into a single, unified, global system (Castles, 2010). Globalisation, however, does not exclusively comprise an increase in the streams of international migration. In addition to that, the literature in fact identifies several other epiphenomenal characteristics of globalisation. These are, among others, an increased diffusion of knowledge (Dale, 2005), a decrease role of the nation state in determining economic policies (Schulze & Ursprung, 1999), and also the convergence or hybridisation of national cultures (Otočan, 2017). Further, it was noted that human languages tend to converge over time (Auer, Auer, Hinskens, & Kerswill, 2004); and because of the relationship between language and knowledge, with the former providing the coding by which the latter is expressed verbally (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2005), this suggests that human knowledge as a whole might also be undertaking some forms of convergence (Dale, 2005).

In parallel to this, and independently from this, it has

also been noted that globalisation leads to an increase in wealth inequality (Siddiqui, 2018). This increase generally occurs both horizontally between nations (Alvaredo, Chancel, Piketty, Saez, & Zucman, 2017; Hickel, 2017), and vertically within the same national economy (Krieckhaus, Son, Bellinger, & Wells, 2014). It appears therefore that globalisation does not provide a single, clear-cut transformation of society according to one exclusive migration. Instead, it is modifying it throughout a large span of its characteristics. It therefore makes sense to study which ones among many characteristics are affected by globalisation more than others.

Globalisation in Asia and its peculiar characteristics

Globalisation is taking place not only in the set of countries as a whole, and which therefore has "global" characteristics; instead, it also presents some peculiar features according to the region of study. Notably, for this paper, we are interested in the specific characteristics that concern primarily Asian countries. In Asia, globalisation is assuming the form of a transformation of the traditional role held by the state (Green, 2007), which is not necessarily being replaced by a pan-continental political union as it is happening, instead, in Europe (Nousios, Overbeek, & Tsolakis, 2012). Of course, one could argue that various forms of regional integrations exist not only in Europe but also in Asia, and indeed the literature concurs on the idea that a kind of regional integration in Asia exists as well (Coleman & Underhill, 2012; Lee, Owen, & Van der Mensbrugghe, 2009). Indeed, similarities between the European and the Asian regional integration have been noted (Murray & Warleigh-Lack, 2013), as did fundamental differences and even divergences (Fort & Webber, 2006). The most important among the latter concerns the absence of an observable and emerging political unity of the Asian continent, which is instead present in Europe in the form of the European Union (Moon, 2017).

The transformation in Asia is multi-faceted, as we will see shortly, but it affects transversally all typical sectors of competence of a nation-state. These sectors include the expanding welfare state (Ramesh, 2004), an urban transformation that is characterised by an increasingly higher interconnectedness of Asian cities (Lo & Marcotullio, 2000), but also education and gender reforms (Ramirez & Chan-Tiberghein, 2003; Siegmann, 2006). It also concerns security and defence (Till, Chew, & Ho, 2008), not only in terms of the traditional paradigm of state-centred security (Zhao, 2008), but also because of the tight relationship between investments in the defence sector and technological innovation (Raska, 2014). A relationship between globalisation and military expenditures has thus been noted (Solarin, 2018); though in some Asian countries it seems that globalisation is causing an increase in military expenditures, while in others the reverse causality is true (Wu, 2017). It is therefore not clear whether the capacity for an Asian economy to innovate derives from the traditional alliance between the industrial and the military sector (Smart, 2016), or whether other factors, such as the different levels of openness of Asian countries, may help explain the different levels of human and economic development achieved by them (Eusufzai, 1996). If openness plays a role in the human development of a nation, as we ask ourselves in this paper, then it should be possible to produce policies that promote development by progressively increasing a country's openness. This has already been suggested by others (Chang, Kaltani, & Loayza, 2009), and in this paper we can study whether the idea applies to Asian countries as they undertake globalisation. The opposite idea, if this is not true, is that globalisation in Asia is promoting inequality rather than development (Kanbur & Zhuang, 2013).

Fig. 1.

A globalising society receives increased flows of knowledge workers, which promotes economic growth but generates inequality.

Openness of a society and its measurable observables: migration in Asia

Connected to the idea of a globalising world is the

concept of openness of a society (Popper, 2020). The whole human social and political system, also called "global system", can of course be considered as a closed system. This is because, if we ignore for a second that the environment around humans also exists, then we can argue that the global system is closed because it includes the whole set of humans. The sub-systems of the global system, however, are open systems. This is because, if we consider nation-states as subsystems of the global system, then they do not include all humans that exist (Fulcher, 2000). If we consider the nation-state in its dynamic evolution over time, however, we can imagine that the degree of its "openness" may vary, as time passes. We are going to give in a second a definition of openness that we use in this paper; but for now, it is sufficient to have the intuitive idea that societies can become more or less open as time passes. We can then ask ourselves the question, how can we determine whether a society is becoming more or less open in the course of its evolutionary dynamic. Let us start by taking two edge cases, that will clarify this concept further.

We can first consider as an improper subsystem of the global system the global system itself. This subsystem is closed, because the global system is also closed. A nation-state that were to become the sole political system on the planet would, by this definition, be classified as a closed system.

We can also consider a nation-state as a proper subsystem of the global system; this is because there are some humans that are not part of it. If, in addition to that, the specific identity of the inhabitants of that subsystem does not change over time, we could then consider that nation-state to be a closed system. Of course, the population may change due to the natural births and deaths that characterise any human population. But for the purposes of this study, we can still think of a system whose population changes only according to deaths and genetic births as a closed system. Another way to call this type of society is "isolated society" (Lightman, 1977), which is equivalent to this particular definition of closeness.

We can also consider an intermediate case between these two extremes. This consists of a society that, while being a proper subsystem of the global system, presents however changes in the composition of its population over time, if these changes are not reducible to natural births and deaths. Of course, if the population does not change because of births and deaths, then this means that there must be some kind of population exchange with other systems. This exchange would take place between the society we are considering and the global system of which that society is a subsystem. If we assume that a political system is inseparable from its territory, as we normally do in political geography (Mellor, 2015), we can then consider the process of entering or leaving that territory as the observable phenomenon that corresponds to this population exchange. Another word for that same process is, clearly, international migration. If we build our theoretical construction in this manner, we can then consider international migration and its associated statistics as measures for the degree of openness of a society.

Wealth inequalities and the measurement of economic or human development

The theory however fails to explain the positive externality that derive from the arrival of a migrant into the hosting country, with the subsequent transfer of knowledge and skills that, even for low-skilled workers, is however still present (Williams & Baláž, 2014). It has been noted that immigrants tend to be particularly active entrepreneurs in certain contexts (Bhachu, 2017), which in turn suggests that migration can under certain contexts promote economic development. The question we study in our paper is whether the emigration of citizens from South East Asian developing countries towards developed Asian countries is a phenomenon the favours the emergence of wealth inequalities in the hosting countries.

The measurement of economic inequality can be done with the usage of several different metrics (Cowell, 2011). Some of these include the Gini coefficient of the distribution of income (Zuguang, 2004), others consider instead the share of national income that the top n earners in a society receive (Bakija, Cole, & Heim, 2012). In this research we use both, in order to avoid the bias that might originate from the selection of a particular metric

as opposed to another.

The theory on economic inequality however emphasises the point that, while the distribution of income might be an important point to target by economic policies, it may be a poor representation of the actual capacity by citizens to conduct economic actions (Sen & Foster, 1997). In fact, the income is a representation of the relative purchasing power by the population of an economy, but does not account for the actual capability to perform economic transactions by the same population (Sen, 1980). Notably, the measurement of inequality in a country based on the income may not detect particularly extraordinary phenomena such as famine, which are believed to have an institutional origin. This institutional origin has been studied in the cases of Finland (Voutilainen, 2016), Russia (Johnson, 2015), and China (Meng, Qian, & Yared, 2015), among others. This is because, the theory suggests (Sen, 2001), the measurement of the economic capability of the population on the basis of a single metric such as income inequality is a gross projection of a much more complex economic system. Instead, one could use the so-called "positive freedom", which is believed to be a better indicator of economic and human development (Prados De La Escosura, 2015), with comparison to economic inequality.

So what is positive freedom? Positive freedom is a term that comes from the literature on sociology (Bowring, 2015), and in particular from Isaiah Berlin's notion of "types of freedom" (Berlin, 1969). A simple way to describe the notion of positive freedom is to frame it as the antithesis to the concept of "negative freedom". The latter is the answer to the question "freedom from what?" (Van Hees, 1998), and can assume various forms according to the discipline that studies it. In political theory, where the concept originated, negative freedom is often associated with freedom from oppression (Grant, 2013), against a tyrant or a totalitarian government for example. In the context of economy and, in particular, of economic development, a typical example of negative freedom is the freedom from the systematic confiscation of private property by the state, that a government might use as a form of economic policy (Epstein, 1982). In contrast to negative freedom, positive freedom can be conceptualised as the answer to the question "freedom to do what?". An example of positive freedom could be by the freedom to choose and purchase some among many possible products (Schwartz, Markus, & Snibbe, 2006), as opposed to a limited selection of them that has been approved by the state. It has also been suggested that positive freedom relates not only to purchase of goods, but also to the acquisition of immaterial objects such as values and culture that originate from the personal preferences of individuals (Friedman & Friedman, 1990). These, in turn, are reflected in the macroeconomic indices that we use to assess the measure of economic freedom in nations (Kaun, 2002). Another way to reformulate the previous sentence is to say that there is a high degree of human bias in conducting comparisons on the level of economic freedom across states. If this is true, this means that inter-state comparisons of openness may not be possible, without some kind of prejudice on the part of the analyst that conducts the research. While we cannot solve this problem here, we can however acknowledge that the variation in wealth inequality is not necessary a good indicator of the way in which an economy is developing, and that some other measures could be used in addition or complement to it.

Comparative analysis of the rate of entrepreneurship

The discussion we made above introduces us to the problem of measuring the impact that migration has on knowledge generation in a country. There is an idea that if migration, and notably immigration, causes a country to generate innovation, this should be observable based on the number of companies that open in that country. This is because, if we follow the Schumpeterian approach (Schumpeter, 2000), the innovation is the action of the entrepreneur that embodies the change in a society (Hébert & Link, 2006). Therefore, the existence of a link between the openness of a society and knowledge generation should also pass through the existence of a relationship between immigration and the rate of entrepreneurship. As we discussed earlier, the theoretical expectation we hold is that, the more open a society is, the more frequently its population generates

knowledge and innovation, or at least this is what one could expect. The measurable characteristics of this relationship is the expected dependency of the rate of entrepreneurship in a country to the volume of immigrants in the same country, short of a time delay if necessary. The figure below sums us the first hypothesis that we test in this paper.

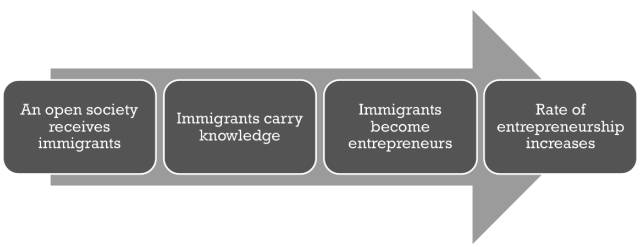

Fig. 2.

The argument that supports the first hypothesis. Opennes of a society favours immigration, which supports the local knowledge production. This results in a measurable increase in the entrepreneurial activities in that society.

The opposite idea, and its corresponding hypothesis, consists in the consideration that migration does not help generate new knowledge and innovation, but instead contributes to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the wealthiest few. This is because, as we discussed, at least part of the migration workforce weighs upon the local welfare system, and is thus unable to contribute productively to the economy. Therefore, if this second hypothesis is correct, one should observe that as the number of immigrants into a country increase, the wealth inequality also increases. The image below sums up the second research hypothesis that we test in this paper.

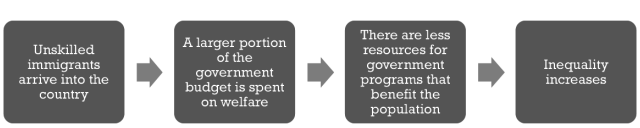

Fig. 3.

The argument that supports the second hypothesis. A stream of immigrants arrive into the country. Over the course of the next years, an increasingly larger portion of the state budget is used to support them financially. This leaves less resources for investments and reduces competitiveness.

Methodology

We selected a group of Asian countries in order to test these two hypotheses. The independent variable that we use is the same for all countries, and corresponds to the number of immigrants arriving in a host country in a given year.

Because we are interested in studying the flow of migrants as a whole, and not the flow of skilled migrants in particular, we selected as countries of emigration those that are characterised by particularly high levels of unskilled emigration. Notably, we chose those countries whose emigrants move abroad to join the labour force in construction sites, housekeeping duties, or analogous unqualified jobs. These countries are: Bangladesh (Moses, 2009), the Philippines (Asis, Huang, & Yeoh, 2004), and Nepal (Yamanaka, 2000). We consider as an independent variable the time series that relates to the arrival of migrants from those countries into each of the three destination countries that we are studying. The destination countries are selected among the most developed nations in Asia, and comprise China, Japan, and South Korea. The table below show in a more convenient format the variables that we used for our analysis and their associated labels (Table 1).

Table 1. Independent variables – time series

Description	Label
Emigration from Bangladesh to China	BC
Emigration from Bangladesh to Japan	BJ
Emigration from Bangladesh to South Korea	BK
Emigration from the Philippines to China	PC
Emigration from the Philippines to Japan	PJ
Emigration from the Philippines to South Korea	PK
Emigration from Nepal to China	NC
Emigration from Nepal to Japan	NJ
Emigration from Nepal to South Korea	NK

The dependent variables are two. The first dependent variable corresponds to the rate of entrepreneurship, which is measured as the number of listed companies in a country in a given year, as a fraction of the population of that country. The idea is that the number of companies represents the entrepreneurship of the population, as a quote of the latter. While it is possible for more than one company to be opened by a single individual, we

assume that this phenomenon is rare and that it does not significantly affect the aggregate ratio. The dataset that we use indicates the number of listed companies, not the number of companies in general; therefore we assume either representativeness of the listed companies over the total number of companies, or the listed companies as being those that comprise the highest proportion of knowledge generation.

The second dependent variable is the wealth inequality, which we measure as it is common in the literature by using the Gini coefficient for the income distribution of the population in a given year (Wolff, 1992). We also use, as an alternative representative measurement of wealth inequality, the percentage of the income that is held by the top 10% earners, as the literature also does (Roine, Vlachos, & Waldenström, 2009). This second measurement is used as a control for the first, and we deem that results that are reflected on both variables are more likely to be accurate.

The table below shows the dependent variables we use for this study and the associated labels (Table 2).

Table 2. Dependent variables – time series

Description	Label
Time difference of listed companies - China	LC
Time difference of listed companies - Japan	LJ
Time difference of listed companies – S. Korea	LK
Gini coefficient - China	GC
Gini coefficient - Japan	GJ
Gini coefficient - Korea	GK
Income share of top 10% earners - China	IC
Income share of top 10% earners - Japan	IJ
Income share of top 10% earners - South Korea	IK

The time period that we consider relates to the most recent 50 years, for both the dependent and the independent variables. This is the longest period of time that is covered by the dataset we used. The resolution for the dependent variables is yearly, the resolution for the independent variables is by decade; this implied the necessity to conduct data aggregation, as we discuss in the next section. All the data that we use for this research originates from the databank of the World Bank; and, namely, from the Global Bilateral Migration dataset[1] and from the World Development Indicators[2].

Results

We set to perform correlation analysis on each pairs of independent and dependent variables. Because this is a requirement for correlation analysis, we had to select time series of equivalent length. This implied the necessity to conduct data aggregation and the cutting of the time series at some more or less arbitrarily points. We conducted data aggregation on the time series related to macroeconomic data (the variables starting with the letters G, I, and L) by rolling over each decade, and by then averaging the values corresponding to the valid observations for that decade. The time delta we used for correlating the time series corresponds to 20 years (2 decades), with the independent variable preceding the dependent variables.

In doing so, the variable LC resulted in only two observations corresponding to the years 2000s and 2010s, so we had to discard it from the analysis. Similarly, the variables GK, IK, GJ, IJ also resulted in only two values, so we had to discard them from the analysis. This is a limitation to the results of the research we conducted, which will need to be filled by studies that use data at a higher resolution and/or longer time series.

The table below shows the correlation measures for each pair of variables that were not discarded following the considerations we made above (Table 3).

Table 3. Pearson's correlations between variables

	GC	IC	
BC	0.999167888	0.999886601	
PC	0.8197964	0.8342622	
NC	-0.65847558	-0.63888932	
	LJ		LK
BJ	0.76519859	BK	0.98713595
PJ	0.89372873	PK	0.883994
NJ	0.95358019	NK	N/A

1 https://databank.worldbank.org/source/global-bilateral-migration

2 https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators

The correlation value for the pair (NK, LK) is missing because the dataset we use reports zero immigrants from Nepal to South Korea up to the 2000s, when that number suddenly becomes 1450. The rest of the values were deemed to be accurate.

Discussion

For two of the three countries that we consider, namely Bangladesh and the Philippines, immigration to China correlates positively with the future Gini index and also with the quota of national income that is held by the top 10% earners. By "future" we hereby mean "twenty years later", since that is the time delta that we use between the two time series, as discussed earlier. This observation seems to support the thesis that immigration leads to higher income inequality in the country where it takes place; and that namely, this is true for China. The third country that we consider, however, shows a strongly negative correlation between immigration and wealth inequality. Because Nepal however holds less than 100 immigrants to China up to 2000s, this may however simply mean that the inflow of migrants is insufficient to affect macroeconomic statistics.

Regarding the impact of immigration onto entrepreneurship, both countries that we included, Japan and South Korea, show a positive correlation. The immigration from Nepal to South Korea has been null up until the 2000s, which is why we did not include it in the final results. With this exception, the positive correlation is valid for all countries of origin that we considered, and for both countries of destination. This is an argument in favour of the hypothesis that immigration support entrepreneurship, and the generation of knowledge into the host country of the immigrants.

As mentioned earlier, the most significant limitation of this research consists in the very coarse-grained resolution of the data concerning the bilateral immigration, that depends upon the usage of this particular dataset. Further research might compensate for it by including observations from the national statistical publications of the host countries, provided that these have a higher resolution than the one we used.

Conclusions

In this paper, we studied the relationship between openness of a society, as represented by the streams of immigration, and innovation and knowledge generation, as represented by the entrepreneurship. We have defined two research hypotheses, that comprised the role that migration has as a promotor of knowledge generation and innovation or, instead, as a promotor of wealth inequality in the hosting country. We have further provided empirical testing of these two hypotheses, on the basis of macroeconomic data associated with the variables of immigration, on one hand, and of entrepreneurship and income inequality on the other. The analysis that we have conducted shows that there is some support to the hypothesis that immigration produces wealth inequality; and, at the same time, that immigration also generates knowledge and promotes entrepreneurship in the hosting country. This research and its conclusions were developed upon a subset of the Asian country that we consider representative of the dynamics of migration and development that are taking place in the continent. If this is true, then the implication is that the two hypotheses we consider are both validated. That is to say, that as migration increases between Asian countries, this leads to simultaneously an increased generation of knowledge by the local enterprises, and an increased concentration of wealth among the top earners. The consequence for globalisation as it takes place in Asia is that, if the current migration trend continues, then the future Asia will see both a higher incidence of private entrepreneurship, and a higher concentration of wealth among the few.

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