

WHY DO IMMIGRANTS RE-MIGRATE FROM ONE AFFLUENT COUNTRY TO ANOTHER? IMMIGRANTS' OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Extended Abstract

Much research on international migration has focused on flows from poorer countries to richer ones. Yet more and more immigrants today re-migrate to North America via Western Europe and Japan. While large numbers of foreign migrants have entered Japan and the UK, many have re-migrated to third countries, such as the US, using Japan or the UK as a stepping stone to reach their final destinations. According to the Citizenship and Immigration Services, 12% of all immigrants admitted to the country in 2000 came from countries other than their countries of birth. Among Peruvians who departed from Japan in 2003, about 10% were estimated to have left the country for the US. Why do immigrants re-migrate from one affluent country to another, despite the countries' comparable economic status, and who does?

According to the interviews I have conducted with second migrants thus far, a key reason lies in the relative opportunity structure. By this they often meant the opportunity to move up the occupational and socio-economic ladder, but some also referred to the opportunity to obtain housing or to engage in transnational activities (e.g., move back and forth between countries). In this paper, then, I will seek answers by comparing immigrants' opportunity structure (and migrants' perceptions thereof) across Japan, the UK, and the US. My findings are based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data--in-depth interviews with second migrants in the US, UK, and Japan, and data from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the New Immigrant Survey (co-directed by Dr. Douglas Massey of Princeton), and national censuses.

Two hypotheses guide my on-going research. First, the "opportunity structure" presented to, and perceived by, immigrants has to do with immigrants' racial and ethnic integration and racial and ethnic diversity within societies. This hypothesis predicts secondary migration from locations where ethnicity or race is problematic. As I documented elsewhere, Japanese-Peruvians increasingly migrate from Japan to the US, not because they experience improvement in income, but because they perceive more options in the US. Although in Japan, they are looked down upon for not being Japanese

enough and resent other (non-Japanese) Peruvians for being too Peruvian, in the US, neither identity is problematic. To the extent they can claim Japanese identity, they affiliate with a high-status group in the US, and they are not expected to be very Japanese, as Japanese-Americans themselves are assimilated. And if this is not an option, they can fit into the large Latino community.

Second, I hypothesize that secondary migration involves individuals with high levels of human capital (education and skills). In a world where human capital, like financial capital, has become more mobile, owners of human capital migrate multiple times to seek the highest possible return. Thus, second migrants would be richer in human capital than those who only migrate to one destination. Whereas primary migration involves the mobility of labor, secondary migration involves the mobility of human capital. Indeed, many West Indian, South Asian, and Chinese re-migrants I have interviewed so far are highly educated professionals. West Indians, South Asians, and Latin Americans also had the legal "privilege" to enter and work in their primary destinations (UK and Japan, respectively) for colonial and ethnic ties. Consequently, many took advantage of their "privileged" status to acquire visas, permanent residency, or citizenship in Japan or the UK in order to re-migrate to the US. Paradoxically, then, secondary migration may occur among immigrants who are relatively well integrated in their primary destinations at least on legal, educational, or economic terms--in short, the type of immigrants most highly sought in these countries.

While "foreign workers' problems" in Japan and "asylum crises" in the UK tend to focus solely on immigrants coming from poor countries, it is equally important to understand why foreigners leave, and want to leave, Japan and the UK. If most second migrants are indeed highly skilled and educated, this may have important policy implication for countries like Japan and the UK that increasingly try to lure, and retain, "desirable" (i.e. educated and skilled) foreigners as its own populations are ageing and projected to shrink.