

## Mobility Transition in Mongolia

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*This paper tries to discuss and evaluate Mongolia's internal migration considering Zelinsky's (1971) theory of the mobility transition.*

### Zelinsky's mobility transition

From a theoretical viewpoint, an important extension of our understanding of the evolutionary nature of spatial behaviour has been made by Zelinsky (1971). Zelinsky described changes in mobility believed to accompany the demographic transition in industrialized societies. He proposed that there are patterned changes through time in rates of different types of population movement, such as rural to urban, urban to urban and international. He saw these changes paralleling the stages of the demographic transition.

He distinguished five phases: (a) The pre-modern traditional society (high fertility and mortality, little natural increase if any); (b) The early transitional society (rapid decline in mortality, major population growth); (c) The late transitional society (major decline in fertility, significant but decelerating natural increase); (d) The advanced society (fertility and mortality stabilized at low levels, slight population increase if any); (e) A future "super-advanced" society (continuing low fertility and mortality). The core of his argument was that each of these phases was linked to distinct forms of mobility, in a process that he coined as the mobility transition (Table 1).

Pre-modern societies (phase (a)) are characterized mainly by limited circular migration. In the early stages of the vital transition (phase (b), in particular), all forms of mobility (circular, rural colonization frontiers, internal rural-urban, international) increase. In phase (c), international migration decreases rapidly, rural-to-urban internal migration slackens, but remains at high levels and

circular movements further increase and grow in structural complexity. At the end of phase (c), the rural exodus significantly decreases, as the number of those employed in agricultural production approaches the minimum level associated with optimum economic return. In phase (d), residential mobility, urban-to-urban and circular migration become more important and, in this phase countries transform themselves from being net labour-exporting to net labour-importing countries because of mounting immigration of unskilled and semi-skilled workers from developing countries. In phase (e), most internal migration is urban-urban and residential, while immigration of unskilled labour continues.

Zelinsky's mobility transition draws attention to the fact that migration and mobility are both mechanisms and symptoms of changes taking place in societies. His proposed model of the mobility transition links levels and types of migration to demographic and development changes, but does not specify in any detail the demographic and development processes underlying these links. Zelinsky's model has attracted great interest although there have been several areas of debate, such as concerning its relevance to less developed countries, and the notion that there is only one sequence of changes for all societies (Skeldon 1990).

Table 1. Relationship between socio-economic and population dynamics

| Socio-economic dynamics   |   | Population dynamics          |  |  |
|---|---|------------------------------|--|--|
| Economic development status   | Modernisation status  | Demographic transition phase |  | Mobility transition phase  |
| Pre-industrial  | Traditional   | A:                           | High BR<br>High DR<br>Low NI           | I:<br>0 RU<br>-C   |
| Independent, dispersed settlements. Sub-regional agrarian enclaves      |   |                              |  |  |
| <i>Early transitional</i>   |   | B:                           | +BR<br>-DR<br>or "Demographic relapse" | II:<br>++RU<br>+RR<br>+E<br>-U<br>+C                             |
| Centre/periphery differentiation commences; incipient industrialisation | Initial diffusion of modernisation from innovative node in the centre                       |                              |  |  |
| <i>Late transitional</i>  |   | C:                           | -BR<br>-DR<br>-NI                      | III:<br>-RU<br>-RR<br>-E<br>+C                                   |
| Emergence of subdominant centres; major industrialisation               | Extensive diffusion of modernisation from multiple nodes; upward social mobility increasing |                              |  |  |
| Advanced industrial   | Modern  | D:                           | Low BR<br>Low DR<br>Low NI             | IV:<br>--RU<br>-- or 0 RR<br>++UU<br>+E<br>+I<br>+C              |
| Interdependent central place network; industrial maturation             | Maximum spatial diffusion; qualitative differences declining.                               |                              |  |  |
| Post-industrial   | Neo-modern  | E:                           | Low BR<br>Low DR<br>Controlled NI      | V:<br>++UU<br>-I<br>+C   |
| Industry declining as % of GNP.   | Socio-cultural convergence  |                              |  |  |
| Interregional and international linkages dominant                       |   |                              |  | Communications developments may modify migration and circulation |

- Notes:
1. Demographic transition: BR = Birth Rate/Fertility, DR = Death Rate/Mortality, NI = Natural Increase.
  2. Mobility transition: RR = Rural-rural migration (colonisation), RU = Rural-urban migration, UU = Inter/Intra-urban migration, E = Emigration, I = Immigration, C = Circulation (reciprocal movements).
  3. Direction and intensity of change: + Increasing, - Decreasing, 0 None, -- Minor, ++ Major.

Source: Zelinsky 1971

Skeldon has built upon the work of Zelinsky (1971) by being more specific about the processes in development that generate clear patterns of migration over time. He describes the mobility transition as a systematic sequence of change in the spatial patterns of mobility over time. He argues that movement shifts from local short-distance migration, to massive rural to urban migration (mainly to the large cities) but still temporary, to a situation where mobility becomes more permanent. Later, commuting becomes dominant and there is some decentralization of urban areas with migration to smaller urban areas. The mobility transition is linked to transformations in production relations.

Skeldon (1997) distinguished the following five "development tiers": the (1) old and (2) new core countries (e.g., Western Europe, North America, Japan) characterized by immigration and internal decentralization; (3) the "expanding core" (e.g., eastern China, southern Africa, eastern Europe), where we find both immigration and out-migration and internal centralization (i.e., urbanization and rural-to-urban migration); (4) the "labour frontier" (e.g., Morocco, Egypt, Turkey, Mexico, the Philippines and, until recently, Spain and Portugal), which are dominated by out-migration and internal centralization; and the so-called (5) "resource niche" (e.g. many sub-Saharan countries, parts of central

Asia and Latin America), with variable, often weaker forms of migration.

### **Mobility transition in Mongolia**

Most countries in the Asian and Pacific region are undergoing mobility transitions. These transitions stem from multiple causes and this is reflected in a variety of patterns of mobility. To understand these patterns it is necessary to locate these transitions within the demographic, social and economic changes that transformed the Asian and Pacific region in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Guest 1999).

Many countries in East and South-East Asia have completed the demographic transition – the movement from a situation of high fertility and mortality to low fertility – and have also experienced rapid export-led economic growth. The majority of countries in South and South-West Asia are in the midst of their demographic transitions and have pursued models of economic growth that have been more focused on import-substitution. North and Central Asian countries generally have relatively low levels of fertility and mortality, but they are also experiencing difficulties in terms of economic restructuring in a period of political and social transformation. Finally, many of the small island countries and territories that comprise the majority of societies in the Pacific are heavily dependent economically on the more developed countries in that sub-region (ESCAP 1998).

As most countries in the Asian and Pacific region, contemporary Mongolia is undergoing mobility transitions. Mongolia is in the midst of its demographic transitions and has pursued model of economic growth that has been more focused on import-substitution. In other hand, Mongolia is in demographic transition, witnessing a moderate, but decreasing, population growth, a sustained decline in fertility and a steep increase in the number of young adults entering the labour market. Population growth reached a peak in the late

1960s and has started to decline since then, mainly because of a sharp decrease in fertility rates from 7.2 in 1975 to 2.8 in 1995. In 2000, total fertility rate was 2.2 births per woman, but it has dropped to the below-replacement level (2.1 births per woman) by 2004 (2.0 births per woman). Population growth reached to 1.2 percent in 2004.

In the past three decades, complying with what appears to be a universal mobility trend; Mongolia's urban population has increased much faster than the rural population. In 2000, 56.6 percent of the Mongolian populations were living in urban areas. An increasing number of internal migrants have settled in the Capital city of Ulaanbaatar and other two big cities. One third of the total population was concentrated in the Capital city of Ulaanbaatar. In 2000, Ulaanbaatar was 4.36 times larger than the aggregated population of the next three largest cities. The urban population growth rate between 1969 and 2000 was 5.0 percent annually. The growth of urban population was mainly because of increase in the rural-urban migration and reclassification (but its contribution was a much lesser) of urban areas and towns. Economic growth has been a strong pull factor in rural-to-urban migration, and has intensified the population concentration in and around a couple of big cities, viz., Ulaanbaatar, Darkhan and Erdenet.

We can say that the pattern of population distribution and urbanization and social and economic changes are closely interrelated. In Table 2, the socio-economic and population dynamics in Mongolia is summarised. Industrialization, collectivisation and the transformation into a modern industrial-agricultural society within the context of a command economy were most important factors in influencing the population redistribution (i.e., urbanization) during 1969-1979. But it was mainly affected by reclassification of urban areas and high level of rural-to-urban migration during the past two decades. Administrative restriction of movement has almost been eliminated since 1992. There are a number

of laws and government orders to regulate internal migration, however, people do not follow these laws and regulations. Thus, rural-to-urban migration has significantly intensified during the last decade. Industrialization has almost stopped and privatisation has been undertaken during the same period. All these changes have a major effect on the migration, urban population growth and urbanization in Mongolia.

Table 2. Socio-economic and population dynamics in Mongolia, 1921-2004

| Socio-economic dynamics   | Population dynamics  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   | Demographic indicators   | Mobility indicators  |
| <i>Period 1921-1939</i>   |  |  |
| This period was called the stage of "general democratic transformation". The economy remained primarily agrarian and underdeveloped. The state began to develop industry based on processing of animal husbandry products and crop rising on state farms. Transportation, communications, domestic and foreign trade, and banking and finance were nationalised with Soviet assistance. Ulaanbaatar became the nation's industrial centre.  | Very high CBR and CDR. In 1930s the natural increase was below 1.0 percent and in some years, 1936, 1937, and 1939, the CDR was higher than the CBR and the rate of population growth was negative. Overall, the population growth rate was around 0.8 percent annually.   | Very minor rural-rural migration and hardly rural-urban migration.<br><br>Very negligible external migration.  |
| <i>Period 1940-1960</i>   |  |  |
| It called the "construction of the foundations of socialism". Agriculture was collectivised, and industry was diversified into mining, timber processing, and consumer goods production. Soviet aid increased, financing the construction of the trans-Mongolia railroad – the Ulaanbaatar Railroad – and various industrial projects. China also provided assistance, primarily on the form of labour for infrastructure projects (e.g. housing constructions). Although industrial development still was concentrated in Ulaanbaatar, economic decentralisation began with the completion of the Ulaanbaatar Railroad and the establishment of food processing plants in aimag centres. | CBR ranged between 35-40. CDR has declined after World War II. It was above 20 per thousand. Population growth rate was 0.3 percent during the mid of 1940s owing to wartime effects and it increased gradually to 0.9 percent during the mid 1950s. Since mid of 1950s it significantly increased and reached to 2.3 percent by the beginning of the 1960s. | Minor rural-rural migration and encouraged rural-to-urban migration.<br><br>Rural-urban migration was increasing. Migration was both voluntary and coerced.<br><br>Very negligible external migration. |

*Period 1961-1989*

It was a period of the "completion of the construction of the material and technical basis of socialism". Soviet and East European financial and technical assistance in the forms of credits, advisers, and joint ventures enabled Mongolia to modernize and to diversify industry, particularly in mining. New industrial centres were built in Darkhan, Erdenet, Baganaur, and Choibalsan, and industrial output rose significantly. Although animal husbandry stagnant, crop production increased dramatically with the development of virgin lands by state farms. Transportation and communications systems were improved, linking population and industrial centres and extending to more remote rural areas. By the mid 1980s, Mongolia began a slow transformation away from total socialism.

Since mid of 1970s fertility began to decline. By the second half of the 1970s, it declined gradually and by the end of 1980s sharply fell. Total fertility rate was 5.5 per woman during the mid 1980s. CDR was about 10-12 per thousand. By the 1990, it was 8 per thousand. Population growth rate increased to 2.9 percent annually by the mid of 1970s. Then it gradually declined and had reached to 2.5 percent in 1989. The population doubled between 1963 and 1988.

Rural-rural migration was increasing. Rural-urban migration (flows to Darkhan and Erdenet cities) was predominated and increased significantly.

Migration to Ulaanbaatar was almost prohibited, though flows from other aimags were continued.

Very negligible external migration.

*Period 1990-1999*

It was the "socio-economic transition from a central control to a market oriented one". At the end of 1989, like other former socialist nations, Mongolia began to shift from centrally planned economy to market oriented economy. The country also experienced changes in political leadership and a radical revision of its economic, social, and political ideology. Soviet union discontinued its financial support.

In the beginning of the 1990s, key industries fell behind schedule because of lack of essential parts, equipment, and raw materials. The volume of trade fell dramatically and, as a result, the country began experiencing a sharp decline both in real income and in economic activity. By 1993, the country faced a deep economic crisis characterised by inflation, unemployment, sever food shortages, and a substantial decline in the standard of living. Between 1990 and 1992, production declined dramatically. The privatisation process has taken place and within the three years of 1993-1995, 80 percent of the state owned enterprises, 90-100 percent of the trade, food public services and tourist concern, and 90 percent of the livestock have been passed to the private hands. As a result of these radical changes in the ownership, by 1994, the private sector was responsible for over 50 percent of the total production of the country.

GDP growth rate was -6.1 percent annually during the period of 1990-1993. It then increased steady, averaging an annual growth rate of less than 3.3 percent over the period of 1994-2000.

The country faced the strong natural disasters, which called dzud during the winter 1999-2000. It considerably influenced on agricultural production and the people's livelihoods, especially on herder families.

Fertility level dropped rapidly at the beginning of the 1990s. During the 20 year of 1970-1990, TFR dropped by 41.4 percent and during the 3-year period of 1990-1993, it dropped by 40.3 percent. In the beginning of 1990s, CBR was around 34 per thousand but it declined to 24 per thousand by the 2000. TFR dropped from 4.5 in 1990 to 2.2 per woman in 2000.

Mortality level also declined but very steady. CDR was 8.6 per thousand in 1990; it declined to 6.5 per thousand in 2000.

Population growth rate was 1.4 percent annually during 1990-1999.

Initially, rural-rural and urban-rural migrations were intensified and major.

Since the late 1990s, rural-urban, and intra-urban migrations increased considerably and began to predominate.

External migration intensified and increased steadily.

*Period 2000 to the present*

By the beginning of 2000, macroeconomic indicators have improved substantially. The private sector contributes over 75 percent of the country's GDP. The country's real GDP growth reached to 10.6 percent in 2004. There is the extraordinary expansion in the mining sector and robust expansions in the services sector, including transport and construction. Transportations and communications between urban and rural areas have been extended significantly. Regional disparities are more widened.

CBR was 21.6 per thousand and CDR was 6.4 per thousand in 2005. During the 2000-2005, CBR fluctuated around 20-21 per thousand and CDR around 6.4-6.5 per thousand as well.

Rate of the population growth stabilised about 1.4 percent annum.

Rural-urban migration was a major. Particularly, flows to Ulaanbaatar are considerably increased.

Emigration is also increased.

From the above, one can say that the case of Mongolia seems generally to conform to transitional migration theory, which predicts that social and economic development initially tends to be associated with increasing internal and international out-migration. Internal migration increases in the early phases of social and economic development, since more people aspire and can afford to migrate. This also seems to apply at the regional and intra-regional levels. Drawing on Zelinsky's (1971) vital transition, Mongolia passed from phase of

the early transitional society to phase of the late transitional society in the early 1970s.

Taking into account demographic and economic determinants and drawing on insights from Skeldon's (1997) regionalisation (or development tiers), it is likely that Mongolia seems to come between the labour frontier, which is dominated by out-migration and internal centralization and resource niche, with variable, often-weaker forms of migration.

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