

RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION: EVIDENCE OF I-LAN COUNTY RESIDENTS

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In this study 2 key interrelated issues were addressed: the main reasons for out-migration occurring in I-Lan county and the characteristics of out-migrants from I-Lan County to Taipei City. The research design and strategy for data collection employed in this study incorporated 2 representative sample surveys, the first comprising 200 out-migrants from I-Lan County, and the second 100 stayers who remained in I-Lan County. It was found that increasing income is not the main reason behind migration.

Keywords: migration process, I-Lan County, Taipei City, rural to urban migration.

Classical theories developed by researchers such as Adam Smith and Karl Marx outline a model of migration based on economic push and pull factors. Push factors include lack of access to land, lack of employment and under-employment, low wages, underutilized land, drought, famine, and population increases. Pull factors comprise attractive urban alternatives for the rural dwellers, such as higher wages and better living conditions. Neoclassical theorists such as Todaro (1976, 1977) regard motivation for rural-urban migration as a function of two variables: the difference in real income between rural and urban areas, and the probability of obtaining a better-paid job in the city; this is because they believe that the rural agricultural sector is characterized by zero or very low productivity. Researchers such as Mortuza (1992) and Li (1996) propose that the most important reasons for moving to a city are underemployment and low income in rural areas, while others, such as Anzorena and Poussard (1985), Scott and Litchfield (1994), and

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Burgess, Carmoda, and Kolstee (1997), regard rural poverty as the main reason for leaving rural areas.

In short, both classical and neoclassical migration theorists focus on economic factors. However, both types of theory are criticized, by researchers such as Sjaastad (1962), McGee (1977), Danesh (1987), Williamson (1988), Castles and Miller (1998), Anderson, Domosh, Thrift, and Pile (2003), and Stalp (2006), for being incomplete explanations of the complex migration phenomenon. Theorists explaining the neoclassical viewpoint describe how social, political, cultural, religious, and traditional factors and migrants' links with their destination, also play a very important and decisive role. Moreover, proponents of classical and neoclassical migration theories cannot effectively explain migration in developed countries. This is because, firstly, the proponents of the two types of theory have focused only on geographic wage and price differentials – between the destination and origin – as the underlying forces in the migration process. Such factors cannot be used to explain the process of migration in developed countries, where job transfers and other reasons unrelated to the search for a higher income, cause the majority of population movements. In these cases, migrants “are not responding to geographic salary differentials, but to institutionalized organizational forces” (see also Johnson & Salt, 1990, p. 29; Kang, 1994). In other words, migrants do not respond to labor market demands and they are professional, noncompeting groups (Johnson & Salt, 1990).

Secondly, the main motivation for migration within developed countries is job transfers and other reasons not related to the search for a higher income. This differs from developing countries, where the majority of migrants move in search of a higher income as a result of push and pull factors in both places of destination and origin. In other words, it is reasonable to say that the motivation for migration in developed countries is not strongly influenced, not by economic factors or economic necessity, but rather by migrants' responses to other factors. This is the biggest difference in comparison with developing countries, where the motivation for migration is often strongly influenced by economic necessity.

There are two main reasons for this. The first is that the differences in wages and living conditions between rural and urban areas of developed countries have become marginal or insignificant. At the same time, the populations of both the places of origin (rural) and destination (urban) have similar access to services and facilities that are only available in urban areas in developing countries. Therefore, migration from rural to urban areas is unlikely to be motivated by the search for a higher income or better living conditions, since urban areas and especially large metropolitan areas are often associated with heavy traffic, air pollution, and noise.

Even though the urban wage is slightly higher than the rural equivalent, as mentioned above, most migrants do not move in response to wage differentials,

since the difference is not significant and other factors need to be considered. As Johnson and Salt (1990, p. 68) point out, “the psychological cost of leaving a home, environment, and friends can never be compensated for easily”. Similar observations can be found in the work of Williams, Burton, and Jenks (2001), Anderson et al. (2003), and Hwang (2003). In other words, financial gain is countered by the loss of other factors resulting from migration.

The second factor is the differences between the economic structures in developed and developing countries. The economic structure of developed countries is dominated by service and technology-intensive industries in both rural and urban areas, while in developing countries it is dominated by agriculture and labor-intensive manufacturing industries, which are concentrated in urban areas. Therefore, most rural-urban migrants in developed countries are not farmers, but skilled and educated residents who migrate as a result of economic changes in their place of origin. They move to urban areas for jobs that suit their skills and level of education, for example migration from a mining town to a town with service industries.

THE CASE STUDY OF MIGRATION FROM I-LAN COUNTY TO TAIPEI CITY

The design for this research and the strategy for data collection consisted of 200 interviews with a representative sample of out-migrants from I-Lan County to Taipei, 100 interviews with 100 residents of I-Lan County who were not planning to migrate to Taipei (stayers), and finally in-depth interviews with 10 of the “stayer” group.

In any attempt to compare one country with another there are challenges, including the fact that each country has its own unique demographic population distribution, political, social, cultural, and religious structures, economic development distribution, and historical background. In addition, migration patterns could vary from one part of a country to another, due to differences in economic development distribution, ethnic population distribution, and the other factors mentioned above. This study is no exception. While it could represent other counties with similar characteristics, such as Ping-Tung and Hua-Lien counties, it might be invalid in the future because of changes in Taiwan’s economic structure, population growth, the distribution of development, and other unexpected factors, such as possible conflict with Communist Mainland China, which could result in war.

However, there appears to be a dichotomy of migrants’ motivation between developed and developing countries, which could be used as a basis for comparison. These two main motivations for migration can be classified into two categories. Firstly, economic necessity, such as the search for a higher income

or an escape from poverty. Secondly, individual feelings or responses to other factors; in this case the individual could continue to make a living or live a reasonable life even without migrating to a new place. This could be influenced by migrating to obtain better or higher education, job transfers, better living conditions (refers to services and facilities), more skilled or specialized jobs, or to expand businesses.

The socioeconomic characteristics of individual migrants belonging to these two categories vary accordingly. Most, though not all, migrants in developing countries that move to urban areas due to economic necessity are poor peasants. In contrast, most migrants in developed countries that migrate for other reasons are highly educated or skilled and not poor. These are the main, comparable points in this study, from which I can draw conclusions, as discussed below.



Figure 1: Map of Taiwan. Source: www.taiwan-map.com

The reasons for and pattern of migration from I-Lan County to Taipei (as shown in Figure 1) were found to be significantly different from those of the push-pull theory in relation to developing countries. This is mainly because Taiwan differs from most developing countries in terms of economic structure

(relatively well distributed) and the contrast between rural and urban areas (less significant, especially in terms of wages and basic amenities and services such as schools, access to clean water, electricity, and sewage, which most of the population has access to). In addition, the findings of this case study suggest that the reasons for migration from I-Lan to Taipei are similar to those in many developed countries. The main motivations for migration from I-Lan County to Taipei City are noneconomic necessity reasons, such as further education, job transfers, and more specialized jobs.

Moreover, the findings also demonstrate a difference between the reasons for migration in I-Lan County and the patterns indicated in previous studies of other parts of Taiwan. For example, researchers such as Chiang (1983) in San-Chung City, and Wang (1973), Liao (1985), Chang (1991), and O'Sullivan (2000), found that economic and/or employment reasons are the most significant factors for migrants moving to the city. This is not applicable to I-Lan. Similarly, Pan (1988) found that in Taichung City, environmental reasons were the most commonly cited.

On the other hand, good living conditions in I-Lan County, such as a pleasant environment, constituted a very important pull factor for stayer respondents in this study to continue to live in the county, a reason cited by 70% of the stayer respondents in the 10 in-depth interviews conducted for this research. This is another similarity with developed countries, where migration – as well as the decision to stay – is not due to economic necessity, but other factors, including the living environment. Hence, push factors such as the lack of land, population increases, drought, famine, or zero or very low productivity in the rural areas – as found in most developing countries – do not apply to I-Lan County.

Therefore, when comparing studies of San-Chung City and Taichung City with this study it seems that in Taiwan the main reasons for migrating from rural areas to cities varies from one place to another (although the findings of the San-Chung and Taichung studies might now be invalid as they were conducted in the 1980s). In other words, it depends on where migrants come from (the place of origin) and where they are heading (the destination). For example, in the case of I-Lan County migrants would not move to Taipei for a better environment, as I-Lan County is, itself, a good place to live. Migrants move to the city for specific reasons, as mentioned above, such as the lack of universities, specialized jobs, or certain other types of employment for them in the place of origin – I-Lan County.

The lack of higher educational facilities is the main reason for out-migration in I-Lan County. This leads to a lack of skilled and professional workers in the county. As a result, I-Lan fails to attract specialized industries. This leads to the out-migration of the area's few skilled and highly educated residents, trained outside the county, or a failure to lure these residents to return to work in the county after completion of their education/training in the large cities (in this

case study, student migrants who did not return to I-Lan County). This is further supported by findings outlined below, that I-Lan to Taipei migrants are better educated, wealthier, and more skilled compared to the stayers.

My findings indicate that the propensity to migrate is greatest not among the lowest stratum (in terms of economic and job status), but among those from the average or above average strata. Nine out of ten (or 90%) pre-migrant respondents' main occupations are not linked to agriculture, yet 62.2% are landowners. The majority of them also have larger holdings than the stayers. By contrast, 20% of stayer respondents are agricultural laborers, but only 36% of them own land. Additionally, the stayers are poorer than the pre-migrants in terms of house ownership, as only 88% of them own houses compared with 95.5% of migrants. Thus, the socioeconomic characteristics usually found in migrants in developing countries are different from those of the migrants in this case study. This is because Taiwan's economic structure is closer to that of developed countries, especially where the number of the people working in the agricultural sector is minimal compared with those working in other sectors, even in rural areas such as I-Lan County.

My findings also support the theory that the propensity to migrate is greatest among those who are in average or above average groups (in terms of economic and job status) in that migrants' families do not rely on an income from them during the process of migration. This is because the majority of migrants (79%) do not send remittances to their villages; in contrast, the majority of migrants (53.4%) receive support (in monetary terms) from their families in the villages. Lastly, the majority of migrants remain alone in the city, as their families are not dependent on them and they, therefore, do not need to join migrants in Taipei.

My findings can be explained by two factors. Firstly, most migrants (61%) knew about job opportunities (including wages and type of job) in the city before their migration. Therefore, farmers are unlikely to migrate to the city in search of a higher income (although this is not the case in this study) since they know that they lack the skills, required there for a better paid job. Also, only those who are better educated and who know they can get a better job that suits their education and skills in the city will migrate. Furthermore, most of the poor population¹ of I-Lan is not in the same desperate position as the poor in many developing countries, where migration is the only option for survival.

¹ It is difficult to locate data on the topic of the poor in Taiwan as a whole, and of I-Lan County in particular. However, according to information gathered by this researcher, including personal communication with Mrs. Cheng (a member of I-Lan County's Parliament) and Drs. Su and Cheng, the term *poor* is applied to *low-income families who lack amenities such as cars and other relatively luxurious private goods/facilities*. In this case, the poor population is not desperate in terms of making a living.

Secondly, since the income level gap between low-skilled workers in Taipei and farmers in I-Lan is small, migrants have to consider the cost of living in the city, which is much higher than in I-Lan County, as well as the cost of losing contact with relatives, friends, and place of birth. The latter, in accordance with the Confucian tradition, is regarded as a very important social bond, especially by the rural population, such as those in I-Lan County. Thus, earning a little extra in Taipei will not compensate low-skilled migrants for the other losses resulting from the move. Therefore, people will not easily consider leaving their home area if the situation is not desperate, which the findings of this study indicate it is not. Hence, it is unlikely that low-skilled farmers will migrate for an insignificant gain, when compared to the losses they would incur they ceased living on their ancestral land.

In short, for the majority of I-Lan's population the main motivations for migration to Taipei do not include the search for a higher income. However, this is not a straightforward case that can be precisely concluded by arguing that the motivation for migration in this case study is exactly the same as that in developed countries. On the one hand, the motivation for migration from I-Lan County concurs with that of developed countries in the broad sense that it is not a result of economic necessity. On the other hand, the motivations of the lack of higher educational facilities, other amenities and facilities such as a library or museum, and specialized job opportunities, which lead to the out-migration of I-Lan County population, are similar to what is found in developing countries.

This is due to the fact that, despite the increase in the income of I-Lan's population during the last three decades, the development of community services and educational facilities in rural areas has been slow, and these areas cannot cope with the increased demand for better services. For example, I-Lan County has no university or equivalent educational institution, no modern hospital (with advanced technology such as hospitals in Taipei), and an inadequate number of hi-tech industries and services. Therefore, its own students, as well as its better educated and skilled residents, have to find such services and jobs elsewhere, in urban areas such as Taipei.

In the 10 in-depth interviews, I found that the lack of these facilities and services in I-Lan County are partly due to the low level of education in the local population, as well as their conservative ideas, which make them slow to adopt modern ideas about development. However, the main reason is the lack of political will among the leaders of both the county and of Taiwan province, who are responsible for the county's development. Further studies of the government policies regulating the development program for I-Lan county, as well as the participation of I-Lan's population in the development process, are needed in order to understand this factor further.

What I have found supports other researchers' findings on the point that migration is selective by age, gender, marital status, education, and wealth. I-Lan County migrants tend to be younger, male, single, better educated and skilled, and wealthier compared to the stayers. However, the proposition made by many previous scholars, including Todaro (1977) and Mortuza (1992), that migrants tend to have a higher incidence unemployment in urban markets, is not true in the case of I-Lan County. The findings gained in this study show that nearly 100% of migrants found jobs within one month (71% within one week and only 3% after more than one month) of their arrival in Taipei, and none were unemployed at the time of the interview.

Moreover, the findings on the basis of employment and job opportunities show that the positions in Taipei City are secure, as 79.3% of the respondents' first jobs were paid on a monthly basis, indicating that they were in full-time employment. In addition, more than one third of the respondents were still in their first job at the time of the interview. The duration of the job-search was also short, with less than one week being the most common length of time spent searching for a first job, accounting for more than 70% of migrant respondents.

Migrants' occupations in the pre-migration period included students, employees in government, finance, insurance, and business services, laborers in manufacturing, and semi-skilled workers. The post-migratory occupational composition indicates that first jobs in the urban labor market are often as semi-skilled laborers (or in the informal sector), but that job status improves after a period of residence in Taipei City.

What I have found seems to concur with the fact that Taiwan, as a whole, has experienced a labor shortage since the 1970s. Thus, it is understandable that the level of unemployment is low, as some migrants were offered a job before migration (27%), the majority of those who did not have job offers were employed within one month of moving to Taipei city (71%), and all were employed in Taipei at the time of the interview (100%). This is further confirmed by the fact that most migrants did not spend more than a week searching for a job in the city. Such a short period spent searching for a job is also partly due to the fact that most migrants had gathered a great deal of information about the city, and their prospects of finding work, from visits to the city before their migration. They were also helped by having contact with relatives, friends, and other types of urban connections, such as associations. Even those who did not have a job offer before migration had a very clear idea of what job they would get in Taipei City.

It was also found that, like most of the arguments made by the researchers outlined in the literature review, migrants are young, single, mostly male, and better educated and skilled than the stayers. However, the most significant group in this study comprised migrants aged 16 to 25, which is an even younger group

than in many previous empirical studies. For example, Chiang (1983) discovered that migrants in San-Chung City, Taiwan, were predominantly aged 25 to 29, and Pan (1988) found, in the case of Taichung City, Taiwan, that migrants aged 25 to 34 were the most significant group.

The fact that most I-Lan to Taipei migrants are aged between 16 and 25, and are not married is inconsistent with the reasons for out-migration from the county. The majority of migrants move out of I-Lan County in search of higher education in Taipei city, since I-Lan lacks this facility. Although further study is needed in the case of migrants from I-Lan County, the dominance of men is partly because Confucianism still influences the population of Taiwan. This is particularly true of rural areas such as I-Lan County, where the higher education of sons is seen as a priority over that of daughters. In addition, parents will live with their sons in their old age, as prescribed by Confucian tradition. Therefore, providing higher education for sons is an investment, as the sons, having secured a better job and better income as a result of their higher qualifications, will be able to take better care of their elderly parents.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that I-Lan to Taipei migration is a consequence of the continued failure to provide I-Lan County's population with adequate higher educational facilities and a market for specialized labor. It is suggested that migration can only be stopped or seriously slowed down (even though it is doubtful that such an attempt will be economical or necessary) by making rural areas more attractive, by providing all the facilities, services, and job opportunities that are normally available in urban areas. This is a necessary but very difficult and expensive task.

The most important finding in this study is that people with different backgrounds (in terms of age, marital status, and gender) have different reasons for leaving I-Lan County. In other words, the decision to move or to stay is different for each case, and varies accordingly. For example, the young, single, female respondents of I-Lan County left for better education in Taipei. However, when these young, single, female respondents or their families initially made the decision to leave I-Lan County they intended to leave only temporarily, and there was a high possibility of them returning after the completion of their studies in Taipei City. Thus, at that early stage it was not migration, but mobility or commuting in the sense that these students visited their I-Lan homes or families once or twice a year, or even more often.

This group did not return to I-Lan County after completing their education. Instead, they found satisfactory jobs in Taipei and settled there permanently. Although they remain in contact with relatives in I-Lan County, they are formally residents of Taipei since they no longer own property in I-Lan and pay fewer

visits to I-Lan County than when they were studying. It is at this final stage that these students' movement from I-Lan to Taipei can be considered migration. In short, results gained in this study indicate that in the case of migration from I-Lan County to Taipei City, for young individuals who migrated for educational reasons, the process of leaving the county evolved from commuting or mobility to migration. In other words, the initial decision was not to migrate but only to commute, or oscillate to improve their education. However, after their studies were completed, they found satisfactory jobs in Taipei, which made them settle in the city permanently, instead of returning to the county, thereby completing the process of migration.

This situation also applies to those who left I-Lan County for better employment opportunities. During the first stage, the move was not seen as migration but as commuting or mobility. Only once they were assured of economic survival in Taipei and had settled there permanently did the process of leaving I-Lan County become a complete migration process. The evolution of this process, however, took a shorter time to complete than to the students. It took anything from six months to two years to complete the process of migration when migrants brought their whole family with them to settle in Taipei City (in the case of those whose families came to join them in the city).

Although I-Lan seems to lack some of the services and facilities needed to keep its population from out-migrating, as mentioned before, further studies on the impact of out-migration on I-Lan county's economy are needed to conclude whether the effect is significant or not. This is because most of the out-migrants from I-Lan County did not leave solely in search of better job opportunities, but also for other reasons, including higher or better education. While, on the one hand, I-Lan County should be better equipped with the services and facilities required by its increasingly wealthy population, on the other hand, it is not economically sound to invest in costly facilities and services for a relatively small number of potential consumers. In other words, cost benefit analysis would allow for evaluation of the cost of installing the services and facilities and the benefit of such services to the population and economy. Yet, it is not an easy task since the motivation for migration is rather complex. For example, even if there was a university in I-Lan County, people might still migrate to Taipei if they want to attend a better university.

Further study on why most of these migrants decide to migrate, instead of commute, between Taipei and I-Lan County (I assume that the main reason is the time it takes to commute from I-Lan to Taipei – two and a half hours or longer), could be informative. Such a study should be in the form of qualitative or in-depth interview analysis, in order gain a deeper insight into the issues surrounding decision-making. The target group for the study should include all population strata, but, perhaps more importantly, should include student migrants

who choose not to return to I-Lan County after completing their studies in the city.

Such a study could be used to answer many questions, such as: “What lies behind the migrants’ decision to abandon their birthplace, which is uncommon in traditional Chinese or Taiwanese society?” Or, “Have the Chinese or Taiwanese traditions of being close to one’s birthplace and kin been less influential than other factors, such as the attractiveness of the urban lifestyle for the younger generation?”

Further studies in the form of in-depth interviews or qualitative analyses of how migrants decided on Taipei and not other cities as the destination that would meet their expectations for education, job opportunities, and a satisfactory urban lifestyle, could also produce interesting results. The study would, therefore, need to include all strata of the population, including those who migrate for education, job opportunities, and an urban lifestyle. Who makes the decision to migrate, and how such a decision is reached among the family members should also be considered.

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