From workers to Entrepreneurs:
The Development of Bangladeshi Migrant Businesses in East Asia

Md Mizanur Rahman
National University of Singapore
Email: rm.mizanur@yahoo.com and mizan@nus.edu.sg
Introduction

- The emergence of migrant businesses has been a part of the urban landscape in some relatively developed countries of East and Southeast Asia in recent decades.

- Migrant businesses such as *Halal* food outlets, Indian restaurants, ethnic retail stores, travel agencies, used car businesses, and others owned and operated by South Asian migrant entrepreneurs have developed.

- While the outcomes of international migration have affected many aspects of the lives of immigrants and their receiving societies, one of the visible but often neglected outcomes of international migration in Asia is the development of immigrant-run businesses.
Labour Migration Programs in East Asia

- Trainee Program
- Work permit

However, a large number of Bangladeshi migrants overstayed their visas and became irregular migrants.
Research Questions

- Who are these migrant entrepreneurs?
- How do migrants circumvent restrictions imposed on them?
- What role does innovation play in migrant businesses?
- Do we need to go beyond transnational entrepreneurship to understand current immigrant businesses?
Conducting Research on Migrant Entrepreneurship in Asia

Participant observations, in-depth and small focus group interviews with migrant entrepreneurs, salesmen, migrant workers and other community members in South Korea and Japan
Migrant Entrepreneurship: Under conditions of temporary migration

- I point to the fact that the making of migrant entrepreneurship is a complex process and it demands an appreciation of the globalization of markets.

- Hence, while I accept that cultural circumstances conducive to migrant entrepreneurship and opportunity structure provide the necessary conditions to facilitate migrant businesses in the host country,

- I also maintain that innovative practices and transnational and multinational linkages are critical to the understanding of migrant entrepreneurship in Asia.
Bangladeshi Migrant Businesses: Japan and South Korea

- Halal Food Trade
- Calling Card Trade
- Used Car Trade
- Ethnic Restaurants
- Other Businesses
BATICROM FOODS
TEL 03-5943-5661 03-3963-6636 FAX 03-5943-5662
HALAL FOODS
BANGLADESH
AFRICAN INDIA INDONESIA KOREA MALAYSIA
MYANMAR PAKISTAN PHILIPPINE THAILAND
世界各国食材 [WORLD FOODS] ● TELEPHONE CARD 有ります
Indian Restaurant & Bar
Tetulia
テトゥリア TEL:03(3916)3669
Pathways to Entrepreneurship

- Immigration Policy
- Motivation for Migration
- Strategies embedded in the migration process
Stumbling Block to Migrant Entrepreneurship in East Asia

Immigration Policy

How do migrants Circumvent it?
Why do migrants want to change their immigration status?

- ‘The cycle of remigration’
- Strategies embedded in the migration process
Innovation

Migrant Businesses and Innovative Practices in East Asia
Innovation

Innovation is the attempt to make one’s business as dissimilar as possible from one’s competitors

(Engelen, 2001:212)
Innovative Practices

- Product Innovation
- Sales
- Distribution
Product Innovation

- Introducing New Products
- Trading in local products
- Hiring skilled ethnic personnel
Introducing New Products

- Introducing Home Products
- Introducing Regional Products

Ethnic groceries are indeed multiethnic in both products and clienteles
Trading in Non-ethnic Products

- Calling cards, used cars and tires, Japanese silks and electronics (computers), Japanese herbals
Hiring skilled ethnic personnel

- Hiring Cooks from South Asia
- Hiring IT skilled professionals from South Asia
Sales and Distribution

- Spatial Strategies
- Temporal Strategies
Spatial Strategies

Spatial Strategies involve attempts to relocate firms to more rewarding markets.
Spatial Strategies

- Restaurant businesses in the case of internal market

- Used car, herbal, used tires, silks, electronic products in the case of international market
Temporal Strategies

- Temporal strategies refer to modifying selling or production hours
- However, due to changes in the modality of sales and distribution, temporal strategies have a minimum impact in the retail business
Unique Features of Migrant Businesses in East Asia

- Online shopping
- Tele-sales
- Pay-upon-delivery
Bangladeshi Migrant Businesses: Transnational or Multinational?

- It is transnational in the transactions of *halal* food, ethnic restaurants and apparel, and used tyres; and multinational in the transactions of used cars, electronic accessories, calling cards, and Japanese herbal products.
Thank you