

Patterns of migration in Mongolia during 1918–1990

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Abstract: This paper examines the patterns of population distribution and migration in Mongolia during 1918–1990. Population is unevenly spread on the Mongolian territory, indicating its dual character of an urban population as well as a nomadic population relying on livestock. The overall migration and population distribution scenario dramatically changed due to the economic and development policies of the Government since 1930s. A large part of the migration process is towards the urban centers and a large part of the population growth in urban areas is due to migration. With regard to internal migration, rural-to-urban movements have been predominant. One major cause of migration was of taking of the ownership of cattle by the state. Resulting on some of herders adopting other occupation by migrating to urban areas. This way in short span of 8 years, urban population increased 3 times, whereas rural population increases only 10 percent. Three factors have been significant in Mongolia's urbanization: (1) industrialization policy, which created industrial complexes in existing urban locations and at new sites; (2) marginal increases in rural production that could not absorb the growing rural population; and (3) administrative channeling of job movement to urban areas where labor resources were needed. The international migration was almost negligent prior to 1990.

Keywords: population distribution, migration, urbanization, Mongolia

Mongolia is located on the Northern part of Central Asia bordering with Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. The total size of the territory is 1567 thousand square kilometers. Until the beginning of XX century Mongolia had the features of a colonial economy. Between 1921 and 1990 for about 70 years, there was an economic system with a socialist label and central planning, indispensable characteristics of a command economy.

Since 1990 Mongolia shifted to a market oriented economy privatizing the state owned ventures, within a multiparty system of government. During this transitional process, Mongolian economy suffered a serious set back, as it lost its Soviet based foreign aid and external trade. The economic hardships on families became the main reason for disintegration of the families causing many difficulties for females, increasing the street children, destitution, crimes, school dropouts, mortality, morbidity, rural-urban migration and urbanization. Despite these difficulties, before the transitional period to a market economy, Mongolia made significant progress in improving the living standards, quality of life, education and public health.

According to the 2000 population and housing census, the resident population of Mongolia stood at 2373.5 thousand, with 56.6 per cent of the population residing in the urban areas and the remaining 43.4 per cent in the rural areas.

In 2000, Mongolia's HDI (Human Development Index) is 0.628. Average life expectancy at birth is 67 years, which is higher than countries of similar GDP levels. Per

capita GDP is 264.6 thousand tugriks (at 1995 prices). About 33.4 percent of Mongolia's GDP is from agriculture, 19.7 percent from manufacturing, and 32.9 percent from services. Employment is divided as follows: agriculture 48.6 percent, manufacturing 14.1 percent, and services 37.3 percent.

Table 1. Population and population density of aimag and the Capital, 1989

Aimag, the Capital	'000	%	Person/km ²
Mongolia	2044.0	100.0	1.3
Central			
Arkhangai	84.5	4.1	1.5
Bulgan	51.9	2.5	1.1
Uverkhangai	96.5	4.7	1.5
Selenge	87.0	4.3	2.1
Tuv	100.1	4.9	1.4
Khuvsgul	101.8	5.0	1.0
Darkhan-Uul	85.7	4.2	26.1
Orkhon	56.1	2.7	66.8
East			
Dornod	81.1	4.0	0.7
Sukhbaatar	50.8	2.5	0.6
Khentii	73.8	3.6	0.9
West			
Bayan-Ulgii	90.9	4.4	2.0
Bayankhongor	74.6	3.6	0.6
Gobi-Altai	62.8	3.1	0.4
Zavkhan	88.5	4.3	1.1
Uvs	84.0	4.1	1.2
Khovd	76.6	3.7	1.0
South			
Dornogobi	57.1	2.8	0.5
Dundgobi	49.3	2.4	0.7
Umnugobi	42.4	2.1	0.3
Gobisumber	—	—	—
Ulaanbaatar	548.4	26.8	116.7

Source: "2000 Population and Housing Census: The main results", NSO, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia 2001

Mongolia is one of the countries with the lowest population density in the world. The population density increased from 0.4 in 1918 to 1.3 in 1989. Mongolia had a total population of 2044.0 thousand in 1989; with an area of 1564.1 thousand square kilometers. The distribution of population varies with topography. The territory is divided into three natural and weather zones. 35 percent of the territory is forest plain, and 20 percent is plain, and 40 percent is Gobi desert. The Central and West regions (forest plain zone) of Mongolia have an area of 918.12 thousand kilometers or 58.7 percent of the total. It contained 55.6 percent of the total population. The East region (plain zone), with 18.3 percent of the area, had 10.1 percent of the total population. The South (Gobi desert zone) has 22.7 percent of the area but had only 7.3 percent of the total population. Ulaanbaatar in the forest plain zone has only 4.7 square kilometers or 0.3 percent of the total area but

contained approximately 30 percent of the total population. By Mongolian standards capital city of Ulaanbaatar has an extremely high population density. The population density of Ulaanbaatar is 116.7 persons per square kilometer. Generally, the Central and West regions of Mongolia had higher densities than the South and East regions.

According to 1918 census 15–20 per cent of the total population lived in urban areas and 80 per cent in rural areas. Establishment of numerous plants and organizations in Ulaanbaatar and Altanbulag and introduction of crop farming in the valleys of Haraa and Yuruu rivers dramatically accelerated the internal migration of population. During 1930–1945 cooperatives and communes were set up en mass, monks were made free from tax and military services and properties of the higher cast of monks and the nobles were confiscated. As a consequence many nobles and laymen lost their livestock and had to move to the urban areas. This, no doubt, contributed to significant increase in the urban population.

Industrialization, building of railroads and expanding of crop industry since 1950s had caused a visible change in the population's resettlement. Thousands of people from all corners of the country moved to and settled in newly established towns and small villages along the railroad. Aimag centers grew larger. Small and medium towns and soums with several thousand inhabitants were established. All of them developed into education, trade and administration centers.

After the arrangement and fixing of the basic herd structure in the agriculture sector, the labour became an excess and available for other sectors. The result is a major change in the population distribution. Thus, migration of the rural people to urban areas dramatically rose which in turn caused a deficiency in the labour resource in the animal husbandry in the mid 1960s. The need emerged again to regulate the internal migration of the population. From 1956–1969 the urban population increased three times while the rural population grew only by 10 per cent. And in the mid of 1970s the urban population exceeded the rural population.

Table 2. Urban and Rural population, 1956–1989

Year	Total ('000)	Urban ('000)	Rural ('000)	Percentage (%)	
				Urban	Rural
1956	845.5	183.0	662.5	21.6	78.4
1963	1017.1	408.8	608.3	40.2	59.8
1969	1197.6	537.4	670.2	44.0	56.0
1979	1595.0	817.0	778.0	51.2	48.8
1989	2044.0	1166.1	877.9	57.0	43.0

Source: "Population of Mongolia", NSO, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia 1994

The urbanization has also been rapid and substantial in Mongolia. According to the 1956 census, Mongolia's urban population constituted 21.6 per cent of the total population. Ulaanbaatar, the capital, was the only city with a population larger than 50,000 inhabitants. The 1963 census recorded 23 urban centers and the total population of these centers was 408.8 thousand or approximately 40 percent of the total population.

In 1973, the Mongolian Government's solution defined urban areas as having a minimum population of 6000 and included 22 such localities. That solution defined urban

areas on the basis of the location of schools, government offices, industries, and cultural centers, legal and marketing facilities. During 1976–1989, urban classification was changed 2–3 times. According to the 1989 census, 57.0 per cent of the population is urban and, in addition to the capital, two more cities have more than 50,000 inhabitants. In 1989, the number of cities was reached to 27 and the minimum population size for a city was changed to 10,000 inhabitants. By the beginning of 1990, the cities as having a population of 15,000–30,000 have about 25 percent of the total urban population. Almost 50 percent of the total urban population lives in Capital city, Ulaanbaatar.

The urban population growth rate between 1969 and 1989 was 5.8 percent annually. The growth of urban population was mainly because of increase in the rural-urban migration and reclassification of urban areas and towns. About 60 percent of the country's population living in urban areas, Mongolia is relatively more urbanized than even several developing countries. In fact, Mongolia ranked 28th in terms of level of urbanization or percentage of urban to total population amongst low-income countries, and 60th middle income countries.

International migration in the past has been negligible in Mongolia. In 1918, more than half of the people living in urban areas were Chinese tradesmen and military, Tibetan monks, Russian merchants and emigrants. But international migration saw a considerable change in the end of 1920s. Thousands of buriards migrated from the north neighboring country escaping turbulence caused by the social and economic changes there. Kazaks also moved in. The border posts along the northern border were discharged hence forcing Mongolians to move deeper in the territory. During 1910–1950, immigrants who were born in abroad, constituted 5–6 percent of the total population of Mongolia. But it decreased to 1.6 percent of the total population in 1989.

During 1969–1989, there was only some temporary immigration on a contractual basis with countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) to supplement labor resources. Emigration was limited to temporary residence of Mongolian students in countries of the CMEA. Nevertheless, it seems that this situation may change in the future. The new administration has not yet issued a formal migration policy, but some changes can be observed since 1990. To begin with, the severe restrictions placed on travel abroad for Mongolian citizens have been relaxed and, because of the effects on employment of the economic crisis, there is not as much concern as previously with respect to eventual labor shortages as a result of emigration. This change of attitude is reflected in the migration of a large number of Mongolian citizens of Kazakh descent to the Republic of Kazakhstan. It is estimated that during 1990, some 12,000 Kazakhs left Mongolia. Unfortunately, exact figures are not available.

Summary

This paper examines the patterns of population distribution and migration in Mongolia during 1918–1990. The findings of this paper may be summarized as follows:

- The overall population distribution and migration scenario dramatically changed due to economic and development policies of the government since 1930s.
- The country's population is an unevenly spread on the territory. The Central and West regions of Mongolia had higher densities than the South and East regions. Capital city of Ulaanbaatar has an extremely high population density.

- The migration from rural to urban areas was predominant. One major cause of migration was of taking of the ownership of cattle by the state. Resulting in some of herders adopting other occupation by migrating to urban areas. On the same time the Government of Mongolia decided to develop virgin land into agriculturally sound areas. Industrialization is another factor, which contributed towards migration of people from rural to urban.
- During the past 40 years, urbanization was intensive in Mongolia. The urban population increased 3 times, whereas rural population increases only 10 percent during 1956–1989. The urban population annual growth rate (3.5%) is recorded to be more than the annual population growth rate (1.8%) in 1989.
- The international migration was almost negligent prior to 1990.

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PROSTOROVÉ USPOŘÁDÁNÍ MIGRACÍ V MONGOLSKU V LETECH 1918–1990

Résumé

Tento článek se zabývá trendy rozmístění populace a směru migrací na území Mongolska v letech 1918–1990. Obyvatelstvo v Mongolsku je nerovnoměrně rozmístěno, vykazuje značné rozdíly mezi městskou populací a populací nomádů závislých na chovu dobytka. Velká většina migrací směřuje do center měst a většina početního růstu měst tak připadá na pozitivní migrační saldo.

Ve vnitřní migraci tedy zcela jasně převládá pohyb ve směru vesnice-město. Tři faktory jsou pro urbanizaci v Mongolsku podstatné: 1. Politika industrializace, která vytvořila průmyslové komplexy v již existujících městských lokalitách, nebo v nově vytvořených městech. 2. Minimální růst produkce zemědělského sektoru, který nemůže uživit stále početně rostoucí vesnickou populaci. 3. Administrativní snaha o migraci do měst, kde je pociťován nedostatek pracovních sil.