



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Immigrants and the Labour Force: Policy, Regulation, and Impact by Ravi Pendakur
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geography that aimed at uncovering the underlying spatial elements of the “lifeworld,” this new approach exhibits the suspicion of universality common to contextualist and postmodern perspectives. Its aim is to elucidate the texture or “feel” of the myriad environments, broadly defined, of social life.

The volume consists of twenty-seven essays dedicated to Yi-Fu Tuan and several themes raised by his work. The central theme is perhaps captured in Tuan’s own contribution entitled “Cosmos versus Hearth,” a sensitive and imaginative treatment of the dualisms of transcendence/rootedness, universalism/particularism. The other essays are written in response to this and related themes in Tuan’s work. The volume aims to demonstrate the power of spatial analysis and the geographical imagination, even though many of the essays are only obliquely about “place” other than in the most general, metaphorical way.

Herein lies the major weakness of the project of geography as an academic endeavor. This is one of several volumes over the last two decades in which the assertion of the relevance of space to human understanding is unmatched by applications of a distinctly “geographical” perspective. The latter is rarely defined crisply, and rarely is it shown how the concepts of place, space, locale, and so on (often italicized to make the point) matter, by which I mean make a difference to our conventional understandings of the social phenomenon under investigation. The essays in this volume, for example, seldom make clear what received wisdoms they are engaging with, either in terms of macrotheories of social change or more specific analysis. Consequently, it becomes difficult for the reader to assess the importance, let alone the cogency, of the claims.

In fact, most of the book is comprised of claims, rather than hypotheses, that are then tested against the evidence or reinterpreted through a newly proposed conceptual lens. To be sure, the project is humanistic in that it eschews what it sees as the positivism of empiricist social research. It wants to play the role of the philosopher, anthropologist, or novelist (or poet) in offering not new explanations but new interpretations through insight. But seldom do these essays offer new insights. (An exception is Paul Adams’ essay “Peripatetic Imagery and Peripatetic Sense of

Place” about the role of walking in constructing a sense of place; it is particularly stimulating, bringing together temporality, spatiality, and the individual body in the socio-economic context of city life and design.) In fact, the essays tend to be full of pronouncements that seem to be written by writers who think they have stumbled upon them for the first time. (In one essay for example, the question “What is this world like, and how do we describe it?” is described as “penetrating.”) This gives the impression that the audience is a narrow one, presumably of humanist geographers, coming to grips with problematics long familiar to other social scientists.

Perhaps the central question raised by the essays as a whole is whether “geography” as an intellectual form of inquiry possesses a distinctive methodology or set of insights into social phenomena. This volume, in my view, does not help answer that question clearly. After all, if every aspect of the social world has a spatial aspect and happens in a place, then it is not clear how this advances our knowledge. Unless we employ crisp hypotheses about the difference that different spatial organizations of social institutions make, and link these with forms of identity, collective action, and macrostructural change, we are not likely to get a handle on the relevance of this variable. One author claims, “By no means do we have to be professional geographers to be aware of our geographical [sic] agency, but being trained in geography can help.” Unfortunately, the essays in this volume, while of interest in themselves, do not help to bear out this claim.

Immigrants and the Labour Force: Policy, Regulation, and Impact, by **Ravi Pendakur**. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000. 246 pp. \$85.90 cloth. ISBN: 0-7735-2058-9. \$36.20 paper. ISBN: 0-7735-2059-7.

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How international migrants contribute to economic growth and transformation in receiving countries is of particular interest in “countries of immigration” such as Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel. Yet

it is also a question of rising interest in countries such as Germany that are now giving increasing attention to the possibility of attracting highly skilled migrant workers for longer periods of residence and perhaps eventual settlement.

Like many other countries of immigration, Canada goes beyond simply selecting and admitting eligible foreigners who wish to settle within its boundaries. It also actively seeks to attract certain immigrants on the basis of their job skills. Such policies lead to various questions. Do changes in immigrant selection criteria have the anticipated impact on who immigrates given that migrants selected as workers are often a minority (in the context of immigration generated by family reunion and refugee flows, etc.)? Are the jobs the immigrants eventually find at the level of their skills and potential? After how long if at all? What happens when the economy changes and the kinds of workers once needed are less in demand—do the migrants shift to new jobs where labor is needed, or do they get stuck in declining industries? Is the process different for immigrants of color or for women immigrants who may face racial and gender discrimination?

Ravi Pendakur examines the preceding questions for Canada over the post-War period, 1946–1991. Pendakur argues: “While immigration regulations determine who gets in, and to a certain degree why people are admitted, there is no direct relationship between intake and eventual labour-force role” (p. 14). Other circumstances, such as racism, nonrecognition of foreign credentials, and poor language skills on arrival may lead immigrants into peripheral (less well paid) jobs when they arrive and keep them there over time.

The empirical analysis is noteworthy for future research in Canada and for comparative analysis with other countries because it is national in scope and assesses change over a long period. Pendakur uses quantitative measures of the occupational differences between immigrant and the native born age in urban communities (where nearly all immigrants to Canada settle) derived from four censuses (1961, 1971, 1981, and 1991). He also usefully documents and analyzes national immigration policy shifts over a longer period, from 1945 to 1991.

His analysis focuses on the relationship between policy changes over this longer period and the skills and employment of immigrants by period of arrival. It highlights what is generally known but seldom empirically specified. Immigrant selection criteria are not decisive. Immigrants continue to be self-selected and self-directed into particular jobs in ways that often depart from national policy goals. In addition, the jobs immigrants actually obtain depend in significant part on labor markets and other forces (gender and racial stereotyping, ethnic networking, and so on) independent of antidiscrimination policy.

The evidence presented also clearly reveals that immigrant workers who are selected and admitted in relation to labor needs in Canada at one point in time are likely to stay in the sectors where they first found employment even when the overall economy is changing. This is particularly true of less educated migrants. Pendakur concludes “differences in the roles immigrants play had less to do with their age or schooling characteristics than with the period in which they came to Canada and with their status as immigrants” (p. 142). As a result, immigrants contributed to structural change in employment sectors over time by arriving in a series of waves, each of which helped to fill emerging employment demand at the time of arrival. Would earlier immigrants have been more likely to later change sectors if new migrants had not come? Pendakur does not address this question. He stays away from modeling labor force demand and remains close to the historical description and analysis of what actually happened.

The book includes one of the most solid and compelling analyses available of federal legislation on “visible minorities” (a Federal designation covering nonwhite immigrants and ethnic communities, including native peoples). It documents the restricted opportunities for certain groups within this population despite the policy effort to give them equal access to good jobs. This analysis (carried in collaboration with the author’s brother, Krishna Pendakur) concludes that “visible minority men born in Canada suffer about a 10 per cent earnings penalty” when controlling for occupation, industry, education, experience, and other variables (p. 191). The earnings gap varies by gender, educational level, and ethnic group in ways that generate various new

hypotheses only partially explored in this book.

In sum, the book contributes significantly to the literature: (a) highlighting continuing policy challenges arising from the fact that the Canadian labor market is substantially less open than one would hope and than government equal-employment policy seeks to achieve; (b) signaling the ways in which successive waves of immigrants do contribute to economic transformation and growth even when their mobility is restricted; and (c) providing base-line data over an important historical period for future studies and comparative analyses.

Given its historical-empirical focus, theoretical issues of migrant incorporation are not significantly addressed, although there is a continuous effort throughout the analysis to develop specific hypotheses to account for variation in findings from one period to another and one immigrant group to another. There are also some puzzling aspects to the analysis methodology, particularly the use of an uncommon “angle of difference” ($\text{Arccos}(R_p)$) measure to assess differences between immigrant and native born workers, and the lack of attention to emigration from Canada in examining how the labor force evolves over time. These features and others of this book foster debate and suggest new research, which is what the book wishes to promote. All in all, this book is a welcome addition to my collection of books and a useful volume for instruction in graduate seminars.

POLITICS, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, AND THE STATE

The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement, by **Dingxin Zhao**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. 433 pp. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-226-98260-2.

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The movement in the spring of 1989 in Beijing, China was one of those rare moments in human history when powerless, infinitesimal individuals bonded together in a large-scale, nonviolent, and fateful challenge against the mightiest of all modern institutions—the state. The happenings from April 15 to June 4 that year—from the initial restlessness in Beijing’s universities to the heart-stirring hunger strike and the final death-defying stand in Tiananmen Square—all these and more have been and will remain an inexhaustible fountainhead for analysis, reflection, and inspiration for generations to come.

Dingxin Zhao’s book represents the most impressive recent fruit in a well-established line of historical and sociological analysis. Based on 70 interviews conducted in 1992 and 1993 and a wide range of secondary sources, including Chinese government accounts of the movement, Zhao makes the case that the 1989 student movement was the result of a peculiar state-society relationship. In his words, “by the late 1980s China’s state-society relationship had crystallized into an authoritarian regime with performance legitimation, a relatively strong capacity for repression, and weakly developed intermediate organizations” (p. 9). Zhao argues that this set of state-society relations shaped all the important aspects of the movement, from state behavior to student mobilization, from the rhetoric and activities of the movement to the role of the media, and to the final showdown between the state and the people.

* Winner of ASA 2001 Asia and Asian American Section Outstanding Book Award