

Comments on “The Displacement and Attraction Effects in Interurban Migration: An Application of the Input-Output Scheme to the Case of Large Cities in Korea”

This paper uses the 2012 city population and migration statistics published by the Korean Statistical Information Service to analyze displacement and attraction effects of the 20 largest cities in Korea. The author first introduces a model that arrival or departure of an individual induces inter-city migration, and subsequently provides empirical evidence that the cities closer to the capital (Seoul) region have stronger displacement effects that push natives to the rural regions as a response to a migration inflow, and have stronger attraction effects that lure migrants as a response to an outmigration shock. The author further divides the 20 cities into four categories depending on the degree of displacement and attraction effects, and finds that attraction and displacement effects are positively correlated with each other.

I think that this paper employs a meaningful approach to analyze the inter-city migration and its effects by disaggregating effects of migrant inflows and outflows, and that it contributes to the literature on migration and urban characteristics of the South Korean region, which is a relatively unexplored subject both in Economics and in Asian Studies. However, before being publishable, this paper needs to provide several robustness checks in the following aspects.

While the author claims that the goal of this paper does not include identifying determinants of displacement and attraction effects of South Korean cities, it is difficult to draw meaningful implications by measuring such effects without identifying the causes of migration. The author’s assumption that outmigration from one city is caused by an inflow of migrants (or an inflow to one city is caused by an outflow of natives) is not justified in the empirical analyses, as there is no evidence that migrants are relocating because of the input shock.

The author’s underlying reasons for inter-city migration attribute to the labor market, where individuals receive the shock and make migration decisions to other cities. However, it seems from the text that the data used for the analysis are the total number of migrants regardless of their labor force participation status – the readers would benefit from more detailed data description. If this is the case, it is difficult to find it convincing that the inflow and outflow of population are the result of “a specific interplay between the labor skills or job classes of migrants and those of native residents (p.14).” A preferable approach would be breaking down inter-city inflows/outflows by job categories or industries. Furthermore, there is a possibility that individuals respond with a time lag. Another possible robustness check is linking inflow/outflow with data at later time points.

More importantly, the author needs to justify the reasons behind choosing only the year 2012 and restricting the sample to only twenty cities in South Korea. I suggest that the author construct a city-panel based on multiple years, undergo regression analyses, and check whether the current

relationship (correlation) holds. The period of 2010's is when a lot of migration cases from Seoul to underpopulated cities that are not included as the sample in the analysis are observed as a result of the Korean government's regional planning. For example, Sejong City, whose inter-city effect with Seoul Metropolitan Region is likely to be very high, is excluded from the sample although its population more than doubled since 2012. I suggest including the set of "Innovation Cities" that the government appointed into the sample, as it is difficult to find the author's argument that the two effects are positively correlated convincing with the current sample size of twenty.