

Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective, Wayne A. Cornelius, Takeyuki Tsuda, et.al., eds.

review by Randall Wood

Among the more salient paradoxes that characterizes the 21st century is the tension between a fierce economic tendency towards strengthened ties, integration, and cross-border flows of capital and labor -- all of which are known to increase societal welfare on the whole -- and the greatly intensified socio-political pressure to restrict the ingress of foreign workers who are at best perceived as a threat to the livelihood of homeland workers, and oftentimes nuisances to public order, vectors for crime, disease, and worse.

Controlling Immigration-A global perspective broadens our understanding of this polemic by analyzing the policies -- both failed and inspired -- of a cross section of Western European, North American, and the Pacific nations that have attempted to address the challenge of immigration. Taking the critically acclaimed first edition (1994) as a point of departure, the book features new essays that benefit from a research conference held at the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies in May 2002, and critically appraise the evolving policy responses of governments that have had to face a dramatic upsurge in immigration flows. In doing so, the authors retain and refine the two hypotheses that characterized the first edition: that real outcomes frequently differ from the political intentions, and that worldwide, both immigration policy and social attitudes towards immigration have converged over the past decade towards a common set of goals and attitudes.

The debate over immigration is a dynamic one shaped by competing demands of local industries and manufacturers' lobbies desperate for lower-cost laborers, a shrinking middle class that feels threatened by a supposedly burgeoning labor pool of foreigners (both naturalized and not), and the political force newer right-wing radical political parties and their demagogue leaders have been able to exert by capitalizing on local discontent and an easy scapegoat: foreign workers. Well-meaning governments thwart their own best interests by implementing vague, contradictory, or toothless policy, and the crisis escalates. From the introduction through the eleven subsequent country studies, editors Cornelius and Tsuda make sense of all the rhetoric and political grandstanding through a series of well-crafted chapters that look at these immigrant-receiving nations in turn. The authors have a well-tuned eye for the paradoxical, from the Spanish and Italian aversion to immigration in spite of a native population implosion and rising demand for low-cost immigrant labor, to the Japanese effort to maintain "racial homogeneity" at all costs, even economic. And they easily cut through the doublespeak of politicians like Italy's that loudly call for reforms to stem the tide of illegal immigrants while quietly catering to the needs of labor-intensive industries whose demand for low-cost labor has been steadily rising for decades.

On the whole, the book reads easily and manages to maintain an erudite tone without being either preachy or arcane, and the editors have obviously striven to ensure the text is accessible even to those who are not immigration scholars, no mean feat for a subject all too frequently mired down in the complexities of statistics or economic policy (this was the fate of The Immigration Debate : studies on the economic, demographic, and fiscal effects of immigration, 1998). That is certainly its strongest point. But the each chapter is

further bolstered by a pair of short scholarly commentaries, some complementary and some that illuminate research gaps, all of which shed additional light on the controversy and expand on themes presented elsewhere in the book.

The articles and their subsequent commentary pick out the major themes of the polemic in the 21st century: how does a nation balance its industry's need for cheap labor against the need to provide jobs for one's own people, what rights to provide to illegal immigrants, and whether or not they have the right to become full-fledged citizens after a certain time period, whether it's better to provide educational activities for one's own citizens or to attract well-educated immigrants from other countries, what to do about asylum-seekers who quickly threaten to overwhelm the system, and how best to manage population growth in countries whose native populations are dwindling. Since trade in goods and services is equally trade in the skills that go into those products, the authors look at proposals to deal with immigration through effective trade policy as well, for example offering greater opportunities to export goods and services, as a way to reduce trade in the workers themselves.

The authors' credentials in this regard are excellent. The book's essays were provided by experts in the field, from sociologists to political scientists, resource economists, and professors of ethnic studies. They represent an equally impressive array of institutions, from the Centre for Migration, Policy, and Society (COMPAS) in the U.K. to the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies in San Diego, CA. as well as nearly a dozen major universities. Their credentials lend enormous weight to the body of research that makes up this book.

The tide of immigration changes rapidly with evolving political, social, and economic history, and this is one field that will nations – both developing and developed – can not ignore in the upcoming decades. Indeed, the debate over immigration in America comprised one of the topics during the presidential debates of 2004 between George W. Bush and John Kerry, both of whom took the opportunity to point out their views on the issue differed. Clearly, the tension that immigration imbues to the political sphere will not be diminished in the upcoming years. Controlling Immigration makes abundantly clear why, and is a highly recommended read for anyone who hopes to understand what will become of immigrants in the future, what their rights will be, and whether or not governments that want to control immigration at all will have any hope of doing so.