

The Age of Asian Migration

The Age of Asian Migration:

*Continuity, Diversity,
and Susceptibility
Volume 2*

Edited by

Yuk Wah Chan, Heidi Fung
and Grażyna Szymańska-Matusiewicz

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INTRODUCTION

YUK WAH CHAN,
GRAŻYNA SZYMAŃSKA-MATUSIEWICZ
AND HEIDI FUNG

Introduction

This volume, together with the first, previously published, volume (Chan, Haines and Lee 2014), is an outcome of the Asian Migration conference held in Hong Kong in September 2013, co-hosted by the City University of Hong Kong and the International Organization for Migration. The first volume covers the six sub-regional areas through focused themes: Northeast Asia: Coping with Diversity in Japan and Korea; East Asian Chinese Migration: Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China; Vietnamese Migration and Diaspora; Cambodian, Lao, and Hmong Diaspora and Settlement; Singapore: New Immigrants and Return Migration; and South Asian Migration and Diaspora. This book consists of eleven chapters arranged under three migration themes: women and migration, borderland and refugee migration, and migration economics. We believe these are among the most important themes in migration studies that are particularly relevant to Asia. The chapters included here provide new case studies, offering fresh perceptions and nuanced analyses regarding the life experiences and wellbeing of migrants.

In the sections below, we discuss how migration is related to world politics and global shifts in the economy. While wars and political struggles led to massive human movements in the second half of the last century, neoliberalist capitalism has predominately boosted migration as a livelihood strategy for many from the South. We hope to suggest pointers that will arouse deeper understandings of migration as a world phenomenon and we also believe Asian migration will provide useful anecdotes for the further development of migration theories and conceptual frameworks.

Migration as international politics

Political instability and economic turbulence often induce rigorous human movement. Asian out-migration occurred throughout the colonisation period from the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. However, the most substantial out-migration waves occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. Decolonisation, shifts in political regimes and Cold War politics brought about sea changes in Asia. Three immense waves of post-World War II migration in Asia included massive population shuffles due to the partition of India into India and Pakistan, the Chinese refugee and migrant movements at the establishment of communist China, and the Indo-Chinese refugee outflows from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam at the end of the Vietnam War. Economic reforms in socialist Vietnam, mass killings in Cambodia, and the political fall-out between Vietnam and China in the second half of the 1970s also led to mass migrations.

With this backdrop, migration in Asia has often been linked to the shifting political economic landscapes across the region and has commanded eminent concern in international political circles and academia. Hong Kong, today an advanced city-state in Asia, was largely constituted of refugees and migrants from China at the time when China turned communist (Hambro 1955). With the arrival of hundreds of thousands of poor migrants and the availability of large sums of refugee capital, Hong Kong's economy was rapidly industrialised in the 1960s, and took off during the second half of the 1970s. Taiwan, at the point of decolonisation, was taken over by a "migrant" political regime, which had attempted to establish its legitimacy over Taiwan through repressive rule from the 1940s through to the 1980s. This migrant regime has since the 1990s been making adaptations to local democratic movements in Taiwan.

International migration immediately entails acts and policies of more than one country. Reactions to inflows and outflows of migrants involve different political decisions. For the receiving countries, this involves all kinds of (long-term or short-term) immigration schemes, border controls, and regulations to deal with large quantities of immigration applications and illegal entries. On the part of the source countries, deliberate policies on border control (either to allow or stop outflows), national economic planning, and labour export policies may bring about very different results of migration.

The Indochinese saga in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in a number of political debates among the Asian transient centres such as Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Thailand, all of which had to make their own policies to

deal with the hundreds of thousands of Indochinese refugees reaching their shores in large and small boats (Grant 1979). These governments had to face international criticism for their lack of, or insufficient, humanitarian support for the boat people. Due to Cold War politics, many Western countries showed a political will to bring remedies to these human tragedies and thus joined the resettlement schemes. However, the seemingly endless influx of Indochinese led to the slackening of such admission schemes (Haines 2011; Lee 2014). The re-appearance of waves of Vietnamese boat people into Hong Kong in the late 1980s resulted in many rounds of political debate between the U.K. government and Hong Kong's legislators. A political decision made in 1988 to repatriate economic Vietnamese refugees gave Hong Kong a poor reputation in the international political arena (Chan 2011a).

Since the 1980s, despite the fact that the region has enjoyed relative political stability, economic deprivation and sporadic political struggles have continued to draw people out of their home countries; disparity between advanced and rising Asian economies and other less developed regions has also induced many intra-regional migratory movements. Thus, intra-regional migration, especially migration between neighbouring countries, often constitutes part of the specific population dynamics and migration politics in the region. Many of these migrations were originally intended to be short-term, but instead became "permanent sojourns"; this was especially the case where the source countries continued to fail to bring improvements to local livelihoods. With the existence of the overland routes that extend through the many miles of borders separating Asian countries, refugee migration across borders has been commonplace. Refugee migration is often born out of local, regional, and global political dynamics.

While most Western countries are seen as possible destinations for refugee settlement, most Asian countries do not play this role. Instead, they have acted as transient centres where refugee migrants file their claims for resettlement. However, the lengthy manner in which the claims are processed means that many refugees are stuck in Asian places for significant periods of time, with no possibility of planning for their own and their families' futures. Asian countries often face international criticism in terms of their treatment of refugees and human trafficking (such as the "Trafficking in Persons Report" from the United States). As such, migration has often involved much negotiation of powers and inter-governmental politics. The treatment of migrant workers also exposes governments to national and international criticism in terms of whether

measures are in place for protecting migrants' welfare and rights, and various relevant entry and exit regulations.

On the other hand, international politics and displays of inter-governmental power sometimes draw countries into whirlpools of tension and make migration a point of concern. One recent case relates to territorial disputes regarding the oil-rich islands in the South China Sea. In May 2013, Philippine coastguards fired at a Taiwanese fishing boat, killing one crewman. The incident triggered an angry outcry in Taiwan and the government demanded an immediate apology. With no favourable reply from the Philippine authorities, some Taiwanese lawmakers urged the Ma Ying-jeou government to file a protest with the Philippines by freezing the importation of Filipino workers (AFP 2013a; AFP 2013b). A similar case occurred in Hong Kong. In 2010, a tour bus full of Hong Kong tourists was taken hostage by a retired Filipino policeman in Manila. Gunfire between the hostage-taker and the police took the life of eight Hong Kong tourists. The incident sparked off social uproar in Hong Kong and a divisive diplomatic row between Hong Kong and the Philippines. Demands for an official apology and the suggestion of a sanction on importing workers from the Philippines generated much tension between the migrant-hosting city (Hong Kong) and the source country (the Philippines). Although the Hong Kong government did not implement sanctions against the entry of Filipino domestic workers, in early 2014, it barred visa-free access to Philippine diplomatic and official passport holders in order to press for an apology. It was only after three years of negotiations that the Philippine government apologised, and compensation was paid to the victims' families in April 2014 (SCMP 2014).

Migration and neoliberalism

Migration and neoliberalism have grown together. As mentioned above, most mass migration movements that have taken place during the last century have been partly the result of global politics in the region. Migration since the 1980s has been boosted by the ending of the Cold War, and the opening up of once-closed countries such as socialist China and Vietnam. Neoliberalism supports the free flow of material goods as well as labour. Expanding economies have made it necessary for countries such as Thailand and Malaysia to recruit an increasing number of legal and illegal workers from neighbouring countries. Advanced economies—including Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong—on the other hand, need large numbers of care workers (such as domestic workers) from poorer countries (such as the Philippines and Indonesia) to release middle-class women

from home duties. South Korea and Japan are also advanced economies and yet, unlike the above, they are not particularly open to labour imports. Instead of importing workers, they import a number of foreign wives from developing Asian countries. To the source countries, exporting human resources is one way to reduce local discontent. For example, exporting workers for overseas work helped the Marcos government to solve the problem of internal unemployment. However, after many years of implementing such a policy, the lack of economic improvement within the country and continuous outflows of human resources have also brought local criticism against the government (Oishi 2005; Parreñas 2008).

Indeed, neoliberalism and the commodification of the care/domestic sector have together crafted a specific global job market for women from poorer countries, and this has also to do with the deliberate neoliberal policy of reducing social welfare (such as subsidising childcare centres) within many developed countries (Parreñas 2000, 2001; Oishi 2005; Farris 2014). Chang (2000) has fiercely critiqued such neoliberal development of the global economy. She argues that:

...the simultaneous dismantling of social service systems in the Third World and the First World is no coincidence...facilitates the commodification of women for labor export as it becomes impossible for women to sustain their families at home...are forced to migrate, often to work as domestic servants in the First World...(t)heir role as commodities (or, at best, mercenaries) in this global exchange is explicit, as they are both prodded to migrate and lauded for doing so by statesmen calling them the new "heroes" of their countries.

Such neoliberal policy coincides with the global patriarchal ideology of the gendered division of domestic labour, making women work in the kitchen and responsible for childcare and home-based chores (Huang et al. 2005). Neoliberalism thus thrives, alongside a resurgence of patriarchy. Such neoliberal patriarchy has not only reinforced the unequal treatment of men and women and sustained the gendered division of household labour, but has also allowed the state to evade its responsibility to provide sufficient social welfare in terms of childcare and other familial support. Parreñas (2008, 53) has stated clearly:

State welfare support for the family has not just responded inadequately to the changes brought by the entrance of women, particularly mothers, to the labor force in many industrialized countries; it has ignored the needs created by women's labor market participation. Welfare support in many countries does not meet the new familial needs of single parents or of dual-

earning or dual-career couples...government assistance keeps child care a private and not a public responsibility.

On the other hand, in providing people with the possibility of seeking employment through migration, governments of the sending countries may face decreased domestic pressure and demands for economic improvement. As stated above, migration has become an outlet for job searching. This is another dimension of neoliberalism. Oishi (2005, 58) has analysed why so many developing countries favour international migration as a development strategy. Firstly, out-migration means increased remittances flowing into the country. Secondly, the problem of domestic unemployment is somewhat alleviated. For a number of sending countries, these remittances already form part of the most dominant components of the national economy; for instance, the annual flow of remittances to the Philippines has increased from \$US2 million in 1970 to \$US25.1 billion in 2013, which constituted 8.4 percent of the country's annual GDP (Philippine Star 2014). The top three remittance recipient countries are all in Asia: India (\$US70 billion), China (\$US60 billion), and the Philippines (\$US25 billion) (World Bank 2014).

In an age of the feminisation of migration, women of the South are prone to migrate for overseas employment. Besides taking up productive (manufacturing) and reproductive work in foreign countries, many women also engage in cross-border marriage in the global marriage market (Piper and Roces 2003; Constable 2007; Thai 2008; Wang and Hsiao 2009). For example, many Filipinas have married Japanese men (Nakamatsu 2003); Vietnamese brides have become the second largest group of foreign spouses in Taiwan (Fung and Wang 2014); and mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese marriage has become a social trend (Chan and Ko 2014). Filipino and Thai women setting up families in Europe are also commonplace (Pe-Pua 2003; Mix and Piper 2003). Such international marriages within and beyond Asia thrive because of the abundant supply of Asian brides as well as the operation of many matchmaking agencies (Wang and Chang 2002; Thai 2008; Yang and Lu 2010; Chan 2011b, 173).

The opening of "borders" for border-crossing labour and marriage migrants has become part and parcel of neoliberal capitalism—this not only entails a hegemonic command of human resources (which transfers people from low-income groups to more affluent parts of the world), but also reveals the elasticity of patriarchy, which has been resuscitated and strengthened by the transnational linkages of the neoliberalist systems. The easy transfer of workers and wives has helped shape the particular form of development seen in Asia, leading to the formation of labour export economies such as those of the Philippines, Nepal, and Indonesia, and the

depletion of young marriageable females from a number of villages and towns in China, India, and Vietnam (Chu 2010; Belanger and Tran 2011).

The import and export of low-skilled labour is an extended phenomenon of the unequal development among different countries in the region. Receiving countries either make policies for overseas recruitment or deliberately “allow” irregular entry in order to make available large pools of cheap human resources from nearby countries. Both receiving and sending countries benefit from such an arrangement. However, these migrants are vulnerable due to the lack of legal measures protecting their rights. Despite legislation of individual nations guaranteeing workers’ salaries and wellbeing, a general lack of political will in Asia to carry out more progressive practices to ensure migrants’ welfare and human rights often renders overseas employment a “black box” within which the global exploitation of migrant workers is generated. Thus, an increasing number of labour and migrant groups have described overseas-based low-skilled employees, such as domestic helpers, as modern slaves. This lack of robust protective measures is also an outcome of the development of the global neoliberal economic mechanism and political mentality.

Bacon (2013) makes a radical critique against the tide of international migration. He has studied the U.S.-Mexican migration relations and asserts that neoliberal policies have driven millions of Mexicans to leave home. The collaborative forces between global corporations and governments of receiving and sending countries have made it inevitable that millions of individuals will move elsewhere to seek better opportunities to survive. Otero (2011) further argues that poor policies in Mexico and the government’s gamble with neoliberalism and integration with North American economies have lost Mexico both its labour sovereignty and its food self-sufficiency, and thus have produced ever-increasing out-migration rates. Both Bacon and Otero reinforce the right of individuals to “stay home”, and the need for the governments of developing countries to support people’s survival at home and local employment, rather than unconditionally depend on migration.

Migration has often been considered a livelihood strategy and “a vote with one’s feet” for those who are not satisfied with the conditions at home. Without the determination to improve the national economy, poor countries have been gradually emptying their pools of human resources to rich countries. Thus, scholars such as those cited above believe that “staying home” is a resistance against global neoliberalism and a route to regaining self-autonomy and dignity.

Asian characteristics of migration

As a politically diverse and economically active region, Asia has become a central concern for world politics and global economic development. Asia has continued to take the lead in human movements, in terms of both producing the greatest volume of international migrants and receiving the second greatest volume of them (bearing in mind also that China and India—the two most populous countries in the world—also have hundreds of millions of internal migrants). As mobile as this region is, Asia is a focal point for both policy-makers and researchers regarding different forms of voluntary and involuntary human movements, as well as regulation of these movements. The migration flows of Asian women in the domestic-care work sector and the global marriage market, and the governing of these flows, have also drawn much attention (Piper 2008; Momsen 1999).

With the experiences of massive refugee movements (in the wake of World War II and the Cold War) and the recycled migrations of the Asian diasporas, Asia can contribute many interesting anecdotes to the discussion of migration impacts on development and migration politics. It is a region carrying specific characteristics of return migration due to the existence of various advanced, expanding, and vibrant transitional economies. While Asian political systems may not often guarantee the best practices of democracies, Asian economies encourage many of those holding foreign passports to continue to work and live in places they had once left.

Asians are particular migrant groups; they tend to revive or sustain home connections and undertake return migration. Regardless of whether or not these Asians finally return home, many seem to hold in their imagination the ideal of their return as a life goal. Many Asians offer intriguing stories of recycled and multiple migrations—continuously moving between their home countries and countries of settlement, as well as other transient locations. Among other reasons, such as root-searching and familial reunion, these returns are largely related to global economic shifts; global economic recession in general and sub-regional economic growth in Asia. Around 800,000 emigrants from Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s returned to Hong Kong for work and other reasons in the 1990s and 2000s (Sussman 2011). Large numbers of overseas Vietnamese, overseas Chinese Vietnamese, and overseas Chinese have also returned to Vietnam or China to explore the golden work and investment opportunities on offer in these transitional economies (Chan 2013; Chan and Tran 2011). Many second-generation Japanese Brazilians also returned to Japan due to the lack of job opportunities in Brazil (Tsuda 2003).

Indeed, return migration in Asia is salient. Return migration has also made many sending countries draw up particular policies and re-entry schemes to cater for their overseas nationals, for short-term visits and long-term stays. The increasing numbers of returnees and their exploitation of local economic opportunities in their countries of origin will inevitably lead to increased social debates on the issues of citizenship, national identity, multiculturalism, and the political-legal hierarchies of weighting entrants of different nationalities, classes, cultures (religions), and sexes.

The particular concern of Asian states with population quality and dynamics has led to the promulgation of migration policies that trap migrants in semi-legal or illegal work environments, limiting their human rights (such as marrying locals and getting pregnant) and submitting them to the mercy of their employers and local police (MMN and AMC 2013). To take Asian migration and its governance as a typology, we do not aim to depict Asia as a region unique and different to anywhere else. On the contrary, we would like to see the promotion of a comparative approach to studying migration in various political and economic contexts.

Kritz, Lim, and Zlotnik (1992) provide a systems approach for migration research. To them, migration has increasingly rendered inevitable transnational exchanges and interactions between political systems. International migration has brought us to see “disharmonious levels, rates, and strategies of economic and demographic growth that encourage people to migrate” (1992, 1). The migration systems approach provides a comprehensive framework within which to study international migration through a system that is “constituted by a group of countries that exchange relatively large numbers of migrants with each other...include in a system all countries linked by large migration flows” (1992, 2-3). To understand the systems, one has to pay attention to the national contexts of making economic, technological, and social policies that continuously respond to the flows of migrants.

In such a diverse region as Asia, migration (a kind of social behaviour governed by national and international regulatory regimes) that takes place in a transnational social system has constituted part and parcel of the political landscape of the region. It has to do with individual as well as familial decisions, social trends (such as migration culture), and entry and exit controls at various checkpoints. It also involves international politics. Migration has often necessitated complex inter-governmental synergy in crafting sending and admitting schemes and in facilitating cross-border movements. While receiving governments have to provide infrastructural

services for the integration of migrants, sending countries also need to assist return migrants in re-adaptation.

As Castles, de Haas, and Miller (2014) have pointed out, migration develops networks between the areas of origin and destination, bringing about changes in both, including changes in demographic, economic and social structures. Not only does this result in a new cultural diversity in the destination country, it also generates challenges to the question of national identity (2014, 7). All in all, we need to consider migration from the perspective of a complex global system that involves political, economic, and cultural decisions at individual, social (familial), and political levels.

Organisation of the book

In this volume, we address three eminent themes in migration studies. The first theme is the feminisation of migration. Ever since the early 1990s, with the large number of women migrating to become low-skilled workers within the region, the plight of women migrants has captured much academic attention. Some countries, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, have become major sources of low-skilled women workers for other countries. Although there has been much discussion surrounding this feminised phenomenon, we believe there are still a number of issues that require further study, which should concern both academic researchers and the migrants themselves.

In the first chapter of this section, Yuk Wah Chan provides an overview of the various scholarly discourses on the benefits and problems of female migration. The chapter seeks to suggest a few less studied but important aspects regarding labour and female migration (including the roles of the intermediary employment agencies and migrants' families in the suffering of the migrants). The chapter also continues with the unfinished debate on the feminist trajectory against the gendered division of household labour and provides new research agenda.

In the chapter that follows, Ju-chen Chen offers a fascinating story of the self-enterprising Filipino domestic workers who do not rest on their rest days, but instead engage in all sorts of event-making activities. By participating in and organising beauty pageants, contests and performances, the migrant women un-mistakenly construct a new group identity for themselves which is not a replica of the national (home) discourse, but is a more regional or home-town based folk network. Through their busy schedules and flamboyant "catwalking" on Sundays, Filipino women reassert their desire to create a better self during their overseas stays as domestic workers in Hong Kong.

In Chapter 3, Jocelyn O. Celero examines the transnational identity of Filipino mothers and their Japanese Filipino children. While a hyphenated identity is often considered halfway and thus belonging nowhere, Celero finds that both the mothers and the children are adept at making use of their bicultural assets to benefit their own lives, and both are able to engage in a rewarding transnational lifestyle between the Philippines and Japan.

In Chapter 4, Evangeline O. Katigbak writes about the heavy material demands that Filipino migrants receive from home. The author argues that migration has created a special culture back in the home villages of migrants which makes non-migrants jealous of families who have someone working overseas. While relatives and neighbours often approach migrant families for material help, there has been a sentiment of resentment among the migrants who try to resist such unending demands. The chapter analyses how migration has brought about tension between migrant and non-migrant families, and the social space in which a kind of “emotional ransom” has been developed.

Part 2 of the book speaks to those who are concerned about refugee migration in the region, and cross-border movements between neighbouring countries. One of the essential forms of migration actually occurs between neighbouring countries. In the West, human flows across the U.S.-Mexico border have been the most discussed and prominent borderland migrations. In Asia, many borderlands have served as temporary or permanent “sanctuaries” for people who could no longer stay in their homeland. Refugee families who are subject to either political purges or economic deprivation often take with them all their belongings to launch their long march across borders, and many of these refugee-seeking journeys have turned into “permanent” settlements.

In Chapter 5, Willem van Schendel examines the form of border migration that is least studied by scholars. With a series of visual images from photographs collected in Mizoram (northeast India), he attempts to capture the everyday life experiences of a special migrant group—military insurgents and their families—who have moved along the India-Burma-Bangladesh borderland to find a place to settle. Such an intersected borderland has provided a temporary sanctuary for this military group.

Tharaphi Than examines the increasingly vibrant economic development of the borderland between China and northern Myanmar. Mongla, a border town that has thrived on what Than calls vices (gambling dens, prostitution, the exotic meat trade, and human trafficking), is the second most prosperous border town of Myanmar. The outgrowth of this kind of “vice economy” has been accompanied by intense border-crossing

movements conducted by people from both sides. While many Chinese have moved to Mongla to pursue business opportunities and to purchase property, many individuals from Myanmar have also crossed the border to search for jobs. Such a thriving border town has also drawn people from other areas within Myanmar. The author urges that attention be paid to the intriguing sinicised borderland development in this part of Southeast Asia and the various types of border-crossing movements and activities.

Valerie C. Yap explores the home-making experiences of Filipino migrants in Guam, a maritime island lying opposite the Philippines in the Pacific Ocean. Although Guam is part of the United States, it is not entirely treated as “American land” in the eyes of Filipino migrants and the local indigenous groups. Guam is also often considered a stepping stone or transient place for Filipinos’ final entry into “America”. However, with long living experiences and the growth of the Filipino migrant population in Guam, Filipinos are gradually removing this “transiency”. Their home-making trajectories and shifting sense of belonging have given rise to new complexities in the construction of identity and inter-racial relations on this western Pacific island.

Part 3 of the book is dedicated to the issues of migration economy and remittances. Economics is often perceived as the most important factor causing international migration. It is well recognised that remittances sent back home by migrants have constituted a major part of the national economy of many developing countries. Yuko Hamada examines the “regime of remittances” which acts as a conceptual framework for the various flows and scales of remittances, and points out that remittance flows are dominant in a number of regions in Asia, and significant factors for economic growth. However, overdependence on remittances has posed a major challenge to the development of these countries. It is found that most of the remittances are spent on household consumption, and not on boosting the country’s investment and manufacturing sectors. The author then brings our attention to some good practices in the deployment of remittances.

In Chapter 9, Kim Kwok and Diana K. Kwok present a thoughtful analysis of an interesting case of migrant economy: the Indonesian ethnic economy in Hong Kong. What is most captivating is the juxtaposing of two groups of Indonesian migrants: the Indonesian Chinese (who settled in the city in the 1970s and 1980s) and Indonesian domestic helpers. Such an ethnic economy has been made possible through the investment of the well-off group (the Chinese from Indonesia who possess economic and cultural capitals in accessing the market) and the large consumption market formed by the masses of Indonesian domestic workers. The chapter

analyses various structural factors that have deprived the domestic helpers of business and work opportunities in this economic niche, and how such a problem has led to the formation of an informal sector within this ethnic economy.

C. Valatheeswaran studies the various impacts of remittances on the wellbeing of migrant households in Tamil Nadu, a state receiving the second highest remittances in India. The author uses congragate data from a survey by the National Sample Survey Organisation and analyses how recipient households have used international remittances. The results indicate that remittances are mainly spent on food, healthcare, and education, which directly enhance the wellbeing of the families, and also secure a better future for the young generations (in terms of children's education). However, there are also data showing that a significant portion of the money received has been used for debt repayment. This shows that many migrant households actually suffer from the high costs of migration (charges by middlemen or overseas employment agencies).

In the final chapter, Nguyen Nhu Ha examines financial literacy among foreign domestic workers (FDWs) in Hong Kong and Singapore. Labour migration has been problematised by many who query whether overseas employment can help alleviate poverty if migrants and their families are not able to put remittances to good use and invest in the long term betterment of their home families. Through evaluating the responses of FDWs towards financial literacy programmes, Nguyen attempts to delineate the advantages and disadvantages of such training and urges increased research into this area.

Overall, we have found that Asian migration has been carried out by different categories of people through different pathways (North-South, South-North and South-South). There is much more to explore as various places within the region are undertaking rapid economic and social changes, and people have been increasingly susceptible to the temptation of migration in the face of various political, socio-economic and cultural challenges at home. As migration scholars from Asia and beyond, we are still in search of more powerful conceptual frameworks through which to unpack the various packages of "knowledge" so far provided by the existing literature on Asian migration.

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PART 1:
WOMEN AND MIGRATION

CHAPTER ONE

ASIAN WOMEN AND ASIAN MIGRATION: A REVIEW AND PROSPECTIVE RESEARCH AGENDA

YUK WAH CHAN

Introduction

The feminisation of migration in Asia has drawn much scholarly as well as public attention since the 1980s. As Zlotnik (2003) has pointed out, compared to migration prior to 1980, a major development of international migration since then has been the increasing visibility of women migrating as international workers. There is no doubt that more women are moving across borders in their own right, rather than being male migrants' affiliates, but this does not mean that women are gaining an equal footing with their male counterparts. Many women who migrate for work are engaged in low-skilled labour; especially prominent is their engagement in the reproductive or care-work sectors, which reinforces women's traditional role as household caretaker on a global scale. Many Asian women from less-developed countries have also become cross-border brides for economic reasons, and are considered to have preserved women's traditional feminine qualities (submissiveness, obedience, filialness and willingness to attend to household chores).

While the feminisation of migration points to the fact that more women are migrating, what does this (the abundance in quantity) mean in terms of women's lives, status, empowerment, femininity, and gender equality? Before answering the above, there are many more questions to be asked. What has made women in the region move so rigorously in recent decades? Are the reasons that make them move today the same as those of 30 years ago? What sustains the push factors? Has "physical" movement really facilitated women's (social) mobility?

Women migrants often land in an alien territory to become hard-working workers or wives, with little support. While fulfilling their new roles and duties in an estranged (geographical and cultural) landscape, they also have to shoulder many obligations from home. Being “far” from home does not mean they have shredded “home obligations”. On the contrary, they are still “closely” connected with home through all kinds of cheap and easily available communication technologies (Vertovec 2004). Transnational connections between home (of origin) and the new home are often said to provide emotional support for homesick migrants and help compensate for their absentee roles as wife, daughter, and mother. Yet, few have discussed how such increasingly easy communication has also made it increasingly difficult for migrant women. High demands (for money and material items) from home have become sources of stress on female migrants, whether such demands are made by parents, siblings, children, relatives, or neighbours. What does migration mean to Asian women as individuals and as a social category? How have migration and the traditional gender roles of women (as mother, wife and daughter) continued to shape women’s (physical and social) mobility and immobility? What effects has migration had on women’s bodies and minds?

This chapter seeks to firstly provide an overview of scholarly discourses regarding women’s migration and how they have discussed issues related to the above questions. Secondly, it will suggest several important aspects that together will constitute a nuanced research agenda for investigating the phenomenon of the feminisation of migration. After three decades of vigorous research and debates on women’s issues in relation to migration, there seems to be a loss of interest in further researching “women and migration”. We believe further research is necessary to elicit a deeper understanding of the whole issue of female migration and the political economy of such migration that has crosscut important gender, social, economic, and cultural issues.

Feminisation of migration: How? How many?

There has been much discussion surrounding the general trend of the feminisation of migration. Around 49 percent of all international migrants (232 million in 2013) are women. However, the situation varies across different regions. The highest proportion of female migrant stock is in Europe (51.9%), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (51.6%), Northern America (51.2%), Oceania (50.2%), and Africa (45.9%). Asia (41.6%) actually hosts the smallest proportion of female migrants (OECD-UNDESA 2013), and this rate of female migrants in Asia has declined

since 1960, which at that time was at 46 percent (Zlotnik 2003). Such a decline in the proportion of female migrants has to do with the great increase in the outflows of male migrants from Asia to the oil-producing countries of West Asia (OECD-UNDESA 2013). Considering Asia as a region producing the second most international migrants, Asian women as a whole are actively on the move.

The “taking-off” of female migration in Asia began in the 1980s. As stressed by Hania Zlotnik (2003), the last two decades before the turn of the millennium witnessed the most dynamic movements of women across borders. The growth of female migration has to do with the increasing availability of low-skilled jobs for women, especially in the field of domestic work. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimated the number of domestic workers around the globe to be close to 100 million; 83% of those are women (ILO 2013, 19). Asia is now hosting the largest proportion (at 41%) of domestic workers. Many of these domestic workers find their jobs across national borders, within as well as beyond home regions (ILO 2013, 19-24).

Female migration is particularly prominent in a number of Asian countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. United Nations’ statistics show that women constitute two thirds of the migrant workers from Indonesia, while half of those from the Philippines and Sri Lanka are women (UNESCAP 2013). There are also large numbers of irregular women migrants from Myanmar to Thailand and from Indonesia to Malaysia. Without regular status, it is difficult to estimate the actual number of women migrants in these sub-regions. South Asian women are increasingly active in crossing national borders to work in the Middle East as well as Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore and Malaysia (ILO 2006).

Let us also take a look at the different situations of individual countries and places where large numbers of female migrants reside. In 2011, 57 percent of Hong Kong’s migrants were female, whereas female migrants in Singapore occupied 56 percent of its intake. Japan and South Korea had the same proportion of female migrants at 55 percent, while Macau, a small place but actively drawing migrant workers, had more than 51.4 percent female migrants (World Bank 2011). These female migration trends are connected with the two predominant modes of migration in Asia.

As mentioned above, low-skilled labour migration has been one major mode of female migration. Another popular female migration pattern is marriage migration. If we take Hong Kong as an example, the city now hosts over 300,000 foreign domestic workers; over 90 percent of these are

Southeast Asian females, mostly from Indonesia and the Philippines. Among the marriage migrants in Hong Kong, the predominant group is that of cross-border brides from mainland China. In 2013, 45 percent of all marriages in Hong Kong were Hong Kong-China marriages, 78 percent of which were with a bride from mainland China (see Table 1-1). A comparable situation can be found in Taiwan. Among all foreign spouses in Taiwan, 65 percent are from mainland China, the majority being Chinese women who have married Taiwanese men (Table 1-2). Capturing the trends and patterns of female migration will help us to better understand what exactly is meant by “the feminisation of migration” in Asia.

After two decades (the 1990s and 2000s) of vibrant female migration in the region, what effects have such movements had on women’s lives, livelihoods, bodies, and minds? The following sections will review different analytical discourses on the phenomenon of female labour and marriage migration that have been provided by previous scholarly studies.

Table 1-1: Hong Kong-China cross-border marriages (1986-2011)

Year	HK-China marriages (with mainland brides)	HK-China marriages (with mainland bridegrooms)	Total cross-border marriages (between China and HK)	Total marriage registrations
2013	19,166	7,444	26,610	55,274
2012	20,621	6,917	27,538	60,459
2011	20,312	5,867	26,179	58,369
2010	19,191	4,836	24,027	52,558
2009	18,145	4,194	22,339	51,175
2006	28,145	6,483	34,628	50,328
2001	18,380	2,359	20,739	32,825
1996	24,564	1,821	26,385	37,045
1991	21,220	1,390	22,610	42,568
1986	15,776	675	16,451	43,280

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Hong Kong.

Table 1-2: Number of foreign spouses in Taiwan (1987-2013)

Country of origin	Number of spouses	Percentages (of all foreign spouses)
China	315,905	64.91
Vietnam	89,042	18.29
Indonesia	27,943	5.74
HK and Macau	13,168	2.71
Thailand	8,375	1.72
The Philippines	7,707	1.58
Cambodia	4,282	0.88
Japan	4,197	0.86
South Korea	1,238	0.25
Others	14,846	3.05
Total	486,703	100%

Source: National Immigration Agency of Taiwan.

Analytical discourses of feminised migration

Although it is not only females from poor countries who migrate, a major focus in academic discussions of the phenomenon of the feminisation of migration has been on women migrants from the developing world. Much interest has been concentrated on those who migrate to find low-skilled jobs or who aspire to marry up and thus achieve a better life. Female migrants from developing countries have therefore become a particular transnational social group under the research spotlights. These two categories of Asian female migrants (low-skilled labour migrants and marriage migrants) have, since the 1990s, drawn immense scholarly attention. Many who examine gender issues in relation to migration have been concerned about the relationship between migration and the enhancement of female power and status. Are women empowered or disempowered in the process of migration and settlement? In what ways are they constructing a new self and new subjectivity? Popular understanding tends to believe that, with the betterment of their economic status, migrant women tend to enjoy greater say and power back in their homeland. However, many have also found that female migration has perpetuated the reproduction of exploited female bodies. Thus, while some may argue that migration can be a form of empowerment and liberation through which women can untie traditional patriarchal bondage, others stress that women are still subjected to subordinating roles and to new forms of exploitation and discrimination in host societies after their migration (Jongwilaiwan and Thompson 2013; Wang and Tien 2009;