
Shift in drivers of migration: From economic accumulation to social reproduction and lifestyle consumption

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The first panel of the workshop aimed at conceptualising the shift in the drivers of migration. One way to understand the shift from economic accumulation to lifestyle consumption is, in Weberian terms, as a shift from *Zweckrationalität* (instrumental rationality) to *Wertrationalität* (value rationality). Alternatively, one can conceptualise it as a shift from production to reproduction migration (Xiang, 2021). How useful are these distinctions? Can they help in reformulating gravity-based push-pull models in migration theory? Should the role of social reproduction, understood as everything that sustains the generational reproduction of life (including education, environmental quality, healthcare, and care for the elderly) be acknowledged in shaping migration decision-making more generally in shaping both the symbolic (*Wert*) and economic (*Zweck*) landscape of mobilities? Or should values (such as nostalgia for a simpler life and more meaningful human relations) and ideologies (such as freedom or tradition) be acknowledged as determinants of migration in their own right?

Biao Xiang

My idea is to propose a framework to study reproduction migration. Reproduction migration refers to cases where people migrate for the purpose of maintaining, producing and enhancing life. This includes better education, better air quality, safer food having more social security, safety, and better care, or to give birth. I propose that this is very different from earlier migration where people went abroad to earn money or remit money back. These people – especially from China, South Korea, Singapore, and Russia – earn money at home and they spend money overseas for the purpose of life itself.

Why call it social reproduction rather than lifestyle migration or consumption migration? This concept is analytical rather than descriptive. Calling cleaning, washing up, childrearing and so on social reproduction reconnects women's invisible labour to the entire capitalist system. By calling these mobilities reproduction migration, it is my purpose to expose the links between these types of individual mobility and changes in the global political economy.

Asia and specifically China have become the centre of the global economy, but the West, including the peripheral West such as Hungary, have become the main sites of social reproduction. Production of, for example, clothes and shoes does not earn so much money. Education, entertainment, technology, fashion, overall lifestyle things are more important: that is where money is. And there is a spatial distribution of these types of activities.

I propose that there are two underlying processes behind reproduction migration. There is dis-embedding, meaning that social reproduction like care and education used to be embedded in family relations and then national welfare systems, and these relations are weakening. Because they are becoming dis-embedded, they become a commodity that can be exchanged in the market. Therefore, you can migrate for the purpose of social reproduction. If education and care were deeply embedded in localised or nationalised institutions, then it would be harder to migrate for this purpose.

The second process going hand in hand with dis-embedding is articulation. This concept refers to bringing different things together and creating something else. It is informed by a French anthropology school called the Articulation School in the 1960s. Its members suggest that migration should not be understood as merely the movement of people. Rather, it is the process that articulates the capitalist mode of the production of people. Migration became the critical link through which value is being transferred from tribal precapitalist mode of people production, or social reproduction to the capitalist core in Western Europe.

The reverse is occurring now: you have material production in the home country and social reproduction in the destination country. People are moving away from East China because social reproduction is very commodified and ironically it is in the West, where the commodification is less ingrained.

Articulation can further be divided into three aspects: structural, ideational and institutional. Structural is very difficult in terms of data because it is hard to decipher what the origin of the money is in the global economy. In China, this money comes from surplus generated from export-led economy. And then you have to figure out what the source of this value is. In relation to ideational articulation or culture: here, culture is not a matter of identity. Rather, it is presented as universal, related to human nature and authenticity. *It is very ideational, it is a process on how to think about the world.* I call this process ideational articulation. How migrants themselves make sense of these activities and choices.

If you look at the history of Chinese student migration, stage one is going abroad to learn technology to bring it back to serve the motherland. Stage two is to go overseas for your own benefit and to settle down. Now it is about neither of them, it is to save human nature. It is because China is too competitive. The education system is very well developed but it is not good for human nature, so you have to go overseas to save human well-being. There is no instrumental concern, but the political economy factor must come in as a part of ideologies or articulation.

Susana Narotzky

I think I am here to talk about reproduction in some way, to respond to this very interesting idea that lifestyle migration is reproduction migration. I really like that you articulated these intimate decisions and decision-making processes with larger structural and institutional processes. I think it is very useful, and it relates to what social reproduction means.

However, when I read your paper – and the papers by Fanni [Beck], Krzysztof [Kardaszewicz] (2021), and Pál [Nyíri] (2022) – I get the impression that precisely these structural or institutional aspects get lost, and the individual aspects of decision-making get

highlighted. This is a bit problematical, because I get the feeling that in that view there remains a dichotomy between production and reproduction, between moving to get a better income and moving to get a better or healthier life. In fact, labour migrants are also moving to enhance life, maybe not so much their own lives but the lives of the people to whom they send remittances. The difference between materialistic migration and ideational migration for a better life is not so easily articulated.

I talked to a lot of labour migrants during my fieldwork in Spain. They all systematically talk about a ‘better life’ and ‘making a life’. They say, ‘I don’t have a life and I want a life, so I have to go abroad.’ And ‘having a life’ means, when you ask them, having children, being able to raise a family, all these things.

You say that, traditionally, the transfer of value between periphery and centre countries was through labour. We can speak about the Articulation School, but Michael Burawoy (in his 1976 article ‘The Functions and Reproduction of Migrant Labor’) reaches the same conclusion. He says that the transfer of value occurs because reproduction is placed outside of the capitalist system as an unaccounted transfer of value. This is what Marxist feminism also said in the 1970s.

The change now is not so much about reproduction or lifestyle migration, but that the transfer of value is happening through capital. China is at the centre of the world economy; it is not on the periphery. So, what is happening is that capital is being transferred from the new centre to these Western countries. That is why the timing of these lifestyle migrations is very interesting – from China to Europe. On the one hand we have had the 2008 economic crisis in Europe, very strongly affecting Southern Europe; there are austerity measures, and there is a problem attracting capital and investment to these countries. So they introduced ‘golden visas’, residency-for-investment schemes, and other legislation benefiting FDI with tax breaks. At the same time, there is almost the opposite movement in China: there is excess capital that has to find places to invest. There is the Belt and Road Initiative and many similar ones. We cannot understand the individual decisions if we do not connect them to these wider structures.

Krzysztof’s paper mentions that the Chinese government facilitates certain kinds of migration, for example education migration (cf. Kardaszewicz, 2021). This makes sense in an expansionary movement of foreign investment because you need people who are trained in these countries’ cultural practices and education.

The other thing is that we cannot disconnect lifestyle or reproduction migration from the other kinds of migration of Chinese people. If you look at Chinese population movements in Spain, there is very strong immigration in the 2000s to the 2010s, then there is an out-migration, which is stronger than immigration, until 2015. And then again there is a strong influx of the population which is connected to ‘golden visas’ and capital movement. But it is also linked to other types of migration like labour migration, reunification of families, i.e. the first wave of migration in the 21st century. These people were usually connected to selling imported goods from Chinese manufacturers or to local restaurant businesses. My question is how do these Chinese migrants, who are very unequal and differentiated, themselves understand these different types of migration? How are these lifestyle migrants re-embedded into the local community or into the national community, in which there is some resistance to them as austerity for citizens is contrasted to ‘golden visas’ for foreigners?

Pei-Chia Lan

I want to start with some comments and then share some of my own research, mostly based on the book I published in 2018, *Raising Global Families* (Lan, 2018). I want to elaborate on the features and significance of reproduction migration, especially to reveal the importance of culture and social aspects in it, and the goal of maintaining life.

I echo Susana in my critique of dichotomising the economic versus the social-cultural and production versus reproduction aspects. I agree that labour migrants also want to enhance their lives when they are making money overseas. I also wonder if this concept is too encompassing empirically. In Biao [Xiang]'s paper it refers to many things: lifestyle migration, retirement, marriage, medical tourism, birth tourism. The category also overlaps with other types of migration: lifestyle migration, educational migration. We need to have a better distinction between these concepts.

It would be helpful to think about the definition of reproduction. Biao identifies two different meanings. One is really general, and the second is a bit more specific, the reproduction of the next generation. As we said earlier, the first definition is more challenging, because all labour migration engages with the everyday maintenance of the household and individual well-being. I do not see this as a unique type even if – as you mentioned in another paper (Xiang, 2021) – Chinese migrants are driven by reproduction as a temporal pressure: the need to get married, the need to buy a house by a certain age. I see this more like a speeding up process for the reproduction aspirations of migrant workers.

I think it is more useful to focus on the second definition of reproduction. But again, I wonder how this is different from earlier empirical phenomena, specifically when we talk about birth tourism and educational migration. As early as the 1980s there were people from South Korea and Taiwan who were sending 'parachute children' to the US. Recently people began to use the term 'global householding' to describe the situation when fathers continue to work at home, while studying mothers bring their children to Singapore, Canada, or Australia. I think we need to be more conscious about the specifics of the current wave of Chinese migration to Eastern Europe. I see some differences in that the logic of migration is different to start with. In this case, migrants are talking about a 'good enough life' in a 'good enough place'. The destination is different: they are moving to the semi-periphery rather than core countries. It is also not just the elite families who are moving but the middle class. They are pursuing reproduction migration for their children.

Lifestyle migration is very much present-oriented: it is about enjoying life *now*, not making money to have a better future. But I am not sure if reproduction migration is like this. The parents are future-oriented: they want their children to have a better future no matter how you define it.

To introduce some examples from my book: I talk about childrearing as a global security strategy. By using this concept, I want to move away from seeing parents as interest maximisers who use childrearing as a calculative action of class reproduction. Instead, I see childrearing as a coping strategy to deal with uncertainty and insecurity in family lives. Parents are doing economic and emotional work to mitigate insecurity for their children. But parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds define security in different ways and therefore come up with different strategies. It is important to situate parents' decisions in the global context, especially for parents in Asia. They enact various types of transnational mobility – short-term, long-term, virtual or physical migration – to mobilise resources and enhance children's lives.

The migratory behaviour of Chinese families reflects a broader pattern of the upwardly mobile middle class in Asia. Similar to the middle-class families I studied in Taiwan, they are mostly first-generation college graduates. They want to give their children a different kind of childhood and also a more globalised future. They also want to break the tradition of authoritarian parenting. At the same time, they are also attracted to a romanticised version of western education and a ‘happy childhood’.

I use the term ‘orchestrating natural growth’ in my book, which can be useful to describe the cases mentioned here. It is used to describe the increasingly popular ideology of middle-class parenting. Some of you cited Annette Lareau’s work (2003), which describes working-class parenting as ‘the accomplishment of natural growth’ because of the lack of money and time. But, in my case, middle-class parents value children’s natural growth as a desired goal of childrearing. Unlike working class parents, these middle-class parents are doing a lot of background work to orchestrate children’s natural growth. For example, they refrain from imposing too much pressure on children’s education or they want to maintain a natural life by consuming organic food.

Some of these Taiwanese parents also engage in internal migration for the purpose of reproduction: they move away from the city to the countryside so that children can attend alternative schools like Waldorf schools. A similar thing is happening in China, where parents are moving for the same reason. There are no examinations or textbooks in Waldorf schools, and teachers incorporate arts and dance, and nature-oriented activities.

Who are these parents who engage in these types of reproduction migration? There is a lot of complexity in their motivations. The earlier generation of Waldorf parents are better described as lifestyle migrants. They gave up urban life, retired from their middle-class careers, and moved to the countryside to do organic farming. The recent cohort of parents in Taiwan migrate mainly for children’s education. Some parents are actually prepared to accept their children’s downward mobility, because these children might not be able to get into universities after attending an alternative school. And the parents can accept the possibility of their children becoming farmers or carpenters as long as they live a happy life and maintain a holistic personality. However, more parents send their children to alternative schools because they believe that these can cultivate soft skills (such as creativity, imagination, or critical thinking). They think that this can help their children thrive and be more successful in the future.

I talk about internal migration in my book, but these people make a lot of global connections through the Waldorf community. They invite teachers from Europe to visit Taiwan or visit the Waldorf headquarters in Switzerland during the summer.

In conclusion, I think we need to have a better focus on reproduction migration, and we need to see how people’s decision to migrate intersects with economic and social cultural aspect. It is not only present-oriented, it has a lot of references to the future. In reaction to Biao [Xiang], especially in Chinese migrating to Eastern Europe, I am not sure if these parents only have their children’s happy childhood in mind. It could be that they believe a happy childhood can turn into soft skills, and that Eastern Europe is a gateway to Western Europe.

Lastly, even though we believe that parents are pursuing security by doing emotional work to enhance children’s emotional security, I want to emphasise that they have achieved relative class privilege. That is why they can afford the possibility that their children are not super successful, but it is still necessary to maintain their children’s relative class privilege and middle-class comfort.

During the discussion, participants questioned whether the phenomenon of reproduction migration constituted a break from previous forms of migration. Speakers emphasised that the middle-class subjects studied were not displaced economically and their livelihood was secure; the driving force of their migration was the internationalisation of reproduction; spending – mostly on services and education – was their primary connection to the destination country; and the language in which they spoke about migration was distinct. However, it remained an open question whether economic security was necessary to allow for this type of migration, or if it should be analysed on a separate dimension.

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