

## Book Review

Liu, L.S., *Chinese Transnational Migration in the Age of Global Modernity: The Case of Oceania*, Routledge Studies in Asian Diasporas, Migrations and Mobilities. Routledge: Abingdon and New York, 2018, 307 pp. ISBN: 978-1-315-43852-8

Traditional scholarly literature looking into the worldwide migration phenomenon has long used confined patterns to study featured migration trajectories, such as ‘return migration’ and ‘stepping migration’. While ‘return migration’ depicts the situation when migrants return to their home country for re-settlement, ‘stepping migration’ entails the further migrant movement towards other destinations after the accomplishment of the previous migration. Nevertheless, in the case of the contemporary migration from Mainland China (PRC) after the 1980s, migration scholars have long recognised that none of these time-honoured terms can quite capture the increasing complexity of its dynamic migration patterns. To understand this increasing complexity, on one hand, it is largely triggered by the current rapid development in the mainland Chinese society, such as, domestic reforms, social and economic developments and increasing openness towards the outside world; on the other hand, it reflects the global trend of rising transnational mobility carried by migrants from various regions, which had already sparked heightened scholarly interests since the 1990s.

*Chinese Transnational Migration in the Age of Global modernity: The Case of Oceania* is a timely and highly relevant publication that responds to the increasing scholarly concerns on examining the contemporary migration from Mainland China. The book is based on a comprehensive study of the migration movements of Mainland Chinese who moved to New Zealand (NZ) after the enforcement of NZ 1987 Immigration Act. To avoid the pitfall of using confined

perspective to study this new Chinese migrant group, Liu, the author, adopted a unique but increasingly influential concept as the fundamental theoretical lens in this book – ‘circulatory transnational migration’. The ontology of ‘circulatory transnational migration’ can be considered as an evolving migratory process comprising different transnational trajectories. This concept, to a great extent, appears to better describe the unconventional migratory routes of many contemporary PRC migrants – that is an unfinished set of circulatory movement in which those migrants engage between the homeland and various migration destinations.

The book uses eight chapters to convey the research to the readership. To efficiently approach the research topic, the author uses an auto-ethnographic style introductory chapter – it starts with the her own personal experience as a migrant who left China as an international student to seek higher education in NZ, supported and encouraged by her parents. By doing so, the author brings a profound and nuanced understanding of the dilemma faced by many of her fellow new migrants who seek a new life abroad while emotionally tied to the families left behind. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive discussion of the PRC migration trend in NZ from the early 1990s to the present, which lays a strong backdrop for the entire research through the coverage of detailed social, political and economic contexts in both PRC and NZ. For instance, while NZ’s 1987 immigration policy encourages ‘quality migrants’ to relocate to this country, the rapid development of PRC brings along an ample pool of such talented migrants to qualify. Nevertheless, China’s one-child policy for population control introduced in 1981 means that the great majority of these migrants are their parents’ only child. The major theoretical and methodological frameworks are delivered by the Chapter 3, which strongly underlines the increasing application of transnational perspective in the migration research

field. Chapters 4 and 5 present some major qualitative findings from the author's multi-sited (i.e. China, Australia and NZ) ethnographic interviews with various new PRC migrants carrying distinctive migratory trajectories. These two chapters reveal some vital elements for probing the impact factors on the ongoing transnational movement of these migrants from a micro perspective, which include their family related issues, as well as their individual emotional experiences, such as their conceptualisation of 'home' and the sense of identity and belonging in association with their perceptions towards citizenship. From a macro perspective, Chapters 6 and 7 use the results from a large-scale online survey and relevant NZ national statistics to examine the phenomenon of trans-Tasman migration and return migration to Mainland China among the new PRC migrant groups in NZ. The final chapter draws together the theoretical and empirical discussions from the previous chapters and delivers heuristic summarising remarks about the current trends of Chinese international/transnational migration in the context of China going global.

Theoretically, the adoption of the concept – 'circulatory transnational migration', as the guiding theoretical lens enables an effective exploration of the dynamic rationales behind the migrants' looked-like paradoxical behaviour, who often never stay settled permanently in the host country and yet never really return to their home country. Methodologically, the marriage of both qualitative and quantitative methods facilitates a comprehensive inspection of the research cohort, which broadens the research horizon from micro to macro level. Apart from those significances, the emphasis on the family-related elements, such as intergenerational relation and interaction, gives the means to the interrogation of transnational migration phenomenon with particular social and cultural analytical contexts.

Nonetheless, this book assigns a less stellar status to its qualitative data collection plan. As the author firmly regards that the intergenerational

dimension of families plays a vital role in orchestrating the new PRC migrants' dynamic transnational strategies, the data collection of this research has only focused on the first generation adult migrants without adequate attention paid to their children and elderly parents. I would posit that a comprehensive data collection covering multiple generations from those transnational families would better benefit this research. This is because, in the family context, particularly among the new PRC migrants, an inclusive and comparative lens towards the diverse generational perceptions could more likely tease out the nuanced insights for the rationale and keeping mechanism of their dynamic transnational behaviours, where the changing values, cultural orientations and lifestyles carried by different generations incorporate, clash or standalone from each other.

Overall, Liu's book is a commendable contribution towards the exploration of transnational migration through the case of new PRC migrants in Oceania. It carries the significance as the debut book focusing on Mainland Chinese transnational migration in this region. By means of the book, the myriad transnational patterns of new PRC migrants, seemingly contradictory and often confusing, can be explained as part of an increasing global migration pattern when all factors are taken into account. Alongside the growing scholarly attention paid to the nexus between the individual agency and wide-range of social structures (e.g. family, community and state) in the transnational social space, the book also brings profound implications towards the future transnational migration research since it successfully builds up an effective theoretical framework to bring the transnational individuals and the familial, social, political and economic contexts where they are situated in into a close dialogue.

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