

Chapter 2

“Wind over Water”: Some Anthropological Thoughts on East Asian Migration

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As this volume suggests, the time is ripe for fuller attention to Asian migration. As a contribution to that effort, this chapter draws on previous work on East Asian migration and how the East Asian situation can contribute to a broader, more comparative understanding of human migration and mobility. There is, after all, an opportunity in the examination of East Asian migration to engage not only with new data and research but also with new ways of understanding migration. Those new ways of understanding may confirm, challenge, or simply complement the North American and European experiences. The East Asian experience with migration, for example, is likely to be especially helpful in reconsidering the many different kinds of migration (and how they interact with each other), in comparing the same migrant groups in very different host countries, and in assessing the ways that migration issues overlap with national population, labor, and social issues—including the many divergent meanings of “multicultural” that are emerging as countries address new kinds of social and cultural diversity.

China, the host for the conference on which this book is based, is especially important for this comparative work, and important for several different reasons. The existence of considerable return migration to contemporary China, for example, is a useful reminder of the extent to which shifting flows characterize global migration (especially interesting because of China’s direct borders with so many different countries). Furthermore, the situation in China, in which much internal migration is similar in structure to international migration in North America and Europe (although far more massive in scale), provides a valuable opportunity to reconnect the too-often-divided topics of internal and transnational migration. Another issue worth noting for China is the extent of planned migration, whether to establish greater density and control in outlying areas (e.g., Nie 2010) or to resettle those

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displaced by development. Such planned resettlement is a useful complement to Western models of migration that have tended to emphasize a simpler continuum between voluntary and forced migration.

2.1 Migration and Human Mobility

This volume also suggests the importance of extending the concern with migration to a broader consideration of human mobility. Mobility—whether of people or of the objects and ideas with which they are connected—is integral to human life on both practical and theoretical grounds. Mobility is a readily apparent fact of life even in quite sedentary societies, whether for marriage, trade, pilgrimage, or war. Furthermore, those who study migration are themselves often quite mobile and their theoretical insights usually reflect that mobility. This importance of human mobility is echoed in classic sources, whether of Heraclitus among the Greeks (as Noel Salazar (2009) has suggested) or the earlier urging of the Chinese Yijing to “cross the great water” to meet one’s proper destiny.

The East Asian material is quite helpful in suggesting the crucial elements of what such a general consideration of mobility might entail: the fluid nature of human movements that vary in intention and actuality; the variable and often unplanned length of movement; how instances of movement channel subsequent decisions to move; how the processes of mobility must be separated conceptually from the experiences of those who move; and how human mobility extends across the generations. In that longer multi-generational frame, mobility often yields to immobility, and immobility again to mobility. Mobility and immobility are thus neither practically nor theoretically separable, instead hinging on a kind of mutual latency. They are often but temporary stages in a process that includes episodes of mobility interleaved with episodes of relative locational stability (cf. Salazar 2009, 2010). That kind of perpetual or periodic mobility is seen especially clearly in the unresolved mobility of business people across the Guangzhou/Hong Kong border (Li 2010). To move, it appears, is human—and to move again perhaps even more so. Such a general consideration of human mobility is inevitably part of the reorientation of migration researchers and policy analysts to the much less geographically fixed social order of the twenty-first century. It yields a broader social consideration of human options and constraints in an increasingly globalized—yet also increasingly atomized—world.

The discussion that follows begins with some general comments on migration theory, policy, and practice, and then presents a few specific issues from the multi-year *Wind over Water* project, particularly how the project reflects on the intertwined logics and empirical realities of human mobility and immobility, whether viewed as separate topics or as the perpetually and mutually recreated counter-images of each other.

2.2 Theory

In theoretical terms, the *Wind over Water* project¹ has aimed to provide a reconsideration of the standard theoretical orientations to migration that have developed for the most part from the North American and European experiences. Central to that reconsideration is an explicitly dual focus on the ways migrants are incorporated into receiving societies and on the ways in which they maintain ties across national borders—thus balancing the often conflicting assimilationist and transnationalist perspectives in the North American and European literature. East Asia provides a particularly good locus for such reconsideration since its experience with migration suggests how the durability of migration flows as part of active networks can provide multiple options for migrants as outsiders and as insiders, as foreigners and as newcomers. It is perhaps easier in East Asia to remember that migrants are often people in perpetual motion, living in-between, and residing at the interstices of global and local networks. Migration is thus about the destinies of migrants yet also about the maintenance of routes of migration; conversely, it is about the process of migration and also about the results of that process.

In addressing East Asian migration from a specifically anthropological approach,² which was a central goal of this project, there were two additional considerations.

¹ This discussion draws from the full multi-year set of academic panels, workshops, and conferences that began in Vancouver in the spring of 2006 at the annual meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, continued with a panel on international marriage (“Marriage out of Place”) in Hong Kong later that year at the meeting of the Society for East Asian Anthropology (only later did I find that Louisa Schein (2004) had already used virtually that title for her analysis of Hmong/Miao intermarriage), and in three separate events in Japan in 2007: a two-day conference at the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku), an academic panel at the annual meeting of the Japan Society of Cultural Anthropology, and a one-day workshop at the University of Tokyo. In 2008, discussions continued with a two-day workshop at the Institute of East Asian Studies (at the University of California, Berkeley with support from the Wenner-Gren Foundation), a summary academic panel at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco, and a series of three academic panels at a conference organized by the Ritsumeikan Center for Asia Pacific Studies in Beppu, Japan. Finally, in 2009, there were four interlinked panels at the International Congress of the Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Kunming, China. For all of these, I am especially indebted to Shinji Yamashita and Keiko Yamanaka, who were there at the beginning of this process in Vancouver, were central to the parts of this project held in Japan, were again together at the workshop in Berkeley, and who are co-editors of the final project volume (Haines et al. 2012).

² As our previous panels and workshops quickly indicated, there is now much research on various aspects of migration to, from, and within East Asia, with a good amount available in English. The edited volumes by Akaha and Vassilieva (2005), Constable (2005), and Douglass and Roberts (2003) are perhaps especially crucial, supplemented now by a volume from our conference at Japan’s National Museum of Ethnology (Yamashita et al. 2008; Haines et al. 2007), a new volume on diversity in Japan (Graburn et al. 2008), and journal special issues that have taken either one country as focus (e.g., Roberts 2007) or looked more comparatively at Asia (e.g., Shipper 2010). The extensive work on returning Nikkei from South America to Japan also deserves note (Linger 2001; Roth 2002; Takenaka 1997; Tsuda 2003). The discussion in this section of the potential of the East Asia versus North America comparison, with particular emphasis on Japan, appears in more detail in Haines (2008).

The first was the need to realign anthropology with a broader recognition of different national and regional perspectives—the kind of “interactive” anthropology that Shinji Yamashita has suggested, a “world anthropologies project which will make possible the coexistence of anthropologists and enlarge the anthropological horizon beyond the traditional East West dichotomy” (Yamashita 2006). Migration is an exceedingly good test case of what such a world anthropologies project might entail since the process of migration itself requires an assessment of source, destination, and in-between. Few topics are as inherently global in actual process, thus few topics are likely to benefit as immediately from being global in intellectual process as well.

The second key consideration was the need to recognize anthropology as an integrative discipline, a discipline that finds its most complete meaning in alliance with such other fields as economics, geography, history, political science, policy studies, religious studies, sociology, and perhaps the arts as well (certainly literature, which may be the surest guide to the full human meaning of migration). While many anthropologists have worked to good effect on migration issues (especially on issues of cultural diversity, family structures, and migrant identity), fewer have been able to move toward a holistic analysis of migration and human mobility more generally. This is somewhat ironic since anthropology is explicitly holistic and its basic approach to alternative human adaptations inevitably shows how mobile humans are.

The core of the *Wind over Water* project lay with this dual attention to making anthropology broader in its global base of intellectual traditions and broader in its role among the other disciplines. Migration (and migration in an East Asian context in particular) provides an excellent mechanism for illustrating how these two goals can work together on an important, yet tortuous topic of national, regional, and global importance. What is at stake here on this complicated issue of migration—of people seemingly out of place—is not only a test of anthropological theory per se but of whether anthropologists can contribute to broader interdisciplinary theories of complex social processes and better solutions to the many dilemmas posed by human mobility.

If one looks for specific theoretical lessons from the East Asian material that can help the broader study of global migration, whether specifically anthropological or not, perhaps the most immediate ones are the extent to which the North American and European migration literature has been less attuned until recently to the shifting balances of in and out migration, and the degree to which migration in either direction is of uncertain duration. Those in North America, in particular, often fall prey to what might be called “immigrationitis”—a tendency to categorize all migration as immigration, envisioning the migration process as a quite finalized one of moving from “there” to “here,” and indeed envisioning it in quite agricultural terms: uprooting from one place and then putting down roots in another. Since the United States lies at the end of multiple chains of migration that do, in fact, tend to terminate there, it is tempting to construe migration in a simply *immigration* focus, thus transforming the divergences and unpredictabilities of migration into the certainties of emigration *from* and immigration *to*. The academic understanding of migration

thus becomes a victim of administrative and even bibliographic categories. East Asian migration is thus important not only in its own right but as an opportunity for rethinking migration overall and to identify and challenge such assumptions in the literature about migration in Europe and North America.

2.3 Policy

Turning from these relatively abstract academic considerations to the world of policy,³ the basic issue of immigrationitis re-emerges. For example, U.S. policy debates are phrased in terms of “illegal immigration” when the people in question are technically undocumented non-immigrants who may or may not become immigrants in the sociological or legal senses (Haines and Rosenblum 1999). One reason for such linguistic usage is doubtless that, at least in the United States, migration and immigration issues are rarely brought into a unified discussion of economics and demography, of labor and fertility, or even of what ought to be the normal flows of people between neighbors such as Mexico and the United States.

Consider, for example, the odd equation that a good labor migrant may well be a bad immigrant and, conversely, a good immigrant may well be a bad labor migrant. If one considers immigration in terms of labor and fertility, the conundrum is clear. For migrant labor, the ideal is people who have families “at home” in the country of origin, to whom they will send remittances, and to whom they will ultimately return. For immigrants, by contrast, the ideal is the reverse: people who will come with their families, expand their families through the generations, and *not* send all their money back to the country of origin. The lack of explicit attention to the connection between labor policy and population policy can result in a mishmash of “immigration” policies, including tacit policies in the United States that have encouraged a very high level of illegal immigration. This is not to say that East Asian countries have necessarily resolved the linkages among labor, population, and migration policy, but it does seem that those linkages tend to be clearer and more explicit in East Asia. Here, then, is another major way in which understanding East Asian migration is a genuine complement to existing Euro-American perspectives.

There are many other more specific policy issues that can benefit from a comparative perspective. One involves the delineation of which migrants have what rights. Here there are some very sharp differences between North America and East Asia. For example, in both Canada and the United States, full citizenship can be achieved simply by place of birth. Thus migrants’ children are citizens. In Japan and Korea, the reverse tends to be the case, that citizenship follows blood rather than place and, until relatively recently, specifically followed father’s blood. Thus

³ Particularly useful discussions of immigration and minorities policy in Korea and Japan include Bartram (2000), Kashiwazaki and Akaha (2006), Kim (2006), Komai (2001), Lee (2003), Lim (2003, 2004, 2009), Seol and Skrentny (2004, 2009), Yasuo (2003), and Yamashita (2008).

migrants' children are not citizens, they are foreigners. In North America, then, citizenship rises from the soil and in East Asia it descends through the blood. Even internally in China—at least until very recently—the *hukou* system emphasized a distinct blood line. In effect people inherited through blood lines not only nationality but also locality.

Yet there are also countervailing tendencies. In Japan and Korea, for example, there have been experiments with permitting foreigners to participate in local elections. That might seem a modest effort compared to the North American willingness to let even undocumented migrants have certain rights. However, North America and Europe have shown signs of moving in more restrictive directions. Thus despite fairly sharp historical differences in migrant rights, there is now some convergence. In Korea, as in the United States, for example, the issue of labor rights for undocumented workers has been receiving increasing attention. Korea's labor actions on behalf of the undocumented have been undertaken with the kinds of support from humanitarian organizations (and occasional resistance from the government) that would be familiar to a North American audience.⁴ In both regions as well, rather fine lines are being drawn and redrawn as specific individual rights (to vote in local elections, to have a driver's license, to be safe from deportation, to be covered by workers' compensation, to be able to unionize) are reassessed as unbundled, or at least potentially separable, rights. This is a particularly rich area for comparative East Asia/ North America research: how are rights bundled and unbundled, who controls the reassessment of rights, and how does that reassessment balance national interests and global interconnections?

2.4 Practice

In terms of practice—the way we go about the business of being anthropologists of migration or migration scholars more generally⁵—there are also some important implications. One is implicit in the notion of “immigrationitis.” We, who should be moving outside our own cultural categories for both more specific and more abstract analysis, appear to be often stuck within them. Much of this is simply a

⁴ Discussions of labor activism on behalf of migrants in Korea can be found in Chung and Seok (2000), Kim (2003), Kim (2009), Lee (1997, 2003), Lim (2003), Moon (2010), Park (2004, 2006), and Seol and Han (2004). Despite the general comment in the text about similarities, there are of course many differences. Moon (2010) is especially clear on the political requirements of being an NGO in Korea and Kim (2009) on the way NGO activities are justified with rather strategic discourses of nationalism and modernity. Nevertheless, the Korea case seems rather more similar to the U.S. than the Japanese case.

⁵ “Practice” has gained great currency in anthropology, particularly through the work of Bourdieu (1990). However, its use in public administration is in many ways more germane to this discussion of policy, since it connotes a “being in the world” that is also an official exercise of rationality (see Schon 1983; Haines 2003).

matter of language. By working, teaching, and publishing so much within our own languages, we may be limiting our ability to communicate and even our ability to think. There are some very useful lessons that can come back to us when we try to move outside this conventional zone. Some lessons are possible even within the world of English. For example, a Japanese colleague asserted quite bluntly in one of our project conferences that in the United States “ethnicity” is “race.” It is hard not to sympathize. Any outside attempt to analyze what is meant by ethnicity in the United States must confront American contortions in the use of the term (Haines 2007). Moving beyond the world of English, the lessons are even more helpful. In Chinese (as well as Japanese and Korean), for example, it is common to refer to immigrants simply as *yimin* (移民) literally “movement people.” One can thus begin a discussion of people in motion as migrants, rather than being locked into the standard subcategories of immigration and emigration. That term also locates the motivations for migration more clearly at both the individual and governmental levels. Words used for “refugee” provide another example. In Vietnamese, the common term is *ty nan* which matches the Chinese *binan*, roughly “avoiding danger.” That is a bit jarring to Westerners since it elides the moral call implicit in the notion of refuge as embedded at the very heart of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic heritage. The Japanese use of the term *nanmin*, (難民—roughly “trouble-people”) goes even further in neutralizing any moral sense to the term.

These examples suggest the potential of not so much a world anthropologies project in the general sense, but an actual multilingual anthropology of migration. Instead of being limited to English as the global scholarly medium, it becomes possible to consider the cultural and cognitive lessons that emerge from questioning particular linguistically channeled ways of talking and thinking. The aim, then, would be to be not only cross-cultural, but also cross-linguistic and cross-cognitive.

As an example, consider the eponymous “Wind over Water” of this project. The original intent for the phrase was simply to invoke the ambience of change and of movement that these words convey. For example, in thinking of wind and water in an East Asian context, one can recognize divergences from the frequent Western emphasis on landscapes as relatively durable, largely human products. In East Asia, by contrast, landscapes are linguistically more often wind (風京) and water scapes (山水). The landscape painting is thus often about what is not seen rather than what is seen, about the ineffable forces that create ever changing refractory and misted images.

There is also the frequent dictum of the Classic of Changes (易經; *Yijing* or I-Ching in older transliteration) that “it furthers one to cross the great water.” That notion seems particularly appropriate to migrants. However, as is often the case in East Asia, such simplistic outsider musings must yield to a little more rigor. “If furthers one to cross the great water,” after all, is phrasing from the classic English translation of the *Yijing*, which is actually a translation by Carey Baynes (1967) into English of the great German translation of the *Yijing* by Richard Wilhelm (the translation of which Carl Jung was so fond). Checking the original Chinese (利涉大川) yields additional insights. For example, the “it furthers one” is actually the single

character *li* (利). That term has a checkered history in classical Chinese philosophy. A middle-of-the-road translation might be “practical advantage,” but the mood of the word can shift toward a more negative sense of unredeemed self-interest. One might remember how Mencius rebuked the King of Hui for even talking about this *li*: “*Wang! He bi yue li?*” (王何必日利 — King! Why should we even talk of this kind of self-interest?). Instead, Mencius would have the king think only of benevolence (仁—*ren*), radiating outward. Mencius, after all, was no neoliberal and he reminds us that notions of rational choice based on personal advantage elide the moral dimensions of human responsibilities and choices, including those of migration.

Moving on in this short phrase, “crossing the great water” seems to evoke ships tossing on the seas, but the “great water” is actually just a “big river” (大川) and it remains unclear whether the “crossing” (涉) is actually a crossing or just a wading into the waters—as contemporary usage of that character would suggest. Instead of “it furthers one to cross the great water,” some alternative translations thus might be: “to make a buck, cross the river” or even “to get ahead, get your feet wet.” These more colloquial translations are also rather good metaphors for migration in the contemporary world. Migration often is quite precisely about getting ahead by wading in.

If it seems this walk through the Chinese classics has produced too much focus on the migrant as individual actor, one might also remember that there is an actual “wind over water” hexagram from the Yijing. It is *huan* (渙) with the meaning of dispersal—of wind blowing over water, clearing the mists, even melting ice. That more specific image of wind over water reflects well the hope that human mobility can work to thaw the frozen structures of separate regional, national, and local experiences.⁶ A little classical Chinese philosophy thus goes a long way in thinking about migration, perhaps especially in this issue of how morality infuses decisions about whether or not to move.

⁶ Despite the emphasis in the text on differences, there is also much about this topic of migration in East Asia that is rather similar to what we know from North America and Europe. Many of the migrant groups are nominally the same: Vietnamese, Filipinos, Thai, Pakistanis, Brazilians—much less the Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans who are again now found with increasing frequency in each other’s countries. Much of the dynamic of migrant life and migrant-host society interaction is also quite comparable. In particular, the situation of low-wage migrant labor is similar, including the range from fully legal (and regulated) workers to over-stayers to undocumented border crossers. The day-to-day realities of such migrant lives in the shadows—whether Chinese in Japan and Korea, or rural Chinese in Chinese cities—would be all too familiar to a North American audience: financial insecurity, weak unionization, limited housing, lack of medical care, poor (if any) education, harsh constraints on family life, and general cultural and social disavowal. Yes there is indeed much that is different between East Asia and North America. The scale of international migration is still, for example, far lower in East Asia. Historically, the degree of cultural diversity is also much lower. One result is that, somewhat paradoxically, the smaller numbers of migrants in East Asia are in many ways more culturally challenging. On the other hand, at least in China, the scale of internal migration is far greater and does (like transnational migration) involve the crossing of many “borders” whether of culture, language, ethnicity, or even legal residential status.

2.5 Some Themes

In the project’s two-day meeting in Berkeley, California in 2008—with great thanks to the Wenner-Gren Foundation—the small workshop format provided perhaps the best chance for open discussion about the nature of migration in East Asia and what it might contribute to a broader understanding of global migration. A brief review of some critical themes in that discussion may be helpful to the broader goals of this book as a whole.

Perhaps the most obvious point that emerged in the discussions was the degree to which people and objects are in motion in different kinds of ways. The migrants themselves are quite varied, from low-skill labor to highly talented professionals, from female entertainers to international brides, from short-term tourists to long-stay retirees. One particularly interesting set of migrants are people who, like the authors in this book, migrate to look at migration. We are one of many kinds of short- or mid-term migrants who return as changed people. The 2008 U.S. presidential election, after all, pitted two “returnees” against each other, one (Barack Obama) who had grown up overseas and the other (John McCain) who parachuted into one major Vietnamese tourist destination (the Lake of the Returned Sword) and ended up in what has now become another major tourist attraction, the “Hanoi Hilton.”

A second more specific area of discussion was the nature of “skill.” Migration scholars often talk about low-skilled labor versus high-skilled “talent,” but the actual level of skill is often far more complex than those simple categories would suggest. Whether as club hostesses or health care providers, for example, many female migrants have very high levels of social and personal skills—functioning as both managers and psychologists—for which they receive relatively low rewards. Receiving societies, in turn, respond to them with shifting policies that may attempt to elevate skill levels but often further undermine their economic status. Here, of course, geographical mobility is intertwined with social and economic mobility.

A third area of discussion involved families. The life history of migrant families is often very complex with interweaving strands of general social change (for example, that women have greater access to more jobs) and the developmental cycle of the household (for example, that women may move in or out of the labor force depending on the presence and age of children). Migration adds another unpredictable strand. The presence of in-migrants to help with domestic chores, for example, may give women more latitude to pursue their careers outside the home. But out-migration of those professionals may then reduce their activities outside the home. The work of Yeoh and Willis (2012), for example, suggests how when professionalized Singaporean women move with their husbands to China, they often end up much more restricted to the home as household managers and parents—and may continue that pattern on return to Singapore. The implication is that to grasp all the kinds of migration that now exist, it is necessary to think more prospectively about how families operate and how they will produce a future that will have both new and old elements. My own work on Vietnamese kinship (Haines 2006), for

example, suggests how enduring are the patterns of delay in marriage and continued co-residence of unmarried children with their parents. These patterns reflect a very useful socio-economic option for both internal and international migrants, and can be seen in data that span at least half a century, and include Vietnamese in their original homes in Vietnam, as internal migrants in Vietnam, and then as international migrants away from Vietnam.

A fourth theme that emerged was the blurring of conventional categories. The East Asian material did not seem to support the conventional view that people move from “here” to “there” (or “there” to “here”) with much finality. That challenges the conventional categorization of migration as either temporary or permanent, since much migration is uncertain and intermittent. Similarly, there is sometimes a tendency to assume that migration is from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Yet this too is often misleading. Shinji Yamashita has noted that Japanese, for example, often move in retirement to places they already know from their pre-retirement careers or to places that offer much that is somehow similar, whether in terms of people, culture, and even scenery (such as irrigated rice fields). Furthermore, many migrants are ultimately returnees who come back to what is supposed to be a familiar “origin” country, which then often turns out to be quite *unfamiliar*. The early stages of interviews with student returnees at my own university (Guterbock and Hochstein 2009; Hamilton 2009; Haines 2012) also suggest how unpredictable, transient, and latent are the personal dynamics of people who move and move again, whether further onward or back to their original homes. In that process, the unfamiliar becomes familiar and the familiar unfamiliar. A subsequent trip is often both a trip *away* but also a return *to* what is now a known and familiar place.

Fifth, and finally, there was much discussion of scales and levels of research and of theory. Xiang Biao provided an early version of his research (Xiang 2012) that traced Chinese migrants who move “downstream” toward destination countries but also “upstairs” in terms of bureaucratic structures in China. Migration, after all, is not just about people moving from place to place and often across national borders. It is also about the local, national, regional, and global domains and institutions that shape the flows of migration and the experiences of migrants. Attending to this multiscalar or multilayer nature of migration may benefit from invoking ways of looking at migration and society that come out of the Asian tradition. Zhang Jijiao, for example, has suggested the possibility of rethinking contemporary migration using some of the ideas developed by the great Chinese anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (cf. Zhang 2012). Here then is an opportunity to reconsider multiple intellectual heritages and what they can contribute to each other on this topic of human mobility.

2.6 Final thoughts

The overall suggestion, then, is that to deal with the complicated layers, meanings, and temporal sequences of migration, there can be great benefit in using a more fully cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, and cross-cognitive approach. In particular, there is

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