

2 Return Migration Decision Making: Theoretical Considerations

The goal of this study is to answer the questions of why and how highly skilled first-time international migrants decide to settle or to move again, specifically, to return. Theoretical approaches from the fields of migration research and decision making promise insight into this issue. This chapter integrates (return) migration theory with decision-making models, while focusing especially on issues of gender and shifting priorities during the life course. Migrants make various decisions that influence return migration or settlement, such as employment decisions or reproductive choices to name but a few. In all of these decisions, they are influenced by factors from various levels.

In order to explain international migration, three components need to be examined: “the effects of properties of the system on the constraints or orientations of actors; the actions of actors who are within the system; and the combination or interaction of those actions, bringing about the systemic behavior” (Coleman 1990: 27). Migration theory has adopted this conceptualization in macro-, meso- and micro-level explanations.¹⁵ A migrant acts within a larger social, political, cultural and economic system that shapes his values and priorities. Based on his priorities and values as well as his perception of the larger environments, an agent makes decisions about how to solve problems or achieve his goals. In an effort to explain individual behavior, scholars have either used attributes of the individuals and of their social environments or have focused on internal processes (Coleman 1990: 1).¹⁶ This study does both: it focuses on characteristics of the individuals, their social (and economic) environments as well as their internal processes.

¹⁵ James Coleman’s conceptualization of macro–micro linkages is often referred to as “Coleman’s boat.” Different levels play a role in migration in that a migrant (micro-level) is influenced by larger frameworks (macro-level) and by others’ actions (meso-level). In turn, his actions impact the macro-level. This conceptualization is explored in further detail in Section 2.1.

¹⁶ The study draws from individual-level data, yet “social theory continues to be about the functioning of social systems of behavior” (Coleman 1990: 1). The individual approach risks not being able to explain developments at the system level (Coleman 1990: 6). As the sample examined in this study is not representative, the study can only propose a model for the individual level that needs to be tested and expanded to fit the system level (see Coleman (1990: 6) for ways to cover the transition from micro- to macro-level explanations; he criticizes that scholars use “aggregation” and the concept of the “representative agent” to “paper over” weaknesses in linking the two levels).

The following sections first map factors that migration theory holds responsible for movement, followed by an outline of decision-making theory. The third part of the chapter presents the model adopted in this study to explain return migration decisions.

2.1 Migration Theory

At the center of this study stand the questions of how and why migrants decide to settle or to return to their home countries (or to move on to other countries). The United Nations Statistics Division (1998: 95) defines return migrants as “persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short-term or long-term) in another country and who are intending to stay in their own country for at least a year.” This definition has attracted criticism due to its focus on nationality, which would exclude naturalized citizens from the inclusion in “return migration” statistics (Dumont and Spielvogel 2008: 164–165). The definition is therefore amended for the purposes of this study to designate *persons returning to their country of birth after having been international migrants (whether short-term or long-term) in another country and who are intending to stay in their own country for at least a year*. Return migration has received only little academic attention. It is reduced to being a result of either a) the failure to meet the goals of initial migration (Cassarino 2004) or b) a lack of integration in the host country, or c) of the preference for one’s home country, or d) achieving the objective of migration (for example, savings or qualifications for occupations at home, see Dumont and Spielvogel 2008: 163). Only gradually did explanations of return migration start to include family factors such as the impact of children on return (Dustmann 2003). Yet, these conceptualizations remain on the surface and fail to adequately address the direction and the timing of mobility. Initial migration motivation is considered important to explain return or onward movement (Cerase 1974), and approaches used to explain first-time migration are mirrored in return migration explanations. In the following, the development of migration theory is briefly sketched to show parallel and diverging lines of arguments for different types of migration.

Research on migration has long attracted criticism as it allegedly lacks a sound theoretical basis (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1970: 46; Kröhnert 2007: 1). Scholars of various disciplines have addressed migration, including demography, geography, sociology, political science and economics. However, interdisciplinary exchange only rarely happens and much research remains within its disciplinary boundaries, ignoring findings from other fields (Brettell and Hollifield 2000: 2, Massey *et al.* 1994: 700–701). Concerning efforts to integrate different approaches to form an encompassing theory, Alejandro Portes (1998: 27) even goes as far as to say that any attempt at a “grand theory of immigration [...] would be futile,” as

it risks being too vague due to the disparate nature of the individual fields of migration theory and differences in levels of analysis (see also Arango 2004: 15). Despite this negative assessment of the possibility to combine various approaches, this study attempts to integrate various theoretical perspectives on voluntary labor migration. Although some of the concepts described in the following sections have been developed for internal migration, their findings are checked for applicability for return migration of Chinese highly skilled. The following paragraphs sketch the development of migration theory and give an overview over dominant perspectives from different disciplines.

Statistician Ernest G. Ravenstein in 1885 was the first one to formulate “laws of migration” about who migrates, distance and direction of migration and the process of settlement. With this attempt, he contradicted the then prevailing understanding of migration as an anarchic process rooted in human nomadic nature and inspired further research (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1970: 46; Kalter 2008: 17; 2003: 328). Subsequent research initially focused on the macroeconomic explanations of migration, specifically on differences in sending and receiving countries (Kröhnert 2007: 1–2). One example is dual labor market theory that explains movement between labor markets by their structural demands, as receiving countries may have become structurally dependent on cheap migrant labor (Piore 1979). Neoclassical economics on a macro level explains migration flows with wage differentials, employment opportunities and conditions, labor market demands as well as costs of migration (Massey *et al.* 1993: 432–434). In contrast, Michael P. Todaro’s (1969) and Larry A. Sjaastad’s (1962) models of individual choice operate on the micro level of neoclassical economics. Sjaastad (1962: 92) seeks to place the phenomenon of migration in an “investment context” (into one’s human capital), while Todaro (1969: 138) stressed the importance of “expected” income differentials. Potential migrants weigh material and immaterial costs and (future) benefits of movement and see migration as an investment in their human capital on which to cash in at a later point in time.

Sjaastad (1962: 91–92) points out that migration does not affect the moving person alone, but also his social networks, as well as the receiving and sending societies and economies as a whole. In contrast to Sjaastad’s and especially Todaro’s approach to income maximization of individuals, the New Economics of Labor Migration approach shifted the focus towards seeing migration as a household strategy aimed at diversifying sources of income and thereby minimizing risk (Stark and Levhari 1982). Although microeconomic theory allows for non-monetary factors influencing individuals’ decisions of whether to migrate, it has yet to identify those factors and show how factors are connected.¹⁷ The reduction of migration to an investment in human capital or as a means toward

¹⁷ Julie DaVanzo (1981: 92–93) points out that non-economic factors are harder to operationalize and therefore difficult to include in microeconomic models of migration.

income maximization also fails to explain why some persons move and others do not, preferences of destination, or, related to this, return movement from developed to developing nations (Arango 2004: 19; Kalter 2008: 18). A model with explanatory power needs to combine macro- and micro-level approaches.

In this line of thinking, Douglas S. Massey (1998: 50) disagrees with Portes' strong statement on the impossibility of an encompassing theory and argues that an explanation of international migration must account for the following four factors:

“a treatment of the structural forces that promote emigration from developing countries; a characterization of the structural forces that attract immigrants into developed nations; a consideration of the motivations, goals, and aspirations of the people who respond to these structural forces by becoming international migrants; and a treatment of the social and economic structures that arise to connect areas of out and in-migration.”

Massey suggests an integration of approaches explaining the beginnings of migration (structural factors and migrants' aspirations) and explanations of how migration flows perpetuate. He thereby combines characteristics of sending and receiving nations, transnational structures built by different generations of migrants and perceptions and goals of the migrants themselves.

One explanation for the perpetuation of migration flows is network theory: its logic is that potential migrants rely on former and current migrants and the social networks and information they provide in the destination country to reduce costs and risks (Castles 2000: 115; 2003: 21; Hammar *et al.* 1997; Massey *et al.* 1993: 448–449; Meyer 2001: 93). It is a theory from the meso level, which focuses on “social relations (social ties) between individuals in kinship groups (e.g. families), households, neighbourhoods, friendship circles and formal organisations” (Faist 1997: 188). At its center stands the assumption of social capital,¹⁸ on which migrants can cash in: social contacts provide information on jobs, housing or cultural norms and in this way social capital can be transformed into “financial, human, cultural and political capital” (Faist 1997: 199).¹⁹ The presence of social contacts in a potential migration destination thereby explains the choice of destination.²⁰ Each movement changes the context of subsequent migrants' decisions, often leading to rising numbers of migrants (see cumulative causation, Massey *et al.* 1993: 451–454). Unlike previous conceptualizations of immigrants who immersed themselves fully and solely in the host society (see Alba and Nee 1997; Berry 1997; Esser 1980 for models of integration), migrants

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu (1980) defines social capital as the benefits a person can derive from his social network. Coleman (1988) conceptualizes social capital as a shared good, of which trust forms a constitutive element (see also Putnam 1993).

¹⁹ See Niels Oelgart (2006) for a critical perspective on the use of social capital as an explanatory variable for many phenomena. In addition to social contacts' practical support during the early stages of migration, especially ethnic networks provide emotional stability at later stages (Achenbach 2015).

²⁰ Yet, the presence of social contacts does not explain the volume of migration (Faist 1977: 188).

remain connected to their home country's society linking it with the host society, a concept Linda Basch, Linda Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994: 3–7) have termed transnationalism.

In addition to economic and social factors on micro and macro levels, political factors also play a role, but the influence of governments on migration and settlement has often been overlooked (Arango 2004: 20–21; Hollifield 2000; Massey 1998: 50). Governmental legislation influences who may legally enter, work or settle in and leave a country, but also which sectors of the economy are boosted with subsidies or favorable legislation.²¹ It remains unclear, though, which structural factors impact migrants at what time and in which ways.

This study attempts to integrate economic, political science and sociological approaches by focusing on decision-making processes of Chinese highly skilled. The author argues that the perception of political, cultural, economic and social frameworks (macro and meso level) shape an individual's assessment of the potential outcomes of movement (micro level). This section reviews relevant literature from migration theory that addresses decision making in migration, agency of migrants in relocation decisions (household and gender perspectives), timing of migration in the life course, the influence of skills on decision-making processes and the special case of return migration.

2.1.1 *Decision Making in Migration*

The migration theories sketched above have neglected to create a model of migration decision making. Although migration is increasingly seen as a process as opposed to an event (Kley 2009: 53; Kley and Mulder 2010: 74), the *decision-making process* has largely been overlooked. Especially the macro perspectives ignored agency of migrants and their families and reduced their decisions to submission to the attraction of labor markets in developed countries, while micro- and meso-level explanations assumed rational considerations of risk reduction or income maximization. The choice of destination happened naturally in the footsteps of earlier migrants. Yet the questions of why some people move and others do not, of who makes the decision and which structural factors influence individuals (or families) in what manner remain unanswered.

James M. Beshers (1967: 133) identified movement as the outcome of a decision-making process that is affected by social and structural constraints, thereby combining factors of different levels. He does not present a model of how decisions are made, but points to important factors various individuals have to consider. Among these are household composition and gender, labor market

²¹ Most migration research from the viewpoint of political science has focused on state's attempts to *control* immigration, to restrict its flows or to influence who enters the country (e.g. by point systems only allowing for skilled migrants to enter) (Cornelius *et al.* 2004).

structure and characteristics of one's occupation and housing markets (Beshers 1967: 133–139). In 1981, Gordon F. De Jong and Robert W. Gardner published the constitutive volume on international migration decision making, in which they include an extensive literature review and articles from various disciplines. In order to explain migration *decisions*, De Jong and James T. Fawcett (1981: 47) suggest a value expectancy model, in which the intention to migrate is the sum of “personally valued goals” (values) and expectancies (subjective probabilities). In terms of sequence, potential migrants are affected by long- and short-term factors on all levels forming a migration motivation. Once the decision is made, a person will move (although they account for intervening variables deterring movement). A decision is seen as a single event at a certain point in time, a concept to be critically evaluated in Section 2.2.²²

De Jong and Fawcett (1981: 53) put the individual at the center of their model, although they assume macro-level factors to shape “family-based microlevel decision making” (see Section 2.1.2. on household perspectives for a discussion of decision-making units).²³ The individual sees migration as an instrument for achieving goals that depend on subjective values.²⁴ An agent weighs a number of goals and the effects of migration on them before making a decision. Goals include wealth, status, affiliation, comfort, stimulation, autonomy, and morality (De Jong and Fawcett 1981: 57). Two other categories influence migration behavior in addition to the formed intention: indirect influences on micro, meso and macro levels and also constraints and facilitators that intervene during the decision-making process (De Jong and Fawcett 1981: 56). They explain that the following three themes influence the decision maker indirectly as “background” factors in his decision-making process and subsequent migration behavior: social norms (e.g. gender roles), personality traits (e.g. risk taking propensity) and opportunity structure differentials in place of origin and destination (De Jong and Fawcett 1981: 55). Migration behavior also differs between potential migrants by *demographic variables* such as life phase, family size, employment, house ownership or migration history (De Jong and Fawcett 1981: 53). Intervening and facilitating factors include changes in family composition, health or support from one's network and unanticipated events (De Jong and Fawcett 1981: 56).²⁵

²² See also Jacqueline Adams (2004: 470) for criticism of this conceptualization, who points out that decision-making processes do not end with a decision but continue and are renegotiated.

²³ Oded Stark (1984) has strongly criticized the De Jong and Gardner's volume for its assumption of the decision-making unit being the individual and not the family, which forms the basis of the New Economics of Labor Migration approach (Stark and Levhari 1982).

²⁴ Expectancy theory had first been applied to a case study of migration by Martin M. Chemers, Roy Ayman and Carol Werner in 1978. They combined expectancy theory described by Victor H. Vroom (1964) with, among others, Beshers' (1967) conceptualization of migration decisions.

²⁵ De Jong and Fawcett (1981: 57) criticize that even the expanding literature on micro-level explanations mainly focused on individuals' economic considerations as determinants of migration.

The model is useful as a general outline for an individual's forming of a migration intention; however, it leaves much to speculation when it comes to the connection between behavior and intention (Goodman 1981: 133). Gardner (1981: 65) in the same volume (De Jong and Gardner 1981) points out this weakness by stating that it is necessary to differentiate between a desire and an intention to move and the act itself.²⁶ He presents a micro-level decision-making model and includes macro-level factors. As one of few scholars of migration decision making (see also Brown and Sanders 1981: 151; DaVanzo 1980: 2; Goodman 1981: 140), he points out that the individual has imperfect knowledge and only subjective assessment of macro-level factors (Gardner 1981: 63). Crucial points for decision making are values, perception of place-related factors,²⁷ objective facilitators or constraints to migration as well as their perception (Gardner 1981: 63–83). Gardner (1981: 88) himself points out that more research is necessary to understand how factors influence the different decision-making stages.

Frank Kalter (2008: 18) propagates a subjective expected utility (SEU) model in order to combine macro- and micro-level approaches.²⁸ By focusing on migration decisions of subjective actors, non-economic factors as well as structural determinants can be integrated. He divides the process of migration decision making into considering, planning and realizing movement (Kalter 1997), thereby laying an explicit focus on the stages before migration.²⁹ Consideration and planning differ in the level of commitment: in the consideration phase people toy with the idea of moving; when they “cross the Rubicon” (Kley 2011: 471; Kley and Mulder 2010: 76) they make a more binding decision and enter the planning stage. Scholars such as Rossi (1955), Kley (2009) and Clara H. Mulder (1993) analyze how life course events impact migration decision processes. The same factor may have a different impact in the phases of considering, planning and realizing migration (Kley and Mulder 2010: 76). However, there is still a gap in precisely how structural factors influence different migrant groups (Faist 1997: 194, 199; Kalter 2008: 19; Kley 2009: 20).

There have been very few studies integrating decision-making theory and migration. Classical decision-making theory (as will be shown in Section 2.2.1)

²⁶ Gardner (1981) draws from the conceptualization of decision-making phases by Warren B. Miller and R. Kenneth Godwin (1977: 95–98), who distinguish five stages: pre-awareness, awareness, consideration, implementation and adaptation.

²⁷ Relevant for migration decisions is whether potential migrants perceive another location to provide better chances of realizing individual goals; yet knowing of the opportunity differentials alone does not influence migration behavior (Huinink and Kley 2008; Kalter 1997; Kley 2011: 472–473). This resembles the model of place utility as explained by Wolpert (1965), explained in Section 2.1.6.

²⁸ The logic of the SEU model is the same as in expectancy theory, yet the SEU model is an elaborate model from the field of decision-making theory. It is discussed in detail in Section 2.2.1.

²⁹ Peter H. Rossi (1955) in his study of relocation processes in the metropolitan area of Philadelphia had laid the groundwork for a conceptualization of migration processes by distinguishing between an intention and a desire to move, differentiating levels of determination.

has increasingly been criticized for the basic assumption that the conceptualizations sketched above have in common: at their center stand rational actors. In migration theory as well, the concept of rationality based on perfect information has increasingly been questioned (Brown and Sanders 1981; DaVanzo 1980; Gardner 1981). In her study on migration to and from New Zealand, Psychologist Aidan S. Tabor applies the framework of naturalistic decision making (NDM), which specifically addresses limits of rationality, in explanations of migration (Tabor 2014: 9, 11). The concept of NDM is explained in greater detail in Section 2.2.2. She defines migration decisions as the result of a lengthy process shaped by individual differences and cultural norms, of a negotiation process between multiple players within a social (family) context whose results affect all players, and of goals that may change during the decision-making process (Tabor 2014: iii). Tabor (2014: 126) found that in *international* migration the question of whether to move was asked before the question of where to move. She identified the following factors as decisive for leaving one's country of origin: lifestyle and environmental factors,³⁰ work–life balance, considerations about careers and children's well-being. Migrants chose the destination (New Zealand) for environmental factors, cultural similarity, migration policy and society's openness towards migrants and quality of life (Tabor 2014: ii). She applies it to migrants of various skill levels, and, for the first time, outside of a US-American context. Her case study constitutes the first step toward integration of NDM and migration theory. Her approach and her findings have yet to be tested for return migration and in an Asian context.

2.1.2 *Household Perspective*

The question of exactly who it is that forms the decision-making unit of migration is contested. The New Economics of Labor Migration approach was the first to systematically include a household perspective in the explanation of migration, taking on an economic perspective of income diversification and maximization (Stark 1991; Stark and Bloom 1985; Stark and Levhari 1982).³¹ Stark (1984: 253) in a critical book review of De Jong and Gardner's (1981) volume suggests that family members make joint decisions in rural-to-urban migration, discussing each member's course of action.³² Sarah F. Harbison in that volume (1981) also

³⁰ Although "life-style" factors have been included in migration decisions before (see De Jong and Fawcett (1981: 33–34) for an overview), Tabor (2014) explicitly points to crime rates, and Guangqing Chi and Paul R. Voss (2005: 14) to biogeophysical factors such as climate and "beauty" (of scenery).

³¹ The New Economics of Labor Migration approach applies especially to migration from developing to developed countries (as in the latter, governmental programs and insurance markets reduce risk to household income (Cerutti and Massey 2001: 187; Massey *et al.* 1993: 436–440)).

³² Gardner (1981: 63) suggests looking at the migration decision to include several perspectives on how a decision is reached instead of putting the focus on individuals or households.

criticizes her colleagues by stating that family structure and function are more than just additional variables; the family's influence needs to be inserted into individual decision-making models. While she states that in some cases the family is the decision-making unit (Harbison 1981: 231, see also De Jong and Fawcett 1981: 50),³³ most often it is individuals influenced by family structure and function (see also Asis 2003: 106). It is necessary to look not only at family composition, but also at the gender and position of the decision maker in the household and in his life cycle (de Haas and Fokkema 2010: 543; Harbison 1981: 231–233; Willis and Yeoh 2000: 254), as well as income differences (Adams 2004: 476; Cooke 2008; Mincer 1978).

The meso level in the form of households and social networks connects the individual to macro structures (Faist 1997: 199; Haug 2008: 588). In opening the meso perspective to more contacts than just immediate and extended family, Sonja Haug (2008: 589, drawing mainly from P. Neal Ritchey's (1976: 389) conceptualization) proposes five functions of social networks in place of origin and destination. The *affinity* hypothesis proposes that integration into one's local community is a preventive factor for movement (Uhlenberg 1973). The contrasting *conflict* and *encouraging* hypotheses suggest that either conflicts in one's home community or encouragement by family members to move (e.g. to diversify sources of income) may act as push factors. The *information* and *facilitating* hypotheses state that a number of contacts already living in the potential destination provide information and facilitate adjustment by introducing new migrants to jobs and integrating them into their networks, thereby increasing the likelihood of migration (Hugo 1981).

This raises the question of who is part of the decision-making process in the family, household, extended kinship or social network. In addition to partners negotiating migration, Tabor (2014: 127) also points to social factors and the role of opportunity in migration decisions. It is not only partners or their children and parents that make the decisions together, but extended family (Lawson 1998: 43; Tabor 2014: 127, 129) or friends and members of one's community may influence the process as well (Adams 2004: 472). The presence of children greatly influences the decision-making process, as parents take the child's well-being into consideration when making migration decisions (Adams 2004: 475; Chiang and Hsu 2005; Michielin, Mulder and Zorlu 2008; Tabor 2014: 130).³⁴ This may be about location choice of the entire family, but also the choice of one parent to migrate alone in the search of higher wages etc., or a separation of the family for the safety of the child (see also Willis and Yeoh 2000: 258).

³³ De Jong and Fawcett (1981: 50) include "affiliation" in their enumeration of goals: the wish to be close to family and friends may overpower other goals and be the single reason for movement.

³⁴ See Thomas J. Cooke (2001) on how the presence of children negatively influences the labor market participation of migrant women.

2.1.3 *Gender*

Nicola Piper (2008: 1) strongly argues for the inclusion of a gender perspective in migration, as gender affects “most, if not all, aspects of migration.” Gender but also class, migration status and other factors influencing social stratification shape migrants’ experiences in both country of origin and destination. Yet migration theory in its beginnings conceptualized either a single male or genderless migrant, including women (if at all) as trailing spouses and caregivers with little agency in the decision-making process (Boyd and Grieco 2003; Cerutti and Massey 2001: 188; Cooke 2008: 256; Iredale and Guo 2003: 81; Pessar 1998: 53–54; Purkayastha 2005: 182). Although theory developed to include sex as a variable, the importance of gender, the socially constructed behaviors and roles ascribed to men and women, has not been systematically integrated (Mahler and Pessar 2006: 29).³⁵ This is especially noteworthy, because women since the 1960s have made up large parts of labor migrants, inducing Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller (2009: 12) to include the feminization of migration in their global migration trends. Starting with feminist scholars, researchers have started to reject the monolithic household view (that states that household members pool income for the benefit of the entire group, Lundberg and Pollak 2001; Mincer 1978: 750), because it neglected power hierarchies of gender and generation (Faist 1997: 191, 197; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kofman and Raghuram 2005: 153; Lawson 1998: 42; Pessar 1998: 59; Radcliffe 1991). Women and men, even within the same household, form different networks and thereby have access to different resources (Mahler and Pessar 2006: 33). They are therefore not able to benefit in the same way from allegedly pooled resources. Also, households do not move unchanged from one location to another, as they can become transnational (Ho and Bedford 2008). Members may contribute actively to its income or indirectly through advice (Lawson 1998: 43). Migration may also change power structures within households by changing the gendered division of labor in the household as women take up paid employment and men and women are exposed to gender role ideology of another culture (Boyd and Grieco 2003; Lawson 1998: 40; Mahler and Pessar 2006: 33–34). Patricia R. Pessar (1998: 65) cites research that shows that women may favor staying in a new country to secure gender equity or new-found independence from parents and husband (e.g. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), yet men may favor return to regain privileges they have lost by moving.

Parental and marital households are just one concept in which gender role ideology shapes opportunity structure and thought processes. Single and married persons alike face gendered structural hurdles. One important factor that shapes migrants’ experience is participation in labor markets, and most often migrants

³⁵ In his conceptualization of migration decisions, Beshers (1967: 135–136) already recognized differences in power and concerns of husband and wife in migration decisions (although assuming a traditional division of power and responsibilities).

experience discrimination in the hiring process, remuneration or the jobs available to them. In addition to discrimination along gender lines, Pessar (1998: 69) advises to also look for discrimination linked to “ethnicity, nationality, class, and legal status” (see also Purkayastha 2005: 183). Legal status refers to e.g. visa category—states may restrict the employment of spouses of labor migrants (Boyd and Grieco 2003). For female migrants, in addition to being discriminated for being foreigners, thereby having less access to good jobs and less of a chance of upward social mobility, being female further restricts the type of job and income available to women (Halfacree 1995: 166–170; Pessar 1998: 63; Waldinger and Gilbertson 1994: 440). Yet it is not only the structure of the labor market on a macro level that influences the employment of men and women. Even in dual-earner couples, it is far more often the man who initiates family migration (Cooke 2008: 255; Gemici 2011: 29; see also Purkayastha 2005: 182; Willis and Yeoh 2000: 258).³⁶ Most often it is hard for the partner of a labor migrant to find suitable employment in the new labor market, thereby reducing income (Lichter 1983; Mincer 1978) and potentially leading to de-skilling.³⁷ If it is more often women who are “trailing migrants,” this pattern further aggravates gendered divisions of labor in households and labor markets (see also Halfacree 1995). Research on the selective group of highly skilled has revealed gender differences in the factors considered when deciding whether to take an international assignment (van der Velde, Bossink and Jansen 2005). The process of decision making and negotiation within families is inherently influenced by gender role ideology (Bielby and Bielby 1992: 1245; Cooke 2008; Ellis, Conway and Bailey 1996: 125). Further research is necessary to analyze the influence of gender role ideology in families’ migration negotiations, in the micro-, meso- and macro-level factors considered by men and women and how migration may change agency, power structures and perception of factors.

Although migration (especially feminist) research that stressed gender in the beginnings almost exclusively focused on female experiences, one must not overlook how gender role ideology in different cultures also affects the experiences of men. Gender roles, interaction between men and women, labor market participation of both sexes in the host society may differ tremendously from the patterns found in the society of origin. Men’s position in the parental household (e.g. as the first-born or youngest son) influences their opportunities to select migration themselves as a way to improve their lives or to contribute to household income. Gender role ideology in terms of working and family lives may influence men’s chances to participate actively in children’s education. They may acutely feel a loss of status and privilege when they enter another country shaped

³⁶ Eleonore Kofman and Parvati Raghuram (2005: 152) explain that this image may be a result of “cultures of migration” and that women may also initiate migration (see, for example, Teo 2003).

³⁷ See Daniel T. Lichter (1980) for the effects of married women’s occupation on the likelihood of movement of households.

by different gender role ideology, discriminatory hiring practices and impeded upward social mobility (Pessar 1998: 65). Yet, masculinities are not homogeneous and may become more flexible in the course of migration, influencing gender relations in the work place and the household (Hibbins 2005: 178–179; Kofman and Raghuram 2005: 153).

2.1.4 *Life Course*

In a study on relocation processes within the metropolitan area of Philadelphia, Rossi (1955) explained the inner-city moves with changes in household size and structure that also changed the amount of available income, such as marriage or birth of children. With the changes, different needs were created: for bigger housing, safe neighborhoods with good schools etc. (see also Geist and McManus 2008: 284). Rossi (1955) linked these processes with the housing market. The conceptualization of the life course started from the family cycle model (Glick 1947), which in turn starts with marriage and the founding of a two-person household. A phase of expansion (birth of children) ensues which in turn is followed by a shrinking (children leaving the household and starting a new family cycle). Any change in household composition through marriage, divorce or childbirth increases the likelihood to consider migration (Kley 2011: 473).³⁸ Scholars are divided on how residential mobility is influenced by changes in household composition in the long run (Clark and Huang 2003; Geist and McManus 2008: 284; Kulu 2008; Kulu and Milewski 2008; Li 2004; Mulder and Wagner 1993). While Rossi³⁹ originally connected relocation within cities with these family-related life-course events, this concept in migration research has gradually been expanded to also include the beginnings and ends of education and employment (Kley 2011; Kley and Mulder 2010: 77; Mulder 1993; Wagner 1989). During life course transitions, the likelihood to consider migration rises (Kley 2011: 470), however, distance associated with each move differs: for university education a person will move further away, while for cohabitation the distance is usually much shorter (Mulder 1993). Most research that adopts a life course perspective has focused on internal migration (e.g. Geist and McManus 2008; Huinink and Kley 2008; Kalter 1997; Kley 2011; 2009; Mulder 1993; Rossi 1955).⁴⁰ Yet, as the author (2012) has argued elsewhere, life course transitions and accompanying changing priorities also shape international migration.

³⁸ As Beshers (1967: 135) put it: “Thus we would expect fertility patterns to influence migration.” Refer also to Wolpert (1965) and Mincer (1978: 759), who mention the influence of life cycle events on migration. Case studies have confirmed their influence on return migration (Bailey and Ellis 1993).

³⁹ Rossi (1955: 175) does mention employment reasons for movement but focuses on changes in family composition during the family life cycle.

⁴⁰ One notable exception is Maria J. Perez-Patron’s (2012) dissertation.

The interplay between career- and family-related life course and its impact on priorities of migrants and their goals remains underresearched. Few studies adopt a life course perspective to explain migration within career- but also family-related terms (Achenbach 2012). One attempt to connect the two is the concept of “parallel careers.” Frans J. Willekens (1991; 1987) points out that migration and events in other “parallel careers” (such as occupational, housing or marital careers, Birg and Flöthmann 1990; Huinink and Wagner 1989; Wagner 1989) are often connected causally or instrumentally. Events that have been found to influence migration include starting university education (or vocational training), a new job, moving in with a partner, marriage and childbirth as well as divorce (Huinink and Kley 2008: 163; Kley 2011: 473; Kulu and Milewski 2007; Mulder 1993). Migration is a tool to achieve other goals, for example a more satisfying job.⁴¹ Migration and other goals therefore “occur as *synchronized events*” (italics in original, Mulder and Wagner 1993: 57; see also Wagner 1989). Yet, it is important to differentiate between single events and the circumstances they create, for example, between getting and being married (Mulder and Wagner 1993: 57). Being married changes a person’s status in a parallel career and may change priorities and decision-making patterns; it therefore has long-term consequences for migration intentions and behavior.

With life phase transitions, priorities but also responsibilities change, for example, as career-oriented singles may turn into family-oriented spouses. In the family life cycle, financial and social responsibilities increase with marriage and childbirth. When considering migration, its impact on family members factors into the decision.⁴² Another responsibility that becomes acute later in the life course is caring for elderly parents. It is important to note that with changes in household structure, power structures change as well. One partner may become dependent on the spouse’s income after childbirth or parents on their children in old age. In the career realm, partners’, children’s and parents’ needs may influence the type of job and employment or location (part-time work, choice of occupation) a migrant chooses. Spending patterns and lifestyle preferences may change with rising income and increasing family responsibilities. At the same time, career considerations also affect fertility patterns of migrants (such as the delaying of marriage and childbirth until return or until the completion of a career milestone, see Achenbach 2014). It is necessary to look at the life phase of the individual migrant who makes his decision in a larger family and career context.

Kley (2011; 2009) suggests dividing the relevant life phases for migration from a life course perspective into the phases of early adulthood (18–29-year-olds without children), family phase (18–50-year-olds with children under the age of

⁴¹ Note the study by Johannes Huinink, Sergi Vidal and Kley (2014) that focuses on persons who are willing to move and for whom this is positively connected to job mobility.

⁴² Hill Kulu and Nadja Milewski (2007: 581) point out that the proximity of parents is a factor migrants consider after childbirth, as migrants’ parents may help with child rearing.

10) and consolidation phase (30–50-year-olds without children or with children above the age of 10).⁴³ For the sample examined in this study, her life phase categories need to be adjusted and further subdivided as will be seen in Section 6.2.1. She found that priorities differed for each phase: in the phase of early adulthood, “opportunities for pursuing own interests” are more important than in other phases, while career considerations are most important for childless young adults, and family considerations dominate for persons in the family phase. However, in the consolidation phase most potential migrants weigh career *and* family factors (Kley 2011: 483; 2009: 153–176, 221–223, 241–243).⁴⁴ A model explaining migration decisions therefore needs to look at the influence of career- and family-related life phases and events on the different phases of the decision-making process (Huinink and Kley 2008: 181). Kley’s (2011; 2009) findings will be tested for international migration, and therefore, in different cultural contexts, of a specific groups of migrants, namely the highly skilled.

Besides looking at career- and family-related life course, another way to distinguish between life course events is to divide them by anticipated and unanticipated events. Previous studies using this distinction have not found a general pattern on how they affect migration decisions (de Groot *et al.* 2011: 50). Among anticipated events are marriage or childbirth, unanticipated events include unemployment or sudden illness. Unexpected events can also include external shocks such as political or environmental crises. These types of events may deter a person willing to move from acting on his intention, or become a trigger to consider moving (for example, unemployment could deter a migrant from moving into a more prestigious place, make him stay in his current location or move to a less prestigious place). Unanticipated events therefore generally become intervening variables in migration decision models.

2.1.5 *Highly Skilled Migrants*

Highly educated or highly skilled are reported to be more likely to move than less-skilled migrants (DaVanzo and Morrison 1982; Grubel and Scott 1967: 138). The dynamics behind this seemingly “unprecedented” mobility remain underresearched as migration theory has been slow to differentiate between labor

⁴³ Kley chose the age of 10 for children as this is when children enter secondary schools in Germany. For international migration, the decision whether children should enter the schooling system of the home or host country carries more weight. Therefore, the author chooses the age threshold of 6 years, as this equals elementary school entrance age. A further subdivision concerns the age and care needs of migrants’ parents. In addition, educational and occupational life phases need to be integrated. Kley (2009) included the career-related life phase by assuming a certain achievement with age, as completion of schooling and the beginning of a first job usually take place before the age of 30.

⁴⁴ Kalter (1997) has also pointed to the importance of social contacts in addition to career considerations for single migrants.

migration of different skill levels (Favell, Feldblum and Smith 2006: 1–2).⁴⁵ Those theories that do focus on the movement of highly skilled vary as much in focus as they do for general migration.

The definition of highly skilled is contested: in an OECD publication, Jonathan Chaloff and Georges Lemaître (2009: 4) use tertiary degrees as one way of distinguishing them,⁴⁶ while a different OECD (2002: 2) publication includes university students, information technology (IT) specialists, business executives and managers, researchers, and intra-company transferees, among others.⁴⁷ Khalid Koser and John Salt (1997: 287) point out that

“[being] a graduate is not in itself sufficient to be regarded as highly skilled in labour market terms, since many graduates are not employed in jobs requiring high-level expertise. Conversely, many people whose work is deemed to be highly skilled are not graduates. Skills can be acquired through experience rather than by education or training, and there is a strong case for distinguishing between skills-based and qualifications-based procedures for recognizing a migrant’s professional expertise.”

Nevertheless, governments attempt to “control” immigration and to distinguish between “unwanted” and more desirable, skilled migrants (Cornelius and Tsuda 2004: 4), by means of visa policy and the criterion of a college degree. They also differentiate the time frames that migrants of different skill levels are allowed to stay. Government-induced migration of the highly skilled includes migration through specifically designed policies or bi-/multilateral agreements; Robyn Iredale (2001; 1999) sees this as an attempt to fill demands on the labor market, as a reaction or an effort to shape the process of globalizing economies.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Much of migration theory has, in fact, been developed with a focus on the movement of low skilled workers. Douglas Massey (1998: 35) insists that while the movement of managers and other skilled personnel may be connected to the flow of capital along channels carved by previous flows of unskilled labor, the two must be treated differently.

⁴⁶ Chaloff and Lemaître (2009) do allow for other skill definitions based on occupation.

⁴⁷ Use of the term highly skilled even within OECD publication is inconsistent. Yet based on the OECD (1994) Frascati Manual and the OECD (1995) Canberra Manual, most publications assume four ways to distinguish highly skilled: by qualification, activity, sector and occupation (Mahroum 2000: 24). Especially feminist scholars have criticized a definition of skills heavily reliant on technological terms, while reducing occupations often occupied by women such as nursing to semi-skilled work (see Guo and Iredale 2003: 81; Hardill and MacDonald 2000: 682; Kofman and Raghuram 2005: 150; Purkayastha 2005: 182). Adrian Favell, Miriam Feldblum and Michael Peter Smith (2006: 2) point out that nurses should be included in the “skilled and educated category” and that some highly skilled migrants are counted as unskilled in migration statistics due to mismatches on the labor markets, deskilling or visa status as a refugee or trailing migrant (see also Iredale 2005: 156; Kofmann and Raghuram 2005: 151; Purkayastha 2005: 182).

⁴⁸ Governments may also seek to shield or protect national labor markets from immigration: a case in point in the migration of medical professionals, for whom it is often difficult to obtain a license to practice their occupation in a different country. See Gabriele Vogt (2011: 211–212) on government-designed policies to attract caregivers to Japan (Economic Partnership Agreements), under which migrants are only allowed to work as assistant nurses or assistant care givers until they pass the relevant examinations, not allowing tasks which the professionals used to perform in their countries of origin.

Governments use human capital measured by educational degrees and working experience as criteria for selecting who is allowed to enter implicitly buying into the belief that human capital is transferable and beneficial to the home economy.⁴⁹

Similarly, much literature on the migration of highly skilled is “dominated by the human capital paradigm” (Meyer 2001: 94) and tends to overemphasize economic motivations and dual labor markets in developing and developed nations. As has been pointed out in previous sections, this ignores factors of discrimination, household dynamics and gender differences (see also Favell, Feldblum and Smith 2006: 18; Iredale 2001: 19; 1999). Human capital is not necessarily transferable (Faist 1997: 188; Favell, Feldblum and Smith 2006: 17) and, as Jean-Baptiste Meyer (2001) argues, dependent on “supportive networks (institutional, infrastructural, technical, educational, social, financial, etc.) [...], for and by which [...] skills have been created or channeled, and therefore have value in the relevant socio-economic context.”⁵⁰

Explanations of highly skilled migration need to include not only government policy and corporate labor markets, but also perceived job chances, labor market structure, taxation policy and working contents in different countries, earning differentials, development gaps, prestige and working environments, favorable legislation for business development/research, in addition to non-pecuniary factors, networks and sociocultural affinity (Iredale 2003: 122; Mahroum 2000; Solimano 2008: 5; Straubhaar 2000: 20–21; Thorn and Holm-Nielsen 2008).⁵¹ Various scholars have pointed out that the factors may vary in importance for different occupations (Mahroum 2000; Solimano 2008). Most research in the field of highly skilled migration lacks a sound theoretical basis; for example, Thorn and Holm-Nielsen (2008: 164) call for more empirical research disentangling factors influencing highly skilled (return) migration.

Interestingly, family factors are almost non-existent in research on highly skilled migration (Kofman and Raghuram 2005: 151–153; Willis and Yeoh 2000). Studies on migrant personality have found that students (from the USA and Europe) prioritized work, achievement and power over family, while Tabor’s (2014: 124) study showed the importance of work–life balance and lifestyle preferences for migration decisions. One would expect that highly skilled, who are supposed to be able to work anywhere, should be unwilling to compromise in this

⁴⁹ In some occupations, it is not policy-makers but companies that select immigration of skilled labor, a channel Iredale (2001: 16) terms “industry led,” exemplified by corporations’ internal labor markets (see also Beaverstock 2012: 245; Iredale 2003: 123).

⁵⁰ This ties in to DaVanzo’s (1981: 116) conceptualization of location-specific capital, explored in detail in the next section.

⁵¹ Karine Tremblay (2002: 59–61) identifies the following factors as determining student mobility: expertise that can be gathered in foreign locations, foreign language proficiency as a goal and the institutionalization of student migration through exchange or scholarship programs.

realm.⁵² For this reason, it is crucial to look at immigration policy for spouses, corporate support for spousal employment and household organization, gender differences⁵³ and power structures in highly skilled migration.

The slowly emerging literature on lifestyle migration focuses on the search for a good life by affluent migrants (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Benson and Osbaldiston 2014). While highly skilled are not at the center of these studies (rather retirement or leisure migration), the identified factors in this string of research may in part be also applicable to highly skilled migration. Factors include for example, preferences of a specific "pace of life", "community spirit" and "freedom from prior constraints" (Benson and O'Reilly 2009: 610). Other studies have also pointed out the necessity to analyze the impact of factors such as identity (Sussmann 2011) and emotional ties (Constant and Massey 2002b), presence of family and friends (DaVanzo 1976: 15), and patriotism (Zeithammer and Kellogg 2013: 645) in migration and settlement.

Publications on highly skilled migration often stress the aspect of time: as early as 1967, Grubel and Scott have differentiated between "once-and-for-all" and "reversible" migration of highly skilled. There is an entire literature on brain drain, brain gain and brain circulation that looks at the economic and social effects of out- and immigration of talent on receiving and sending countries.⁵⁴ Sending countries seek to profit from migrants that have acquired skills abroad and to this end design policies to attract them back (or, as in student migration, require students to sign contracts ensuring their return). Dumont and Spielvogel (2008: 177) find that highly educated migrants are generally more likely to return. The question of how much time migrants spend abroad, how they raise their human capital during this time and how they decide when and whether to return is at the center of this phenomenon. However, migration decision-making processes about return, further delay of return or settlement remain underresearched.

2.1.6 *Return Migration*

Previous migrations have been found to increase the likelihood that someone will move again (Morrison 1971). Yet how the subsequent migration decision-making processes differ from first-time migration remains undertheorized, and thereby the "understanding of it [return migration] remains hazy" (Cassarino 2004: 253; see

⁵² Andrés Solimano (2008: 6) and Sami Mahroum (2000: 28) mention family factors in passing, but emphasize career factors.

⁵³ Most research on highly skilled has focused on male-dominated occupations, yet skilled migration of women and men follows different rules, also because women are mostly employed in occupations in which migration is heavily regulated (Kofmann and Raghuram 2005: 149–150).

⁵⁴ As Iredale (2003: 121) points out, the literature on skilled migration has moved from focusing on the brain drain to seeing migration as "a search for greater opportunities and life chances and lifestyles by professional people from both developing and developed countries."

also Faist 1997: 188). Return migration challenges general, in particular economic perspectives of migration theory that is largely based on the “permanent settlement migration paradigm” (Hugo 2003); it is especially the return to less developed economies that puzzles (neoclassical) economists in migration theory (Dumont and Spielvogel 2008: 178; Dustmann 2003: 815; Dustmann and Görlach 2015: 2). This might be due to the underlying assumption that migration for a better life economically happens unidirectionally (to better developed countries). Existing instruments for explaining international mobility usually assume settlement migration and are therefore inadequate for modern mobility patterns.⁵⁵ As argued in the previous sections, it is not only economic factors that migrants consider when making migration decisions, but where they can best fulfill any number of goals. As Amelie Constant and Douglas S. Massey (2002a: 32) have found in a study on the return migration of German guest workers, it is not human capital characteristics and socio-economic achievements but social and economic attachments to Germany or their home country that decided about return or settlement.⁵⁶ Also, as pointed out by many scholars (Kley 2009: 53; Kley and Mulder 2010: 74), migration is a process, that is, the migration decision-making process may not be over after moving (Adams 2004; Tabor 2014: 127–128).

DaVanzo, one of the most prominent scholars of return migration,⁵⁷ has published on return and onward migration in cooperation with Peter A. Morrison (1982). They argue that most people move several times in their lives, in contrast to general migration theory’s treatment of movement as a final and once-in-a-lifetime event. Differences between initial and return moves include (most often) more knowledge about the destination as well as better strategies of information allocation in the latter case. DaVanzo and Morrison (1982: 2; DaVanzo 1980: 2; 1981: 117) assume an imperfectly informed individual that invests and seeks benefits by moving.⁵⁸ Another crucial element in DaVanzo and Morrison’s publications is location-specific capital.⁵⁹ This refers to factors from which an individual can only benefit in a particular place, including job-related factors such as a regular clientele, license to practice an occupation or company seniority, but also social factors such as friendship networks or community connections

⁵⁵ Christian Dustmann and Joseph-Simon Görlach (2015) compiled numbers of temporary migrations to OECD nations, showing that the outflows from OECD nations of foreign born agents ranged from 20 to 87 percent (OECD 2013).

⁵⁶ Social attachments include the presence of family, economic attachments the possibility to send remittances; yet Constant and Massey (2002a: 32) also point to political attachments, for example, German citizenship. Social ties between movers and stayers remain even after international migration, which “is why many movers return to the countries of origin,” as Thomas Faist (1977: 188) states.

⁵⁷ DaVanzo’s work focuses on micro-level, mainly economic, factors influencing migration.

⁵⁸ DaVanzo and Morrison (1982: 2) explicitly state that they do not assume a rational individual, as information is never completely correct and its allocation is dependent on interests, networks and channels (and therefore costly, DaVanzo 1980).

⁵⁹ DaVanzo and Morrison (1982) also include non-pecuniary factors as determinants of migration.

(DaVanzo 1981: 116; DaVanzo and Morrison 1982: 4). After a first move, location-specific capital needs to be built up in the new place; however, with more time spent there, location-specific capital in one's place of origin may decrease, thereby also diminishing the likelihood of return migration (DaVanzo 1981: 116).⁶⁰ While DaVanzo and Morrison do present one of the basic assumptions of this study, namely that agents weigh consequences of movement based on subjective perceptions, they completely leave out a model of decision making.

When an agent considers moving to a different location, John Kennan and James R. Walker (2013) point out that "home," or as DaVanzo (1981: 116) argues, to some degree any place at which a migrant has spent time before, are considered differently than other places, and are, most often, the preferred destination.⁶¹ DaVanzo (1976: 15) hypothesizes higher earnings opportunities to be of less importance to returnees than to first-time migrants, but that non-pecuniary factors (such as the presence of friends and family) are of higher importance. Return and onward moves may be reactions to changes in expected costs and benefits (or corrective moves due to the non-materialization of expected benefits), but also well-planned out strategies of further human capital investment (Cassarino 2004: 254; DaVanzo and Morrison 1982: 3). Therefore it is important to take the goal of the original movement into consideration when analyzing return migration decisions.⁶² DaVanzo and Morrison (1982: 51–53) find that the propensity to

⁶⁰ This study adopts the concept of location-specific capital over "place utility" (Wolpert 1965), because the former is more useful to explain return migration. Julian Wolpert introduced the idea of place utility in 1965. It denotes "the net composite of utilities which are derived from the individual's integration at some position in space" or "a positive or negative quantity, expressing respectively the individual's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with respect to that place." He distinguished between place utility that is expected at the current place and potential destinations, which "consists largely of anticipated utility and optimism which lacks the reinforcement of past rewards." This lack of personal experience of utility for a potential migrant has to be compensated by information (Wolpert 1965: 162). In the case of return migration, the migrant (thinks he) knows more about his destination from personal experience and needs to rely less on externally provided information (although the accuracy of his information may decrease with time).

⁶¹ While some of the (intended) movement analyzed in this study cannot be directly classified as "return" migration (see Peek (1981) on this distinction, cited in Arowolo (2000: 61)), because students have moved from rural areas to Japan to study and intend to "return" to China but to "move on" to larger cities such as Shanghai or Beijing. They need to move to "global cities" (Sassen 1991) as it is only where specialist jobs concentrate that they can best cash in on their newly acquired human capital (Koser and Salt 1997: 290). For them, their location-specific capital is likely to be diminished in those new towns, although they possess language and general cultural skills. Language and cultural differences persist between rural and urban areas, but also between urban areas such as Beijing and Shanghai in China. In addition, migrants need to organize additional paper work when they move to a place at which they are not registered (see Section 5.3.1 on issues of *hukou*).

⁶² While students may have left their home town to focus on their studies, with the end of their studies they may return and enter the labor market (or an additional study program) as planned. Other positive examples are if a migrant earns as much money as planned to realize a goal in his home country. In other cases, workers may fail to get a job they desired or to earn enough money and return earlier than planned. Distinguishing between failed immigration and successful temporary migration reflects the

return declines the more time a migrant spends away as location-specific capital at his home decreases, while they interpret returns after a short period of living away from home as corrective moves, made often by the least educated in their sample. This study fills the gap in the literature about how a group of highly skilled decides about return or settlement. It zooms in on events that all of these highly skilled have experienced, such as university graduation or ends of company training and analyzing the importance of various factors in the decision-making process. In the following paragraphs, theoretical explanations of return migration are presented.

Francesco Cerase (1974) in his study of Italian returnees from the United States points to other than only economic factors that are considered in neoclassical economics and the New Economics of Labor Migration: return might be motivated by the failure to integrate (return of failure),⁶³ by the achievement of the goal in the host countries (return of conservatism or of innovation) or be triggered by retirement.⁶⁴ Over time, explanations came to include the preference for life in a migrant's home country (Dumont and Spielvogel 2008: 163) or family factors such as the impact of children on return (Dustmann 2003). Whether reintegration in one's home society is successful depends on the degree of detachment of a migrant during his time abroad, on the level of change in the home society and whether a migrant can readjust (or readapt), and on his skill development abroad, which can be used in the home economy (Cassarino 2004: 259; Dumon 1986; King 1986). Transnationalists, in contrast to this structural approach, point out that migrants often maintain links with their home societies

distinction between neoclassical economic migration theory and the New Economics of Labor Migration, respectively (Cassarino 2004: 255–256).

⁶³ A factor that may influence return migration is an individual's conception of identity and adaptation. Both the host society's attitude (as well as institutions such as migration policy) and individual-level characteristics of the migrants affect the success of adaptation (Furnham and Bochner 1982; Sussmann 2011: 51). An individual can have many identities, based on family, ethnicity, nationality, gender, occupation or even hobbies, to name but a few. In the context of migration, identities may shift or aspects may gain in importance. Transnational identities may develop through identification with the society of origin and host society (Cassarino 2004: 273). Feelings of belonging to a certain culture may only sharply come out when one encounters behaviors of members of an "out-group" that reinforce a sense of difference. Models of integration (most famously by Esser (1980) or Berry (1995)) take this into consideration to varying degrees; yet for this study, it is argued, only migrants' perceived integration matters. The issue of reintegration into one's home society upon return, although not studied in detail in this study, is of importance when migrants consider a return to their home countries. Society, economy and even the environment may have changed during their absence, and return migrants need to get re-accustomed (Arowolo 2000: 62).

⁶⁴ The structural approach also looks at the role returnees play in their home countries (Cassarino 2004: 257–261). In fact, much research on return migration is more concerned with the impact of returning labor migrants (Iredale, Guo and Rozario 2003: 5). See, for example Cerase (1974) on the role of returnees as agents of change or conservatism. If a migrant detaches himself from his home country during his stay in the host country and adopts, for example, spending patterns, he may want to act as an agent of innovation after return. If he saves up money for his return, he aspires to reintegrate at a higher level of the social hierarchy without attempting to change his home society.

(Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994: 3–7), thereby avoiding detachment and facilitating reintegration (Cassarino 2004: 262). This process is aided by governmental efforts of home countries seeking to benefit from their overseas population economically (or even politically, Cassarino 2004: 263). Governments may aid with reintegration (Arowolo 2000: 67). Migrants can profit from their ties by building transnational businesses. Social network theory, similar to transnationalism, stresses the goals and structures of various networks. Return migrants may benefit from the social capital they acquired in the host country or maintained in their home countries.

Jean-Pierre Cassarino (2004) compared five theoretical approaches to return migration, summarized in the following table:

Table 2.1: Theories of Return Migration

	neo-classical economics	new economics of labor migration	structuralism	trans-nationalism	cross-border social network theory
return migration	stayers are successful, returnees have failed.	return is part of the plan ("calculated strategy"), after achieving objective in destination country.	"core/periphery dichotomy," return happens without "changing or compensating for structural constraints" in country of origin.	return must not be final locational decision but strategy, after goals of migration are met and enough resources available to make living at home.	migrants keep up social and economic networks across borders that provide information.
the returnee	"unsuccessful migrant who could not maximize the experience abroad."	successful migrant who reached goals in destination country.	brings savings back home, "behavioural divergence" upon return.	Part of a "globally dispersed <i>ethnic group</i> " [italics in original], goal is cross-border mobility.	"a social actor who has values, projects, and own perception of return environment", well-planned return, returnee well-integrated.
the returnee's motivation	failure of migration, need for return.	"attachment to home and household," aims of migration fulfilled.	"attachment to home and household, nostalgia," adjustment to "realities of home market and power relations."	"attachment to home and household," crucial family ties, favorable perception of conditions in home country.	motivation is "shaped by social, economic and institutional opportunities at home as well as by relevance of own resources."
financial (fc) capital	migrant brings home no income or savings.	remittances as insurance, assistance for household.	remittances or savings do not impact development, fc remains in household.	remittances incl. pensions/ social benefits, fc impacts economy/politics at home.	fc just one type among many resources. Used to invest in projects to secure return.
human capital (hc)	hc not transferable to home labor market.	"acquisition of skills varies with probability of return."	hc not transferable to home labor market (structural constraints), no social status change.	upward mobility by means of newly acquired skills.	skills, knowledge and connections can be used to secure return.

Source: Cassarino (2004: 269), altered version compiled by the author.

Cassarino's (2004) table shows well how different theoretical approaches evaluate return migration as the result of a successful or unsuccessful stay abroad. This further stresses the necessity to take original migration motivation into consideration when explaining return movement.⁶⁵ The theories all use different underlying assumptions about the original motivation: a settlement paradigm, a clearly defined temporary goal, or return as part of the plan which leads to the formation of sustainable transnational networks and the objective of forming transferable human capital. However, Castles and Miller (2009: 20) point out that "the experience of migration and of living in another country often leads to modification of the original plans, so that migrants' intentions at the time of departure are poor predictors of actual behavior." This, it is argued, holds not only true for the intended time frame of migration⁶⁶ but also for how migrants behave to sustain or increase (transnational) social or human capital. It is therefore necessary to analyze migrants' return migration decision processes to understand behavior and migration outcomes.⁶⁷

2.2 Decision-Making Theory

There is much dispute about what constitutes a decision: whether the decision is a process or an event, about the level of rationality of the person(s) involved, and how a decision maker processes a problem to arrive at a solution, to name but a few points. Other disputed aspects concern the timing and causality of an action stemming from a decision, as a person may not act according to a made decision. This chapter provides a short overview over decision-making theory while zooming in on approaches applicable to return migration decision making.

Research on decision making can be divided into three approaches: normative, prescriptive and descriptive. Normative approaches produce models of how "idealized" persons "should think and should act," while prescriptive models attempt to improve decision-making processes of real persons. Descriptive approaches on the other hand deal with decision makers' perceptions, constraints, and processes of deliberation depending on their characteristics (Bell, Raiffa and

⁶⁵ Research by Elizabeth Thomas-Hope (1999) shows that in the case of skilled migrants, return is often part of the plan when emigrating, as migrants seek to profit from their experience abroad economically and in terms of social mobility (Iredale, Guo and Rozario 2003: 7).

⁶⁶ Most migration decision-making models rely on the concept of migration "intention" (Kley 2011; 2009), yet life events change the circumstances and priorities of migrants, thereby leading to the postponement or cancellation of migration intentions (de Groot *et al.* 2011). Since Rossi's 1955 study, research has focused on the discrepancy between the intention to move and actual behavior, showing that some people who stated an intention never realize it (de Groot *et al.* 2011; Kan 1999: 95).

⁶⁷ Brigitte van Baalen and Tobias Müller (2008) have published a study on return intentions of temporary migrants in Germany, yet they reduce the tendency to postpone initial return migration plans to the inability to accumulate sufficient savings and wrong predictions of their future tastes.

Tversky 1995: 16–17). This section first reviews classical decision-making (CDM) theory, before focusing on naturalistic decision making and its applicability to return migration decisions. Conceptualizations of decision-making stages (by process decision theories) and the connection between decisions and subsequent actions are presented before moving on to the model of migration decision making adopted in this study.

2.2.1 *Classical Decision-Making Theory and Limits of Rationality*

The CDM approach is characterized by a) choice between available alternatives, b) a focus on the consequences of a decision for a desired outcome, c) searching through information to analytically reach a decision, and d) the goal of abstract model formation (Lipshitz *et al.* 2001: 333). At its center stands the rational individual with perfect information and unwavering preferences (Zey 1992: 10). Most decision research has focused on the quality of the outcome of decision-making processes, that is, how close it comes to the “right” or ideal choice (Orasanu and Connolly 1993: 12).

One of the individual-level models that is based on an idealized decision maker is *subjective expected utility* (SEU, Simon *et al.* 1992: 33).⁶⁸ It differs from *expected utility* by including the idea that utility may differ for various individuals. Assumptions of the SEU model are that there are no uncertainties regarding the outcomes of actions and that in addition to complete information a decision maker also has a fixed set of preferences for consequences (Bell, Raiffa and Tversky 1995: 20–21; Hollnagel 2007: 6; Simon *et al.* 1992: 33). David E. Bell, Howard Raiffa and Amos Tversky (1995: 21) describe the SEU model as “a normative system that captures in a crisp and elegant fashion the formal properties” of ideal rational choice. Criticism of the SEU model covers the points that information is almost always incomplete and preferences do not only differ by individual but also for a single individual over time.⁶⁹ It also leaves out the framing of decisions or goal setting (Simon *et al.* 1992: 33).

The image of the “rational” individual in normative models was criticized by Simon (1955) as unrealistic as early as the 1950s. The “homo economicus” who acts in order to maximize his interests after carefully considering a comprehensive list of potential options based on complete information does not exist (Simon

⁶⁸ See De Jong and Fawcett (1981), Kalter (2008) etc. for migration-decision studies applying this model. Gardner (1981), Brown and Sanders (1981) and DaVanzo (1980) have pointed out imperfect information in real life as a weakness in those models.

⁶⁹ As Herbert A. Simon *et al.* (1992: 34) put it: “limits are imposed by the complexity of the world in which we live, the incompleteness and inadequacy of human knowledge, the inconsistencies of individual preference and belief, the conflicts of value among people and groups of people, and the inadequacy of the computations we can carry out.”

1955: 99, 114; Zey 1992: 10–11). Instead, Simon (1972: 168; 1978) developed the idea of “satisficing,”⁷⁰ based on a person of bounded rationality. Satisficing is adopted as a strategy in complex situations because of situational or organization constraints, rather than seeking for the optimal solution (optimizing). Other scholars have also tried to systematically limit rationality as the basis of their theories, partly after conducting laboratory experiments that test for rational solutions to hypothetical problems (often statistical or choices from a fixed set of alternatives). Those experiments have shown that humans show systematic biases that lead to less than rational choices and that they are easily influenced by how the problems are framed (Coleman 1990: 14; March 1994: 14–15; March and Shapira 1992: 276; Orasanu and Connolly 1993: 14; Tversky and Kahneman 1995). Factors that limit rationality include limited attention, memory, comprehension and communication (March 1994: 10). In his description of the theory of purposive action,⁷¹ Coleman (1990: 17–18) points out that even though actions may not be rational objectively, humans act to achieve certain goals and to them at the time of the action, they will perceive their choice as rational. What matters is therefore the “point of view of the actor” (Coleman 1990: 18). As argued in the previous section, return migration needs to be examined at a micro level to understand the perception of the individual.

2.2.2 *Naturalistic Decision Making (NDM) and Limits in Applicability*

CDM theory often deals with “small” decisions, choosing from “a fixed set of alternatives” (Orasanu and Connolly 1993: 5). Most theories aiming to explain decisions are normative prescriptive theories, originating from lab experiments and focusing on the event of decision making. The approach of *Naturalistic Decision Making* (NDM) has developed in opposition to normative, laboratory-tested models, in which an agent weighs expected consequences on his goals for each alternative, seeing whether the course of action fits his value system, and then makes a choice. NDM researchers, in contrast, focus on situation awareness, problem diagnosis and planning instead of a “moment of choice” (Beach *et al.*: 1997: 30; see also Klein 1997a: 290; 1997b: 387). Judith Orasanu and Terry Connolly (1993: 5) criticize CDM theory as having little to do with real-life decision-making circumstances and instead suggest refocusing the attention on naturalistic decision settings.

They point to eight factors that hinder this straight-forward process outside laboratory settings:

⁷⁰ Simon has used the Scottish word for “satisfying” to denote the act of setting an aspiration level and looking for and finally choosing an option that is satisfactory in terms of said level (Simon 1957b).

⁷¹ Drawing from Max Weber’s (1904) study of Protestantism and capitalism, Coleman (1990: 13–14) proposes this theory in which rational individuals seek to maximize utility by a particular behavior.

1. ill-structured problems,
2. uncertain dynamic environments,
3. shifting, ill-defined, or competing goals,
4. action/feedback loops,
5. time stress,
6. high stakes,
7. multiple players and
8. organizational goals and norms (Orasanu and Connolly 1993: 7).

Most of these factors apply to return migration decision making:

Ill-structured Problems

Migrants face multi-faceted problems. Depending on how they define the problem, return migration may or may not be a solution. Problem definition is dependent on situation assessment (explained in detail in Sections 2.3 and 5.1). In real world settings, agents need to reduce complexity of situations to identify a problem and make a decision based on problem definition (March 1994: 11; Simon *et al.* 1992: 34). Too little information hinders situation assessment; too much information makes it hard to focus on the important issues (March 1994: 11, 24; March and Shapira 1992: 276; Simon 1978: 13).⁷²

Uncertain Dynamic Environments

John D. Sterman and Linda Booth Sweeney (2005: 58) point out that many decision-making environments are “intrinsically dynamic,” that is by making a choice and acting accordingly one alters the state of the system.⁷³ In addition, decision-making environments may change on a number of levels: on a macro level, legislation or political systems or even stages of economic development may change, on a meso level, occupational and private networks may expand or weaken, but also one’s position in expanding and shrinking households or companies may be subject to change, for example.⁷⁴

Shifting, Ill-defined, or Competing Goals

With each step in the career- and family-related life course (see Section 2.1.4), priorities and responsibilities in the private and career realm shift, complicating

⁷² Diagnosis is used to narrow down which aspects are particularly unsatisfactory. Decisions are made in a complex context; the way in which a decision maker perceives his situation based on available information influences his decisions.

⁷³ This reflects the logic of cumulative causation that states that the movement of each migrant alters the dynamics and leads to a perpetuation of migration (Massey *et al.* 1993: 448–449)

⁷⁴ As Erik Hollnagel (2007: 5) points out, decision making is not a distinct event happening out of context: it may be the outcome of “continuous coping with complexity” of life, but it can, as will be shown in later sections, also be the reaction to a specific event. Factors leading to uncertainty could be environmental problems, feelings of political instability and security.

their integration. Critics of rational choice have pointed out that actors do not rank their goals hierarchically and estimate the consequences of a number of potential courses of action on each goal. Amitai Etzioni (1967: 390), however, has pointed to the fact that actors have one or a small number of *primary* goals and that they do consider the impact of action on the most important ones.

Action/Feedback Loops

An agent trying to solve a problem may not rely on only one strategy or on only one decision, but adopt a series of decisions trying to solve an ill-structured problem (Orasanu and Connolly 1993: 9). The decision to migrate needs most often to be seen as one strategy among many to alleviate problems—for some migrants, return migration is the first, for others the last option. In the meantime, other solutions, such as job switches or divorce, change the environment in a way that adaptations of strategies become necessary.

Time Stress

Naturalistic decision making deals with expert decision making under time stress; yet in migration decisions, the time stress is not as pressing. In some cases, time constraints become crucial, though: for example, when considering job opportunity structures for different life phases and career stages in the country of origin, to enter a booming market early on, or as reactions to crises.

High Stakes

Decisions that involve high stakes are most probably very stressful to the decision maker who is riddled with doubt, conflict or anxiety over a decision, scared to diminish his social status or self-esteem (Janis and Mann 1979: 15, 17). Migration decisions have tremendous consequences and call for a number of resulting decisions. Through a decision for migration, social and cultural environments change, jobs need to be switched etc. The stakes to return rise with heightened family responsibilities, increased or decreased social and economic integration. This point could also be connected to the study of risk. Whether an individual will opt for a risky choice depends on his estimation of the risk, his character (willingness to take risks), and structural factors that shape the environment in which risks could be taken (March 1994: 35–36, 40). This reflects the dichotomy of internal and external factors as well as the individual's perception; the latter is the focus in this study.

Multiple Players

Employers, spouses, parents and children and even friends among other persons are affected by decisions of an individual. An agent may make the decisions alone or include others in the decision-making process. In some cases, others may make the decision for a migrant.

Organizational Goals and Norms

This refers to organizational settings that affect decisions, in the sense that the organization's rules and goals set a framework within which an individual operates. This is the constraint observed least in migration decision making. However, this may be an issue when persons are sent abroad by their companies.

Since the first NDM publication in 1993 (Klein *et al.*), research has shifted from stressing complex environments to seeing the expertise of the decision maker as the defining element of NDM research (Zsombok 1997: 3–4), although NDM has also been applied to test differences in experts' and novices' decision making. This shift in focus leads to the situation that although the field settings are similar, the models that NDM researchers developed for expert⁷⁵ decision making are not necessarily applicable to return migration decisions. Yet, this section focuses on findings and research foci useful to explaining return migration decisions.

NDM focuses on the *process* of decision making. It assumes experienced experts matching solutions to a problem; models are context-specific (Lipshitz *et al.* 2001: 333).⁷⁶ Scholars research which information experts seek and how they interpret it to make a decision. *Matching* is the process of recognizing a situation and the appropriate solution. In this case, various options are evaluated one at a time until one that matches the situation is found; there is little or no comparison between the options and their outcome (Lipshitz *et al.* 2001: 334–335). However, the decisions of returning, settling or moving on are most often not the result of matching a *typical* solution to the encountered problems.⁷⁷ Although all the persons included in this study moved at least once, they do not qualify as experts in the sense that they have developed expertise through repetitive tasks and multiple feedback loops (Lipshitz *et al.* 2001: 335).⁷⁸ They combine behavior shown in expert and in novice decision making by combining a small number of alternative courses of action based on analytical situation assessment.

Difficulties an agent encounters in his decision-making process also include uncertainty. This has been defined as inadequate understanding of a situation due to limited situation awareness, lacking or unreliable information, or conflicting

⁷⁵ People become experts by experience; the idea is that they more easily identify the situation correctly and choose from alternatives they have learned. NDM has been applied to explain the behavior of fire fighters, chess players, soldiers etc. It is quite telling that the first conference that led to the first concerted effort to publish a volume under the new name of naturalistic decision making was sponsored by the Army Research Institute (Lipshitz *et al.* 2001: 332).

⁷⁶ As NDM research is still in its early stages, some aspects remain underresearched. This is true to decision making for different cultures (H.A. Klein 2005: 244), gender, etc. Also, NDM has started out as a countermove to CDM theory and has yet to integrate some of the valid findings of earlier decision research into its own body of theory (Howell 1997: 45; Klein 1997b: 387).

⁷⁷ Skilled decision makers "perceive situations as typical cases where certain types of actions are typically appropriate, and are usually successful" (Lipshitz *et al.* 2001: 336) This conceptualization draws mainly from Klein's (1993) Recognition-Primed Decision model.

⁷⁸ This type of expertise is the focus of research of empirically based prescription.

alternatives (Lipshitz *et al.* 2001: 338). Ways to cope include reducing uncertainty, making assumptions to make up for a lack of knowledge, comparing pros and cons of alternative courses of action, preparation for negative consequences, and suppression of uncertainty by ignoring it (Lipshitz *et al.* 2001: 338, Lipshitz and Strauss 1997; March 1994: 38). Decision makers have also been found to mentally simulate the intended actions and think of (unintended) consequences (Lipshitz *et al.* 2001: 336⁷⁹). Based on this simulation, they decide whether to adopt the proposed course of action.

2.2.3 *Stages/Phases in the Decision-Making Process*

Explanations of return migration decisions must focus on the *process* of decision making; without an understanding of the process and the factors which influence it, theory must remain on a superficial level with insufficient explanatory power.

Raanan Lipshitz and Adi Adar Pras (2005: 102) divide the decision-making process into two phases, “one consisting of definition, situation description, and diagnosis (in relatively ill-defined problems), and the other consisting of action, option evaluation and elaboration.” Yet these phases need not only occur once and decision makers may switch back and forth several times. If the problem is complex, their evidence shows that individuals switch between the phases far more often than in the case of simple problems (Lipshitz and Pras 2005: 103).⁸⁰ In the first phase, the terms situation “awareness” or “assessment” are crucial to the understanding of decisions (Orasanu and Connolly 1993: 18; Zsombok 1997: 11).⁸¹ Based on the understanding of a situation, decision makers form mental models which lay the groundwork for subsequent considerations. Mental models by definition do not accurately mirror reality but are subjective; they represent an “internal reality” (Burns 2005: 17). The way problems are framed affects the solutions considered (Coleman 1990: 14; March and Shapira 1992: 276; March 1994: 14–15; Orasanu and Connolly 1993: 14; Simon *et al.* 1992: 33).⁸²

⁷⁹ Adriaan D. De Groot (1965: 266–274) has termed this “progressive deepening” to denote lengthy thought processes in chess, in which chess players go through phases of a) orientation (“looking at” consequences of general possibilities), b) exploration (deeply “calculating” moves, mind-mapping consequences), c) investigation (intensification of the previous step, more directed and exhaustive investigation) and d) a final phase of proof (constructing arguments for or against moves).

⁸⁰ In Kley’s (2011; 2009; Kley and Mulder 2010) “Rubicon” model of migration, toying with the idea of moving is largely limited to the consideration phase, while after one “crosses the Rubicon” and enters the planning phase, decisions become more binding. If one drops the intention to move in the planning stage, that decision comes at a social, emotional or financial cost.

⁸¹ In his review of real-world decision-making conceptualizations, Lipshitz (1993a: 128) summarizes most scholars agreeing on the idea that decision makers’ cognition guides their subsequent behaviors.

⁸² In traditional experiments of CDM this has referred to the wording of the problem description, as, for instance, in Kahneman and Tversky’s (1995) study on medical choices. Participants chose differently when asked about the probability of “dying” or “living.”

Hollnagel (2007: 6–7) conceptualizes decision making as a cycle triggered by an event followed by situation assessment, intention of action, choice of option and action, after which follows a feedback loop.⁸³ Yet how does one decide on an option based on one's situation assessment and problem definition? As pointed out before, an agent does not reflect on every possible option and its effect on a fixed list of priorities. Usually, to reduce complexity under organizational constraints, decision makers test potential courses of action for compatibility with only a few primary goals (Etzioni 1967),⁸⁴ while optimizing means that the goal of the decision is the best-possible outcome for a number of requirements or objectives (Janis and Mann 1979: 29).⁸⁵ As will be shown in this case study, potential return migrants satisfy to some degree, yet the search for the “best” solution among a small number of choices is still carried out, reflecting the logic of SEU.⁸⁶ Return migration is always in the back of migrants' heads when looking at options to solve a problem that is framed to be connected to living in a foreign country.⁸⁷ In a decision maker's evaluation of which option is the best fit, Lee Roy Beach (1993: 157) points out that not only are decision makers trying to achieve certain goals, but they are also influenced by how they perceive the world in terms of norms and beliefs, by how they think things *ought* to be.⁸⁸ As Henry Montgomery, Lipshitz and Berndt Brehmer (2005: 5) have stated “[all] decisions [...] are made in a social context.”⁸⁹ Decisions have to be justified or made with immediate and extended family members and affect at least the immediate family (Tabor 2014: 129).

⁸³ However, Hollnagel (2007: 5) sees decision-making not as a process but as an activity.

⁸⁴ Irving L. Janis and Leon Mann (1979: 26) point out that satisficing implies that a person usually distinguishes between two options when looking to improve his situation: a new option that came to his mind and the one currently adopted. However, if neither is satisfactory, he will continue to look for one that is, leading to a consideration of a number of alternative courses of action. Yet, they stress that the decision maker does not compare all possible options for optimal fit (Janis and Mann 1979: 27). James G. March (1994: 27) points out that satisficing is a rule for the search of information rather than decisions. The search for additional information to help make a satisfactory decision depends on the evaluation of the expected outcome of a potential course of action. Inherent in this model are feedback loops between performance and search. Elements of consequential choice (cf. March 1994: 2) are reflected in this study, as decision makers weigh consequences of competing choices on goals.

⁸⁵ Janis and Mann (1979: 30) also theorize on how a decision maker tests whether an option meets the requirements by stating that there is a *minimal cutoff point* for each alternative and each is treated the same way. In contrast, in an optimizing strategy, the impact of a course of action on several, hierarchically ranked requirements is examined.

⁸⁶ March (1994: 18–19) has pointed out this weakness of the satisficing approach: as one of its basic assumptions is that courses of action are considered sequentially, a course that will lead to satisfactory outcomes for a number of goals would be chosen over another one that leads to satisfactory but better outcomes, simply because it was considered first. As will be shown, this is not adopted as strictly in return migration decisions. One reason could be that goals are ranked hierarchically and therefore, a number of alternatives is considered to lead to satisfactory outcomes among the goal spectrum.

⁸⁷ In this sense, it can be said that they may “match” the solution of spatial relocation to a situation they have encountered before.

⁸⁸ One example of this are gender norms in parent–child or marital relationships.

⁸⁹ This has only received attention in that team decisions have been examined through an NDM lens.

2.2.4 *Decision Making and Problem Solving in Migration*

In the literature review sketched out above, it becomes clear that decision making as conceptualized by NDM scholars and problem solving are closely related. In their study on recognition-primed decisions, which actually deals with problem-solving processes, Lipshitz and Pras (2005: 103) conclude that “the problem-solving process observed in this laboratory study is essentially identical with the decision-making processes observed by Klein and others [...] in naturalistic settings.” For analytical clarity, decision making and problem solving are differentiated in this subsection. Oswald Huber (1986: 109) likens parts of specific types of decision-making processes to problem solving. A problem is defined as “an (undesired) initial situation (initial state), a desired goal situation (goal state), that the problem-solver does not know in advance how to transform the initial state into the goal state” (Huber 1986: 110). Problem solving examines the stages agents adopt in solving a problem, while decision making addresses the process of identifying alternatives and choosing among them (Hollnagel 2007: 3). Yet, in their analysis of decisions NDM scholars integrate process models formerly reserved to problem-solving approaches, including situation analysis and identification of the problem, only to then turn to the more narrow definition of decision making, analyzing how agents use expertise to make a decision about how to react to the identified problem. This holistic approach to decision making is also adopted in this study. It ties in to models adopted in migration decision making (Kalter 1997; Kley 2011; 2009; Kley and Mulder 2010) that differentiate between considering and planning migration, two stages that are divided by the decision to move. The four-staged migration decision-making model presented in this study goes a step further back and analyzes which situations or events trigger a stage in which agents would consider relocation. The first stage in the model, therefore, draws from problem-solving literature, redefining the phases within this stage, and then analyzes the stage of option evaluation, which can be more closely defined as decision making. Once an agent has made the decision to move, he enters a planning stage, in which he makes resulting decisions to prepare the final action of relocation. In this study, the term locational decision-making refers to the entire process, from situation analysis to action, while acknowledging that lesser decisions form part of this process.

2.2.5 *Decision Making and Taking Action*

A problem connected to decision-making theory is the distinction between decision making as a distinct process and the following action. Agents may have decided on a course of action, yet encounter constraints, face additional difficulties, receive further information that lead them to either abandon their

decision or to alter it. Return migration is a perfect example for this: although an agent may intend to return to his country of birth in the future, many factors can get in the way of this intention.⁹⁰

Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen (1975), who published one of the first volumes on predictions of social behavior, suggest that looking at intentions of humans will most often be enough to predict subsequent action (if there are no unforeseen developments). Instead of subscribing to perfect rationality or to behavior as a result of “overpowering desires” they propose a “theory of reasoned action” (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980: 5; Fishbein and Ajzen 2010: 24). The intention to perform a behavior is determined by a person’s attitude towards the behavior (positive or negative evaluation of the behavior) and subjective norms (perception of social pressures towards the behavior).⁹¹ In a later study, Ajzen (1988: 132) added a third factor to the framework he then called a “theory of planned behavior,” namely the factor of perceived behavioral control.⁹² Beliefs are often biased and rarely rational; yet from an ill-informed basis, a person will make reasoned choices to serve his interests (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010: 24). It is important to distinguish between attitudes and norms about behavior and attitudes about things or circumstances. For example, a negative stance towards political parties in general is different from a negative attitude towards the behavior of voting. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980: 8–9) treat this type of attitude as an external variable that may influence the attitude towards a behavior, but that is conceptually different. Whether behavior follows intention depends on the stability of the intention over time; the longer the time interval between forming of an intention and its intended action, the less accurate behavior can be predicted from intention (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980: 42, 47). The process of arriving at an intention differs with the time available and the novelty of the situation or gravity of the decision; while routine decisions of little importance can be made spontaneously based on previous experiences and a set of long-held beliefs, novel situations require more thorough processes (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010: 24).

In order to sufficiently explain behavior, not only must a researcher look at intentions but also subjective norms and attitudes that together form intentions, and, a further step back, factors that influence subjective norms and attitudes. In this line of thinking, they also refer to the information individuals possess about their environments and their beliefs about themselves, as these shape their

⁹⁰ Hollnagel (2007) stresses the importance of time as the information that forms the basis of deliberation and the stability of the situation ages and a “window of opportunity” may close if one waits too long to act on a decision/information. In order to cope with time stress, he suggests satisficing strategies, which, however, may lead to regret, as, retrospectively, a different choice might have yielded better results.

⁹¹ March (1994: 2) also distinguishes between the “objectively” expected outcomes of actions and the subjective feelings about them.

⁹² In Fishbein and Ajzen’s latest (2010) publication, all three factors are included in the “reasoned action approach.”

perceptions and, ultimately, situation assessment and identification of potential solutions (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980: 62, 79). Based on incomplete (or even false) information, persons form behavioral and normative beliefs, which in turn influence attitudes towards behavior and, as a last step, intention to perform/not perform a given behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980: 244). Factors that influence beliefs may include “age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education, nationality, religious affiliation, personality, mood, emotion, general attitudes and values, intelligence, group membership, past experiences, exposure to information, social support and coping skills,” yet there is not necessarily a causal connection to behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010: 24–25).⁹³

Positive individual evaluation of a behavior may conflict with social pressure not to perform it; an agent needs to reasonably weigh pros and cons, and strengths in one domain may outweigh weaknesses in the other (Ajzen 1988: 144; Fishbein and Ajzen 2010: 22). Yet, the ensuing intention about performing the behavior will most probably explain subsequent (in)action. Ajzen’s (1988: 132) additional factor of *perceived* behavioral control refers to anticipated obstacles and the level of difficulty in performing a behavior. Perceived behavioral control influences motivation, as the perception of strong obstacles working against a behavior that is positively connoted hinders the forming of an intention to act on this positive evaluation (Ajzen 1988: 134, 143). Perceived behavioral control can also serve as a proxy for actual constraints, such as lacking skills or external constraints, which are harder to measure (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010: 21).

After an action is carried out, an agent enters a feedback loop. In NDM research, the term “error” that is prevalent in other conceptions of decision-making research does not exist. Instead, unsatisfactory results can be the product of “ineffective attention management and inadequate problem detection” (Lipshitz *et al.* 2001: 339). Whether a decision is right or wrong is mostly impossible to detect as there is no way to test for potential alternative outcomes. Yet regret or satisfaction may point toward the individual’s evaluation of past decisions (Janis and Mann 1979: 10–11). By satisficing, by compromising on the degree of “thoroughness” in search of information or options for action in situations of internal or external pressure, decision makers risk “failure” or regret (Hollnagel 2007: 8–9). Hollnagel (2007: 9) proposes different types of decision failures that may apply to migration decisions: wrong timing, duration, speed or direction of action.⁹⁴ In the context of migration, a person may say that he has moved at the wrong point in time, waited too long to make a decision to move (or settle), moved too fast without preparing correctly or moved to the wrong place, respectively.

⁹³ Fishbein and Ajzen (1975: 11–12) refer to the “age-old trilogy of affect, cognition and conation” when they use the terms attitude (feelings/evaluation), beliefs and behavioral intention, respectively.

⁹⁴ Other decision failures are distance, pressure, object and sequence of actions (Hollnagel 2007: 9).

2.3 Model of Return Migration Decision Making

One of the basic questions of migration research is why some agents move and others do not (Fischer, Martin and Straubhaar 1997: 53). Once the “permanent settlement migration paradigm” (Hugo 2003) was softened, this question was further subdivided into who settles in the host country, who moves on and who returns. Migration experience has been found to increase the likelihood of migration and highly skilled are considered especially mobile, moving in the direction of economic opportunity. The phenomenon of return migration of highly skilled puts migration theory to the test, as it often happens in opposite direction to economic opportunity (Dumont and Spielvogel 2008: 178). This section introduces a return migration decision-making model for highly skilled Chinese in Japan. First, the level of analysis is presented, and then the process of decision making as well as factors influencing the decision are traced, closing with a brief outline of the study and its contribution.

2.3.1 *Level of Analysis*

Decision-making theory has almost exclusively focused on individual-level decisions (exceptions include Duffy 1993; Orasanu and Salas 1993), while research on migration decisions has distinguished between household and individual decisions (De Jong and Fawcett 1981; Harbison 1981; Stark 1984).

In this study the author hypothesizes that return migration is only one option to solve problems or achieve goals of individuals and households. An individual perspective is adopted while including the possibility for joint decision making and decisions made for the individual by persons of power (such as parents, spouse and employers), who thus take the locational choice from the individual. The individual acts within a larger framework of macro-, meso-, exo- and micro-level factors (Bronfenbrenner 1989; Voydanoff 2008). Macro-level factors include stages of economic development, political structures, immigration regimes and “broad belief systems”. The macro level influences all other levels by providing “life-course options, patterns of social interaction, shared belief systems, and life styles,” including norms and ideologies (Voydanoff 2008: 38). Meso-level factors refer to social networks, exo-level factors to indirect influences of external environments through immediate network contacts (such as the spouse’s work settings, Achenbach 2014; Voydanoff 2008: 38). Micro-level factors refer to the roles and activities of an agent in family or friendship circles and at the workplace.

Therefore, in looking at the individual agent and his locational decisions, demographic factors such as age, gender, family-related and career-related life phase, position in the household and occupation need to be included (see also

Beshers 1967). Fishbein and Ajzen (2010: 24–25) also add personality,⁹⁵ general attitudes and values,⁹⁶ exposure to information and social support as factors on a micro level to explain behavior. A lack or inaccuracy of information is a crucial factor to explain less than rational decisions (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980: 244; DaVanzo 1980; DaVanzo and Morrison 1982). In addition, the perception of behavioral control, that is, the perception of social, political, cultural or economic obstacles (real or imagined) influences the evaluation of options and the likelihood to act on a decision (Ajzen 1988: 132–144; Fishbein and Ajzen 2010: 21–22). An individual's general attitudes, values and norms, are influenced by the macro level. Norms and ideology differ by culture: examples that are of importance in this study are gender role ideology or the norm of filial piety.⁹⁷ How these norms are interpreted and integrated into behavior depends on individual circumstances and their importance may shift during the life course.

The changes that come with career- and family-related life phase transitions, such as the ends of education or training, job switches and promotions, as well as marriage, childbirth, and ageing (frail) parents influence a number of factors. Among these are: responsibilities, priorities and goals of the decision maker, the number and influence of persons involved in the decision-making process, negotiation leverage and perception of behavioral control. Initial migration decisions are often made without including other agents in the process, but with rising responsibilities for spouse, children and elderly parents, the influence of these agents rises. The presence of children changes priorities, available income and power structures within households. The top priority “career” of the initial migration decision may be substituted by, e.g., “well-being of the child.”⁹⁸

The study examines priorities in locational decisions of highly skilled agents in different educational/occupational career- as well as family-related life phases, before integrating the two with the concept of parallel careers in Section 6.2. Educational/occupational career-related life phases comprise students/young workers starting out in their careers on the one hand (including B.A., M.A. and PhD students as well as those who had just only started out in their active careers), and participants established in their working lives on the other (division heads, middle and top management, academics as well as entrepreneurs). Family-related life phases range from the phase of early adulthood (single migrants or participants in non-committal relationships until age 35, who do not wish to start a family), family phase (defined as agents looking to settle down, including married migrants trying to start a family or with school-age children) and the establishing phase (in

⁹⁵ See Tabor (2014: 90–119) on the role of personality as a factor in migration decisions.

⁹⁶ Tversky and Kahneman (1986: S257) refer to the decision makers’ “norms, habits, and expectancies” that shape the framing and editing (in addition to evaluation) in prospect theory.

⁹⁷ Although cultural norms are not static, some are reinforced by legislation and thereby, slower to change (for example, taxation policy that encourages women to stay home).

⁹⁸ See Etzioni (1967) on primary goals.

a serious relationship/married without the desire to have children or married with children that have finished high school). This does not reflect conventional life course approaches, which differentiate not by the wishes of agents (the plan to start a family) but by their actual circumstances. Nevertheless, the study differentiates between these groups based on their intentions, as these intentions directly influence mobility behavior: some agents see their time in Japan as a moratorium on their private lives and exclude starting a family in Japan. The desire to start a family, therefore, has a real impact on migration decisions, justifying the grouping of participants by an expanded life course perspective. A detailed explanation of the rationale for this approach as well as results can be found in Section 6.2.

Previous studies have found gender differences both in the experiences of migrants, but also in the decision-making process underlying mobility behavior (Bielby and Bielby 1992: 1245; Cooke 2008; Ellis, Conway and Bailey 1996: 125; Purkayastha 2005: 182; Willis and Yeoh 2000: 258). Section 6.3 analyzes how career-oriented men and women differ in the factors they consider in locational decisions. In addition, the study examines how agents of different occupations vary in their perception of influential and decisive factors. As Beshers has pointed out as early as 1967, the occupation of the migrant influences his experiences in the host country, but also his decisions about settlement, onward movement or return migration. Development stages, legislation shaping working environments and immigration regimes, but also norms about job switches, upward mobility of women and foreigners, as well as income levels differ for various occupations in host and home countries. The classification of workers in this study is as follows: managers and executives, middle management, engineers and technicians, academics and scientists, entrepreneurs and students, drawing from Mahroum's (2000) conceptualization. In addition, occupational fields are distinguished: finance and consulting, engineering, sales and trade, education and research, IT, and law.

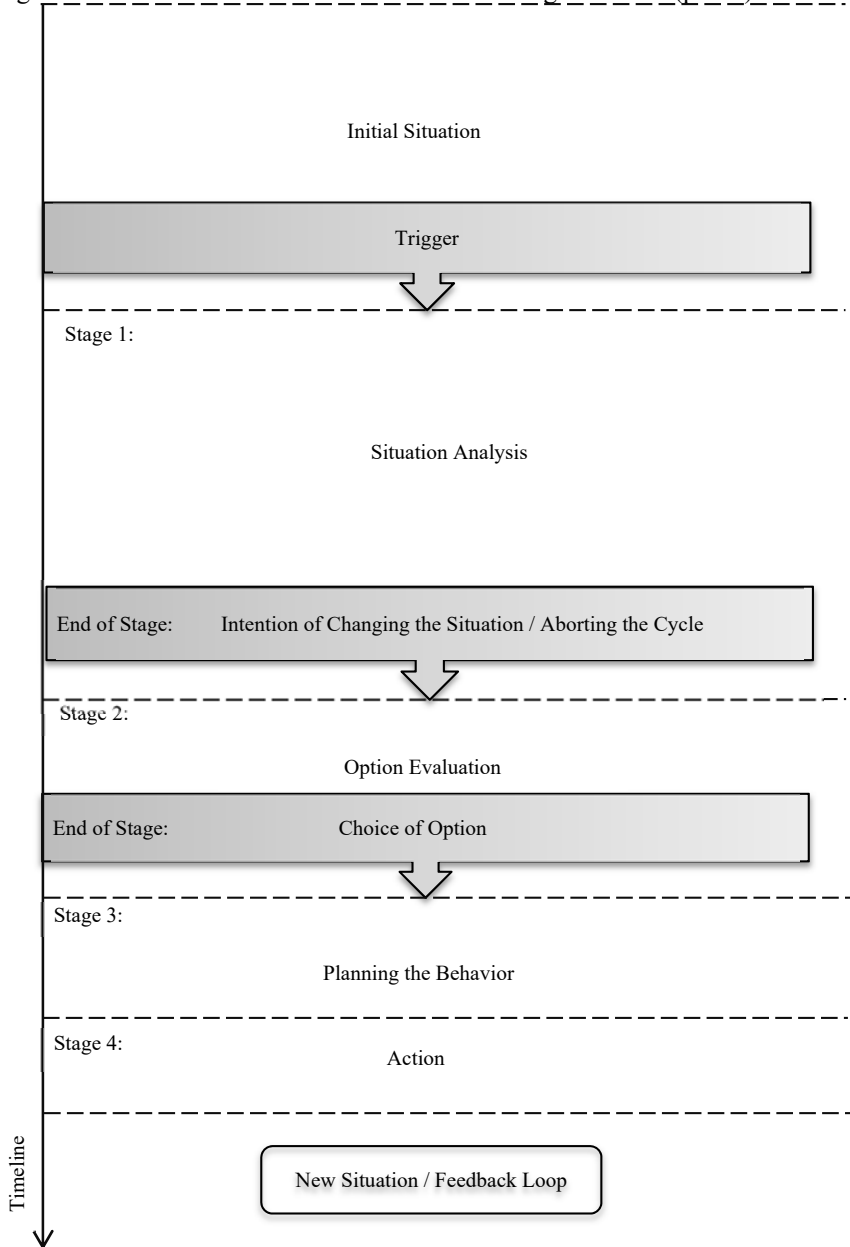
This study looks at the agency of migrants facing structural constraints on various levels and how they integrate those obstacles and facilitating factors into their decision-making processes.

2.3.2 *Process*

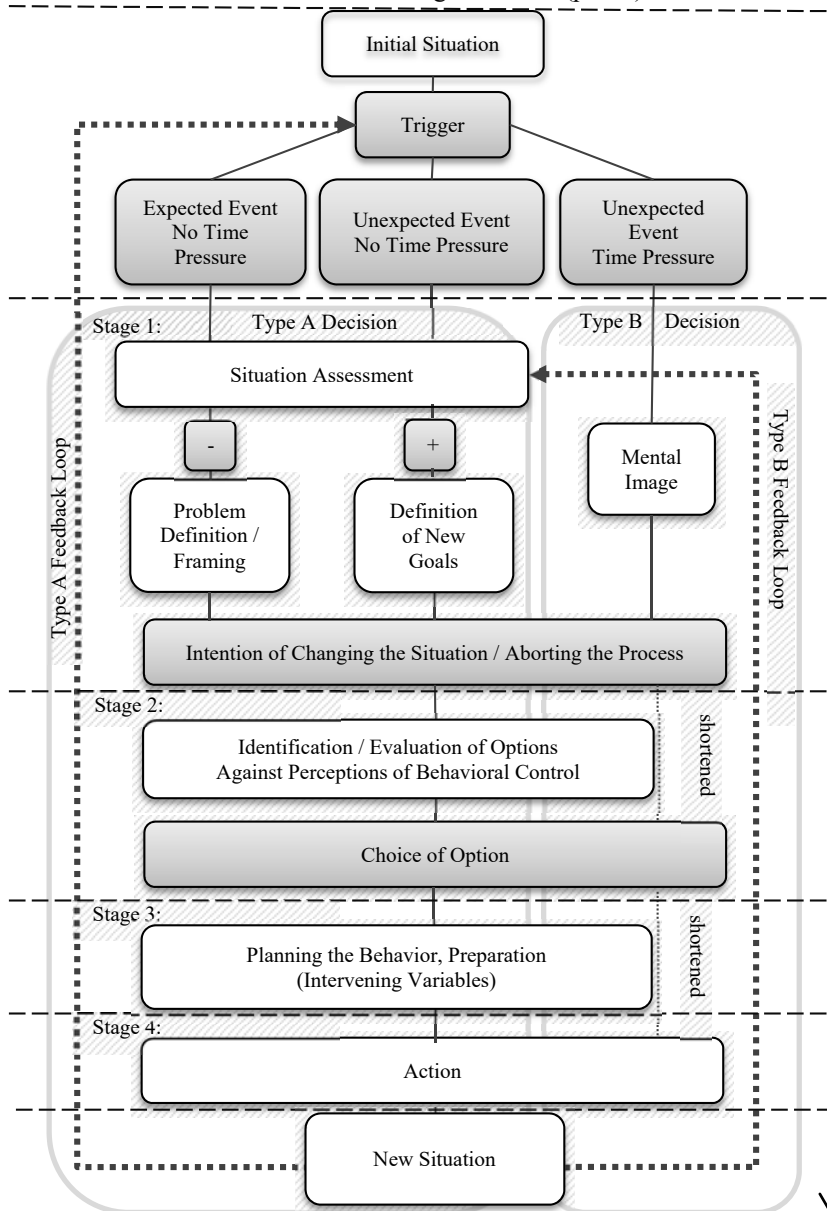
The decision-making model presented in the following two pages is based on findings from empirical data analysis of this study, Hollnagel's general decision-making (2007: 7) and Kley's (2009: 54) migration model.⁹⁹ The explanation of stages and phases follows after Figure 2.1, explored in detail in Chapter 5.

⁹⁹ Hollnagel's (2007: 7) decision-making cycle consists of an event, situation assessment, intention to act, choosing what to do, carrying out the action and feedback loops. Kley (2009) conceptualizes migration considerations, decision, migration plans, and carrying out the decision, i.e., moving.

Figure 2.1: A Model of Locational Decision-Making Processes (part 1)



A Model of Locational Decision-Making Processes (part 2)



compiled by the author.

Initial Situation and Triggers to the Decision-Making Process

Participants of the study are considered to be in a feedback loop of their (original decision to) move to Japan. By putting the initial migration decision into action, agents find themselves in a changed situation, in the case of migration, in a different country. This migration behavior (including physical relocation, but also actions in the host country, visa renewal etc.) usually is intended to last several years before agents return. Triggers to reevaluate the locational decisions are manifold, and the outcome need not always be migration. Events that induce migrants to reconsider their locational decisions are the end of a set time frame for living abroad, external, family- or career-related events. Family- and career-related events include the ends of educational programs, job switches but also “starting a job, marriage or starting to live with a partner, childbirth, having experienced the out-migration of family members or close friends, [...] having a partner who has the wish or necessity to move” (Kley and Mulder 2010: 79), or illness and sudden care needs of a parent.¹⁰⁰ In most cases in the sample, the decision-making process about return migration is triggered by the end of a set time frame or an expected event such as child birth, for example. Some of these events do not only act as triggers to the decision-making process, but they (e.g., childbirth) change a migrant’s negotiation power and position in the household. In addition, they fundamentally transform the hierarchy of goals, thus changing the factors that are considered in migration decisions. Other events found to trigger the process for participants include career-related events, such as job offers or retirement, but also unexpected events such as the earthquake, tsunami and following nuclear crisis of March 11, 2011. The following stage of situation analysis in the decision-making process differs by the agent’s perception of time pressure: in the absence of time pressure, he enters a Type A decision-making process, or if he perceives time pressure, begins a Type B decision-making process (see Figure 2.1). The two types differ in the stage of situation analysis, but also by length or thoroughness of the overall process, and especially the feedback loop after the decision is put into action, as is explained in the following.

¹⁰⁰ One important case that triggers a decision-making process and exemplifies the influence of situation assessment is the birth of a child. It changes housing needs, creates needs for child care and for a decision of whether the child should enter the host or the home country’s school system, which is often considered crucial for the child’s future. Migrants assess the situation of housing markets, childcare support and school systems both for the country of origin and the host country. Most migration happens during one’s 20s, but mobility rates increase again in later life due to health reasons or the wish to be close to family (Hayward 2004: 85; Geist and McManus 2008: 284).

Situation Analysis

Usually triggered by an event (in rare cases by general dissatisfaction, see Kalter 1997: 73–76; Speare 1974) with one's current situation) the decision-making process begins with a stage of situation analysis. As Hollnagel (2007) points out, time is of crucial importance, because information ages, an agent makes decisions in “uncertain dynamic environments” (Orasanu and Connolly 1993: 7),¹⁰¹ goals and priorities shift or simply because there is time pressure to act to solve an acute problem.¹⁰² The agent analyzes how the event affects his life; if it disrupts his usual routine, he will look for a way to either “restore” it or build a new one.¹⁰³

Type A Decision: Situation Assessment

In the absence of time pressure, the stage of situation analysis consists of the phases of situation assessment followed by either problem definition/framing or setting new goals. The agent assesses his current situation, particularly whether he has achieved his goals and is satisfied in the three spheres of career, family and lifestyle preferences. This assessment can vary in its level of thoroughness; if the trigger is a career-related event, he does not necessarily examine his satisfaction in the family sphere, but may only focus on his career goals. At the end of a set time frame, however, agents usually do assess their levels of satisfaction in all three spheres. Depending on the outcome, that is, whether agents have reached their initial goal of migration, or whether they are satisfied in various life spheres, agents either define underlying problems or set new goals.

Type A Decision: Problem Definition and Framing

If the agent is dissatisfied with one or more areas of his life, he will move on to analyze and identify one or more underlying problems.¹⁰⁴ The problem often lies in the same sphere on which situation assessment focused, but problems are

¹⁰¹ Examples are Japan's economy in crisis or changes in migration policies.

¹⁰² Similar to a strategy described by Etzioni (1968: 294, see also Janis and Mann 1979: 36), in times of crisis decisions can be made fast and they can be costly, while in times of stability, decisions are made incrementally and are closely watched by one's social system.

¹⁰³ One example is unexpected job loss; an agent will look for a new job (in the same field, same location) to “restore” his routine, but he may also build new routines by, e.g., starting his own business.

¹⁰⁴ Simplifying strategies to break down complex problems include editing, decomposing, heuristics and framing (March 1994: 12–15). Editing is the conscious reduction in the search for and analysis of information; in the decomposition process, problems are broken down to subjectively important parts, possibly dealt with individually to solve the larger issue (March 1994: 12). Heuristics refer to the situation recognition and identification of appropriate problem-solving behavior (March 1994: 13), reflecting the idea of matching. Framing means that decision makers frame the decisions “by beliefs that define the problem to be addressed” (March 1994: 14). They need not only rely on their own way of framing a problem but may be influenced by friends, family or colleagues.

usually ill-structured and manifold, affecting various areas of life.¹⁰⁵ Part of this process of problem identification is also the framing of the problem: the same problem can be seen as the result of various circumstances, influencing the next stage of option evaluation. For example, if a migrant is unhappy with and seeks to improve work–family balance,¹⁰⁶ he could define long working hours, insufficient support from employers or insufficient child care provisions and a lack of support from the spouse in the household as problems, to name but a few. Whether an agent sees the problem as connected to living in the country of destination, as a work or a private problem influences the solutions he considers.

Type A Decision: Definition of New Goals

An agent enters this phase if his situation assessment is positive. This is the case, for example, if the trigger to the decision-making process is the end of a set time frame and the migrant has reached one or more of his goals. He probably will set new goals in the sphere in which he has reached his initial goals, yet, he may also opt to keep the status quo and focus on other areas of life. The following stage of option evaluation depends on the specificity of goals and problems.

Type B Decision: Mental Image of Current State

The stage of situation analysis differs, if the agent perceives time pressure to react to an unexpected event. In that case, he forms a mental model of the evolving situation to “describe, explain, and predict an evolving situation” (Burns 2005: 17). His model is probably flawed, as the agent is never able to grasp the entirety of macro-, meso- and exo-level factors that together shape his current situation. In the context of locational decision-making processes, the agent does not assess his levels of satisfaction and goal achievement, but reacts to an unanticipated, external problem. In this case, the decision-making process culminating in physical relocation is sped up; the agent considers only a small number of options to ease the effect of the external event on his situation, carries out only the most urgent preparations, and relocates. Once he finds himself in a new situation, in a new location, he will re-enter the decision-making process at the phase of situation assessment, analyzing whether this was the right decision based on his general

¹⁰⁵ One example of this is if unhappiness with an agent’s working situation spills over into his private life, while changes in family life (such as child birth) may affect his goals and demands for his working environment (work–family negative spill-over, see Shimada *et al.* 2010: 335–336; Suzuki 2007: 14).

¹⁰⁶ Sociologist Patricia Voydanoff (2008: 48) defines work–family balance as the “global assessment that the work and family resources are sufficient to meet work and family demands such that participation is effective in both domains.” Time constraints but also strains in one area (work or family) may spill over into the other domain, leading to work–family negative spillover or role overload (Shimada *et al.* 2010: 335–336; Suzuki 2007: 14).

levels of satisfaction with his place of residence before sudden relocation. In the sample, Type B decisions were observed after 3/11. Agents would swiftly relocate, yet while for some this constituted the end of their migration experience in Japan, others returned to Japan after a few weeks.

Intention of Changing the Situation/Aborting the Process

Depending on the agent's perception of the gravity of the situation, he makes a first smaller decision, namely whether he intends to act to solve the identified problem or reach new goals. Some problems may be too small to act on or too big to be influenced by an action of the agent. In other cases, he will continue his behavior to keep the status quo. In those cases, the agent will not even go through a process of option evaluation but accept his situation.

Considering/Evaluating Options

In contrast to CDM theory, an agent does not rationally consider every possible option (due to lack of resources such as information, time and attention span). As a migrant has chosen moving before to reach goals, this option already forms part of his problem-solving repertoire and is likely to be considered. Following the logic of SEU models, an agent does consider the impact of a few options on his primary goals, which shift over time (March 1994: 31; Simon *et al.* 1992: 48).¹⁰⁷ However, an agent may make false estimations of consequences of choice (March and Shapira 1992: 276). Which options are considered more in depth than others depends not only on primary goals and priorities but also on norms and values. At this stage, the agent may involve other agents from his network who give advice and/or who are directly affected by the options he considers. It is also at this stage that the perception of behavioral control comes in: some options are excluded from deeper consideration due to perceived insurmountable hurdles.

Choice of Option

At this point, an agent decides on a course of action, based on his evaluation. It is assumed that he will choose the option which promises a satisfactory outcome or that maximizes the utility of a specific goal (March 1994: 18; Simon *et al.* 1992: 37). This stage connects to Kley's (2011; 2009; Kley and Mulder 2010) image of crossing the Rubicon; after choosing an option, abandoning this choice comes at a psychological cost. Usually at this stage the choice is communicated to the immediate network.

¹⁰⁷ This strategy matches Etzioni's (1967: 389–390) characterization of *fundamental* decisions: "Fundamental decisions are made by exploring the main alternatives the actor sees in view of his conception of his goals, but details and specifications are omitted so that an overview is feasible."

Planning Action

Once a choice is made and communicated beyond the ones directly involved, an agent enters the planning stage, which, in turn requires a number of resulting decisions and actions. Yet, even if an agent is firmly set on one course of action and a time frame for carrying out the behavior, intervening variables may delay, rush or terminate his plans. While planning and action are conceptually different stages, return migration comprises a number of decisions and actions resulting from the intention to relocate. For the purposes of this study, the stages of planning a behavior and action cannot be neatly separated: intervening variables may jeopardize plans, although lesser actions such as booking the plane ticket are already performed. The decision-making process ends with the “final” action of relocation for the purposes of long-term return (at least one year, matching the United Nations’ (Statistics Division 1998: 95) definition of return migrants), although the author is aware that this decision is reversible and that migration entails more actions than physical relocation.

Action and Feedback Loop

Once the action of physical relocation is carried out, the decision maker assesses the new situation and the decision-making process starts over. For return migration, it is the initial migration decision that creates the current feedback loop that lasts for months or even years in the sample. As pointed out above, the feedback loops differs for Type A and Type B decisions: Type A decisions are intended for the long term, which is why agents usually do not immediately consider another relocation, even if they encounter problems to which international movement would be a good solution. Instead, they will generally seek to find a local solution to their problem. In Type B decisions, the agents assess the new situation, and may find that they are satisfied with the temporary return and decide to go through with return migration, deciding to quit their jobs in Japan etc. In other cases, they will be dissatisfied and act correctively.¹⁰⁸

One of the main questions of this study is why and at which point in the migration process some migrants (finally exclude or) include return to China in their list of seriously considered options again. This is because especially in the beginnings of living in a new country, problems are often linked to living in the destination country and return is therefore seen as a solution. However, depending

¹⁰⁸ In Type B decisions, the term feedback loop is used in a narrow sense as suggested by NDM scholars: a previous action is assessed for its impact on the perceived problem; agents may decide to correct it in the feedback loop that ensues after the action. In long-term decisions which stand at the center of interest in this study, the feedback loop designates the new situation that results from performing a behavior. The agent is unlikely to act correctively in the sense that he returns but he makes other decision to improve his situation in the new location.

on the initial goals of migrants, return may not be a feasible option as they want to gain an educational degree or working experience etc. Migrants may therefore choose to seek other solutions or not to act to solve a problem.¹⁰⁹ There are differences by gender and life phase in the various stages of the decision-making process: the framing of the problem, the perception of macro-level factors influencing situation assessment and options, but also behavioral control over one's actions as well as one's position within households and thereby negotiating power differ, justifying the individual as the level of analysis in this study. Time is crucial; if the event, in the understanding of the agent, creates an urgency to act, he skips or cuts short all phases in the decision-making process (most notably the stage of setting new goals). In that case, the event constitutes a problem in the agent's life and, depending on his mental representation of the situation, he will move directly to the evaluation of options to solve the problem.

2.3.3 *Influential Factors*

Migration is a tool to ensure a better life. What constitutes a “good” or “better” life depends on individual goals of migrants.¹¹⁰ These can be roughly divided into three categories, which may overlap: a fulfilling career, rewarding family life, and a life according to one's preferences in terms of lifestyle, hobbies or ideology.¹¹¹ A person strives to achieve the best possible balance of these goals. How goals are defined and which priority is attached to them differs by gender and by individual characteristics. In addition, the importance of these goals changes over the life course, as some goals take precedence over others for a limited amount of time. Some goals may not be clearly attributable to one set of goals but span several

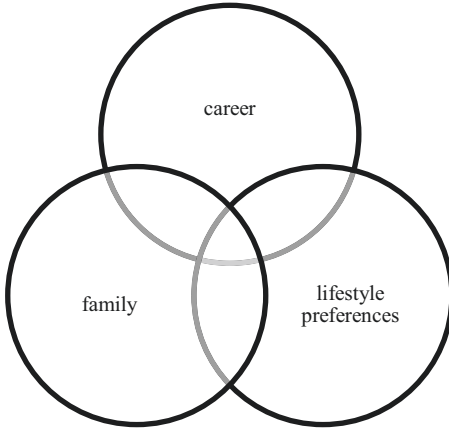
¹⁰⁹ Etzioni (1967: 389–390) states that incremental decisions happen within the confines fundamental decisions have set. (Incrementalism, or “muddling through,” is a concept of political decision making described in detail by Charles E. Lindblom (1959; 1979). Political decision makers take small rather than bold steps toward a policy goal, attracting less criticism.) Initial migration can be seen as a fundamental decision, as it sets the boundaries for subsequent decisions. The decisions made while living in Japan then are incremental decisions, as long as they do not lead to moving. See Achenbach (2014) on Chinese highly skilled women's other strategies to increase work–family balance.

¹¹⁰ Siegwart Lindenberg (1996; Lindenberg and Frey 1993) has conceptualized two overarching goals: physical well-being and social well-being, which cannot be achieved directly but only optimized by achieving the instrumental goals of stimulation, comfort, status, behavioral confirmation and affection (Ormel *et al.* 1999: 61). Although Lindenberg's (1996) conceptualization and Abraham H. Maslow's (1970; 1943) hierarchy of needs overlap, Lindenberg argues against the inclusion of self-actualization, as he claims it is dependent on approval of others (Ormel *et al.* 1999: 69), however, self-actualization is identified as an important goal in this study.

¹¹¹ This is a reduced model that nevertheless includes De Jong and Fawcett's (1981: 50) seven goals of wealth, status (career), affiliation (social and family life) comfort, stimulation, autonomy and morality (lifestyle preferences). These goals overlap in the author's conceptualization, for example, because wealth may be a tool to ensure the well-being of the family.

spheres of family, career and lifestyle preferences.¹¹² Additionally, how they are set depends on behavioral norms, such as gender role ideology. Figure 2.2 shows the influential spheres for migration decisions, depicting that the spheres may overlap.

Figure 2.2: Influential Spheres for Migration Decisions



compiled by the author.

Each individual-level goal can be subdivided into factors that are important to achieving it. These factors exist on various levels. In the following section, factors for the three spheres are presented that were identified in the analysis of the interviews. The influence of the factors differs for various stages of the decision-making process and by gender, which is argued in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6. If return migration is considered, differences between the factors in host and home country are evaluated as well as the effect of a move on primary goals.

2.3.3.1 Career

There is a vast literature that assumes that wage gaps or economic considerations in general are sufficient to explain movement (see Section 2.1; Kröhnert 2007; Massey *et al.* 1993: 432–434; Piore 1979; Sjaastad 1962; Todaro 1969). Especially

¹¹² One goal that connects all three spheres for highly skilled migrants is work–life (or work–family) balance. The two terms differ in that work–family balance applies only to the assessment that an agent is able to meet demands of both the work place and the family (Voydanoff 2008: 48), while work–life balance juxtaposes the terms work and life, the latter including family life, but also hobbies and other “private” or non-work areas of an agent’s life.

the highly skilled, though, cannot work everywhere in the world in occupations in which they were trained (Faist 1997: 188; Favell, Feldblum and Smith 2006: 17; Meyer 2001); migrants will therefore compare levels of development to ensure finding a job suitable for their skills that is also interesting or challenging for them. Other career factors that are of importance in migration decisions include the (gendered) structure of labor markets, potential for upward mobility (especially of foreigners and/or women), favorable legislation, financial incentives or favorable taxation policy for business founders. Table 2.2 provides an overview of factors considered for several places when thinking about moving, based on findings from the literature and empirical analysis.

Table 2.2: Goals and Influential Factors in the Career Sphere

	individual goals	influential factors
career	high wages	- income level differences - taxation policy/favorable legislation
	challenging work contents	- development of occupation (level of technology) - legislation regarding profession - applicability/transferability of skills
	working styles/prestige	- working styles in specific company - cultural norms about working styles
	upward mobility	- overall state of the economy (demand, openness/discrimination towards foreigners) - career speed
	entrepreneurs: business expansion	- location-specific size and quality of occupational network - restrictions of labor markets
	human capital expansion	- availability/quality of education - job chances - quality and quantity of jobs

compiled by the author.

A migrant possesses incomplete information about most of the larger-level factors and is not able to compute or forecast accurately where he will be most likely to achieve his career goals. Macro-level factors and their perception differ for men and women and for different occupations (see van der Velde, Bossink and Jansen 2005). One factor that has been identified to encourage settlement is the non-transferability of location-specific capital. A migrant must make forecasts about the potential of building up a clientele or the availability of licenses to practice his occupation in another country. Nevertheless, career goals need not take precedence for all highly skilled migrants in all life phases. Migrants may compromise in this realm to ensure other goals. In addition, some of these goals may not only be connected to career considerations: higher earnings, for example, may be a tool to provide for a migrant's family.

2.3.3.2 Family

Although some publications have dealt with households as decision-making units in migration, they have yet to address negotiation processes and goals of the individual in the family realm. Not all migrants share the goals that are compiled in Table 2.3, and the importance of the goals differs with life phase.

Table 2.3: Goals and Influential Factors in the Family Sphere

	individual goals	concrete measures	influential factors
family	be a good child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fulfill parents' wishes - send remittances - take care of elderly parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural norm of filial piety (and gender role ideology) - insufficient welfare state provisions - immigration policy
	be a good spouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support spouse's career and locational preferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural norms of gender role ideology - job chances/discrimination in different labor markets
	be a good parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensure good education - encourage identity formation - provide safe environment - spend time with children - material well- being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - quality of educational programs - legislation concerning education - political stability - environmental/food safety - availability of child care services - work-family balance support structures (company-/state-level) - immigration policy

compiled by the author.

In the phase of early adulthood, family factors usually are of less importance, as migrants move away from their closest contacts to invest in human capital (and potentially send back remittances). In the family phase, family considerations usually trump career factors, especially during the first years after having children. With life phase transitions, priorities change and the number of persons involved in the decision-making process rises from negotiating with parents to negotiating with spouse, parents and children. Gender role ideology plays an important role in family factors, as parents of participants have different expectations of daughters and sons, as women and men often occupy different functions in households (for example, in child rearing duties). It influences individual behavioral norms: for example, in order to fulfill one's perception of what constitutes a good parent, good spouse or a caring child to elderly parents, a migrant might return to his country of origin, although his lifestyle and career preferences favored staying in the destination country.

2.3.3.3 Lifestyle Preferences

The category of “lifestyle preferences” includes individual characteristics of a migrant and his lifestyle preferences in a stricter sense. While these preferences are easily given up for family and career goals by some migrants, they constitute primary life goals for others.

Table 2.4: Goals and Influential Factors in the Sphere of Lifestyle Preferences

	individual goals	influential factors
lifestyle preferences	autonomy (freedom/self-actualization)	- legislation - culture - social norms
	live according to political/ ideological/religious convictions	- type of political regime - openness of society towards religiousness
	lifestyle preferences in a narrow sense	- culture - environment - level of development
	rewarding social life	- openness of society

compiled by the author.

Individual characteristics that come into play in this category are, for example, risk averseness, sense of belonging, identity, or political convictions. Depending on the factors in this category, some migrants will categorically exclude moving to certain places, or such a decision will come at a high personal cost.

2.3.4 Outline and Contribution of the Study

The following chapters present results of the study, aiming to answer the question of why some highly skilled Chinese in Japan settle while others return (or move on). A special focus is placed on the underlying question of why some agents adhere to their original migration plan while others deviate, returning earlier or later than originally intended. Chapter 3 contains information on methodology of data collection and analysis, while Chapter 4 places participants’ locational decisions in the relevant context, including the history of Chinese migration to Japan, Japanese immigration policy, the composition of the Chinese population in Japan, and China’s policies aimed at increasing return migration. Chapter 5 and 6 report the results of the study. Chapter 5 explains the decision-making model introduced in Section 2.3.2 in more detail, providing information on various triggers to the process, contents of situation analysis, potential options and perceptions of behavioral control, planning, and action, as well as the resulting feedback loop. After the presentation of the qualitative results of *how* agents make

locational decisions, Chapter 6 quantitatively analyzes the individual decisive and influential factors and examines how they differ in importance for various groups. This results in a holistic explanation of participants' migration behavior.

Previous explanations of return migration have largely reduced it to reactive behavior, usually focusing on only one set of variables, such as earnings or unemployment. The decision-making process was only rarely analyzed, and routinely left out migrants' choices between a number of options to solve ill-structured problems. Quantitative studies focus on the impact of quantifiable factors on moving behavior, but cannot depict the process accurately, such as why migration becomes an option that is considered to solve problems or achieve goals in the first place and how the weighing up of different factors works that leads to the agent picking migration over other options. In order to explain return migration, it is necessary to look at the individual migrant, his priorities and goals over the life course, his position in immediate and extended networks, his behavioral norms, negotiation leverage and agency, and, most importantly, his perception of behavioral control. In order to explain movement, but in particular, to explain deviations from original migration intentions, the integration of perspectives on processes and contents of decision-making is crucial. Understanding how migrants make locational decisions sheds light on their perception of circumstances in Japan and China, how they process information, how different triggers but also framings of the same problem lead to different outcomes and how intervening factors lead to a deviation. The quantitative analysis, in turn, analyzes how factors differ for various groups, how goals shift over the life course influencing the contents of the decision-making process, how men and women vary in their goals and perceptions of how various locations can serve to improve their lives.

The conceptualization of migration decisions described above differs from other migration decision-making models, as it takes into consideration that migration is only one solution to ill-structured problems, that whether migration is chosen depends on the framing of the problem, that multiple participants take part in a potentially unequal negotiation process and that migration affects all aspects of life (family, career, lifestyle). Agents strive for the best balance of hierarchically ranked primary goals. The conceptualization contributes to general decision theory, as it identifies new phases and refines previously identified stages for the case of return migration, and analyzes how these phases are interdependent. Triggers interrupting an agent's routine or plans lead to a reassessment of his current situation, which in turn influences problem framing or which leads, in case a migrant is satisfied with his situation, to setting new life goals. It is especially the phase of option evaluation that is analyzed to understand how a migrant assesses the influence of options on his life goals and why he chooses migration over other options against potential constraints in the field of politics, economics, networks contacts or his own lifestyle preferences. The conceptualization and

sequence of decision-making phases adds to decision-making theory, while the analysis of influential factors to migration theory, integrating the two strings of research. An understanding of return migration decisions of highly skilled Chinese is interesting for various actors for at least three reasons: governments and companies are interested in attracting and retaining the best brains internally and externally for economic growth and their international competitive ability. As mobility increasingly form part of highly skilled workers' lives, knowing what difficulties the widely sought after workers and migrants face and how they make locational and thereby also career and family decisions can be used by national and local governments as well as companies to design better-fitting policies to attract and retain talent, but also to better support migrants in companies and communities, improving migrants' well-being. International exchange also serves political purposes, as it is part of cultural diplomacy and hypothesized to increase "mutual understanding" between different cultures (MEXT 1999; MOFA 1977).¹¹³

¹¹³ "Exchange students will, in the future, not only become people knowledgeable about Japan as they understand Japanese culture, but they are also resources that will carry on Japanese culture into the future with their knowledge and energy supporting the Japanese society, and spreading of the Japanese language and culture to the world." This policy is stressed for the East Asian region and aims at establishing Japan as a "Peaceful Nation" (Council on the Promotion of Cultural Diplomacy 2005).

Return Migration Decisions

A Study on Highly Skilled Chinese in Japan

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2017, XVIII, 302 p. 4 illus., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-658-16026-5