

Research in  
Migration and  
Ethnic Relations  
Series



# Globalizing Chinese Migration

Trends in Europe and Asia

Edited by  
**Pál Nyíri and Igor Saveliev**

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## Trends in Europe and Asia

*Edited by*

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ASHGATE

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Published by  
Ashgate Publishing Limited  
Gower House  
Croft Road  
Aldershot  
Hampshire GU11 3HR  
England

Ashgate Publishing Company  
131 Main Street  
Burlington, VT 05401-5600, USA

Ashgate website: <a href="http://www.ashgate.com">http://www.ashgate.com</a>
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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Nyíri Pál

Globalizing chinese migration : trends in Europe and Asia.

- (Research in migration and ethnic relations series)

1.Chinese - Europe 2.Chinese - Asia 3.Europe - Emigration  
and immigration 4.Asia - Emigration and immigration

I.Title II.Saveliev, Igor R.

305.8'951'04

**Library of Congress Control Number:** 2002100896

ISBN 0 7546 1793 9

Printed and bound by Athenaeum Press, Ltd.,  
Gateshead, Tyne & Wear.

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# Foreword

This book grew out of the workshop 'The past decade of migration from the People's Republic of China' which was sponsored by the Asia Committee of the European Science Foundation and the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) and held in Budapest on 26-27 May 2000. The workshop included participants from 14 countries in Europe, Asia and North America.

The original idea behind this workshop was to bring together academics from different fields (anthropologists, sociologists, demographers) and regions as well as some journalists who have researched migration from the PRC into Europe, Northeast Asia (Russia and Japan), and Southeast Asia. The aim was to piece together disjointed and partly unpublished empirical knowledge, and to analyse this along with the help of renowned migration scholars. In doing so, we also took into account forms of migration traditionally excluded from discussion, namely the movements of students and tourists.

The editors would like to thank all participants of the workshop. We are particularly indebted to our hosts, the Director and staff of the Institute of Sociology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

In preparing this book manuscript, the editors attempted to preserve the diversity of the opinions and perspectives that were revealed at the workshop and to broaden the framework by inviting contributors who had not been among the conference participants. The studies are presented from a variety of vantage points and methodological apparatuses; some follow local traditions of scholarship rather than dominant Anglo-Saxon discourses of social science. A certain heterogeneity is thus inevitable, and while it was desirable at the workshop we sought to reduce, but could not altogether eliminate, it in the book. Nonetheless, we believe that the chapters when read together, point towards a new understanding of Chinese migration as a global phenomenon with globally inscribed, and competing, meanings.

The editors are deeply indebted to Adam J. Clulow who completed the index and greatly improved the manuscript by clearing it of all kinds of errors.

The editors are especially grateful to the Asia Committee of the European Science Foundation, which provided financial support for the publication of this book.

P. Ny. and I. S.

# A Note on Conventions

Chinese words are represented in pinyin, Chinese and Japanese surnames precede given names. Russian words are transliterated by the Library of Congress system. For well-known names and words the conventional spelling is used.

# Contents

<i>Contributors</i>	vii
<i>Foreword</i>	ix
<i>A Note on Conventions</i>	x
 Globality and Diversity: Introduction <i>Igor R. Saveliev</i>	 1
 <b>PART I     GLOBAL CHINESE MIGRATION: NEW SPACES AND NEW FLOWS</b>	
 1    Evading the Divine Wind Through the Side Door: The Transformation of Chinese Migration to Japan <i>H. Richard Friman</i>	 9
 2    Chinese Migration to Russia in Space and Time <i>Igor R. Saveliev</i>	 35
 3    Chinese in the Labour Market of the Russian Far East: Past, Present, Future <i>Anatolii M. Shkurkin</i>	 74
 4    Contemporary Chinese Migration to Russia <i>Vilya G. Gelbras</i>	 100
 5    Illegal Aliens Smuggling to and through Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle <i>Bertil Lintner</i>	 108
 6    The Dongbei: The New Chinese Immigration in Paris <i>Marc Paul</i>	 120



## PART II THE GLOBAL CHINESE: CONSTRUCTING THE DISCOURSE

7	Chinese Migrant Workers in Japan: Policies, Institutions and Civil Society <i>Daojiong Zha</i>	129
8	Non-Remaining and Non-Returning: The Mainland Chinese Students in Japan and Europe since the 1970s <i>Cheng Xi</i>	158
9	A Group in Transition: Chinese Students and Scholars in the Netherlands <i>Li Minghuan</i>	173
10	Changing Chinese Identities and Migration in the Borderlands of China, Burma and Thailand <i>Mika Toyota</i>	189
11	From Class Enemies to Patriots: Overseas Chinese and Emigration Policy and Discourse in the People's Republic of China <i>Pál Nyíri</i>	208
12	Gold from the Lands Afar: New Fujianese Emigration Revisited <i>James K. Chin</i>	242
13	Time Travels: Locating <i>xinyimin</i> in Sino-Cambodian Histories <i>Penny Edwards</i>	254
14	Mobility, Entrepreneurship and Sex: How Narratives of Modernity Help Chinese Women in Hungary Evade Gender Constraints <i>Pál Nyíri</i>	290
	Appendix <i>Go Bon Juan</i>	309
	Afterword <i>Pál Nyíri</i>	320
	<i>Index</i>	338

# Globality and Diversity: Introduction

Igor R. Saveliev

There still exists a fundamental contradiction between the rights of every individual to seek refuge from persecution, or in a broader context from human rights abuses, poverty, and oppression, in other countries, as stipulated in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and immigration policies of developed countries restricting the flow of asylum-seekers and other migrants. As it is difficult to anticipate that this contradiction will be solved in the near future and as the split of the world into rich 'developed' and poor 'developing' worlds inevitably entails continued migration from the latter to the former, international scholarship on migration continues to illuminate modern trends of this migration with the vague objective of exploring how migration could affect receiving societies and accelerate the globalisation process. In this regard, this volume attempts to illuminate relatively new trends and directions of Chinese migration, especially concentrating on elusive patterns of migration, when a migrant may have the double identity of a student and an illegal worker or petty entrepreneur, and by discussing the place of the migrant in the politics of both sending and receiving countries. This introduction aims to outline new directions of Chinese migration, showing the increasing diversification of the overseas Chinese world; and to briefly discuss the relationships between nation-states and the Chinese diaspora.

Part 1 of this volume identified several new spaces of Chinese migration, focusing on Japan, Russia, Burma and France and limiting the scope of analysis in each chapter to one of these countries. This is complemented by the essays in Part 2, which concentrated mostly on government policies towards migration. The six chapters of this part attempt to show new trends in recent Chinese migration in the four countries mentioned above.

Each of the four areas represents a comparatively new and little-studied terrain for Chinese, although they have a certain degree of continuity with existing or historical Chinese communities. Thus, Yokohama Chinatown in Japan, Chinese communities in Burma and a history of early-twentieth-century Chinese migration to Russia and France represent important backgrounds for the *fin-de-siècle* reappearance of Chinese sojourners.

All of them, except France (Chapter 6 by Marc Paul), are

geographically proximate countries that serve as natural recipients for Chinese migrants' mobility, fuelled by economic reforms since the late 1970s. As socio-political changes in these countries suddenly created conditions for accepting migrants, those who chose to move up in the social hierarchy by moving spatially, particularly abroad, did not fail to enter these new 'lands of opportunity'. Their new groups and organizations complemented Chinese networks in other regions that are 'created, sustained and modified across transnational boundaries through modern transportation and mass communication systems' (McLellan 1997: 280).

Russia and Eastern Europe, located on the way to affluent Western Europe, have long been a missing link in Chinese networks. The collapse of the Soviet Union swept away the obstacles to including these new spaces in the terrain of Chinese overseas migration. As Pál Nyíri outlines in his afterwords, the emergence and spawning of 'Chinese markets' across Russia and Eastern Europe in the 1990s reflects the changing nature of Chinese sojourn and trade and a shift from immigration to a certain country to continuing sojourn within the limits of a wider region, where national boundaries are not seen as serious obstacles. This globalising of Chinese migration in the region has been aided not only by the opening up of Eastern Europe but also by the tearing down of internal EU borders under the Schengen Agreement.

An important trait of Chinese in Eastern Europe or Japan is that a migrant may have several very distinct occupations in several countries simultaneously, through what we might call 'multiple embedding'. Thus, a petty entrepreneur in an East European country may have an unskilled part-time job or study at a college in an affluent Western European country. Each of these occupations can be seen as symbolic of success in gaining social prestige. Indeed, both the status of entrepreneur and a migrant on his way to the West can be emblematic of success not only for the migrant's co-villagers in China, but also for his new East European neighbours, albeit lack of integration will generally prevent him from converting this success into local social capital.

Although students have previously been excluded from categories of overseas Chinese (Christiansen 1998: 44), experiences of Chinese students in Russia and Japan eloquently verify the opposite. Since the late 1980s – early 1990s, self-financed language and college study abroad has gradually increased among Chinese. When in the mid-1980s the Chinese government and various Chinese universities signed exchange programs with Western European and Japanese universities, the first Chinese students (*liuxuesheng*) appeared in the Netherlands in 1986 (Chapter 9 by Li Minghuan), in Japan in the mid-1980s (Chapter 1 by Richard Friman) and in other countries. Soon after, the number of Chinese students consistently increased and became noticeable in a number of countries. Thus, they comprised more than 30 per cent of the total number of foreign students in

Japan at the beginning of the 1990s, and nowadays their number is approaching the level of 50 per cent (51,298 people in 1998).<sup>1</sup> However, entering a college or language school in Japan or Russia, apart from the purpose of learning the language of the destination country, is also a tool to secure a residence permit that allows the holder to stay or trade in the country and enjoy incomes many times higher than average earnings in the PRC. It would, however, be a fallacy to consider all of them as merely 'hidden workers'. Even if almost all of them concentrate significantly more on activities outside of college or school, greatly exceeding the limits of legally allowed part-time work, those who do not overstay their visas and avoid involvement in semi-criminal activities do in fact enjoy the benefits of spoken language skills and a good relationship with their tutors and advisers. Combining, thereby, school or college studies and unskilled work, they retain this kind of 'double embedding' within their endless term of 'study abroad'.

Illegal migration represents another important issue raised by contributors to this volume (Chapters 1, 3, 4). Certain areas in the PRC have experienced an exodus of illegal migrants since the outset of reforms. These migrants are usually portrayed as helpless pawns in the hands of traffickers who follow a local tradition of emigration without much agency of their own. They, however, see themselves as future owners of a petty enterprise and 'respected member[s] of the transnational community' (Pieke 1998: 11). At the moment of leaving their native locus for the first time, they have already obtained some information about their routes and point of destination from returnees who had already experienced this travel. This mode of information exchange repeats century-old East Asian emigration patterns, when most Chinese, Japanese and Korean emigrants originated from a very limited number of areas (southern coast in China, Yamaguchi, Hiroshima, Fukuoka and Kumamoto prefectures in Japan, northern Hamgyondo in Korea) with a durable tradition of overseas sojourn.

Although human traffickers frequently enjoy usage of super-modern means of transportation and communication,<sup>2</sup> methods of entering the country of destination frequently represent the same patterns that were typical for the 'coolie trade' of the nineteenth century. Just as Chinese and other Asian contract labourers 'had been enclosed under battened-down hatches in "Cimmerian darkness" without water' (Daniels 1962: 7) onboard 'coolie-trade' vessels', contemporary illegal migrants are frequently in danger of asphyxiation in lorries and tracks. Their difficulties continue in the destination society, even if they do manage to reach it. Whereas only a tiny group of 'real' students and scholars have substantial knowledge of the countries of their destination and are mentally and psychologically prepared to live in distinct cultural environment, most migrants remain totally unprepared for life in an unfamiliar cultural environment. Surrounded by

fellow Chinese, migrants might acquire only a very limited vocabulary of the language spoken in the country of destination. All these factors make newcomers increasingly dependent on their compatriot predecessors, who do not fail to exploit the vulnerability of the former.

Essays in this volume, particularly in Part 2, exemplify the complexity of interaction between various groups of Chinese migrants within common social contexts. The linguistic and cultural diversity of China itself generates the diversity of overseas Chinese, who should be seen not as a homogeneous diaspora, but as a large number of fluid groups. The construction of the boundaries between these groups may take into account age, spoken dialect, place of origin, and other factors, but is largely situational. This diversity depends greatly on the period of their migration. Older communities hold onto the cultural heritage of past epochs that often seems obsolete to recent migrants. Conversely, the latter often do not gain social acceptance among older generations of *huaqiao*, who may see their social habits as offensive (Appendix of this volume).

Chinese women, as Pál Nyíri outlines in Chapter 14, have their own peculiar strategies, taking advantage of wider opportunities of entrepreneurship in Eastern Europe, particularly in Hungary, and attempt to 'evade the social and entrepreneurial constraints imposed by the regime of the "Chinese family"'. This breaking of boundaries may symbolize a new important dimension of further diversification in the overseas Chinese world.

The diversity of the Chinese diaspora inevitably generates a great variety of governmental attitudes in receiving countries on both nation-state and local self-government levels. Critically, almost all countries examined in this volume employ various side-door mechanisms, which are considered to mesh with the goal of curbing immigration, rather than opening the front doors to provide migrants with all rights that their citizens enjoy, as it is the case in traditional immigrant countries. These side-door mechanisms are exemplified by Federal Migration Service permissions to employ foreign workers in Russia (Chapters 2 and 3) and by 'intra-company transferees' programs in Japan (Chapter 7 by Daojiong Zha). As Chinese workers' and trainees' employment is frequently confined to a limited number of areas in receiving countries, they are usually subjected to the local self-governments' policies rather than central governments'. Attempting to correct a conceptual bias in studies of Chinese migrants in Japan that usually focus on criminal aspects, Daojiong Zha's study focuses on the role of Japanese employers in Chinese labour immigration, abuses of Chinese workers' rights by their Japanese employers, and local civil society's attitudes towards these conflicts (Chapter 7).

In terms of naturalisation, governmental policies also significantly vary from country to country. In South Asian (Chapters 5 and 13) and East European countries, it is still not particularly difficult to obtain a permanent

residence permit or even citizenship. But the legal regulations concerning the obsolescence of such status is often unclear or inconsistently enforced. This lack of detailed regulations concerning immigration and the status of foreign residents may lead to further tensions around the issue of Chinese migration and may strain the relations between Chinese and other ethnic groups within host societies.

Governments of West European countries and Japan, where immigrants are frequently accused of exploitation of social welfare, have been tightening the issuing of visas to Chinese in parallel with a broader crackdown on illegal immigration. According to the February 2000 amendment to the Japanese Immigration Law, illegal stay is now considered a crime and carries a ban on re-entry to Japan for five years, up from one year previously.

As a sending country, the PRC pursues policies of enhancing ties with overseas Chinese mostly in terms of attracting their investments to China's economy, allowing voluntary expatriates to remain loyal to their countries of citizenship (Chapter 11 by Pál Nyíri). As Zha Daojiong points out, the government of China even began to undertake joint measures with Japan to regulate Chinese immigration. At the same time, the PRC government's growing interest in migrants' activities overseas is frequently expressed in diplomatic missions' attempts to gather them in embassies and consulates by organizing various events. While 'increasing migration from China and resurgent Chinese nationalism overseas is clearly linked to the PRC's great power aspirations' (Chapter 11), it could hardly play a significant role in China's relations with receiving countries.

In sum, being integral parts of a global framework, Chinese migrants' networks represent a large diversity of forms and areas of location and we can anticipate that their diversification will continue to grow in the near future.

## Notes

- 1 Paper 'From Student to Illegal Worker: Chinese Migrants in Japan', presented by Tadao Furumaya at the international workshop 'The past decade of migration from the People's Republic of China', May 2000, Budapest.
- 2 A paper presented at the workshop by Furumaya Tadao attests that smugglers of illegal Chinese migrants entering prefectures at the Sea of Japan coast use satellite phones and other modern devices to set up a place where the migrants can change vessels in open sea and to contact criminal groups in inner Japan about the place of their landing.

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# Part I

## Global Chinese Migration: New Spaces and New Flows



