Nr. 124 | Juli 2012

International Labor Migration to Japan:
Current Models and Future Outlook

ASIEN

Begründet von Günter Diehl
und Werner Draguhn

REZENSIONEN

FORSCHUNG – LEHRE – INFORMATIONEN

NEUERE LITERATUR

AUTORINNEN UND AUTOREN DIESER AUSGABE

Networks in Transition: Migration Decisions in the Life Course of Highly Skilled Chinese in Japan

Ruth Achenbach

Summary

In recent years, Japan has increased its efforts to recruit highly qualified Chinese migrants; on the other side of that coin, China has also made efforts to bring its highly qualified emigrants back home. These students and workers fulfill important functions connecting the two countries economically, culturally and academically. Yet, it is not clear how migrants decide where and when to move. This paper focuses on individual decision-making processes and analyzes the importance of family responsibilities, social and professional networks, and career planning in a life-course framework.

Keywords: Japan, China, circular migration, highly skilled, students, life course, decision-making processes

1. Introduction

Circular migration of the highly skilled represents everything for which advocates of globalization argue (Cervantes and Guellec 2002). Highly qualified migrants, including both workers and students, connect markets and countries and help advance technology and develop economies. They are imagined to be able to work anywhere in the world and are sought after by global companies. How to keep highly skilled employees happy and productive in a company is an expanding area of research in economics (Wühr 2011; Enaux 2011). Creating policies to attract the highly qualified is an issue for most governments, not only those of industrialized nations (Cervantes and Guellec 2002; SRI 2008: 2). National regulations in sending and receiving countries—including emigration and immigration policies, legal restrictions in the research sector, and educational and economic policies—create the larger migration context. One complicating factor in this seemingly win-win scenario of highly skilled circular migration is that human capital,[1] if defined as excellence or knowledge in a certain field (for example technology), *cannot* be

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[1] The concept of human capital (Becker 1964) says that persons invest in their own human capital in order to increase their productivity and their income. Human capital includes education and practical and work experience. Those who invest a lot in their own human capital are thought to be more productive and they tend to receive higher incomes (Giddens, Duneier and Appelbaum 2007: 303).

cashed in anywhere in the world: only language skills and (in most cases) cultural knowledge make the application of human capital in foreign countries possible in the first place. Also, economic and political macro perspectives leave out an important angle in explaining global movement: the individual preferences of the migrant. While pay, work environment, position and career advancement are important factors in highly skilled migrants' decisions to move, their personal lives, family and friends, lifestyle preferences, and integration into personal and professional networks also play a role. In addition, priorities and life plans differ according to one's life stage: while fresh university graduates often have relatively young parents, are unmarried and are therefore able to move and focus solely on their careers (Vasile and Vasile 2011: 98), older highly skilled workers are more settled in terms of family responsibilities and occupation. At this point, a closer look at a highly skilled person's life stage, personal preferences and especially his/her network can help solve the puzzle of how highly skilled migrants decide to stay home or go abroad. Are migrants embedded in supporting structures, in both their business environments and their personal networks? Do the structures allow migrants to further advance their skills, including their cultural skills? Do the living conditions satisfy the migrants or do migrants hope to gain a higher quality of life by making the effort to move again?

This paper analyzes the case of highly skilled Chinese in Japan. Japan is a prime example of a developed country that aims to attract exclusively highly skilled migrants, but largely fails to attract enough skilled persons[2] and struggles to retain the talent it has attracted (Oishi 2012). While Japan's immigration policy makers and Japanese companies are increasing their efforts to attract global talent, it has become clear that these macro factors only present the framework for individual decisions. In order to fully explain why some of the targeted persons move under these policies and some do not, meso- and micro-level factors need to be examined. This paper first presents factors on a macro level that influence movement and then zooms in on individual migrants' decision-making processes. Chinese students and recent graduates now active in the labor market stand at the center, as they represent the largest share of highly skilled foreigners in Japan. Lifestyle preferences, networks, and career and family plans greatly differ from one's college years to one's working years; it is therefore necessary to trace the influence of different factors in various life stages.

2. Factors Influencing Migration Decisions of the Highly Skilled

This paper combines approaches coined by Andrés Solimano (2008) and Stefanie Kley (2009), respectively: 1) a model of macro-, meso- and micro-level factors

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[2]   University representatives repeatedly (2011/01/07; 2011/01/20; 2012/02/24) stated in personal interviews with the author that they felt that mainly second-class students chose Japan to pursue a degree (compared to the U.S., Canada, Australia and Europe).

influencing migration decisions among the highly skilled, and 2) an approach based on life stage. The "highly skilled" are defined in this paper according to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (2002: 2) as university students, information technology (IT) specialists, researchers, business executives and managers, and intra-company transferees, among others. This matches Solimano's (2008: 4) definition of "directly productive talent," including entrepreneurs, engineers, or other "people who are engaged directly in activities that lead to the actual production of goods and services" along with "academic talent," including students and researchers. [3]

Migration scholars generally use three approaches to explain initial migration motivations. These are macro-level (political frameworks and economic structures/gaps), meso-level (networks) and micro-level (individual) approaches. With regard to agency, the decision to move is often framed as an individual or a household decision (Massey *et al.* 1993: 436; Castles and Miller 2009: 24). A focus on macro-level factors helps us to understand the larger framework within which migration takes place; it is the political and economic circumstances that make migration possible and profitable in the first place. This approach, however, fails to explain why some people move and some do not. This paper focuses on individual decisions. It briefly presents the political and economic circumstances surrounding these decisions, and it analyzes developments on the micro and meso levels and their influences on the decisions of highly skilled Chinese.

In his framework, Solimano cites income gaps, demand in the host country, and political regulations as factors from the macro level that explain migration decisions. Income gaps are a sign of differently developed economies—macro migration theory from neoclassical economics has led scholars to believe that such gaps strongly influence movement (Massey *et al.* 1993: 433). It is the same macro perspective on labor markets that sees a demand in host countries and an oversupply of labor in home countries as influencing labor migration. Solimano refers to political regulations, not only in the sense of immigration policy, but also with regard to economic policy and rules and regulations shaping the contents and environment of work. [4]

On a meso level, the most important factors are networks linking migrants with the destination country. Network theory in migration stipulates that existing connections between individuals in different countries or simply the presence of a large number of persons of the same nationality in the host country influence the decision to migrate to that particular country, as those fellow countrymen/-women will help the

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[3] Solimano also identified a third category of cultural workers, who are not included in the sample analyzed in this paper. This category entails people who "are engaged in artistic and cultural creative activities that have a value of aesthetic enjoyment and personal development" (2008: 4).

[4] For example, legislation on genetic research differs within countries. This could be a factor in the movement of the "best heads" to countries with laxer regulations.

new migrants find jobs and apartments and in a number of ways facilitate the initial process of settling in. Networks "lower the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns to migration" (Massey *et al.* 1993: 448). However, network theory has not been systematically applied to a decision made far more often— namely, whether to stay in the host country. We can assume that this question is both posed far more frequently and answered positively more often than negatively as a more negative opinion would lead to more movement. Integration into the host society has been identified as the most crucial factor in the decision to settle (Alba and Nee 2003). For highly skilled migrants, Jean-Baptiste Meyer (2001: 92) has found that

> expatriates have left mainly because they did not have enough supportive networks (institutional, infrastructural, technical, educational, social, financial, etc.) to build, develop, express, use and […] cash in on their skills at home. These expatriates are most likely to stay abroad because they are precisely inserted into such supportive networks, for and by which their skills have been created or channeled, and therefore have value in the relevant socioeconomic context.

Meyer therefore places the integration into several types of networks between the macro-level aspects of technological and economic advancement of countries and the micro-level aspect of personal fulfillment (both in terms of skill development and social life).

Factors on a micro level also include "non-pecuniary motivations" (Solimano 2008: 4), such as political and ideological reasons (for example, the desire to contribute to the development of one's home country), lifestyle preferences, or institutional quality. As decisions are made by the migrant him- or herself or by his/her household, it becomes necessary to look at the migrants' social environment—it can be expected that migrants with children consider different aspects in their decisions to move than single students (or at the very least, different emphasis is placed on the same factors). In the literature on highly skilled migration, this aspect has often been overlooked. It is therefore necessary to combine stages in the life course with the shifting preferences, family situations, and work situations of migrants.

(National) migration research has increasingly been paying more attention to the connection between events in one's life course and one's movement (Kley 2009; Mulder 1993). Both anticipated events (graduation, family responsibilities such as taking care of one's parents or children) and unexpected events (such as political, economic or environmental crises) are influential in the decision-making process. An underlying assumption is that preferences shift and values change depending on one's life stage: responsibilities towards family are more serious after the birth of a child and with marriage than they are during single college years, factors that might affect a migrant's choice of (re)location. The role networks play is unclear, as they both create a feeling of belonging and open up opportunities for a life in a different place. Therefore, this paper will examine the role of personal and professional networks in different life stages in migration decision-making processes. In addition,

it will examine migrants' attitudes towards work and private life in the host country. Concerning the decision-making process, this paper is based on a model proposed by Kley (2009: 3): "a pre-decisional phase (considering migration), a phase after the decision is made (planning migration), and a phase in which the action is carried out (moving)." This paper analyzes three groups of migrants: those that are not considering moving again, those that are in either the pre-decision or post-decision phase, and those who have already gone back to their home country.[5]

The paper uses the framework presented by this triad of micro-, meso- and macro-level factors to explain the circumstances in which highly skilled Chinese decide to move to or from Japan. In the following pages, factors of different levels that set the larger framework of Chinese migration to and from Japan are presented.

2.1 Macro-level Factors

Factors on the macro level are, as stated above, political regulations in the fields of immigration and the labor market, among others; economic and technological differences in development; and the demands of the labor market.

In terms of immigration policy, Chinese are subject to strict visa regulations almost everywhere in the world; however, since the opening of the country in the 1980s it has gradually become easier to leave China. This has led to an outflow of students and highly skilled workers; yet China has shifted its policies and is now wooing its overseas highly skilled back. Japan, under pressure caused by a shrinking labor force due to demographic changes and rising competition from neighbors, is seeking to create global talent inside the country and to attract highly skilled workers from abroad. Its immigration policies are designed to officially invite only temporary and exclusively highly skilled labor migration.[6] One source of highly skilled migrants that the Japanese government has recently been trying to expand is that of international students,[7] a strategy that Gracia Liu-Farrer (2011a) has termed "educationally channeled labour migration." Both China and Japan have designed policies that should result in circular migration of Chinese—China profits from the

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[5] While many students and highly skilled workers move to Japan planning to stay for a limited time before moving back or to a third country, very few actually take the step towards a third country. According to a survey conducted by the Japan Student Services Organization, only 1.2 percent of foreign students in Japan choose to move on to a third country after graduation (JASSO 2010: 2). This paper therefore focuses only on Chinese migrants in Japan and returnees in China (although some interviewees have migration experience in other countries but decided to move back to Japan or China).

[6] Japan has adopted policies to also invite less-skilled laborers to Japan, although these policies do not officially aim to ease a labor shortage. Among these policies are the inviting of people of Japanese ancestry to Japan, and the trainee system that invites low-skilled laborers under the umbrella of development aid (Behaghel and Vogt 2006: 128–130).

[7] One example of this strategy is the 300,000 International Students Plan (*Ryūgakusei 30man nin Keikaku*), a package of measures to increase the number of foreign students to 300,000 by 2020 (MOFA 2008).

education of its overseas Chinese, Japan counts on the commitment of its former students to the Japanese economy even after moving back to their host countries.[8] Chinese in 2011 accounted for the largest number (32.5 percent) of registered foreign nationals in Japan (MOJ 2012), yet their group is highly diverse. They make up the largest share of international skilled workers and students in Japan.[9] On a political level, there are unresolved issues that shape Chinese migrants' experiences in Japan. Among these are history issues, territorial disputes, and Japanese media's focus on Chinese crime[10] and visa overstaying.[11]

Economically, however, Chinese–Japanese relations are very well developed. In 2009 China become Japan's largest trading partner (JETRO 2010/02/16), and China's economic rise presents increased economic opportunities in both China and the transnational economy.[12] Scholars of Chinese migration to Japan have often framed their studies in terms of migration from a developing to a developed nation; however, China's rapid economic development, especially in the coastal regions, and the advanced skill level of these migrants in Japan require a change of focus in studying the Chinese migration phenomenon (cf. Huang and Yorimitsu 2003: 1–2). Accompanying the economic rise of China is an increased global demand for Chinese workers, who are thought to facilitate a company's entry into the Chinese market. Yet China itself is also wooing its workers back to China to develop its own economy as part of its plan to shift from being a site of labor-intensive industries to one of technology-intensive production. This initiative to win back highly skilled overseas Chinese is triggered by the realization that although China is rapidly catching up in science and technology, it still lacks the human resources necessary to create advancement in these sectors, which is addressed, for example, in the National Medium- and Long-Term Talent Development Plan (2010–2020). China's rapid economic rise has led to an increased demand for highly skilled workers in areas of technology and engineering, in which both a degree and work experience

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[8]   A source from the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2011/11/17) affirmed in a personal interview with the author that the idea behind the temporary migration scheme is that Japan will also benefit from a brief stay of highly skilled migrants, as it connects them to the country and facilitates an engagement in Japan's international business connections. Settlement is therefore generally not encouraged; however, migrants can acquire Japanese citizenship or obtain a permanent residency visa under strict conditions.

[9]   See Liu-Farrer (2011b) for Chinese students' changes in visa categories after graduation and an overview of the share of Chinese migrants in Japan's visa groups.

[10] In 2004, for example, according to a survey conducted by the Cabinet Office in Japan (*Naikakufu,* 2004), over 70 percent of respondents stated that they feared becoming a victim of crime committed by a foreigner. The Japanese fear of foreign and especially Chinese crime even entered the international press: a 1997 article by Sheryl WuDunn in the *New York Times* (1997/03/12) takes on the subject under the heading "Japan Worries About a Trend: Crime by Chinese."

[11] For these reasons, migrants sometimes are advised not to go to Japan by their contacts in China, when migrants inform them about plans to advance careers in Japan (this is more severe for migrants who arrived in Japan before the year 2000).

[12] See Liu-Farrer (2009b) for a description of the opportunities for Chinese graduates in the transnational economy between Japan and China.

gained abroad are highly valued. China has therefore designed policies to further qualify its domestic population and to attract its own overseas highly skilled workforce as well as foreign workers to China (Wang 2010). It has politically facilitated return migration and created economic and social incentives and networks organized by embassies abroad to spread this news among its expatriates.[13]

Yet, the income gap between the two countries is still quite large. Although China has surpassed Japan and risen to become the second-largest economy in the world in terms of nominal GDP, Japan's GDP per capita is ranked eighteenth in the world, while China's is ninetieth (IMF 2011). Japan's demand for the highly skilled in its economy is large due to its technological advancement and stage of development on the one hand, and its demographic change on the other. Japan has politically acknowledged its own desire for highly skilled foreign workers as opposed to low-skilled workers (Behaghel and Vogt 2006: 125). However, the number of persons migrating to Japan at any skill level is actually smaller than economic organizations (for example, the Japan Business Association, *Keidanren*) consider necessary to keep Japan's economy internationally competitive (Nippon Keidanren 2007; Shiraki 2011/11/29). If one pictures economically motivated migrants and looks at only the economic and political frameworks, one might either expect a large flow of migrants back to China, as that country seemingly offers more economic opportunities than the stagnating Japanese economy, or envision a large number staying in Japan, as wages are still higher there.[14] Yet neither expectation meets reality—the outflow back to China is not happening as fast as could be anticipated, yet it is a trend even in sectors in which Japan still offers higher wages. A look at economic and political frameworks alone does not solve the puzzle; however, a look at individual preferences might shed some light on the movement of the highly skilled.

2.2 Meso- and Micro-level Factors

This case study focuses on meso- and micro-level factors in different life stages. For this reason, at this point only general observations on the situation of Chinese migrants to Japan will be presented; the analysis of cases follows in Section 4. The meso level includes network links between countries that are thought to facilitate migration, but it also covers integration into networks and the benefits of this.[15] Integration into "supportive networks" (Meyer 2001: 92) influences migration

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[13] In order to accomplish these goals, China holds fairs, sends delegations (for example, to Silicon Valley), and offers high salaries, social status and network integration plans, according to an interview with representatives from the Human Resources Association of Zhejiang Province, 2012/02/26.

[14] See Tsukasaki (2008) for an analysis of economic and political frameworks for the labor market integration of highly skilled.

[15] This is Pierre Bourdieu's definition of social capital (1980: 2). Social capital can be translated into other forms of capital, and network contacts carry the benefit of easing the settlement process emotionally (Achenbach: forthcoming).

decisions. However, networks are not static. Especially in cases where workers are embedded in Chinese *and* Japanese networks professionally and privately, new business opportunities,[16] private opportunities or crises may lead to movement. This paper therefore analyzes the influence of integration into networks during different life stages—namely, university and working life—on decisions of movement.

On a micro level, which includes personal preferences in terms of lifestyle, ideology and politics, as well as the individual desire to advance in different realms of life (be this in terms of character, professional skills, or otherwise), "non-pecuniary factors" require further investigation, especially in the case of China. Migration between different political systems could be influenced by political considerations and lifestyle preferences. A recent rise in national pride among young Chinese could also influence the decision to go back (Liu 2011). Other more idealistic considerations such as the desire to contribute to one's home country's development fall into this category, too. In terms of personal considerations, Solimano (2008: 4) also cites career advancement—manifested in the presence of high-level institutions, equipment and colleagues in the host country—along with "linguistic compatibility, networks and sociocultural affinity." The paper will further analyze these motivations.

It is important to note that there are differences in personal and professional networks and their influences on migration decisions. Solimano focuses mainly on professional spheres of life, but this paper divides the factors of networks and attitudes towards life in the host and home countries into professional and personal aspects. The factors of career and family planning fall, respectively, into the professional and personal spheres of life.

3. Methodology

In order to study how migration decisions are made by highly skilled Chinese in Japan, the author conducted fieldwork in Tokyo in 2011 and in Shanghai[17] in 2012, gathering qualitative data—for example, through personal, semi-structured interviews with highly skilled workers and students. Assuming migration decisions to be individual or household decisions, a qualitative approach focusing on individuals and their perceptions provides the necessary data to answer the research question of what factors influence migration decisions. Relying on theoretical

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[16]   Granovetter (1983: 298) developed a model of how one's contacts are a key factor in the search for jobs as an example of how networks can bring about business opportunities.

[17]   At the time of writing, the author had conducted six months of fieldwork in Tokyo and three weeks of fieldwork in Shanghai, expanding the sample to highly skilled returnees from Japan. This way, the three different groups described in Stefanie Kley's and Johannes Huinink's (2010: 2) study are included in the sample: people who intend to stay, people who have moved, and people who are thinking of moving. In addition, people who spend part of their life in Japan and part in China were also interviewed. The stays were funded by the Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation, the German Institute for Japanese Studies and the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation.

sampling, interviewees were recruited through personal and professional networks, approached during networking events for Chinese students and workers as well as networking events with Japanese.[18] In this paper, data only from workers who have studied in Japan are analyzed, leaving a sample of 39 workers and 34 students. Interviews were coded based on the selective coding methods of grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990). Ages ranged from 19 to 48, periods of stay from three months to fifteen years. All of the students and workers came to Japan after the mid-1990s. Students are from the top-ranked universities in Japan. Thirteen of the students major in humanities, nine in economics and twelve in engineering. Workers include eight entrepreneurs (all of them active in the transnational economy), nine employees of international companies, sixteen working in the transnational economy between Japan and China, and six working in Japanese companies with no international contacts or duties. In order to analyze how the interviewees were making decisions about where to live and work, they were questioned using the categories identified by Solimano and asked to identify and weigh factors that influenced their decisions. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, interviewees were asked to fill out questionnaires on their network composition and their use of various contacts. Interviewing highly skilled persons in different life stages in addition to asking workers to reflect on their student lives enables the study to trace the influences and development of various factors in decision-making processes.

4. Case Study

The following case study is divided into groups. The first group is made up of persons who express a desire to stay or who are not seriously considering leaving Japan. The second group is made up of persons with concrete plans or a strong inclination to move. The third group consists of persons who have already moved back to China. Within each of these groups, professional and personal spheres and their influence on decision-making processes are analyzed.

4.1 Staying in Japan

This group includes those who express a desire to remain in Japan or who are open to staying in Japan and have not been seriously considering moving to another place. Few unmarried students fall into this group; most students and workers within this group have spouses and children in Japan. Of those married, the spouses are also working in Japan. Occupations range from self-employment to employment in financial institutions, IT companies and educational institutions. Places of origin are

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18   This approach was chosen in order to avoid the pitfalls of snowball sampling, in which the researcher might unintentionally gain access only to a certain group (through either introductions or participation in networking events), risking excluding persons not in a network.

also very diverse within China. Spouses are most often (eight out of twelve) of Chinese origin (three of Japanese, one of non-Asian origin). Children reside with the parents in Japan (only in one case are they in China with their grandparents).

4.1.1 Professional Lives

Career advancement is usually the original incentive to move for the highly skilled included in the sample of this paper. All of the interviewees first entered educational institutions in Japan. They either perceive education in Japan as superior to education in China (this is especially true of the older generations) or believe they will acquire additional skills by receiving a Japanese education. None of the interviewees who now wish to stay had chosen Japan as one option out of many: most did not think they had the chance to go anywhere else. This can be explained by financial restrictions, institutional cooperation (that is between universities), language skills or a specialization in a field in which Japan was more advanced than other places (this is especially true in science). The students in this category are all graduate students—they have received training in China but decided on Japan as the place to work on a doctoral degree. These students specialize in fields that are especially applicable to the Japanese labor market. None of the workers expected to stay in Japan as long as they did—as with the others in the sample, they expected to stay a few years after graduating in order to gain work experience to heighten their value in the Chinese labor market or to acquire the skills to found their own companies.

After graduating from university, most of the respondents of the older generation first entered medium-sized Japanese companies but eventually transferred to international companies or founded their own companies. Many of them switched jobs repeatedly in three- to five-year intervals before finding their current employment. Younger respondents had all entered international companies from the beginning and had not switched jobs. All respondents expressed satisfaction with their current jobs and occupy leading positions, or, in the case of younger respondents, see good career opportunities for themselves within their companies. The majority work on projects that connect them with the Chinese market. They work in niches where they feel they can fully use their linguistic and cultural skills and, most importantly, their professional skills. In terms of business networks, all of them have well-developed networks in Japan and about half of them have well-developed networks in China that could provide them with working opportunities in their home country.

In terms of their professional lives, almost all of the respondents are content with life in Japan. Although some express regret or envy regarding the skyrocketing careers of their acquaintances in China, they reject moving back either for personal reasons or because they do not feel they could translate their skills to the Chinese (or any other) labor market. This is because their skills have, as Meyer (2001: 92) framed it, "been created or channeled" for the Japanese or the transnational market.

More important to the migrants, though, are 1) the perception that their skills will not serve them in the Chinese market and 2) their preference of life in Japan for other reasons.

4.1.2 Personal Lives

The majority of migrants within this group came to Japan unmarried, yet most either found partners in Japan or were set up in China and brought their partners to Japan with them. In the initial decision to move, parting with one's family, friends and familiar environment were (for most) bitter yet necessary side effects. Migrants accepted these strains on their personal lives in order to improve their overall lives as well as the lives of their family members, but they expected these constraints on their personal lives to be only temporary.

The following information on migrants' personal lives is organized into family considerations, friend networks, and attitudes towards living in Japan. Most of the members of this group are married and have children that are at least of kindergarten age, and most of their spouses are also employed; we can therefore presume that spouses and children are also settled in. When children are born, their education proves to be one important element of consideration for the parents. Parents make decisions about their children's education very carefully—reasons parents mentioned for wanting to educate their children in China are the competitive environment, the formation of a positive Chinese identity, and Chinese language and cultural skills that will help the children in their future careers. In the case of Japan, the lack of harsh competitiveness in the educational system and a less politically biased education are often cited. Sometimes, therefore, parents decide to send their children to live temporarily with grandparents, thus separating the family for a few years before reuniting. Yet, this degree of family responsibility, the complication of moving with family in tow, and the social integration of the family members into networks at the workplace or at the educational institution all lead to a decreased chance of the migrant moving again. Taking care of one's parents is the other issue (next to education and family formation) in the realm of family life that is often cited as influential in migration decisions. Some of the interviewees have siblings that take care of elderly parents, while only children rely on institutions for the elderly and visit regularly; others have not dealt with the question yet, but rule out moving back to China.

A changing pattern of friend networks can be observed in the transition from university to working life: while Japanese friends are scarce in language school, their number increases incrementally during university years and rises dramatically after the migrant enters into working life. Many workers of the older generation had no time during university to engage in social activities as they were often working several part-time jobs at once. However, they did get along well with their colleagues, and sometimes these friendships are the longest lasting. After entering a company, contact with colleagues intensifies and workers have more time to engage

in free-time activities. Often, therefore, workers' subjective feelings of integration or even belonging change dramatically in the years after entering the labor market. All of the workers in this sample had Japanese and Chinese friends they described as close. Also, their Chinese friends at this point were those who had decided on a life in Japan—this stability in social relations can be one of the incentives that lead workers to commit long term to living in Japan.

Attitudes towards life in Japan were shaped largely by a feeling of safety, which is directly opposed to how participants felt about life in China. This includes food safety, environmental conditions and a stable economy—all of these points are important especially with regard to family planning. These factors also trump the economic opportunities, which are perceived by almost all of the interviewees to be higher in China. Politics was only rarely mentioned as a factor that influenced decisions. All of the respondents felt positive about life in Japan, an attitude echoed by a negative stance on life in China.

4.2 Leaving Japan

This group includes those who express a desire to leave Japan, some of whom have already taken steps toward doing so. This group is made up of mostly unmarried students and workers, along with workers with Chinese spouses and children in Japan. All of the spouses are working or studying. Occupations range from self-employment to employment in financial institutions and IT companies. Places of origin are diverse, yet all group members express the desire to return to the financial centers on the east coast of China. Plans concerning when exactly to return to China differ in specificity. While most students and some workers say they want to leave after another two to five years, for some the plans to return are far more concrete. These include mainly couples with very young children and singles with a few years of work experience who want to get married. This group is younger on average than the other groups analyzed in this paper, which is explained by the number of students; the workers in this group (and their children) are also younger than in the other two groups. They are in a different life stage.

4.2.1 Professional Lives

For this group as well, the move to Japan was originally made with the intention of pursuing a career in China. For a younger generation of undergraduate students, though, it is also an escape from the competitive Chinese educational system—a stay in Japan, as is the idea for many graduate students, will increase their chances in the home labor market. Majors are diverse, yet except for a large number studying law, students in this category do not have a strong Japan-specific focus. Of those already working, all have had approximately four to six years of work experience. One interviewee is self-employed with a business in the transnational economy; the others are working in international companies.

Students in this group below the level of Ph.D. students plan either on working in Japan for three to five years after graduating or on entering a Ph.D. program in a classic immigration country like the U.S. Most Ph.D. students in the sample do not plan on working in Japan, but want instead to return to China immediately upon finishing their theses. They are all enrolled in non–Japan-specific fields—only those studying law plan to work in Japan. Undergraduate students are often dissatisfied with the quality of college education in Japan, while graduate students tend to appreciate the Japanese system. All universities have special programs to help foreign students with the job-hunting process, and all Ph.D. students express satisfaction with advisors and the academic networks to which they have access. The emerging pattern in this group is that fewer people are studying Japan-specific topics, yet they believe that work experience in Japan will boost their chances in the Chinese labor market. Therefore, they usually plan to stay for more than five years, including in this timeframe their studies and work experience. Those who come to obtain an advanced degree only plan to stay on to gain work experience if they have also acquired Japan-specific knowledge in their fields.

In terms of professional networks, undergraduate students often have underdeveloped networks.[19] Also, because many are funded by parents and small scholarships, there is little need to work part-time. This deprives students of some Japan-specific knowledge that can ease the transition into working life (Liu-Farrer 2009a). Those who seek advanced degrees, who are maybe even considering a career in universities, often depend on their advisors for assistance in forming networks. Unless they study Japan-specific topics, the elite in their fields are located all over the world—hence, Japan is not their first choice after graduation. For those who have a Japan-specific interest, naturally, the situation is different. The field they studied is right outside their door, as are colleagues studying similar topics. Even if there are well-respected centers focusing on the same research outside of Japan, colleagues eventually all come to Japan, and networks with different scholars are therefore easier to establish. Still, these students consider going abroad, but gaining work experience in the field itself is often necessary before looking outside of Japan. In this case, therefore, the content of studies directly influences the number of years a student is planning on spending in Japan.

The workers present a slightly different picture. They have already finished their education and for them the question of going back is simply a matter of time. Similar to the students in this group, workers plan on working a short time in Japan before moving on to somewhere else or back to China.

Workers in this category are either self-employed in the transnational economy or employed by Japanese or international companies, working on Japan-centered or

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19   This is not always the case for scholarship recipients. Some scholarships offer regular meetings with business representatives to establish close connections between these top students and the business world. Yet, even these students express a desire to stay in Japan only temporarily.

international projects. Those that work in Japanese companies on Japanese projects express the desire to change jobs as they do not see good career opportunities in Japan—a factor they ascribe to their Chinese background. This has motivated some to become self-employed, starting businesses in the transnational economy. Although they have a good business, these entrepreneurs express the desire to go home for private reasons, even though this would entail a financial risk. Some give up their business altogether and plan to start afresh in China: What are the reasons for taking this leap, for abandoning one's business and possibly not being able to use one's skills to the fullest after the move? Most often, the reasons have to do with private life—yet, these workers also see the opportunity to employ their broader range of (not Japan-centered) skills in the Chinese labor market or in the transnational economy with a business based in China (for example, in the field of investment and communications technology). Those working in international businesses (who are by far the majority in this group) are generally happy with their working lives in Japan—for the time being. They have not worked in Japanese companies before, which also means that their Japanese business culture skills are limited compared to those of the first group who are working in international companies. Japan is only one stop on a larger career path, one that involves employment in the headquarters or opening new branches in China. These workers want to stay in Japan until they have outgrown their positions and feel they need a new challenge.

Most of these workers are content with their working lives in Japan, but only to a certain extent, and most do not plan on being in Japan long term. They are usually younger than their counterparts in the first group—they are often more career-oriented and less family-oriented. Career reasons led them to come in the first place and they desire to stay on only temporarily. Skills are often not Japan-specific and therefore more easily translatable to other markets.

4.2.2 Personal Lives

The picture given above sheds light on only one part of the decision-making process—while the transition from university to working life is important professionally, it also often coincides with a transition towards family planning. Workers with concrete plans to return all have small children or are planning to take a step towards more intense engagement in family life. Also, the nuclear threat after the triple catastrophe of March 11, 2011, has sped up or substantiated the decision-making process.

Most students in this group are unmarried, but there are a few married students and workers who have children under the age of three. Spouses are all Chinese and all are working. Children are one important factor for people who have concrete plans to move back. Reasons include worries about radiation and educational considerations. The stakes for the decision to go back to China seem high—parents give up businesses, positions at universities after graduation, and international

research institute positions. For others, wedding plans or divorce are reasons for a change of location. For those who have less specific plans to return, taking care of elderly parents is the most-cited reason among private considerations. Respondents are predominantly only children and thus feel great pressure not only to care for aging parents, but also to succeed.

For this younger generation, the pattern of friend networks is also slightly different. As Japan has started inviting more foreign students, the number of scholarships has risen. At the same time, increasing affluence in China has led to a decreased need for students to work several jobs at a time. This means that although less time is spent learning Japanese business culture, one would expect it to be easier to make Japanese friends at university. Yet, the number of interviewees with close Japanese friends during their college years is small. This could be explained in part by the idea of staying in Japan only temporarily—this attitude causes them to engage more in making Chinese friends, who often also plan on staying only temporarily. Those who intended from the beginning to stay for a longer term in Japan have more mixed networks and are included in the first group presented in this paper.

For workers in this group, the change described above regarding networks including more Japanese is not as drastic as in the first group. This is partly because people in this group often directly entered international companies, where there are fewer Japanese workers and more foreigners, who often share this "temporary" mindset. Members of this group do have contact with Japanese; however, they often feel that they have deeper connections with other nationalities. This leads to a feeling of exclusion from a society they themselves perceive as "homogeneous," in line with the myth of Japan as a *tan'itsu minzoku kokka* (racially unified nation) (Mouer and Sugimoto 1986; Oguma 1995). As with the first group, they are willing to temporarily bear the distance from their families and friends and a feeling of not belonging in Japan. While the first group was successful in shaping new networks with Japanese and like-minded Chinese and has made long-term plans for life in Japan, in this group the same factors tended to affirm the temporary nature of plans for life in Japan.

While Japan's past economic development is often admired, migrants are also convinced that China will surpass Japan economically, politically, and in terms of quality of life in the future. While it is easy to live in Japan in terms of infrastructure, interviewees often express a feeling of social distance there.

As noted by Kley (2009), one factor that can lead to a more concrete decision to leave is an environmental crisis (a source of external shock). The triple catastrophe of March 11, 2011, led to an immediate outflow of migrants—mainly students, but also workers (especially those not employed by Japanese companies). Most students and workers eventually came back; however, many of those with younger children decided to move at least the children outside of Japan, and they themselves often followed.

4.3 Having Left Japan

This group includes highly skilled workers who have left for Shanghai after having studied and worked in Japan for several years. It includes persons employed mostly in the financial sector, but also in IT, trade and law, and self-employed persons. Almost all of them are married and have children. In order to provide a more coherent sample, comparable cases of only those who returned after the year 2000 are included in this paper.

4.3.1 Professional Lives

Members of this group all graduated from top Japanese universities and entered globally active, large Japanese companies. All worked on transnational projects. The older ones (with more than ten years of working experience) had already accepted spending their professional lives in Japan, while the younger ones were more determined to find a way back. Interestingly, only about a third of the workers decided to return on their own at any cost, quitting their jobs and moving back to China. The others chose a different path: they were sent to the China office by their Japanese companies, where half of them stayed; the other half switched jobs after a short time working in the subsidiary office. All of them work on projects connected to Japan. Most of them express satisfaction with their jobs in China—those who had worked in Japanese companies before even feel that their skills are better used in China, as their knowledge of both the Chinese and the Japanese market can be applied (in Japan, they were often working solely on Chinese market-related projects). If they found new jobs in China, they often used networks in China that they had built either before coming to Japan or during their working lives in the transnational economy. For some, this was also a crucial factor—persons within the networks enjoyed great success upon moving back to China, these networks having provided job opportunities for the returnees. The large majority of the workers cited professional reasons as the decisive factors for moving back—either they were sent by their companies, or they perceived the opportunities for career advancement and higher earnings to be better in China. Regardless of the circumstances under which they came back, they all welcomed the return. At the time they left, they were all at a crossroads in their careers. All still keep in close touch with their professional contacts in Japan, as this is often the basis of their success in China. Due to the fact that they work on Japan-related projects, those contacts are crucial.

All perceive their move back to China, but also the period of working in Japan that set the basis for their current employment, as a success. They are satisfied with the amount and content of their work, as well as the freedom they often enjoy when they are sent to lead a subsidiary office.

4.3.2 Personal Lives

Most of the migrants who were married had Chinese spouses, who had lived with them in Japan. They brought their spouses with them when they moved; in only one

case does a migrant now live separate from his wife and child, both of whom stayed in Japan (due to the child's education and the spouse's work and preference for Japan). All spouses are working. Most former migrants have parents living close by, but none of their parents is in need of care (yet). They often travel to Japan for work, and sometimes take a few days off during their time there to meet up with old friends.

The younger migrants were quite eager to return to China, although most had not set a date yet. Although they said they felt well integrated into personal networks that were equally inclusive of Japanese and Chinese, many cited responsibilities towards their parents, who had been asking them to return, as influencing their decision to leave Japan. Life phase transitions are clearly noticeable—the combination of marriage/family planning with the Fukushima accident led to younger interviewees making the final decision to stay in China. The older generation was also well integrated in terms of social networks and settled in terms of family. They, most of whom were sent by their companies back to China, may not have made the decision to move back at that point—but either family responsibilities made it necessary to follow the company's wishes or going back to China promised higher earnings. Although not everyone in this group moved back to their places of origin, none of them cited problems forming social networks in China.

Attitudes towards life in Japan were quite positive, even though respondents had decided to move back; in fact, respondents had very balanced views of positive and negative aspects of life in both countries. Most cite a feeling of homecoming and feel more comfortable with the Chinese way of human interaction. They rule out moving back as they perceive their time in Japan as one episode in their lives, and they have arrived back in their natural space—which also provides good economic opportunities.

4.4 Discussion of Results

The factors that affect decision-making processes in different life stages are always the same: family responsibilities (generally towards parents or children) and career goals. For younger migrants and graduate students, it seems natural to go back to China. At this point in one's life, family responsibilities (parents) are in China. In terms of their careers, working in Japan is one step towards economic amelioration, professional advancement, and variety of tasks and responsibilities within their careers. All undergraduate and most graduate students plan on staying to gain work experience after graduation. Yet, Ph.D. students with majors not specifically related to Japan plan to move back to China after receiving their degree. The initial years after entering the labor market are crucial for migration decisions. This is the time when migrants start families, set the basis for their careers and form networks different than those of their college years. In private life, Chinese–Japanese marriages lead to a positive decision about staying in Japan. Chinese–Chinese

marriages, however, do not necessarily lead to concrete plans of changing locations, but getting married is one point at which returning to China is considered. This is connected to family planning. Having, raising, and educating children are the big considerations in migrants' life courses on a private level that lead to a reconsideration of their migration choices. Migrants' parents in China want to help rear their grandchildren and therefore ease migrants' difficulties of combining work and family responsibilities, which is another factor influencing decisions to move back. Also, as migrants' parents age, migrants feel the need to return to China to take care of them. On a professional level, one's area of expertise is highly important in migration decisions—if migrants specialize in (only) Japan-related fields, they are more likely to stay than those who feel they can use their skills anywhere else in the world (and knowing Japanese is only an additional skill). Few of the respondents in Japan worked in Japanese companies, and most expressed concern about the possibilities of career advancement within Japanese companies because of their Chinese origin. This perceived limitation leads to them choosing to work in an international company, to become self-employed, or to seek to enter subsidiary firms in China that seem to offer greater freedom, faster promotions and more opportunities to use all of their skills.

Family responsibilities therefore change throughout one's life course—while during university, family responsibilities usually do not weigh very heavily as parents are still young and students often unmarried, the importance of these factors often changes after one's entry into the labor market, which often coincides with marriage and having children. Professionally, graduation and forks in career paths are points in the life course where migration decisions are reconsidered. Graduation is a marker of transition to a new life stage. This is only partly true for those who seek another, more advanced degree—but finishing college, which is most often accompanied by a change of location (as the location of one's daily life changes), almost always makes students consider not only their employment but also their location options. While studying abroad can be the first step towards a settled life in the host country, it often constitutes merely one experience among many, and serves as a secluded period in one's life.

Network development often follows a similar pattern—the number of Japanese friends or close contacts is limited during the college years but rises with employment. There are stark differences between those who work for Japanese companies and those who work for international companies, and between those working in Japan-related fields and those working in fields unrelated to Japan specifically. Those in Japanese companies and those working in Japan-related fields are often surrounded by and have friends among both Japanese and Chinese who plan on staying in Japan long term. The Chinese contacts and friends of migrants who work in fields unrelated to Japan also generally plan to stay in Japan only in the short term. This can lead to a migrant feeling excluded from mainstream Japanese society. In terms of professional networks and career planning, the connection of

one's work to Japan is also highly influential in migration decision-making. For workers in non–Japan-related fields, the elites are often not in Japan, and therefore Japan is not their first choice in terms of career location. Contacts they make with persons in their fields can create career and business opportunities abroad. For those working on Japan-related projects, integration into professional networks contributes to a positive decision about life in Japan, as it difficult to translate skills into another labor market and as contacts with other specialists are often rare.

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzed individual migration decision-making processes of highly skilled Chinese migrants to Japan. The larger economic and political context is shaped by 1) initiatives on the part of the Japanese and Chinese governments to facilitate the circular movement of students and highly skilled workers, and 2) close connections between the Japanese and Chinese markets that provide job opportunities in various sectors. These developments on the macro level influence the environment in which decisions are made: the fast-developing Chinese economy is attracting more and more overseas Chinese, and while Japan's increased efforts to recruit foreign students have been especially successful in the case of Chinese, they cannot take into account the timing and personal reasons for which some people move and others do not. The paper therefore used a qualitative approach to analyze the decisions of individuals. Professional and personal considerations as well as networks stood at the center of the analysis. While factors in professional and personal spheres play a role in all migrants' decisions, how they are weighed and what kind of movement, if any, occurs differs from individual to individual. The pattern identified is that personal and professional events in the life course lead to a reconsideration of migration decisions. Favorable decisions towards staying are made if the migrant is working in a Japan-related field, as s/he is well integrated into professional and social networks, and his/her family resides in Japan. Attitudes towards life in Japan are positive, and skills are difficult to translate into a non-Japanese labor market. The desire to return to China at some point in the future is strongest during the beginning of a migrant's life in Japan. It accompanies the migrant into his/her first few years in the labor market, especially if s/he works in a non–Japan-specific field. This desire to return home intensifies with marriage and the birth of a child—usually at this point a decision is made about whether to return or not. With the entry of the child into school at the latest, parents will decide whether to stay or go. These migrants are often not well integrated into Japanese networks, yet have good transnational connections that offer new job opportunities. Although these job opportunities exist for all migrants and increase in number with migrants' increasing work experience, no matter at which life stage migrants are, it is at these life course events that they tend to make (re)location decisions.

Ways for Japan to increase its long-term attractiveness for highly skilled Chinese migrants on a macro level (which sets the framework for individual decisions) are manifold. In terms of working lives, migrants often choose non-Japanese companies and cite workload and working environments as reasons for this. An environment (the social environment as well as the actual work content or the language spoken) in which foreign workers' skills are more easily translatable into a company might set up a framework in which migrants are more likely to stay in Japan. Another way would be to show foreign students early on in their college lives how to build a career in Japan—usually this step is taken with juniors in college, but by then many students have already made up their minds about where to look for employment. This long-term perspective and the message that foreign students are welcome in Japan might influence migrants' perceptions of Japanese society and the contacts they make. Another way would be to improve Japanese college education—while so far Ph.D. programs are more highly valued in Japan than they are in China, the same does not hold true for undergraduate education. Improving the quality of programs of all levels could lead to migrants making a longer commitment to Japan after graduation. From a different perspective, easing family unification in Japan will take pressure off the generation of Chinese only children, who need to take care of their parents in China. Although it can be foreseen that Japan will suffer from a lack of care workers, elder care in Japan is still far superior to China's. Envisioning an immigration policy that also allows for migrants of different skill levels (such as foreign care workers), Japan could set up a framework in which the highly skilled receive the support to freely choose where to spend their lives in order to fulfill their family responsibilities and realize their professional and personal goals.

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