

UCLA

UCLA Previously Published Works

Title

New dynamics of multinational migration: Chinese and Indian migrants in Singapore and Los Angeles

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8475k5gx>

Journal

Geographical Research, 58(4)

ISSN

1745-5863

Authors

Zhan, Shaohua
Aricat, Rajiv
Zhou, Min

Publication Date

2020-11-01

DOI

10.1111/1745-5871.12397

Peer reviewed

Zhan, Shaohua, Rajiv George Aricat, and Min Zhou. 2020. "New Dynamics of Multinational Migration: Chinese and Indian Migrants in Singapore and Los Angeles" *Geographical Research*. *Geographical Research*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12397>

New dynamics of multinational migration: Chinese and Indian migrants in Singapore and Los Angeles

Zhan, Shaohua, Rajiv George Aricat, Min Zhou

Key insights

This study examines the ways in which individual, institutional, and contextual factors interact to affect personal decisions on multinational migrations. It employs a novel three-way comparison between the two migrant populations in two global cities, Singapore and Los Angeles, and goes beyond the 'one host society, a single migrant group' trend in migration studies.

Abstract

The emerging literature on multinational migration highlights migratory journeys that involve more than one country of destination. This article focuses on the lived experiences of new Chinese and Indian migrants in Singapore and Los Angeles. We conduct a novel three-way comparison to examine personal choices to engage in additional migration(s) and to consider the reasons behind such moves. Drawing on in-depth interviews and analysis of policy documents, we find that new (and especially skilled) migrants from China and India are inclined to participate in multinational migration. However, observable variations exist between these two national origin groups and between the two global cities. Factors affecting the decisions whether and where to further migrate include immigration policy of the host country, job opportunities, homeland economic development, and migration networks. Singapore regulates migrants' long-term settlement more tightly than does the United States, thus migrants in the former are more likely than the latter to move onward to another country. Due to a more robust economy in the homeland, Chinese migrants are more likely to return and are thus less likely to migrate to a third country than their Indian counterparts. Job opportunities and migration networks also have strong effects on personal decisions concerning additional migration(s) and its pathways.

Keywords: *multinational migration, global city, Chinese migrant, Indian migrant, Singapore, Los Angeles*

Authors' details

*Corresponding author. Shaohua Zhan, Assistant Professor, Division of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, 48 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639818. E-mail: shzhan@ntu.edu.sg

Rajiv Aricat, Research Fellow, Division of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, 48 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639818. E-mail: aric0001@e.ntu.edu.sg

Min Zhou, Professor of Sociology & Asian American Studies and Walter & Shirley Wang Endowed Chair in US-China Relations & Communications, Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles, 264 Haines Hall, 375 Portola Plaza. Box 951551, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1551. E-mail: mzhou@soc.ucla.edu

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by an Academic Research Fund tier 2 grant from the Ministry of Education of Singapore [No. MOE2015-T2-2-027]. We are grateful to guest editors Anju Mary Paul and Brenda Yeoh for their enormously helpful comments.

1 | Introduction

Multinational migration refers to migratory journeys that involve multiple countries of destination over a given period of time. This phenomenon has received growing academic attention. Scholars have employed such terms as mobile expatriates, serial migration, stepwise migration, and re-migration to capture these new dynamics in international migration (Conway, 1980; Ho, 2019; Ossman, 2013; Paul, 2011). As Lee and associates (2014, p. S26) have noted, the ‘traditional model of one-time migration followed by permanent settlement may not be the primary form of migration today and likely will not be the dominant form of migration in the future’.

There have been two main strands of scholarship on multinational migration. One focuses on the mobility of expatriates, particularly from Western developed countries of the Global North, who are sent by multinational corporations for overseas assignments. They are often perceived as a privileged group whose members occupy top-ranked managerial and well-paying professional positions and periodically move from one country to another, particularly across global cities. These expatriates arguably desist from long-term settlement in host countries and eventually return to their home country after their overseas assignments. Thus they would have little interest in interacting with the host society and are indifferent to either social integration or social exclusion (Beaverstock, 2002, 2012; Iredale, 2001; Kōu & Bailey, 2014; Winders, 2014). However, recent studies have begun to challenge such assumptions by highlighting their in-group diversity and interactions with the host society (Cerna, 2016; Tseng, 2011; Tong *et al.*, 2018; Yeoh & Huang, 2011).

The other strand of scholarship on multinational migration focuses on low-capital and low-skilled migrants or refugees from developing countries of the Global South. Paul (2011, 2017) employs the concept of stepwise migration to capture how domestic workers from the Philippines have managed to settle down in North America or Europe by moving through a hierarchy of countries. Paul emphasises the agency of low-capital migrants in navigating through the unfavorable opportunity structure to eventually reach a more favorable destination. It should be noted that the strategy of stepwise migration is not always successful. Most low-capital and low-skilled migrants are either stuck in an intermediate destination or have to return to their home country (Dauvergne & Marsden, 2014; Rajkumar *et al.*, 2012).

This article focuses on the lived experiences of multinational migration or foreseeable multinational migration(s) of new migrants from mainland China and those from India who migrated to Singapore and Los Angeles in recent decades, particularly since 1990 when the economic development in the two home countries has gathered force. The migrants in our study moved to Singapore and Los Angeles mainly for employment, business/investment, or long-term settlement. They intend to settle down in the country of current residence or hold an open mind about permanent settlement. Most of them are skilled migrants who hold a range of technical and professional jobs in the respective host labour market, working as IT technicians, lab technicians, financial consultants, sales agents, medical personnel, middle-ranked managers or supervisors, and university professors and researchers, and attaining middle or upper-middle incomes. They are distinguished from top-ranked executives and managers in multinational corporations or expatriates in the conventional sense.

An investigation of new Chinese and Indian migrants extends the literature on multinational migration beyond studying top-ranked expatriates or low-capital or low-skilled migrants. The migrants in our study represent what may be called the middle stratum of migrant populations. The migrants in this middle stratum are both numerous and diverse, representing a major force in multinational migration but receiving insufficient scholarly attention.¹ Moreover, most studies on multinational migration have focused only on one national origin group or one national context of reception, which limit their explanatory power. Our study fills the gaps by comparing two skilled migrant groups in two different receiving contexts. The two national origin groups, Chinese and Indians are two of the largest and fast-growing groups of international migrants, and many of them migrated to emerging global cities such as Singapore (which is actually a city-state) and Los Angeles (Aydemir & Robinson, 2008; Sassen, 1990). The prevalence of multinational migration among new Chinese and Indian migrants may suggest the emergence of new international migration systems driven by rapid economic development in China and India and cross-border movements from these countries of origin.

Our study is methodologically innovative in that it compares two migrant populations in two destinations. Under a three-way comparative framework, it examines the ways in which individual, institutional, and contextual factors interact to affect personal decisions on multinational migration. Such approach enables us to uncover complex mechanisms in multinational migration. Our study shows that four main factors have strong effects on migrants'

decisions on multinational journeys: immigration policy of the host country, job opportunities, homeland economic development, and migration networks.

We organize our paper as follows. We first briefly describe Chinese and Indian migration to Singapore and Los Angeles, and then introduce the comparative approach that we adopt for our analysis.² After that, we investigate each of the four factors - immigration policy of the host country, labour market conditions, homeland economic development, and migration networks - and their interactions with other factors, respectively. We conclude by elaborating on the methodological and theoretical implications of our research.

2 | Background: new Chinese and Indian migrants in Singapore and Los Angeles

Both Singapore and Los Angeles have witnessed rapid growth of immigration from China and India. In Singapore, Chinese and Indians are two main races, accounting for 74 per cent and nine per cent of the resident population, respectively, in 2018 (Sing Stats, 2018). In the 1990s, especially after the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the Singaporean government intentionally recruited large numbers of foreign professionals to build a knowledge economy (Author, 2017). Mainland China is one of the largest sources of immigration. The number of China-born migrants in Singapore increased from 150,000 in 1990 to 450,000 in 2015, accounting for approximately 18 percent of the foreign-born population (United Nations, 2017). India is another major source of immigration, accounting for 6 percent of the foreign-born population in Singapore as of 2015. This influx of migrants met with strong native opposition, and such social backlash prompted the government to restrict immigration in the recent decade (Yeoh & Lam, 2016). Partly as a result, it has become increasingly difficult for skilled migrants to obtain permanent residence in Singapore.

In Los Angeles, as well as elsewhere in the United States, the number of Chinese and Indian immigrants has surged after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and further accelerated since 1990 (Author, 2009; Dhingra & Rodriguez, 2014; Sahay, 2009). For example, Asian Indians in Los Angeles more than doubled in 20 years from 59,000 in 1990 to 120,000 in 2010 (South Asian Network, 2017). Over half of Asian Indians in Los Angeles have a college degree or higher and earn an annual income of US\$75,000 or above (PERE, 2017). Los Angeles has also seen successive waves of contemporary Chinese immigration, first with migrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by migrants from

mainland China since the 1980s. Moreover, Chinese migrants in Los Angeles spread beyond the old Chinatown in central city into affluent white middleclass suburbs as well as newly emerged ‘ethnoburbs’. The Chinese ethnoburbs in the San Gabriel Valley reflect diverse socio-economic backgrounds of the new migrants, a thriving ethnic economy, and expansive transnational, cross-class networks (Author, 2009; Horton, 1995; Li, 2009).

3 | Methodology: a three-way comparison

We employ a comparative approach to examine two migrant groups in the two receiving contexts. Most studies focus only on one destination city or one host society and a single migrant group, and thus it is difficult to explain why patterns of multinational migration vary by national origin group and by country of destination. A comparative approach can overcome this shortcoming and identify drivers and motivations in multinational migration in a more robust way. For example, by comparing Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers, Paul (2017, p.137) revealed how marriage, educational attainment, overseas networks, and cultural affiliations had led to divergent ‘destination aspirations and migration trajectories’ between the two groups. Drawing on Paul (2017), this study takes a step further on this comparative approach. We conduct a three-way comparison to reveal not only factors that drive multinational migration but also how these factors interact with one another to affect migrants’ motivations and actions. The three-way comparison looks at factors that operate at the levels of migrant group, host city/country, and country of origin.

The first form of comparison is that between two host cities. Both Singapore and Los Angeles are global cities. There are a great number of domestic and multinational corporations (MNC) in the cities, and these provide diverse employment and business opportunities for natives and migrants. However, Singapore and Los Angeles may occupy distinct positions in the hierarchy of preferred destinations for Chinese and Indian migrants, shaped by immigrant selectivity and broad economic and geopolitical factors (Paul & Yeoh, forthcoming). In addition, Singapore is a city-state while Los Angeles is the second largest city in the world’s largest national economy. The geography and size of the economy of the country where the host city is located may also matter for multinational migration.

The second form of comparison is that between two national origin groups. As we discuss below, Chinese and Indian migrants in Singapore and Los Angeles differ with regard to their

socioeconomic characteristics, job opportunities in the local labour market positions and migration networks, and other social and financial resources. For example, Indian migrants have possessed more extensive migration networks than their Chinese counterparts due to India being a Commonwealth nation and the unique history of colonisation. These differences may lead to diverse outcomes in multinational migration.

The third form of comparison involves considering levels of economic development in the country of origin. China and India are the two most populous countries in the world, and the economies of both countries have been growing rapidly in the past three decades. Homeland economic development provides resources and opportunities for Indians and Chinese to engage in international migration, and it may also draw migrants to return, either temporarily or permanently. The Chinese economy is much larger than the Indian economy, and income per capita is also higher in China than in India. In 2017, annual per capita income in China was US\$8,827 as compared with US\$1,942 in India (World Bank, 2018). These differences may affect motivations and actions with regard to multinational migration.

The three-way comparisons allow us to analyse how various factors interact to exert combined effects on multinational migration. For instance, China's economic development may affect Chinese migrants in Singapore and their counterparts in Los Angeles differently because of contextual and institutional differences in the host cities.

The data are mainly drawn from in-depth interviews in the two cities. Between May 2017 and October 2018, the research team conducted a total of 130 interviews with migrants, including 38 Chinese and 31 Indians in Singapore and 30 Chinese and 31 Indians in Los Angeles. The research project had necessary ethics clearance from the Institutional Review Board of local universities in both Singapore and Los Angeles, where the researchers were based. All participants were asked to sign a consent form, which included the details of the study, before the start of the interview.

We asked a range of questions concerning past migration experiences, modes of entry, current immigration status, future short-term and long-term plans, and motivations to migrate again. We have also examined and compared immigration policies of the two countries. In addition, we conducted a survey with a sample of 1,012 respondents from the two cities. However, we use our survey data only to inform the general trends and patterns because the survey does not contain detailed information on multinational migration.

Of the 130 migrants we interviewed, 21 had a history of multinational migration, either for study or for work, accounting for 16 per cent (see Table 1). However, there is a much larger number of potential multinational migrants in our sample. We assess this potential based on the participant's intention and other information provided during the interview. We find that 37 participants would migrate to a third country in the near future, accounting for 28 per cent. Taken together, past and potential multinational migrants made up 45 per cent of the total. A high proportion of past and potential multinational migrants demonstrates the prevalence of multinational migration among new Chinese and Indian migrants.

[Table 1 here]

[Figure 1 here]

There are notable differences between these two national origin groups and between the two cities. For example, our participants in Singapore are much more likely to participate in multinational migration than their counterparts in Los Angeles. We also find that Chinese participants in Singapore are more likely to be drawn to economic opportunities in the home country than their Indian counterparts, which would reduce their chances of moving to a third country. Figure 1 shows major patterns of Chinese and Indian migration to and from Singapore and Los Angeles observed in our study. Four factors have emerged during the three-way comparison to have significant effects on multinational migration or lack thereof, including immigration policy of the host country, job opportunities, homeland economic development, and migration networks. The following sections examine these four factors and their interactions with other factors in turn.

4 | Immigration policy of the host country

Both Singapore and the United States are long-standing countries of immigration. Immigration policy has affected both who are admitted into the country and who is allowed to settle permanently and integrate into the nation. The restrictive immigration policy in Singapore has a constraining effect on migrants' long-term settlement, which pushes migrants to constantly think about moving, either to another country or back to the home country (Author, 2019). For migrants in Los Angeles, the paths to permanent residency and citizenship are more predictable.

Despite President Trump's repeated promises and attempts to tighten immigration in recent years, legal and institutional infrastructures have remained in place to facilitate paths to social mobility, integration, and naturalization and these infrastructures are intertwined with relatively large and diverse labour market demands locally and nationally.

Singapore does not allow low-capital and low-skilled migrants such as domestic workers and construction workers to apply for permanent residency. The city-state's policy favors skilled migrants and grants them either Employment Pass (EP) for those holding professional jobs or S Pass for those holding middle-skilled jobs with possible pathways to permanent residency and citizenship. In recent years, around 30,000 migrants were granted permanent residency each year. However, the number appeared very small as compared to the total number of skilled migrants in the city. In 2017, for example, there were approximately 650,000 skilled migrants and their families (dependent pass holders), and only five per cent of them were granted permanent residency (Loh, 2018; Ministry of Manpower, 2018).

From a total of 69 participants in Singapore, 31 were not permanent residents or naturalized citizens and 24 of them (77%) were worried that their applications for permanent residency would be rejected while 12 already had their application rejected at least once. Upon each rejection, they were forced to seriously reconsider their long-term plans, even though they were allowed to reapply. Some of them sought to move on to countries with less strict immigration policies. In these cases, multinational migration is a direct outcome of policy restrictions. Alok, 45, an Indian migrant who had worked in a professional job in Singapore since 2013, shed some light on this situation:

People [migrants] are not welcome here to stay for long. I was quite taken aback with that ... To me, it does not make sense ... you spend four, five, six years here ... you build your life and network, but suddenly you realise you still don't belong to the place ... Here is someone who left his own home country, has come here all the way, has a reasonably good background, formal education, and makes reasonably good money in this country. He is paying his taxes like an honest citizen. But you still don't accept him? I just don't understand the rationale.

Alok and his wife both worked in the insurance sector and belonged to high income categories in Singapore. Despite their intention to settle down, they were unable to obtain permanent residency. Alok had worked in Dubai for two years, returned to India, and moved

again to Singapore through a recruitment agent. He had been in Singapore for four years, and he may have to migrate again, either to another country or return to India due to the restriction on long-term settlement in Singapore.

The uncertain prospect of getting permanent residency forced some skilled migrants to leave the city-state. Four participants (one Chinese and three Indians) had made concrete plans on departure, while others considered leaving a real possibility. Jagan, a 42-year-old Indian migrant, received a doctoral degree in engineering from a reputed university in the United States. He had been working in the oil and gas sector in Singapore and lived with his wife and two children for four years. When interviewed in September 2017, Jagan just received notice that his permanent residency application had been rejected. After that, Jagan was actively looking for job opportunities in Australia. We contacted him again six months later and found that he had already moved to Australia with his family, where his chance of permanent settlement was higher.

While immigration policy is a major factor causing multinational migration in Singapore, it appears much less so in Los Angeles. Among the 61 participants in Los Angeles, 52 considered the United States their home for the rest of their lives or at least until retirement. This finding echoes Paul's study (2017) of Filipino domestic workers, who usually ranked the United States at the top in the hierarchy of preferred destination countries, but the subjective construction of the hierarchy has much to do with immigration policy. There are multiple pathways for migrants in the United States to apply for permanent residency and citizenship, including those sponsored by employers via H1B visas as a first step and by relatives through family reunification and marriage, whereas these pathways are much narrower in Singapore.

As documented in literature, the majority of contemporary immigrants to the United States were sponsored by family or employment after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965. Immigrants from China (76%) and India (80%) have among the highest naturalisation rates in the country (Pew, 2018). Of the 420,000 immigrants originating from Asia granted permanent residency status in 2017, 72,000 (or 17%) were Chinese nationals and 60,000 (14%) Indian nationals (Department of Homeland Security, 2019). China and India surpassed Mexico as the two largest sources of legal immigration to the United States based on the 2013–17 American Community Survey.

Los Angeles has been one of the top-five immigrant friendly cities in the country, attracting the largest number of migrants among its cities. Our participants believed that migrants in Los Angeles, regardless of legal status, were treated more favorably by local laws in California than those in other states even when federal policies on cross-border movements and settlements turn stricter. Siddhartan, an Indian male aged 33, evinced confidence in California's immigrant-friendly laws. A financial consultant on H1B visa, Siddhartan had been in the country for six years. According to him, state policies and the socio-legal environment in California have positively influenced his decision to seek long-term residency in the city. He commented regarding Los Angeles:

I think it's a good place. I would want to raise my children over here. But if things change and it becomes less open, which is [where] the world is going, Trump and all ... the California governor and Californians, Mexicans and other immigrants would stand up ... And the state can do stuff against federal policy, so that kind of makes me feel good about California ...

Nevertheless, as Siddhartan noted, tightening of immigration control under the Trump presidency would have serious consequences on highly skilled Chinese and Indian migrants and their families. The regulatory changes under Trump's "Buy American, Hire American" executive order would reduce the quotas on H1B visa, restrict the extension of H1B visas, delay the adjustment of non-immigrant visas including H1B to green cards, and reverse the rule that allows spouses of H1B visa holders to work in the US (Sahay 2019). Highly skilled Chinese and Indian immigrants would be forced to choose alternative destinations or return to the home country were these proposed changes rigorously implemented.

The status adjustment from temporary non-immigrant visas to immigrant visas (green cards) has already got lengthy in the United States. As recent statistics indicate, Indians, who hold one of the largest numbers of H1B visas, would have to wait much longer than previously (even longer than 10 years) to have their non-immigrant work visa status adjusted to permanent residency status (Baron, 2018). Our research in Los Angeles finds that migrants are sensing a widening gap between foreigners and citizens, which increases their anxiety and motivates them to naturalize in order to ensure certainty.³

5 | Job opportunities

Rapid and sustained inflows of skilled migrants to global cities such as Singapore and Los Angeles are triggered by capital investments in sectors such as business services, finance, and information technologies (IT). However, transnational capital has become increasingly mobile, causing the ebb and flow of businesses and job opportunities in any given city. Our research shows that maintaining or finding well-paying jobs is a major motivation of multinational migrants.

Singapore has drawn a large number of MNCs in the IT and finance sectors because of favorable tax policies, business-friendly climate, and political stability. However, these firms would move to other locations if they sense more comparative advantages there. Migrant and native workers face retrenchment or redeployment in the wake of these capital flows. All skilled migrants who participated in our in-depth interviews moved to Singapore due to high demand for their skills. However, the temporary nature of their employment and fluctuations in the local job market would lead them to further migrate. Of 28 participants in Singapore who would potentially migrate to a third country (see Table 1), 23 (82%) would do so because of a possible change of jobs.

Manu, a 42-year-old Indian migrant in Singapore, exemplified the impact of unexpected transborder flows of capital and rapid changes in business operations. Manu had been working in the city as a marketing professional for a multinational firm for seven years. Earning a high income, he lived in a private apartment with family comprising two school-age children. However, he was unsure whether he should actively seek permanent residency, fearing that his employment might take him to other destinations in future. ‘My challenge is the kind of work I do, I don’t even know how long I will be here ... I work for an MNC [multinational corporation]. ... suddenly you’re moved to another headquarter or something like that ...’.⁴

Despite having been granted permanent residency, some professionals may still seek careers in another country. They would even be willing to relinquish their newly obtained citizenship if the situation demanded it. This pattern is observed more among young and single professionals, as they are less burdened by family obligations and more inclined to pursue or maintain high-paying, high-status jobs. These trends are reflected in our quantitative survey of 1,012 Chinese and Indian migrants in the two cities, wherein 34 per cent of permanent residents

and naturalised citizens in Singapore remained open to *not* settling down in their current location. Many native Singaporean citizens have also engaged in multinational migration for better employment or business opportunities (Ho, 2011).

The story in Los Angeles is different. The key difference is that Chinese and Indian migrants in Los Angeles mostly considered being in the city or in the US as their best option. Siddhartan's case—which was discussed earlier—reflects on this situation. With an extensive multinational migration history, Siddhartan weighed the pros and cons of being in different global cities. His migration journey started from developing regions (Bombay and Lagos), but eventually moved up the hierarchy (London, Rochester and Denver), and finally reached Los Angeles, where he considered his final destination.

Another difference between Singapore and Los Angeles is that the latter has a much larger job market and is situated in a large, continent-sized country. A migrant in Singapore may have to move out of the country for a new job, but the one in Los Angeles may find it easier to obtain better employment in another city within California or in another state within the United States. Among past and potential multinational migrants in Los Angeles (20 in total), eight moved or would potentially move across borders for the sake of job opportunities. However, another seven participants in the city moved or would move within the country for career reasons. It should be noted that internal migration within the United States for those holding H1B visas is also constraining, as it is affected by both employers and recruitment agencies. In such cases, individual migrants had less room for negotiation, given that their eligibility for permanent residency hinges on their employment.

In summary, the skilled migrants that we studied engaged in multinational migration to find or keep their well-paying jobs, which allow them to build successful careers or maintain high socioeconomic status, even though it sometimes entails giving up permanent residency or citizenship in a host country. Due to different geographical and economic sizes of host cities, a migrant in Singapore is likely to consider multinational migration upon a change in jobs, whereas one in Los Angeles is likely to move within the city or within the country to find new jobs. In addition, the Los Angeles metropolitan region offers a wider range of economic opportunities, including entrepreneurship, for immigrants than Singapore, which also reduces the possibility of further migration.

6 | Homeland economic development

The economic rise of China and India has profound impacts on international migration and return migration. Capital investments abroad have opened up the pathways for more and more Chinese and Indians to move across national borders. In addition, economic development in both countries has expanded domestic markets and created attractive employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. These conditions, in turn, draw emigrants to return. The increases in return migration and transnational economic activities have mixed effects on multinational migration: they may reduce the need for a migrant to move to a third country due to the strong pull from the homeland, but they may also have the opposite effect, as economic development in the home country provides migrants or potential migrants with greater aspirations and more resources to move to another country (Ray, 2013; Skeldon, 2006; Yeoh, 2014).

Our findings show the strong pull exerted by economic development of China and India on compatriots overseas, particularly among Chinese in Singapore. This pull may be due to both the geographical proximity between China and Singapore (as compared to Los Angeles) and the larger size of the Chinese economy (as compared to India). Some migrants partnered with firms located in their home countries, while others invested in start-ups and managed the business operations from another country. Isaac, a 30-year-old Chinese migrant, moved from China to Singapore eight years ago as a post-graduate student of electrical and electronics engineering. He worked in Singapore for a few years after graduation, and then started his own logistics company to move cargo from Singapore to China. At the time of his interview, Isaac foresaw an expansion of his business due to the growth of the Chinese economy. Like a number of Chinese migrants among our participants, Isaac kept open the option to move back to the home country. When asked about his long-term plan, he replied, ‘I think (I will be in) either Singapore or China ... Most of my customers are from China. So, I keep relationship with them. I have investments in China, and have an office in China ... But Singapore also has opportunities’.

Apart from investing in the homeland, migrants are keen to explore employment opportunities there, ranging from education to research and development. At least two academics among our participants expressed confidence about the expanding higher education sector in China, which is expected to provide more stable employment opportunities. Chris, a 36-year-old Chinese migrant, moved to Singapore to pursue a doctoral degree in 2009. After graduation he worked on a few temporary research jobs in Singapore. Although he became a permanent

resident in the country, he failed to secure a stable job. In the meantime, he got married and had two children. He told us that he was thinking of returning to China to get an academic job with employment security.

Chris's case shows that the choice to return is also shaped by a lack of good jobs in the host society or a desire for stability. Singapore's higher education sector is too small to provide employment opportunities for a growing number of doctoral graduates. Many foreign students who have received advanced degrees and who are working as educators and researchers in Singapore aspire to move to a third region such as Oceania, North America, or Europe, as is the case of Edward, a 29-year-old Chinese migrant. Edward graduated from a reputable university in Singapore and secured a post-doctoral position in the city-state. He had exemplary academic records and belonged to a newly affluent middle-class family in China. Edward lived with his wife in a rented luxurious private apartment, which most of his peers were unable to afford. Yet, he was still actively looking for opportunities in a third country. He prepared a list of countries to migrate to, including the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia, among others, while considering a return to China as a backup.

Indian migrants in Singapore did not view the opportunities in their homeland as positively as their counterparts from China. There are career opportunities in India, but they seem not comparable to those in Singapore. Among our 38 Chinese and 31 Indian participants in Singapore, 13 Chinese migrants cited better career prospects for their possible return to the home country, but only one Indian migrant did so, and most Indians said they would only return because of job instability or low likelihood to secure permanent residency in Singapore.

In Los Angeles too, the homeland economy also seems to exert a stronger pull for Chinese migrants than for their Indian counterparts. Among Chinese, however, due to the large size of the US economy and ample job opportunities in and around the city, the economic pull from China appears much weaker than that in Singapore. We only found three cases of Chinese migrants in Los Angeles wanting to return to China for economic reasons, and they intended to return only temporarily without making plans for long-term settlement back in China. For example, 29-year-old Chinese migrant, Ping, ran his own company in Los Angeles. His main business was to import Chinese goods to the local retail markets in the United States. Sponsored by his parents, Ping moved to that country in 2013 as a legal permanent resident. When his daughter turns six, Ping plans to send her to China for education, where he would also go to expand his business.

However, neither Ping nor his child would resettle in China permanently. He said, ‘I want to send her back to China to go to school [since] primary education there is better and she could maintain her Chinese proficiency. As an international student she will have better opportunities to find a job compared to a native student [in the US]’.

Like Ping, nearly 50 per cent of Chinese migrants in Los Angeles in our study are willing to maintain transnational connections with China because that will allow them to benefit from the booming Chinese economy and gain advantages in business or job competitions. However, they do not express a desire to return to China permanently. Among those participants in Los Angeles—four Chinese and four Indians—who reported that they would return to their home countries in the future, mostly cited retirement and cultural affinity as the main reasons to return (see Purkayastha *et al.*, 2012).

The trend among migrants to accept the United States as their home is evident among Indians in Los Angeles as well. The development prospects of India do present them with better opportunities to invest or partake in nation building. However, given that the opportunities in the local labour market are enormous, emerging opportunities in India are not attractive enough to tilt the balance. Kabir, 29, had lived in Los Angeles since he was seven. Currently a naturalised US citizen and supported by a network of extended family in different parts of the US, Kabir’s personal goal is to become an entrepreneur. His family planned to expand its business in India, which would incentivise him to return to his country of origin, but Kabir would go to India only for running business rather than permanent resettlement.

7 | Migration networks

In this study, migration networks refer to ties with non-migrants, including families or kin, who are either left behind in the homeland or scattered in different parts of the world, and they remain among the key drivers for international and multinational migration. Migration networks can facilitate and provide a direction to migrants as they migrate and re-migrate at different phases in life (Fawcett, 1989; Gold 2005; Massey *et al.*, 2008, pp.42-4). In both Singapore and Los Angeles, we observed network-supported migration among our participants, but the effects of these networks on multinational migration are different between these two ethnic groups and between the two cities. The focus on migration networks helps us look beyond economic and institutional factors while paying attention to the agency of migrants, but we should be mindful

that migration networks are also shaped by macro factors such as migration histories, geopolitics, and economic development (Castles *et al.*, 2014; Massey *et al.*, 2008, pp.34–55).

Migration networks across national borders, particularly those networks that span multiple countries, offer valuable sources of information and support for prospective migration (Tsujiimoto, 2016; Van Liempt, 2011). Ranjit, an Indian migrant, testified to the importance of multinational extended family ties. Ranjit left India at the age of six, migrating to Italy with his family. He had lived in Italy for about 13 years before moving to Los Angeles. His decision to migrate to Los Angeles was informed by at least three reasons. First, he aspired to fulfill his professional ambition to become a mechanic of new model cars. He expected that, with a large and strong automobile market, the United States could offer him this opportunity. Second, as a rebellious and adventurous young man he wanted to be away from his relatives. Ranjit's family had a large kinship network in several European countries, including his grandparents in England. Finally, he migrated specifically to Los Angeles because his uncle already lived there—an uncle he had never met until he landed in the city. As in the case of Ranjit, a number of participants in our study moved to the United States with the sponsorship of family members such as uncles/aunts or siblings. Examples of migration arising from family sponsorship in Singapore are rare because of its restrictive immigration policies. Nevertheless, some migrants did choose Singapore as their destination due to the presence of their friends or relatives in the city.

Compared with their counterparts in Los Angeles, many migrants in Singapore moved (or intended to move) to a third country. However, we also found that some considered Singapore as their final destination after stints in other countries, owing to the country's cultural and geographical proximity to China and India. Elizabeth, a 43-year-old Chinese migrant in Singapore, is a case in point. She followed her husband, who was also from China, to Sweden when he found employment there in 2002. A major research and development organisation in Singapore then offered her husband a job and the family moved to the country in 2005. Elizabeth and her family eventually became naturalised citizens in Singapore. Despite her husband receiving several job offers in the following years, the family did not move from Singapore. According to Elizabeth, she could tap into the resources of the ethnic Chinese market in Singapore as an insurance agent. An equally important consideration was being able to visit their ailing parents and in-laws in China frequently. Thus, being in Singapore, rather than in any other

country, provided them the convenience to make frequent visits to families in China. In this respect, a study by Ortega *et al.* (2018) finds that being close to elderly parents is an important reason for some Chinese scientists to choose to work in universities in Singapore, even though they could find positions in the US or Europe. By basing themselves in emerging academic hubs like Singapore, these Asia-born academics achieve a balance between accumulation of social and human capital and their desire to return ‘home’ for various reasons.

Our findings also show the differences between Chinese and Indian migrants with regard to network-driven multinational migration, particularly those in Los Angeles. India is a member of the Commonwealth, thus Indians maintained social networks that spanned the Middle East, Africa, and Europe (Bhachu, 1985; Singh, 2008). Seven out of 31 Indian participants migrated to Los Angeles via these diaspora networks after living and working in another country for varying lengths of time; Bilveer, a 52-year-old, is a good example. He was born in India but has family members born in different Commonwealth countries—his mother in Pakistan and his father and sister in Kenya. The family lived in Nairobi, where Bilveer’s father started practicing as a medical doctor, for a few years, and moved to London for a short stint before moving to the United States. Bilveer had relatives living in India, London, and on the east coast of the United States.

By contrast, new Chinese migrants, particularly from those non-traditional sending regions of mainland China, do not have diaspora networks as extensive as their Indian counterparts. This is probably due to two reasons. First, China has never been fully colonised nor any part of the Commonwealth. Its diasporic networks are concentrated in Southeast Asia and the Americas. In the case of North America, legal exclusion in the US and Canada in the nineteenth century greatly disrupted these networks. Second, the communist revolution in China and the isolation of the country between 1950s and 1970s further weakened or even ruptured the connections between citizens of China and diasporic communities overseas (Wang, 2000).

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, however, the integration of China into the global economy has opened up many pathways of international migration. Chinese migrants have moved in growing numbers to Africa, Latin America, and other countries in Asia, as well as North America, Europe, and Oceania, and are engaged in a diverse range of occupations (Author, 2017; Ho, 2019). It remains to be seen how skilled migrants from China will benefit from newly formed global migration networks. Nonetheless, the expanding migration networks are expected

to facilitate multinational migration in the future, giving rise to new dynamics of international migration connecting and centring around China, Indian, and other emerging markets.

8 | Conclusion

We have investigated the emerging phenomenon of multinational migration. We extended the literature by studying and comparing the two largest national origin groups—Chinese and Indians—in two global cities—Singapore and Los Angeles. We have conducted a novel three-way comparison between the two national origin groups in two host cities. Going beyond most studies that focus only on one host society and/or a single migrant group, our analysis revealed that multinational migration or lack thereof among these two groups was mostly shaped by the interaction of four structural factors: immigration policy of the host country, job opportunities, homeland economic development, and migration networks, leading to diverse patterns. For example, the rise of China and India has a strong effect on multinational migration. In Singapore, restrictive immigration policy and constrained opportunity structure interacts with homeland economic development to draw skilled Chinese migrants to return to China (this may reduce the chance of further migration) but to push skilled Indian migrants to move to a third country rather than return. In Los Angeles, although economic growth in China had a similar pull on Chinese migrants there, the enormous size of the US economy with ample job opportunities and relatively favorable environment for integration kept skilled Chinese migrants from returning, particularly in the case of permanent return.

Our research provides a nuanced understanding of multinational migration among skilled Chinese and Indian migrants. We have shown that skilled Chinese and Indian migrants are drawn to the global cities such as Singapore and Los Angeles in recent decades, but that they appear more mobile than what conventional migration theories assume. In fact, a large number of our participants are past or potential multinational migrants even though many intend to resettle in the current or future destination rather than return or keep migrating. Thus, their multinational migration journeys are not only driven by individual agency but also shaped or even forced upon by structural factors related to countries of origin and the destination.

Notes

¹ The research on these migrants' multinational migration pathways has been growing. Examples include Xiang (2007), King and Newbold (2007), and Lu and Roy (2017).

² Singapore is city-state and is treated as a city in comparison to Los Angeles.

³ It should be noted that California is an immigrant friendly state, and the legal system in the US allows the state to challenge the Federal Government's legislations. Thus, immigrants in the state may enjoy more protections than those in other states.

⁴ The respondent also wanted to avoid a situation in which his two children would be doing the mandatory National Service while he worked temporarily in Singapore. National Service is mandatory for the young male children of Permanent Residents and citizens in the city-state.

References

- Aydemir, A. and Robinson, C., 2008. Global labour markets, return, and onward migration. *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 41(4), pp.1285–311.
- Baron, E. 2018. *H-1B visa to green card: Wait time for Indian workers is up to 151 years*. The Mercury News. Available at: <https://www.mercurynews.com/2018/06/08/h-1b-visa-to-green-card-wait-time-for-indian-workers-is-up-to-151-years-report/>. [Accessed 06/06/2019].
- Beaverstock, J., 2002. Transnational elites in global cities: British expatriates in Singapore's financial district. *Geoforum*, 33, pp.525–38.
- Beaverstock, J., 2012. Highly skilled international labour migration and world cities: Expatriates, executives and entrepreneurs. In: B. Derudder, M. Hoyler, P. Taylor and F. Witlox, eds. *International Handbook of Globalization and World Cities*. Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar. pp.240–50.
- Bhachu, P., 1985. *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain*. New York: Tavistock.
- Castles, S., De Haas, H. and Miller, M., 2014. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World (5th edition)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cerna, L., 2016. *Immigration Policies and the Global Competition for Talent*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Conway, D., 1980. Step-wise migration: Toward a clarification of the mechanism. *International Migration Review*, 14(1), pp.3–14.
- Dauvergne, C. and Marsden, S., 2014. The ideology of temporary labour migration in the post-global era. *Citizenship Studies*, 18(2), pp.224–42.
- Department of Homeland Security, 2019. *Yearbook 2017*. Available at: <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2017/table3>. [Accessed 06/06/2019].
- Dhingra, P. and Rodriguez, R., 2014. *Asian America: Sociological and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Fawcett, J., 1989. Networks, linkages, and migration systems. *International Migration Review*, 23(3), pp.671–680.

- Gold, S., 2005. Migrant networks: A summary and critique of relational approaches to international migration. In: M. Romero and E. Margolis, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Social Inequalities*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Ho, E., 2011. Migration trajectories of 'highly skilled' middling transnationals: Singaporean transmigrants in London. *Population, Space and Place*, 17(1), pp.116–29.
- Ho, E., 2019. *Citizens in Motion: Emigration, Immigration, and Re-migration across China's Borders*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Horton, J., 1995. *The Politics of Diversity: Immigration, Resistance, and Change in Monterey Park, California*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Iredale, R., 2001. The migration of professionals: Theories and typologies. *International Migration*, 39(5), pp.7–26.
- King, K., and Newbold, K., 2007. Onward emigration to the United States by Canadian emigrants between 1995 and 2000. *International Migration Review*, 41(4), pp. 909–29.
- Kōu, A. and Bailey, A., 2014. 'Movement is a constant feature in my life': Contextualising migration processes of highly skilled Indians. *Geoforum*, 52, pp.113–22.
- Lee, J., Carling, J. and Orrenius, P., 2014. The International Migration Review at 50: Reflecting on half a century of international migration research and looking ahead. *International Migration Review*, 48(S1), pp.S3–36.
- Li, W., 2009. *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban America*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Lu, Z. and Roy, M., 2017. *Migration Paths: How do Highly Skilled Workers Make Their Way to Canada?*. New York: World Education Services.
- Massey, D., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A. and Taylor J., 2008. *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Ministry of Manpower, 2018. *Foreign workforce numbers*. Government of Singapore. Available at: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/documents-and-publications/foreign-workforce-numbers>. [Accessed 06/06/2019].
- Ortiga, Y., Chou, M.-H., Sondhi, G. and Wang, J., 2018. Working within the aspiring center: Professional status and mobilities among migrant faculty in Singapore. *Higher Education Policy*, 32(2), pp.149–66.

- Ossman, S., 2013. *Moving Matters: Paths of Serial Migration*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Paul, A., 2011. Stepwise international migration: a multistage migration pattern for the aspiring migrant. *American Journal of Sociology*, 116(6), pp.1842–86.
- Paul, A., 2017. *Multinational Maids: Stepwise Migration in a Global Labor Market*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Paul, A. and Yeoh, B., forthcoming. Studying multinational migrations, speaking back to migration theory. *Global Networks*.
- PERE, 2017. *South Asians in the Los Angeles region*. Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Available at: https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/South_Asian_Network_web.pdf. [Accessed 06/06/2019].
- Pew Research, 2018. *Naturalization rate among U.S. immigrants up since 2005, with India among the biggest gainers*. Available at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/18/naturalization-rate-among-u-s-immigrants-up-since-2005-with-india-among-the-biggest-gainers/>. [Accessed 06/06/2019].
- Purkayastha, B., Iwata, M., Adur, S., Ray, R. and Tiamzon, T., 2012. *As the Leaves Turn Gold: Asian Americans and Experiences of Aging*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Rajkumar, D., Berkowitz, L., Vosko, L., Preston, V. and Latham, R., 2012. At the temporary–permanent divide: How Canada produces temporariness and makes citizens through its security, work, and settlement policies. *Citizenship Studies*, 16(3–4), pp.483–510.
- Ray, M., 2013. The global circulation of skill and capital—Pathways of return migration of Indian entrepreneurs from the United States to India. In: T. Yong & M. Rahman, eds. *Diaspora Engagement and Development in South Asia*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. pp.75–102.
- Sahay, A., 2009. *Indian Diaspora in the United States: Brain Drain or Gain?*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Sahay, A., 2019. Skill gap and brain drain for United States: Impact of Trump executive orders on H1 B and India. In: A. Sahoo and B. Purkayastha eds. *Routledge Handbook on Indian Transnationalism*. New York: Routledge, pp.31–41.

- Sassen, S., 1990. *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Loh, J., 2018. Singapore's population grows slightly to 5.64m, with non-resident numbers stable. *Channel New Asia*. Available at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/singapore-s-population-grows-slightly-to-5-64m-with-non-resident-10763132>. [Accessed 06/06/2019].
- Sing Stats, 2018. *Population Trends*. Available at: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/population/population2018.pdf>. [Accessed 06/06/2019].
- Singh, A., 2008. South African Indian migration in the twenty-first century: Towards a theory of 'triple identity'. *Asian Ethnicity*, 9(1), pp.5–16.
- Skeldon, R., 2006. Interlinkages between internal and international migration and development in the Asian region. *Population, Space and Place*, 12(1), pp.15–30.
- South Asian Network, 2017. *South Asian Americans in Los Angeles County*. Available at: <http://southasiannetwork.org/resources/san-reports-and-publication/>. [Accessed 06/06/2019].
- Tong, Y., Su, W. and Fong, E., 2018. Labor market integration of non-Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong from 1991 to 2011: Structure of global market or White privilege? *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 4(1), pp.79–108.
- Tseng, Y-F., 2011. Shanghai rush: Skilled migrants in a fantasy city. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37(5), pp.765–84.
- Tsujimoto, T., 2016. Affective friendship that constructs globally spanning transnationalism: The onward migration of Filipino workers from South Korea to Canada. *Mobilities*, 11(2), pp.323–41.
- United Nations, 2017. *Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin*. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/docs/MigrationStockDocumentation_2015.pdf. [Accessed 05/08/2019]
- Van Liempt, I., 2011. 'And then one day they all moved to Leicester': The relocation of Somalis from the Netherlands to the UK explained. *Population, Space and Place*, 17(3), pp.254–66.

- Wang, G., 2000. *The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Winders, J., 2014. New immigrant destinations in global context. *International Migration Review*, 48(S1), pp.S149–79.
- World Bank, 2018. *Work Bank Open Data*. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/>. [Accessed 06/06/2019].
- Xiang, B., 2007. *Global 'Body Shopping': An Indian Labor System in the Information Technology Industry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Yeoh, B., 2014. Asia(ns) on the move: Globalisation, migration and development. *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia*, 2(2), pp.157–62.
- Yeoh, B. and Huang, S., 2011. Introduction: Fluidity and friction in talent migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37(5), pp.681–90.
- Yeoh, B. and Lam, T., 2016. Immigration and its (dis)contents: The challenges of highly skilled migration in globalizing Singapore. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 60(5–6), pp.637–58.

Table 1 Past and potential multinational migrants among the participants

		All participants (N)	Past multinational migrants (%)	Potential multinational migrants (%)
Singapore	Chinese	38	3 (7.9%)	15 (39.5%)
	Indian	31	7 (22.6%)	13 (41.9%)
	Sub-total	69	10 (14.5%)	28 (40.6%)
Los Angeles	Chinese	30	3 (10%)	3 (10%)
	Indian	31	8 (25.8%)	6 (19.4%)
	Sub-total	61	11 (18%)	9 (14.8%)
	Total	130	21 (16.2%)	37 (28.5%)

Figure 1 Major patterns of Chinese and Indian migration to/from Singapore and Los Angeles

