

Reservations About an Evolutionary Approach to Cross-Border Mobility

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What is in a rate? The task assigned to all contributors to the volume *Globalising Migration History* is to calculate cross-cultural migration rates (CCMR). This serves to make migratory movements comparable to one another across the Eurasian continent. The basic hypothesis tested in the volume is that these movements are indeed comparable to one another, meaning, first, that looking over the past 500 years neither in Europe, nor in Asia did the Industrial Revolution cause a fundamental change in the volume of these movements in relation to the total population, and, second, that Asian migrations were not inferior in number to those in Europe. This hypothesis could not be rejected. Several authors suggested that it is perhaps not the volume of migrations that is important, but the proposed typology of migrants' categories. The Lucassens agreed and conclude that in Asia forced and state-led migrations were, by comparison, more important than in Europe. This led them to propose studying institutional frameworks for migration.

Remarkably, none of the authors questions the validity of the CCMR, or asks why they should try to construct it: this was obviously not part of the brief. Yet, questions arise at this fundamental level when traversing the book, and they affect how the resulting CCMRs can be interpreted and put to use. To begin with: what is meant by “migration”? The Lucassens seem to be interested most in problems of assimilation, defined in this essay as productive interaction: “[...] the propensity of migrants to interact with inhabitants of the region of destination and vice versa, as well as the chance this will offer for cross-cultural (ex)change” is “at the heart of migration history”. The question of whether – and if so, to what extent – this propensity differs among the six categories of migrant distinguished by the Lucassens is regarded as a “more technical question”.¹ One wonders how this could be done without taking into account the subjective

1. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (eds), *Globalising Migration History. The Eurasian Experience (16th–21st Centuries)* (Leiden, 2014), p. 418.

propensities of the migrants, residents, and governments involved, who were often divided among themselves. Further, since they help determine the manner in which migration statistics are constructed and interpreted, one needs to take into account the discourses, which each of the social groups and institutions involved uses and which might conflict with one another.

In placing assimilation processes thus defined at the centre of their research problem, the Lucassens concur with Patrick Manning's approach, which they explicitly use themselves in the study of world (or global) history, and which holds that "[C]ross-community migration, the migration of communities across boundaries of language and culture, is a consistent human pattern of behavior which provides a pattern of social evolution".² In other words, migration must be studied over historical time because it contributes to the improvement of the human race, contrary to that of animals, which only progresses by the incidence of genetic mutations. The study of history then serves to find out what hampers and what stimulates successful migration and the concomitant assimilation and social development: "[T]he very notion of 'history' would make very little sense if it failed to account for some sort of 'development'".³ For Manning, and, to a large extent, for the Lucassens, migration is the movement from one place to another, followed by settlement and/or a return to the home country. But this barely touches on the problem they are interested in: real creative assimilation or productive interaction happen only when people migrate and settle down in another community. Therefore, one wonders why settlement is not used in calculating the CCMR. Settlers do play a role in Manning's approach as one category of migrants, but they have dropped out of sight as a significant category altogether in the approach taken by the Lucassens.

Next, what is the use of a rate if it is not clear how it is constructed from the available historical data? None of the authors who calculated the CCMR for their own situation has addressed in much detail the problem of how their materials have been collected, and thus how significant the margin of error is by which their results are to be qualified. Most authors refer only to the secondary literature and published sources, and then tell us that their results are uncertain (in some cases very much so) and are subject to correction by subsequent research. Many of these data are based on proxy sources, such as tax registers and cadastres, and these might differ over time depending on the manner in which the data were collected and used. This makes any estimate subject to considerable margins of error. My own research is on migration between South China and Taiwan during

2. Patrick Manning, "Cross-Community Migration: A Distinctive Human Pattern", *Social Evolution & History*, 5:2 (2006), pp. 24–54, 24.

3. *Idem*, *Migration in World History* (London and New York, 2013), p. 10.

the period of Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945). This period is famous for the high quality of source materials, collected and often published by the sophisticated and knowledge-oriented Japanese bureaucracy and academia. Yet, looking through the published sources and secondary literature, the number of Chinese migrant workers estimated to have resided in Taiwan during the 1930s varies from around 45,000 to 150,000, a difference of more than 100 per cent. Aside from the different methods of calculation used, and which can only partly be adjusted for, there is an intractable difference between the data provided by the Japanese authorities, who had an interest in publishing the lowest possible numbers and usually arrived at a figure of 60,000 migrants, and those claimed by migrants' organizations, which put the number of settlers at 100,000, because they had an interest in aggrandizing their constituency. Even this is a difference of nearly seventy per cent.⁴ If such differences can occur in colonial Taiwan, what can we say about those in premodern states?

Of course, the Lucassens and the contributors to this volume are fully aware of this problem, and one accepts that, in order to proceed in this field of enquiry, one needs a clearly delineated baseline from which to start future research; this has been duly provided. More than that, the book's chapters abound in dense descriptions of the societies, economies, and states in and among which the mobility occurred, and in arguments to support the plausibility of their authors' estimates. Yet, from a strict methodological point of view, one should not be satisfied with statements that though arguably plausible are not refutable. It is not unusual in historical studies to be confronted with sources that are too defective to enable this, especially in the pre-industrial period. New research will commonly require the sources to be reassessed and, even more, workable theories to explain the data and account for their deficiencies. It is interesting to note that the only two contributions that do employ primary sources do not use them to calculate CCMRs. These are the studies on the migrations by South Indian weavers during the pre-industrial period and the "zomian" migrations in the China – Myanmar – Thailand triangular region, which we discuss below.

Not coincidentally, the same divide occurs when looking at the meaning of "cross-cultural" in the definition of the CCMR: the two authors who avoid focusing on numbers pay most attention to culture and the issue of creative assimilation; with the others, it is the other way around. The Lucassens themselves do not care much about "culture". They mention that, contrary to the success of markets and states in explaining the success of societies, "cultural explanations, for the prevailing centuries, have lost

4. Leo Douw, "The Huaqiao in Taiwan 1895–1945: Their Ambivalent Localization", *Journal of Chinese Overseas*, 7:2 (2011), pp. 143–168, 155–156; Man-houng Lin, "The 'Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere': A New Boundary for Taiwanese People and Taiwanese Capital, 1940–1945", paper presented at the conference "Japan, China and the Construction of History", University of Amsterdam, 25–26 June 2015, p. 35.

much but not all of their attraction".⁵ It is not surprising, then, that most authors simply assume that the migration situation they address fulfils the cross-cultural requirement and proceed to calculate the CCMR.

This entails a number of problems. One might wonder, for example, whether the transfer of military migrants to or across frontier positions does not differ too much from other types of settlement subsumed under the same category. Such migrants were mostly separate from the local population, and such migration did not usually result in settlement, exceptions notwithstanding, as in the case of the military settlement of troops, a distinguishing feature of China's history. But should we, as the Lucassens do, give such weight to the millions of Japanese soldiers who moved throughout East Asia after 1937 and returned to Japan in 1945?⁶ Or to their civilian counterparts? The perspective of these millions might certainly have been changed by the experience of migration, but is that comparable with the type of creative assimilation that the Lucassens claim took place? A better comparison would be that with tourists: they might enjoy their holiday in Turkey, but at home they have their reservations about Turkish settlers. Another parallel can be found in the vast waves of Chinese peasants who migrated to Manchuria from the late nineteenth century onwards, the subject of Yuki Umeno's contribution. He takes for granted that these led to the Sinification of the local population of Manchurians. However, this ignores the fact that the Chinese, together with the Japanese and Taiwanese who later invaded Manchuria, comprised such an overwhelming majority that the local populations had little opportunity to creatively assimilate them.

Unlike most of the chapters, the studies on the Indian weavers and the "zomian" migrants along Yunnan's borders consider the assimilation problem at great length. Moreover, they go against the comparative approach on which the book rests, emphasizing instead the connectivity of migration movements. In doing so, they identify the actual reason why I think the Lucassens made cultural borders such a central part of their CCMR: they had to find a way to do away with national borders in order to provide a base for their comparative exercise, because nation states existed neither in Asia, nor in much of early modern Europe.⁷ This made it opportune to introduce Manning's cross-community migration, in which communities are held together by a shared language and culture. This was, apparently, an attractive option also because Manning does not specify in much detail what he means by culture, or by cultural assimilation. This approach certainly represents an advance from earlier migration studies, but one wonders whether one should not go further and more radically focus on connections

5. Lucassen and Lucassen, *Globalising Migration History*, p. 424.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

instead of comparisons, thereby shifting the focus from what divides people towards what binds them.

Let us now look at the debates to which the calculation of the CCMR is intended to contribute, namely those on global economic inequality, state building, and identity formation. The “Globalising” in the book’s title promises to shift migration history towards a global framework. We might wonder, therefore, how far the book succeeds in this task, daunting in itself: it involves a fundamental rethinking of how mainstream historians have conceived of history since the nineteenth century. The most provocative statement on the character of the shift involved is that of the prominent historian of East Asia, Prasenjit Duara, who has proposed “rescuing history from the nation”; another, Dipesh Chakrabarty, has referred to “provincializing Europe” and of shaking off “the nightmare of tradition”. Aihwa Ong uses the phrase “Ungrounded Empires”, founded by national-border-ignoring Chinese business networks.⁸ Central in this is the repositioning of the world’s preindustrial past to a position equal with that of the present, and not just as a lower-level predecessor as conventional historiography would have it. The motive for this is not so much the discovery of new facts, but a shift in how we have come to look at the world since the 1990s. This applies most distinctly to the decreasing importance of industrialization worldwide: it explains the ongoing re-evaluation of pre-modern mobility better than the undeniable availability of more and better datasets.

The background to this paradigm shift is the restoration of market-oriented economic policies since the 1980s, and also includes the orientation towards entrepreneurial rather than state-building values, and towards identity formation rather than ideologies (political and otherwise). The rapid emergence of the large Asian economies and states is part of this, as are the new political discourses that go with it. One challenge for historians is to deal with the exuberant claims made by politicians about their glorious, but premodern past: the Qing, Ottoman, Persian, and Russian/Soviet empires to be restored, and the challenge this offers to the claims of the superiority of European culture. These were taken for granted until the 1980s, but may now be “provincializing” rapidly.

For the Lucassens, the so-called Great Divergence debate⁹ ranks high among the debates on global economic inequality, state building, and identity formation: how one can integrate the study of migration with explanations of how the West came to diverge from the rest of the world in

8. Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago, IL, 1995); Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts”, *Representations*, 37 (1992), pp. 1–26; Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (eds), *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (New York, 1997).

9. Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

terms of wealth and power is an explicit, important and valuable objective for studies on migration. It is surprising to see how little attention has been paid to migration in general development theory. Too many popular student course books pay only marginal attention to this,¹⁰ and, for example, Leiden University's Tracking Development Project (2006–2011) ignores migration while setting the faltering development of four African countries off against the economic success of four countries in Southeast Asia.¹¹ Furthermore, since the Great Divergence debate is deeply engaged with quantifiable variables, it seems to fit the research preferences of the Lucassens more than the other debates.

Looking at how the CCMR is framed in Lucassens's book, however, one wonders how this would work out. Their methodological emphasis is clearly on comparison, even if the boundaries are presumably determined by cultural rather than territorial or "national" claims. As we saw, the Lucassens conclude that ultimately the trends in migration in (regions and/or countries in) "Europe" and "Asia" differ in several ways, and this might explain the different development trajectories of these regions (or even "path dependencies", as they claim).¹² This sounds like conventional Eurocentrism, which positions countries or nations on a basically level playing field on which they all compete, but have reached different stages of development. The model for explaining global disparities in wealth in terms of competing nations is somewhat outdated for yet another reason: nowadays, the most important differences in wealth are not among nations, but inside them.

The other ongoing debates provide even better arguments, however, to deviate radically from this approach. Glick Schiller and Salazar advocate the fuller acknowledgement of "[...] the ongoing dynamic between situations of settlement and those of mobility within situations of unequal power", and the notion that "global power dynamics have a direct influence on the relations between the various actors [...] and on the micro-dynamics of power in social relations", thus "[...] mov[ing] beyond categorical opposites such as fixity and motion, self and other, and communalism and cosmopolitanism".¹³ William Skinner qualifies the importance of ethnic

10. Tim Allen and Alan Thomas, *Poverty and Development: Into the 21st Century* (Oxford, 2000); Marc Edelman and Angelique Haugerud (eds), *The Anthropology of Development and Globalization: From Classical Political Economy to Contemporary Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA, 2005).

11. Jan Kees van Donge, David Henley, and Peter Lewis, "Tracking Development in South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa: The Primacy of Policy", *Development Policy Review Special Issue: Tracking Development in South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa*, 30:51 (2012), pp. 55–824; David van Oostveen, "Examining 'Tracking Development': de impact van emigratie vergeleken tussen Afrikaanse en Aziatische landen van 1975–2006" (BA thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2015).

12. Lucassens and Lucassens, *Globalising Migration History*, p. 425.

13. Nina Glick Schiller and Noel B. Salazar, "Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 39:2 (2013), pp. 183–200, 188.

identity by arguing that Chinese migrants assimilated more easily in early modern Siam (Thailand) than in Java and the Philippines, because in the former assimilation was accompanied by upward mobility, whereas in the latter it was not.¹⁴

Here, identity building and state formation come into play. In the Lucassens's book, Mireille Mazard and Vijaya Ramaswamy make the point that migrating "zomians" – those living in a stateless area along the borders between China, Thailand, and Myanmar – practice slash-and-burn agriculture not because they are backward, but because their relationship with neighbouring communities forces them to do so. The Indian weavers moved, largely, because they expected to advance socially by migrating to cities, irrespective of the difficulties they might encounter. Among these impediments were state borders, which might restrain their geographical mobility at times, but interestingly enough not their language ability: because of their habit of intermingling and migrating, they master up to three of four languages.¹⁵ In both cases, according to the authors, the result was creative assimilation, but it came more or less incidentally and seems to have been secondary to the institutional frameworks within which the migrants moved.

East Asia had much stricter regimes governing the movement of peoples and commodities than the early modern European principalities and emergent nations did. More than elsewhere, trading communities in China and Japan were limited to narrowly confined harbour areas, and until deep into the nineteenth century trading was mostly indirect. This confirms the Lucassens's conclusion that Asian migration regimes were more state-oriented than European ones, but it might lead to the conventional Eurocentric question: would this have made Asia less productive than Europe in terms of creative assimilation during that period?

By the late nineteenth century, when modern nation-state building began in China and Japan, Japan had soon become China's colonizer and occupied Taiwan, and subsequently Korea and Manchuria.¹⁶ Japan's role in establishing international migration regimes in the region became so significant that the importance of power relationships and the ensuing institutions is revealed most clearly; colonialism was added to the detachedness that had characterized past relationships between the two countries.

The creation of a new border between Taiwan and mainland China makes the migrations across the Taiwan Strait during the colonial period (1895–1945) particularly informative, because the new border cut through culturally homogeneous populations, and assimilation was prevented only by sociopolitical and

14. G. William Skinner, "Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia", in Anthony Reid (ed.), *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Sydney, 1996), pp. 51–95.

15. Lucassens and Lucassens, *Globalising Migration History*, p. 96.

16. See the special issue of *Translocal Chinese: East Asian Perspectives*, 10:1 (April 2016), entitled *Imprinting Boundaries in East Asia: The Ethnic Chinese in Korea*.

not by cultural difference. I would like to conclude by summarizing some of the findings from my own research on these migrations, and illustrate how calculating something like a “Productive Interaction Rate” is not just a “more technical issue”.

Cross-Strait migration during the colonial period can scarcely be regarded as cross-cultural, since it was the same Hokkien and Hakka migration that had been going on since the seventeenth century;¹⁷ the migrants were connected to the host society through their close linguistic and cultural affinity, and by overlapping networks of kin and friends. Their status as migrants was determined by the interplay of Japanese and Chinese political, economic, and cultural claims on them, and was predicated upon the fundamental inequality between Japan as the colonizing and China as the colonized country. This created two diverging institutional settings in which migrants traversed the process of settlement, depending on whether they crossed to Taiwan or to mainland China.

The people who left South China for Taiwan were assigned the status of migrant population through an elaborate set of politically informed administrative regulations.¹⁸ After 1904, they could enter Taiwan only through the Nanguo Company, which had a monopoly on the recruitment and transportation of migrants, for which all paid a fee. Upon arrival on the island, the migrants were free to reside and work wherever they wished. They also had to go through the Nanguo Company when they returned to China, the company having been allotted a supervisory role. Most migrants were lower middle-class artisans and workers, who went up and down the Strait during the year: the colonial government had imposed an annual quota of 10,000 entries; of these, around 2,000 stayed behind each year, thus contributing to the growing population of settlers. Around 1920, the settlers began to surpass the non-settlers in number, so that by the 1930s a somewhat contested number, as we saw, of about 60,000 was reached. Their status as foreigners, namely “Chinese” (in Japanese *Shinkokujin* until 1919, thereafter *Shinajin*), and the Japanese inclination to articulate their foreign status, forced them to organize in Overseas Chinese Associations, just as Chinese migrants did elsewhere. This also made it possible for the Chinese governments of the period to claim them as their subjects. In the public media they were quick to be called *huaqiao* (Overseas Chinese), just like Chinese migrants elsewhere outside China. This marked them out as a group with an identity separate from the resident population. After Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, a great number fled back to China. They returned to Taiwan in even bigger numbers, but a large minority fled again on the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese war in 1937.

17. Some claim the existence of a distinct Taiwanese culture and society after the 1860s, but this is a minority position. See Evan N. Dawley, “The Question of Identity in Recent Scholarship on the History of Taiwan”, *The China Quarterly*, 198 (2009), pp. 442–452, 445.

18. The passages on the migration towards Taiwan are based on Doww, “The Huaqiao in Taiwan 1895–1945”.

This did not prevent the migrants becoming assimilated however. And one should ask whether this occurs to a lesser extent in situations where cultural differences are greater, and, as a consequence, whether assimilation is needed to make migration productive. The influence of the Chinese governments and politicians in Taiwan was slight during this period, and was suspected and strictly controlled by the Japanese. The suspicion was mutual: Taiwanese with a migrant background who wished to return to mainland China were usually identified as Taiwanese rather than Chinese. At the same time, the Japanese had great difficulty enforcing the migrants' formal foreigner status, and undermined it. One important issue was the listing of migrants in the *baojia* registers along with the resident Taiwanese: they were exempted from this burden following protests by their associations only in the late 1920s. The Japanese had great difficulty in accepting a Chinese consular representative on Taiwan: shortly after this had finally been permitted, in 1931, the consuls became ineffective because Japan invaded Manchuria. Even more important, Chinese migrants were not allowed to establish their own schools and were restricted in accessing and creating their own public media. If ever it was their ambition to move upward in Taiwanese society, they would have to enter Taiwanese schools and learn Japanese. In fact, the Japanese appear to have been quite interested in how far migrants advanced in their society: they kept records of any improvement in Japanese language skills among the Taiwanese, and included the Chinese migrants. Most assimilation is likely to have been the result of work and marriage. Integration was obviously easy at the micro level of family and work, and it worked out well. After war broke out in 1937, most migrants remained on the island, and found a way of accommodating to the new situation. This case shows how state institutions might create migrant identities, and also how they might even hinder their interaction with the local population without preventing their being productive in the economy by learning from and adapting to a new situation.

This is apparent, too, from the history of those Taiwanese who moved to mainland China after 1897. Their numbers are even more difficult to estimate, mainly because their registration was much more problematic than in the reverse case, but an "educated guess" would put the figure at about 30,000.¹⁹ These people were registered as Japanese citizens, and became known as "Registered Taiwanese", but with exclusions: the (Japanese) Meiji Constitution did not apply to them, and they were not subject to military conscription until late into World War II. They benefited, however, from the same colonial power that repressed Chinese migrant workers in Taiwan, mainly because as foreigners they were

19. The passages on migration from Taiwan are based on Leo Douw, "Reorganizing the Taiwan Jimin and the Taiwan Huaqiao in South China, 1937–1945: A Global History Approach", *Journal of Overseas Chinese Studies*, 8 (2013), pp. 83–117, and *idem*, "The Revision of Cross-Border Flows under Japanese Colonialism 1895–1945", paper presented at the conference "Japan, China and the Construction of History", University of Amsterdam, 25–26 June 2015.

exempt from several taxes that Chinese subjects had to pay, and also because they had a right to protection by the powerful Japanese consulates in the cities where they went, mainly Fuzhou and Xiamen in Fujian province. At the same time, they had easy access to economic opportunities in the region, because they shared a culture and language with the local population, and had or could easily build networks of kin and friends – also among the Chinese power-holders. As a result, they formed a powerful middle class in those cities where they resided: in Xiamen, where by far most of them lived, during the 1930s they owned two thirds of all real estate. The Japanese had various reasons to engage with them: they could be used to exercise soft power and propagate Japan's presence by helping establish and staff newspapers, hospitals, and schools. To this end, even local high-ranking families who had never been to Taiwan were assigned Japanese citizenship. Even worse for the identity they assumed was the physical protection the Japanese demanded from them from the 1920s onwards, and the help they were required to provide in breaking trading boycotts led by the emerging nationalist movement in China. This encouraged the growth of the criminal gangs that had formed among the Taiwanese in China, who engaged in smuggling and trafficking, and accounts for much of the bad name they gained locally at the time among the broader population and among Chinese officialdom. The separation from the local population increased during the 1920s and 1930s, and so they had to be evacuated when war broke out in 1937. Those who did not manage to escape had to be protected by the Chinese government against the wrath of the population, but many were killed, or incarcerated in special camps, because they were suspected of collaborating with the Japanese, in many cases not without good reason. This case is an even clearer example of how political and institutional arrangements could hinder assimilation with the local population without impeding the economic productivity of settlers.

After the war neither of these groups grew in number, because the Japanese ceased to govern Taiwan and China. They retained their identity, however, because during the war trials they could be condemned for war crimes, or base a career on having been on the right side. Apart from this, they disappeared from sight until the late 1980s, when the indigenization movement emerged in Taiwan, and the presence of Overseas Chinese in Taiwan was found to be controversial, if not unacceptable. The reputation of the Registered Taiwanese, too, was felt to be an obstacle to the smooth establishment of viable relations with China.

For the purpose of the present essay, however, it is the lack of a cross-cultural element in the migration process that is of significance. It makes it clear that political exclusion might affect the identity of migrants more than cultural differences might, while not necessarily impeding their being economically productive; indeed, it might even have been a condition of their being economically productive. This makes the intended construction of a

“Productive Interaction Rate” an even more reductionist and potentially Eurocentric exercise than the present work on the CCMR, however well executed and useful in many ways. Looking at East Asian migrations, instead of making comparisons with Europe one would be advised to look more closely at the assumption, which apparently underlies the Lucassens’s thinking, that assimilation is needed for migration to be productive. That seems to be another relic of the mainstream national historiography that has informed the discipline since the nineteenth century. One hopes that future research will reconsider its use of the CCMR, and, before proceeding with the construction of another rate, engage with this alternative perspective.