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The Cultural and Economic Logics of Migration

Jamie Coates

The field of migration studies has generally targeted the question of why people move, what happens when they move, and how should a 'host' state or society accommodate new arrivals. These logics of migration address the motivations of migration and its potential consequences, important issues in how we might understand patterns of human mobility both past and present. Historically, the models used to explain the motivations for movement have largely been explained in economic terms (see Cole and Rigg this volume), however more recent scholarship, particularly from ethnographers, has made compelling arguments for the sociocultural dynamics that shape migrant flows. We might say that established understandings of migration theory today recognize both sociocultural and economic factors that shape human mobility, but these two factors are still often treated as separate spheres of logic or separate scales of analysis. The puzzle of migration, however, also serves as a useful case study for problematizing simplistic distinctions of economics and culture. In particular, the case of migration in Asia challenges this kind of simplistic dichotomy. Focusing on the case of Chinese migration in Asia, this chapter argues that mobility and the economy are deeply imprecated within cultural imaginaries of desirable lifestyles and personhood today.

Before examining recent developments in Asia that challenge a simple distinction between economic and cultural logics of migration, it is important to understand how respective understandings of culture and economics have influenced the development of migration studies. Contemporary understandings of the 'economic' and 'cultural' are both theoretical inventions developed to research social life. They have a history that traces back to the nineteenth century, whereby the economic came to stand for objective conditions of human

activity, and the cultural as its subjective counterpart. The nineteenth century anthropologist Sir EB Tylor is generally credited with the definition of culture that is used today (Fischer 2012). In Tylor's definition, culture was synonymous with any shared system of meaning and usually signified a society or civilization. He defined it as:

> "… that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [sic] as a member of society" (Tylor 1920: 19)

Prior to Tylor's influential definition, culture was perceived as the highest achievements of a particular aesthetic practice, such as opera or painting, rather than a shared system of meanings that people used to negotiated their lives. In contrast, the word 'economics' in English comes from the Greek term 'oikonomia' which referred to the management of household affairs (Hann and Hart 2011). Somewhat ironically, its etymology is closely related to many of the everyday aspects of life that we associate with the term 'culture' today. At the time, the oikonomia was seen as domestic, and distinct from the market. However, the oikonomia's pragmatic connotations eventually led it to inspire utilitarian understandings of human behaviour. In particular, under the influence of nineteenth century political-economists such as Marshall and Marx (Marshall 1890; Marx 1976), the pragmatic concerns of household affairs were expanded as a metaphor for understanding wider objective social processes. Neo-classical economics, for example, posited that individual actors work towards maximizing their own personal utility as an objective condition of human behaviour. In contrast, Marxist political economy focused on how relations of production and labour were the objective conditions that constituted social inequality. In this way, whether Marxist or Neo-classical, understandings of economics were seen as somehow separate from meaning-based relations and consequently more objective.

How the economic and cultural logics of migration were separated

The dichotomy between culture and economics became highly influential within research on migration. Scholarly interest in migration first developed in the ‘state sciences’ of the nineteenth century, such as geography, political-economy and various subfields of early sociology (Harzig, Hoerder, and Gabaccia 2009). These disciplines largely conducted their research in societies that received migrants, developing their analyses as a response to the ‘social problem’ of mass migration across the Atlantic, within Europe, and to a lesser extent within the colonial regimes of Asia and Africa (ibid 54). Managing populations, in terms of labour, health, and productivity, were the primary goals of these disciplines, and flows of migrants were usually analysed on a large scale using a cartographic and demographic approach. As scientists, researchers posited migrants as units of analysis that at best filled gaps within labour markets, or at worst posed threats to population health. Migrants, as people, were of little interest to early migration researchers, but rather, researchers focused on the objective conditions that would potentially make them more manageable.

For example, the cartographer Ernst Georg Ravenstein is generally credited with developing some of the first ‘laws’ of migration in the 1880s (Ravenstein 1885). Faced with an influx of labour migrants into industrial centres in the United Kingdom, Ravenstein developed a set of statistical rules of migration that would aid the British government in managing mobile populations (Ravenstein 1885). Ravenstein saw economic logics as the most objective influence within migration, as he states: ‘It does not admit of doubt the call for labour in our centres of industry and commerce is the prime cause of those currents of migration’ (1885: 198). The historic movement of large numbers of people into Britain’s urban centres was a crucial part of industrialization, which employed and attracted migrants as new sources of

labour. In this sense, Ravenstein's statement may seem apt at first glance. However, if we unpack his statement as an explanation for why migrants move, circular logics become apparent. Who are the agents in Ravenstein's summation? Who is calling for labour, and does this 'call' explain why people move? If we interpret Ravenstein's use of the term 'call' as 'need' it may simply suggest that a gap in the market attracted labour. However, such an explanation relies heavily on hidden actors, and puts little consideration into the human qualities of economics. It does not explain how people come to know about demands for labour in new destinations, or how they decide where they will move. More abstractly, it also forgets that economies are made up of people, who act in culturally informed and occasionally irrational ways.

In scholarly circles, the broad understanding of the cultural and economic as potentially separate phenomena, and consequently separate spheres of analysis, largely shaped the major theories of migration in the twentieth century (Brettell and Hollifield 2000; Bodvarsson and Berg 2009; Gupta and Omoniyi 2012). Neoclassical economic theories of labour migration have been particularly influential, and in many senses framed the terms of the debate. From a neoclassical perspective, people seek to maximize their gains by working in markets with the highest wages or the best chance of employment. Hicks (1932) and Lewis (1954) originally connected this perspective to the question of migration and labour distribution. From this basic premise, migration theories focused on how migrants perceive the costs and benefits of migration. For example, theorists extended the neoclassical model to consider how gains in human capital, interpreted as economically valuable skills such as education, were also included in migrants' economic logics (Sjaadstad 1962). Push-pull theories of migration followed a similar approach where migrants pursued utilitarian goals within a context of push-pull dynamics produced by differences in economic, political and legal conditions (Lee

1966). In more critical leftist circles, world systems theory explained how migration patterns were distributed along core, periphery and semi-periphery destinations. Core destinations, largely made up of nations rich in capital and controlling the means of production, were thought to attract migrants from poorer nations on the periphery and semi-periphery (Wallerstein 1974). Viewing flows of capital as the primary way in which movement is channelled globally, world systems theory, much like neoclassical approaches, saw economic conditions as largely determining movement (see for example Cervantes-Rodriguez, Grosfoguel, and Mielants 2008).

The social and cultural dimensions of migration developed in parallel to economic theories, and were heavily influenced by the experiences of the United States. After a massive influx of migration to the United States, the Chicago school of sociology started addressing the socio-cultural aspects of migration in the early twentieth century. Focusing on migrant communities within North America, the Chicago school rarely questioned theories as to why migrants moved, but rather focused on what happens to them once they are living in a new place. This emphasis is exemplified in their efforts to develop a theory of 'assimilation' (Park and Burgess 1921; Park 1930; Park 1950). In the early twentieth century in the US, public concerns about immigration had reached a political breaking point, and an emergency bill was enacted that limited the number of migrants on a nation-based quota system (Higham 2002). Migrants were seen as a 'social problem', and the Chicago school attended to this concern through questions of social incorporation and cultural competency analysed on a local scale. As Robert E Park and Ervine Burgess originally described it, this local problem was seen to come from questions of how one might 'establish and maintain a political order in a community that has no common culture' (1921: 734).

The Chicago school's emphasis on local communities enabled a compromise between

researchers of sociocultural phenomena and economics. Culture came to stand for the local concerns of host societies, whereas the economic stood for the wider objective dynamics that framed patterns of movement. However, this compromise also suggested blind-spots within the social sciences. The ways in which culture was perceived as local, tended to emphasize the solidarity of groups. Cultures were treated as bounded organic wholes, whose parts were already functionally integrated. Such a conceptualization overlooked the fact that the boundaries of a 'culture' or community are difficult to determine, and that in many ways pre-established members of a group may not be, or feel, integrated. On an ethical note, it also put the responsibility of assimilation on newcomers because the local was already assumed to be functionally assimilated. More generally, the framing of culture as local, and consequently particular, also reified the 'universal' and objective image of economics.

Globalizing cultures of migration

The last few decades of the twentieth century saw a shift away from the relegation of the social and the cultural to a local scale. Faced with increasingly visible patterns of mobility around the world (see Lin and Gleiss, this volume), scholars, particularly ethnographers, started to attend to the cultural dynamics of migration across borders. An increased focus on transnationalism (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995) and 'cultures of migration' (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011; Massey et al. 1993) started to posit sociocultural dynamics as something beyond the concern of local incorporation. Working in the places migrants were leaving, or in multiple sites along migration flows, these scholars challenged the relegation of culture to the local, and they challenged the ways in which national borders were treated as 'natural' boundaries (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994). While the contributions of these scholars cannot be understated, there were still limitations to their work. Their major focus

was on the ways flows of migration, once established, develop new cultural meanings and social dynamics. At times this focus on pre-established migration patterns left the original split between the economic and cultural logics of migration untouched. Economic justifications for the original reasons why migrant groups historically moved were implicitly left unquestioned, at times implying that economic logics come before the cultural.

These approaches tend to emphasize cultures of migration as historically new, raising the question as to when and how a culture of migration is established. Is there a primordial stage of migration, largely determined by non-cultural dynamics (often assumed to be economic), that precedes the sociocultural dynamics of migration? Some scholars have argued that Asia entered the 'age of migration' in the second half of the twentieth century after Europe had already undergone several centuries of migration (Castles and Miller 2003; Haines, Yamanaka, and Yamashita 2012). Facilitated by decolonization, economic growth, and new technologies, Asia's 'age of migration' was seen as signifying a new era of globalization. However, recent work by historians have shown that while different, Asia has had an equally long, if not longer, history of mobility (Lucassen, Lucassen, and Manning 2010; McDonald 2014; Kuhn 2008; see Amrith this volume).

The history of migration in and out of China is a particular case in point. As East Asia's largest nation-state, the area we recognize as the People's Republic of China (PRC) today has left a sizeable footprint on the ways migration in Asia is imagined. Historically, emigrants from China established communities throughout Southeast and Northeast Asia, contributing to the formation of new states and communities, as in the case of Singapore, and distributing networks and enclaves of people who identified as Chinese throughout the region. In 2009 it was estimated that roughly 40 million people of Chinese ethnic identity were living outside

of China, of which 75% lived in Asia (Li and Li 2013). Several attempts have been made to date the historic movements of the people that grew to become this Chinese diaspora, however it is generally agreed that historical records of travel from China date back at least as far as the twelfth century (Tan 2013). From merchant voyages to labour migration in the south, to religious and artistic sojourns in the north, the reasons for travelling overseas were varied, albeit with a strong emphasis on establishing trade networks throughout Asia. These economic activities filtered through kinship networks and households, establishing enclaves in various parts of Southeast Asia that would eventually draw wider social networks out of China.

Historically, the movements of Chinese people have also been circulatory, rather than emigration-immigration two directional flows. Some 20 million sojourners are estimated to have travelled back and forth between China and Southeast Asia between the 1700s and 1900. Distinctly transnational rather than emigrant settlers, many Chinese sojourners decided to stay in the Southeast for more than economic reasons. Today some 55% of the overseas Chinese population is estimated to live in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand. While the origins of these networks may seem to have solely developed out of economic interests, romantic and heroic portrayals of China's closest frontier 'the south seas' (Nanyang/nanhai) have also been noted as influencing migrants' decisions to 'adventure' south (Bernards 2015; Wang 1997). Other phenomena also influenced people's decision to stay. For example, political conflict in China, interethnic marriage, and positions of power within colonial regimes in the South eventually encouraged many Chinese to stay. These historical accounts of international movement suggest that Chinese migration has historically been as much a transnational culture of migration as an emigration-immigration process shaped by economic forces.

Personhood, mobility and the blurring of cultural and economic logics in China

In the accelerating and intensifying mobilities of Asia today, the line between cultural and economic logics is increasingly blurred. Moreover, the ways in which migration and migrants are valued, and the efforts to manage this valuation, shape the decisions of individuals. Most especially, the cultural and economic logics of migration increasingly influence perceptions of personhood in Asia. Personhood can be understood as the qualities attributed to being a person, differing across time, space and cultures (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). It is a form of imagination that defines what makes a 'person' in a given context and the ways that person is valued. From a personhood perspective, what defines a 'person' is a product of wider relations and processes than individuals themselves. In other words, it is cultural. In Asia today, the capacity to be mobile is increasingly framed as a valuable trait. It is seen as a quality that signifies citizens who are able to respond to the vicissitudes of global capitalism. In this sense, the economic frameworks used to attribute value to persons in Asia today is inevitably and deeply cultural. Countries such as China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia increasingly describe desirable persons as cosmopolitan elites, mobile professionals, global talents, flexible labourers, transnational entrepreneurs and international students. This positive framing of mobile subjects forms a feedback loop, influencing the logics of why people move and where. Fearing competition in the global markets of today, migrants' economic imperatives are increasingly steeped in cultural anxieties and expectations.

China's drive to 'join tracks with the world' (yu shijie jiegui) from the 1980s is perhaps the most explicit example of how the cultural and economic logics of migration re-shaped the social valuation of persons at the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, mobility was a

cornerstone of China's cultural and economic policy framework in the reform era (Nyiri 2010) and the opening of China resulted in what has been popularly called 'leaving the country fever' (Chuguore). From 1985 when passports were made available to Chinese citizens to 2009, the overseas Chinese population doubled, with roughly 10 million Chinese emigrating from the PRC (Li and Li 2013). Over this period an increasing trend towards emigration out of the PRC to North America, Australasia, and Europe also shifted the proportions and dynamics of ethnic Chinese communities around the world. Within Asia, new movements took on different pathways with significant growth in countries that historically had small Chinese populations, such as Japan (Liu-Farrer 2011; Pieke 2007; Tajima 2003). The positive value attached to migration in China has not only influenced emigration, but also patterns of domestic migration. Within China the number of seasonal migrations between rural and urban centres has almost rivalled the number of international migrants as a whole. In 2004, for example, it was estimated that there were 126 million internal migrants in China, while there was a total of 200 million international migrants globally (Murphy 2008). These human movements, both international and domestic, signified widespread social changes in how Chinese people imagined their place in the world.

The intersection of these two drives has resulted in a process where, as Julie Chu suggests, 'mobility is a privileged qualisign of modern selves' among everyday Chinese people (Chu 2010:63). Borrowing from Piercian semiotics, Chu uses the term qualisign to show how movement, as a quality, has come to signify success, modernity and cosmopolitanism for those who manage to leave the country. For example, she details how those left behind in a Fuzhounese village feel anxieties and pressures due to their lack of migration (Chu 2006) showing how mobility as a qualisign is not only important to those who move, but also those who are unable to do so. Even for those who do not move, the accumulation of commodities

that signify mobility is important to their sense of self. As Chu shows, the accumulation of remittances and gifts also embody Chinese dreams for mobility when stuck at home (2010). Case studies such as this suggest that mobility has come to frame the cultural and economic logics of China in general, and reshaped what defines positively valued personhood in Chinese cultural spheres.

Proportionally, only a small number of Chinese citizens have managed to emigrate to other countries. In 2013, it was estimated that only 0.61 per cent of China population were living outside of the PRC (IOM 2015). However, as a normative perception emigration is valued positively (Coates 2013). Entrepreneurs and students who went abroad have become heroes in official and popular discourse, and governments have attempted to kindle the positive associations Chinese citizens have with emigration and study abroad through official policies (see Ho, this volume; Nyiri 2010). This is not merely a coincidental product of reform era social dynamics, but has been an explicit objective within Chinese government rhetoric. The ongoing efforts to frame overseas study as patriotic, and to foster patriotism among those overseas dates back to the 1990s and early 2000s (Xiang 2003; Fong 2004; Nyiri 2001). For example, in 1992 government directives stated that overseas study policy should 'support study abroad, promote return, [uphold] freedom of movement,' and 'promote overseas individuals to serve the country' (Nyiri 2001: 44). These directives continue today. Just recently, government documents were circulated among China's various cultural missions abroad, stating that overseas institutions should work to, 'assemble the broad numbers of students abroad as a positive patriotic energy' (Buckley 2015).

The official rhetoric that encouraged educational and entrepreneurial migration is reflected in the logics of those who have moved, albeit with more reflective nuance than governmental

discourse. For example, Vanessa Fong's work on young aspiring migrants from Liaoning, revealed that a sense of China's 'backwardness' (luohou) combined with a desire to be recognized as modern cosmopolitan people, shaped the cultural and economic logics of those hoping to leave the country (Fong 2004; Fong 2011). Viewing their decision to leave as both filial and reflexive, Fong shows how economic and cultural logics of migration are imprecated with one another under contemporary imaginaries surrounding personhood in China today. Their choice of destination is also involved in this process. Aspiring to become modern global subjects, Fong's interlocutors spoke more of going to a 'developed country' in the abstract, than choosing a particular destination (Fong 2011).

Mobility as a qualisign of the modern self not only influences people's decision to go overseas but also many of the reasons for internal mobility in China today. Despite the dominance of economic explanations of internal migration in China, research has shown that desires to overcome stereotypes of 'backwardness' and gender hierarchies in rural areas feed into the reasons given by rural-to-urban migrants (Jacka and Gaetano 2004; Jacka 2014). For example, in a 1999 survey conducted by Knight, Song and Jia, over half of the rural-to-urban migrant women interviewed stated that 'more experience in life' was their primary reason for moving to the city (1999 cited in Jacka and Gaetano 2004: 6). More recently, ethnographic work has shown how migrant women challenge images of backwardness and construct themselves as modern subjects through internal migration (Gaetano 2015; Jacka 2014; Zheng 2011). For example, in Tiantian Zheng's research on migrant women in Dalian in Northern China, women's performance of gender co-opts symbols of mobility as a means to overcome stereotypes of their 'earthy' (tu) rural backgrounds (2011). From their choice to move, to their choice to emulate fashions from Korea and Japan, these women utilize signs of mobility to perform a modern, cosmopolitan gendered self.

While the motivation to move as a means to becoming a modern subject may be shared between those who leave the countryside, and those who leave China, these two forms of mobility are not valued equally. The 'floating population' of internal migrants, although the backbone of China's recent economic success, have been treated with suspicion, attacked, and spawned discourses that perceive these groups as subhuman in some cases (Jacka 2014). Debates around human mobility have been coupled with discussions of what constitutes a good citizen, exemplified by campaigns to raise the 'human quality' (suzhi) of the Chinese population (Anagnost 2004; Jacka 2009; Kipnis 2006).

Through the rhetoric of suzhi, China's floating population has been framed as lower in quality than urban populations. Mobility has featured as a keystone within these debates, whereby to some rural-to-urban migration signifies a means to improve the 'quality' of China's population, and to others these mobilities pose a threat to the 'quality' of urban people. In contrast, moving overseas for study or business is seen as a means to improve one's suzhi. The combination of mobility as a qualisign of the modern subject with discourses of 'human quality' in China suggest the pivotal role migration plays in the contemporary ideas of valued personhood that feed into the cultural and economic logics of those who move.

These wider cultural imaginaries inform why the desire to move is so great among many Chinese people, with emigration framed as the most valued form of movement. Young Chinese desires for the developed world have ensured that America is the largest recipient. For example, in 2015 over 300,000 Chinese students arrived in the United States, showing a 10 per cent increase from the previous year, and exponential growth over the past 5 years

(Open Doors 2015). At the same time, Chinese migration within Asia has also taken on new patterns in the reform era. Chinese migration to Japan is a particular case in point when thinking about how the new dreams of mobility in reform era China have shaped migratory patterns. Starting from small numbers of migrants who had moved to Japan during its imperialist expansion into China, the Chinese population in Japan has increased 10-fold since 1985 (MOJ 2015). Being China's closest identifiable symbol of modernity in the 1980s and 1990s, Japan attracted migrants who often had cultural, educational and money-making aspirations. Under a slogan of internationalization (kokusaika) from the 1980s, Japan has introduced a series of policies to attract and cultivate foreign students, labour and talent. Coupled with a strategically designed Japanese visa system that permitted long working hours while studying, educational migration became a proxy for labour migration in Japan in the 1990s (Liu-Farrer 2011).

While the logics of this migratory flow may seem primarily economic, according to the testimonies of Chinese migrants in Japan, there are fewer contradictions between everyday economic and cultural logics than there may seem (Coates 2013). These purportedly separate logics were combined into a variety of narratives that demonstrate the blurring of the economic and cultural in the everyday. Some migrants justify the move to Japan through ideas of the 'good life' and how one has to be successful to be valued as a person (Coates forthcoming). Others moved as a response to family desires and pressures after failing to get into university in China (Liu-Farrer 2014). And much like rural-to-urban migrants in China, some desired to develop their cosmopolitan sensibilities (Lai 2015). Japan's status as a popular culture hub in East Asia is also shaping the desires of young Chinese who wish to work in cultural industries abroad. It is increasingly common to meet Chinese photographers,

visual artists, musicians and fashion designers on the streets of Tokyo, pursuing cosmopolitan lifestyles found in Japan.

What are the logics of migration?

According to Martijn Konings, the image of the economy as objective, conceals the central meanings that the 'economy' holds within our world. As he states, it is important to recognize that, 'morality, faith, power, and emotion, the distinctive qualities of human association, are interiorized into the logic of the economy' (Konings 2015: 11). This critique applies to understandings of the cultural and economic logics of migration, as much as they do to understandings of the economy in a philosophical sense. While the economic and the cultural were initially purified of one another in early theories of migration, today this purified state is no longer tenable. As explained, some have tried to re-connect these divergent fields through periodization, where the economic precedes the cultural, however this compromise also fits poorly with the ways in which migration has developed historically and intensified in recent years.

Developments at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first warrant a reconceptualization of how we understand the drive for migration with the realization that people's desires to move are simultaneously cultural and economic. As I have shown, it is desirable to be considered mobile in China today, and this desire fuels peoples' decisions to move. This cultural trend has ensured that the line between economic aspirations and other cultural ambitions is increasingly blurred, with migration acting as both a practice and an important signifier that connects the two. This dynamic extends beyond the field of migration to encapsulate other forms of mobility that could not be covered within this chapter. Briefly however, it is worth noting that the capacity to engage in other forms of

mobility, such as tourism, is also part of everyday notions of personal success in China (Nyiri 2006). Similarly, the capacity to live multi-nodal lifestyles is seen as desirable, whether as transnational elites (Osburg 2013) or as lifestyle migrants who have businesses in Beijing and Shanghai with the capacity to retreat to mountain villages in Yunnan (Wong 2013).

While I have focused on the case of Chinese migration for the purposes of this chapter, it should be noted that these trends do not apply to China alone. In terms of Japanese emigration, the relationship between lifestyle and economic aspirations are increasingly complicated. Today, Japanese working holiday visa workers seek cosmopolitan lifestyles across the world, despite the economic disadvantages that often come with this travel (Kawashima 2014). Similarly, Japanese retirees seeking relaxed lifestyles are increasingly turning to Southeast Asia, as lifestyle migrants (Ono 2015). Pop culture flows from Hong Kong, Korea and Japan are also ensuring that Northeast Asia is a desirable location for young people, who aspire to travel there for cultural, rather than solely economic reasons (Otmazgin 2008). And so, the cultural and economic logics of migration are increasingly blurred across Asia, as much as they are in China.

Within this context, how might we understand the logics of migrants? Lessons from the neoclassical premise that individuals seek to maximize their utility are useful in thinking through why individuals choose to behave in a certain way. However, rather than perceiving these individuals as 'rational actors' it would be more pertinent to say that they are actors with 'rationales'. These rationales emerge from cultural contexts, and migrants behave strategically in accordance with the practical logics and values developed over their own personal histories (Bourdieu 1990). They seek employment and education in new locations because those endeavours are valued in their places of origin. They choose particular

destinations because of the values ascribed to those locations, whether a nearby city or another country. They find particular opportunities and weigh up their worth based on what those opportunities might mean for themselves, their families, or their communities.

These insights resonate with certain economic theories as much as sociological ones. As the economists Joseph Stiglitz and Robert Greenwald highlight in their critique of free market economic models, information is an unevenly distributed resource that deeply impacts on the capacity for people to make economic decisions (Stiglitz and Greenwald 1986). There is no invisible hand to the market, but rather, market dynamics emerge from networks of economic actors with differing levels of information. From this insight we can extrapolate that economic rationales, based on imperfect knowledge, are historically, geographically, socially and culturally contingent. More concretely, when considering migrants' reliance on imperfect knowledge of labour markets and economic opportunity, we must question whether their perceptions of 'the economy' and the reasons for why they move, are reflective of economic conditions. Rather, as some research within the neoclassical school suggests, migrants act on expected economic returns (Bauer and Zimmerman 1999; Massey et al. 1993).

From these standpoints, it is more useful to understand economic logics as a form of cultural imagination. Imagination is the capacity to think beyond one's owns circumstances in creative and associative ways (Anderson 1991; Castoriadis 1998). Economic logics are never simply about economic conditions. Rather, they allow people to think through hopes and desires in tangible ways. The desire to be accepted, attractive to others, or to be a cosmopolitan consumer, are some of the ways the differences between economic, personal and cultural logics are difficult to determine in everyday life. This is particularly the case in China. Consequently, rather than treating economic and cultural logics as separate phenomena, it is more useful to approach the economic logics and cultural aspirations of

migrants as embedded within an ongoing culture of migration where meanings and contingencies shape their decisions to move and where.

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