Return Migration and Transnationalism: Evidence from Highly-skilled Migration

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(acknowledging: ASU IHR, Hao Wang, Sarah McCool and Anna Epifanova; title page photos: courtesy of Osvaldo Muniz (NCGE Project))
From: Martin Pasqualetti
To: L.ORG.LA.SGSUP.FAC

I hate to see such talented people leave.

How can we better recruit some equally smart people to train who will stay in the US when they finish?

- more educated Chinese tend to return; v
- more educated Mexican immigrants tend to stay in the United States (Aguilar Esteva, 2013)
## Conceptual Framework

### Return Migration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approaches</th>
<th>Migration Theories</th>
<th>Perspectives on Return Migration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neoclassical economic</td>
<td>Income differentials and wage inequalities are key factors for migration</td>
<td>Outcome of a failed migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approach (Todaro, 1969)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>New economic approach</td>
<td>Migration as a calculated household strategy involving risk and opportunity evaluation</td>
<td>Result of successful migration experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Stark, 1991)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Structural approach</td>
<td>Social and institutional factors in the sending countries and receiving countries</td>
<td>Part of a circularity of movements, not the end of a migration cycle</td>
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<td>(Gmelch 1980; Lewis and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams 1986)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Adopted from Li and Lo, 2012
Transnationalism

- Circular movements (Vertovec 1999, 2009)
- Sustain social and economic contacts in multiple countries (Levitt 2001; Portes 1999)
- Constantly travel across boundaries and interconnect with multiple societies (Al-Ali and Koser eds. 2002)
- Identity relates to multiple nations (Glick Schiller et al. 1999)
Connection Between Return Migration and Transnationalism

- **Similarities**
  - Goal of migration is to enhance migrants’ economic wellbeing and social status
  - Return migration is an outcome of migrants’ strategic decision but also bound by societal conditions (Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Smith 2006)

- Return migration involves some level of transnational connections (Guamizoa 1997; Ho 2011; Tsuda 2003)

- re-migrate after returning home or move among different countries during various life stages (Ley & Kobayashi 2005)

- “Return migration should be viewed as part of a broader pattern of transnational connection: those who have come to the United States with the notion of going back truly have their feet in two societies” (Foner 1997, 66; Glick Schiller 1999).
Theoretical Gap

What has been studied:

- *Political and social context of return in each country* (Chacko 2007; Lessinger 1992; Zweig et al. 2008)
- *Regions where returnees tend to go in each country* (Golgher 2008)

Where is the gap:

- *Previous theory*--- Economy and society in immigrants’ home countries remain less developed
- *BRIC countries*--- origin countries can develop rapidly in a short period of time, which will influence transmigrants’ decision to stay, return, or move to another country
Research Questions

1. What characterizes transnational activities of BRIC migrants?

2. How do the transnational connections sustained by highly-skilled BRIC migrants inform their awareness of their home countries’ and the US situation?

3. How may the transnational activities help or hinder their decisions to return to their home country or stay in the US?
Significant increase of highly-skilled migrants to the US since 1990s

- Economic and Political changes in BRIC countries
  - **Brazil** - economic crisis, hyperinflation, and political instability
  - **Russia** - dissolution of the former USSR, change from socialist property regimes to a market economy that led to high unemployment
  - **India** - abandoning its largely socialist economic policies in favor of free-market reforms in 1991 (Chacko 2007).
  - **China** - economic reform policies in 1992; Chinese universities significantly increasing their annual admissions in 1993 (Li and Yu 2012).

- **US Immigration and Nationality Act in 1990**
  - Emphasize the employment-based migrants to the US
Legal Status

- Student visa F-1
- Optional Practical Training
- H1-B temporary work visa
- LPT – Green card
- US citizen (?Years)

USCIS website
Number of BRIC Migrants with H1-B visas and Obtained Legal Permanent Residency by Employment-based Preferences, 1996-2011

- Brazilian H-1B
- Russian H-1B
- Indian H-1B
- Chinese H-1B
- Brazilian employment-based
- Russian employment-based
- Indian employment-based
- Chinese employment-based
## Interviewees and Methods

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<th>natural science</th>
<th>engineering</th>
<th>business/law</th>
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<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
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<th>Assistant Professor</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
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<th>Female</th>
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</table>
Transnational Connections

- Close contact and ties with their countries of origin
  - *Modern communication*
    - Early migrants (came in 1980s) --- occasional communication, isolated from home country situation
    - Recent migrants --- close contact with their families via Skype and online calling, better access to information in both countries
  - *Advanced transportation technologies for home country visit*
    - 1980s --- every few years due to high cost and lack of transportation facilities, mainly for family reasons
    - Recently --- every year or two, combined family and career reasons
Transnational awareness

- Obtaining information via home country news outlets using one’s native language

Aware of and pleased with the rapid economic growth in their respective homelands

- Confident about their countries’ future
- Concerns: corruption in home country
- Seek to live and work in a just society, in addition to financial rewards

US academy--- decisive advantage

- Academic freedom
- Open and merit-based research environment
Still “X Plus One Syndrome”?

- Transnational activities
  - Factor into consideration of return, stay, or move to another country

“What we always used to think, we will work for “x” years and in “x+1” we will come back. ... ultimately ending up in a situation where people never came back. This was for people who migrated in the 1960’s, 70’s, and 80’s. What I found different among my classmates who came here in the 90’s when the economic opportunity became much better, a lot of them actually decided to go back, which was something that was not heard of in the earlier groups. I hear more and more stories of my classmates deciding to go back (I36m).”
Changing Conditions in BRIC Countries

- **Awareness of programs geared at attracting highly-skilled migrants**

  - India’s participation in the United Nation Development Programme’s “Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals” since 1990

  - Among BRIC countries, Chinese government has input the largest policy effort on attracting highly-skilled returnees
    - Chinese governmental agencies
    - Educational and research institutions
    - Industrial sectors
Questions? Your feedback and suggestions are greatly appreciated!