

重思當代移民理論之遷移決策分析

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中文摘要

本文針對遷移決策的主題，批判式地探討當代移民理論及研究的微視面向。本文首先就社會學的角度，對當前主要的移民理論進行深入的介紹及評論，並就此分析這些理論如何解析移民決策的課題。理論評析中顯示，由於移民理論強調鉅視層面的因果性影響，及其對人在遷移情境中決策方式的膚淺認知，使移民決策的重要性被嚴重忽略。解決這個理論性問題的一個主要手段，即是就決策的概念進行一個跨領域的對話，藉由其它學術領域中決策理論及研究的發展成果，來增進我們對移民決策這個主題以及廣泛的移民現象的了解。本文自心理學、經濟學、及社會學之領域中，擷取三個重要的決策理論觀點，並據此對遷移決策的理論建構及實證發展，建議新的思考方向。

關鍵字：人口遷移，決策，理性選擇

Rethinking Migration Decision Making in Contemporary Migration Theories

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the micro-level perspective of migration theories and research, with a focus on migration decision making. It first presents an extensive sociological review of current major migration theories with particular attention to the ways that migration decision making is observed in each theoretical model. The subject of migration decision making has been severely marginalized in current theories because of their emphasis on macro-level causal influences and the naïve perceptions of the ways people make decisions in the context of migration. To resolve this issue, a cross-disciplinary dialogue on decision making is an essential means for shedding new light on the subject as well as enhancing our knowledge concerning the general phenomenon of migration. This paper proposes alternative directions for reconceptualizing migration decision making and further engaging in empirical exploration of the subject by reviewing three important perspectives of human decision making, drawn respectively from psychology, economics, and sociology.

Key Words: Migration, Decision Making, Rational Choice

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Introduction

Migration has always been a significant aspect of human history. The touchstone for the field of migration studies is Ravenstein's late 19th c. analysis of migration in Britain and Western Europe, and his resulting proposition of the "laws of migration."¹ Despite the early beginning of migration studies, it was not until the 1950s that the interest in the field truly flourished. It was fostered by the emergence of several relevant social science paradigms and a growing realization among policy makers of the importance of analyzing and understanding migration processes. Several theoretical models have since been developed in an attempt to grasp the increasing complexity of human migration, including its causes, processes, and consequences. Although several scholars have proposed different taxonomies of current migration theories, these theories are generally categorized into three perspectives. The macro-level approach emphasizes the aggregate phenomena of migration, exploring the patterns and directions of population movement as well as identifying the social-economic, political, geographic, and other structural factors associated with the migration systems. The micro-level approach observes the ways individuals respond to structural forces within the migration systems and the ways they construct their migration experiences; this approach ascribes particular significance to mobility choices and the adaptation process. The middle-range approach concentrates on institutional variables, underlining how family and social networks function to link micro and

¹ Reacting to a study by Farr published in 1876, which claims that migration appears to proceed without any particular logic, Ravenstein proposes seven "laws" of internal migration in his two seminal papers of the 1880s. (1) Migration and distance: the majority of migrants move across short distances, and migrants who move across long distances are generally attracted by a major center of commerce and industry. (2) Migration by stages: migrants from more remote areas, setting in motion waves (or what Ravenstein calls "currents" of migration), fill the gaps in the rural areas left by those who have migrated to urban centers. (3) Stream and counter-stream: each major stream of migration produces a counter-stream. (4) Migration motives: economic welfare is the dominant motive of individual migrants. (5) Migration and gender: females are generally more likely than males to engage in short-distance migration. (6) Urban-rural difference: generally, rural inhabitants are more prone to migration than urban dwellers. (7) Technology and migration: advancements in transportation technology and the expansion of manufacture and commerce all lead to increases in migration (Ravenstein, 1885; 1889).

macro processes (Pedraza, 1994; Stalker, 1994).

This paper aims at reconceptualizing the micro-level perspective of migration theories and research, with a focus on migration decision making. It first presents an extensive sociological review of current major migration theories with particular attention to the ways that migration decision making is observed in each theoretical model. Based on the review of these theories, I will argue that migration theories to date have mostly emphasized macro-level causal influences. The available micro-level theories, which have been generated mostly from *post hoc* assumptions, have also oversimplified the nature and process of migration decision making. These theoretical perspectives either adopt a perfunctory view on the nature and process of decision making in the event of migration, or simply take for granted the prominence of economic motives in migration strategies and behavior. To resolve the issue of the marginalization of migration decision making in migration theories, this paper calls for a cross-disciplinary dialogue on decision making to shed new light on the subject as well as to enhance our knowledge concerning the general phenomenon of migration. The first step needed to remedy the theoretical underdevelopment of migration decision making is to take on the theoretical and empirical work on decision making accomplished in other fields of study. After all, migration is a demographic phenomenon that represents not only the effects of structural and institutional forces, but also a complex social-psychological process of choosing and making decisions. By learning how decision making is examined and understood in other fields and under different contexts, we may enrich the sociological insights on decision making in the context of migration.

Furthermore, this paper carries a pragmatic proposition concerning migration policy and practice. If migration intervention strategies are to be successful, they must be based on valid knowledge of causal factors. Theories and research that focus on structural or institutional factors may presumably seem more useful for policy considerations, for they deal with the broad processes that public policies seek to shape. Nevertheless, as De Jong and Fawcett point out, “the descriptive usefulness is not the same as prescriptive usefulness” (De Jong and Fawcett, 1981: 44). Causal connections shown at the macro-level are sometimes of limited practical value because they refer to factors that cannot

readily be modified by public policy. Studies and theories that focus on the process of migration decision making, however, will suggest alternative means by which such a decision can be influenced through public policies and programs. For example, they can suggest ways in which policy interventions may “channel” people’s migration decision-making process or alter their expectations about obtaining their goals in alternative locations.

Approaches to Migration Decision Making: A Critical Review

Although different theories have been developed to explore the phenomenon of migration, for one reason or another, the issue of migration decision making is rarely the predominant focus in major theoretical models. Therefore, instead of providing a review of the theories of migration decision making, I will critically examine the six major theoretical models of migration in light of how migration decision making is comprehended in each model and what can be learned from utilizing these models to study migration decision making. These six models are: the push-pull model, the human capital model, the place-utility model, the value-expectancy model, the neo-Marxist model, and the network model.

Theoretical Models of Migration

Push-Pull Model

The push-pull model was derived essentially from Lee’s “theory of migration,” in which Lee identifies four types of factors affecting the process of migration: (1) factors associated with the area of origin, (2) factors associated with the area of destination, (3) intervening obstacles between origin and destination, and (4) personal factors. In the areas of origin and destination, three kinds of factors are involved: (1) “pull” factors which act to hold people within the area or to attract people to it, (2) “push” factors which act to repel people from the area, and (3) factors to which people are essentially indifferent (Lee, 1966). According to Lee, the “push” and “pull” factors at origin and destination co-shape the size and direction of migration, with the intervening obstacles and personal factors mediate therein. Based on his theory, Lee also refines and

restates Ravenstein's "law of migration" as a series of macro-level hypotheses regarding the volume of migration, the development of streams and counter-streams, and the characteristics of migrants.² Because Lee's theory and hypotheses help to restore an analytical emphasis in migration research, his theoretical framework has since been used extensively to investigate the spatial, temporal, and causal factors in migration (Lewis, 1982).

Influenced by the macro-orientation of Lee's theoretical framework, the push-pull model emphasizes the structural factors of attraction and repulsion in areas of origin and destination in the formation and regulation of migration patterns. At the macro level, this model suggests that migration is an outcome of poverty and backwardness in the sending areas. The structural "push" (economic, social and political hardships in the poorest part of the world) and "pull" (comparative advantages in the more advanced countries) factors not only are causal variables that determine the size and direction of human migration; they also operate systematically to filter migrants from a broad population in shaping the distinctive profiles of migrant groups (Georges, 1990; Portes and Rumbaut, 1990; Cinel, 1991; Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991). This perspective is established under two assumptions: first, the expectation that those who are in the most disadvantaged sectors of the poorer societies are most likely to participate in migration; and second, the postulation that such flows arise spontaneously out of the mere existence of global inequality.

At the micro level, the push-pull model transforms the structural "push" and "pull" factors into an individual's "costs" and "benefits." In the push-pull model, migration decision making is dominated by rational choice. It suggests that an individual's migration behavior results from a rational calculation of costs and benefits and aims at maximizing gains, in which pursuing the economic gain being the prime goal. Each individual migrant is regarded as a rational being who neutrally assesses the available destinations to select the optimal option with the greatest expected returns. The model also implies that the factors being weighed in a migration decision are comparable in value and thus can be measured and

² For details of the hypotheses, see Lee (1966: 52-57).

prioritized on one standardized scale. Moreover, individuals engaged in migration decision making are assumed to be equally informed and fully aware of all possible options. In this sense, each individual's perception or understanding of reality is presumed to mirror the "objective" reality.³

The assumptions of "rational calculation" and "gain maximization" are based on neoclassical rational choice theory.⁴ The rational choice approach is based on four basic premises (Olson, 1965). The first premise contains *utility maximization*, which means that a person chooses an option that he or she believes can best serve the objective(s). The second premise involves the *structure of preferences*. For this assumption to hold true, all options must be available to an agent to be rank-ordered, and the preference orderings are transitive.⁵ The third premise concerns decision making under *uncertainty*. The fact that decision making often takes place under conditions of uncertainty and situational constraints requires that the rational choice approach focuses on the maximization of an agent's expected utility rather than the actual outcome, which is assumed to be assessed in numerical terms. The fourth premise pertains to the centrality of *individuals* in the explanation of collective outcomes. Individuals are

³ While Lee emphasizes the structural "push" and "pull" forces at origin and destination in operating the migration process, he also notes the importance of individuals' *perceptions* of these "push" and "pull" factors in influencing the propensity to migrate. As he states: "[I]t is not so much the actual factors at origin and destination as the perception of these factors which results in migration" (Lee, 1966: 51). He also indicates that because of the personal factors involved in a migration decision, "the decision to migrate is never completely rational" (ibid.). However, in the macro-level generalization of his theory and hypotheses, he discounts the dimension of individuality and the process of deliberation in migration decision making. He argues that the migration decision which does not follow the principles of classical rationality and maximizing behavior should be treated as exceptions and exempted from analysis. As he asserts: "We must expect, therefore, to find many exceptions to our generalizations since transient emotions, mental disorder, and accidental occurrences account for a considerable proportion of the total migrations" (ibid.).

⁴ Although it is commonly called "rational choice theory," it is rather a theoretical approach with a set of central assumptions and principles upon which different theories of rational choice are built. The rational choice approach is known as such an established paradigm that, as Green and Shapiro put it, "there is no single rational choice theory or unambiguous standard for assigning the label 'rational choice' to a theory" (Green and Shapiro, 1994: 13).

⁵ That is, if A is preferred to B, and B is preferred to C, then A must be preferred to C. Transitivity assumes nothing about the intensity of preferences or the amount by which the different possible outcomes are valued in comparison with one another.

the relevant maximizing agents, and collective action is nothing more than “the action of individuals when they choose to accomplish purposes collectively rather than individually” (Buchanan and Tullock, 1962: 12). According to rational choice theory, in decision-making situations, there is one course of action that can be rationally believed to best satisfy various logical, physical and economic constraints. In reaching decisions, a rational individual constructs a subjective ranking of the feasible alternatives, based on a consideration of the possible outcomes to which these alternatives might lead. The individual will then choose the highest-ranked course of action from among all feasible alternatives in order to receive the most positive outcome (Elster, 1986).

The notions of the push-pull model are ostensibly self-evident. However, this model tends to be applied to migrant flows that have already taken place, which thereby makes it incapable of explaining and predicting two modes of difference in the origin and destination of migration (Portes and Böröcz, 1989). First, it is the difference among the collectivities – primarily countries – in the size and direction of migration; i.e., why equally “poor” countries do not necessarily generate similar migrant flows, and why equally “rich” countries do not always attract migrants with similar numbers or from the same regions. Second, it is the difference among individuals within the same country or region in their propensities to migrate; i.e., why some migrate and some do not. Moreover, the view of individuals as “profit-maximizers” is problematic. The assumption that people act as utilitarian choice makers with complete knowledge relevant to their decisions is criticized to be divergent greatly from reality (Cook and Levi, 1990; Green and Shapiro, 1994). Differential access to sources of information ought to affect people’s perceptions of the “push” and “pull” factors involved in migration decisions, and non-economic factors ought to play an important role in affecting individuals’ migration decisions. This model also fails to acknowledge the limitations in time, resources, and personal ability that impinge on people’s chances to make “objectively optimal” migration choices.

Human Capital Model

The human capital model applies the concept of economic maximization to examine the individual- and household-levels of migration. According to this model, each person can be considered as the product of a series of investments –

in his or her education, skills, or health, etc. Migration becomes a means of personal investment that will be made only if returns for the behavior are justified. Just as financial capital seeks the highest return on investment, so too does each unit of human capital move to wherever the best return can be achieved (Schultz, 1962; Sjaastad, 1962; Stalker, 1994; Chen, 1995). This model is closely linked to the notion of social mobility. Social mobility as a motivation for migration has been emphasized in the sociological literature. Because aspirations for higher social status are frustrated by the lack of opportunities for advancement in the area of origin, the decision to move is made with the goal of enhanced opportunities for social mobility. This model also underlines the rational calculation of costs and benefits in migration decision making. It suggests that current and future monetary and non-monetary costs and benefits must be evaluated in some fashion before the move will be undertaken (Sjaastad, 1962; Somers, 1967).

The dominance of economic incentives in labor mobility has long been established since Lansing and Mueller's landmark study (Lansing and Mueller, 1967). Unfortunately, the empirical applications of this approach do not adequately assess the cost-benefit calculus. A few major operational problems are involved. First, because of its reliance on the normative assumptions of rational choice theory, the human capital approach is perceived more suitably as a guide to "rational" migration decisions than a descriptive device of the realistic ways individuals make migration decisions. Second, non-monetary costs were rarely included in tests of the theory. Third, the studies mostly utilized aggregate regional data to generate inferences about the causal relationship at the personal level between migration decisions and capital formation, which clearly violates the rule of scientific inference (Courchene, 1970; Greenwood and Sweetland, 1972).

Place Utility Model

The place utility model has been used in geography since the 1960s to study migration decisions and outcomes, and yet it is still rather unfamiliar to sociologists. Wolpert develops place utility theory in the geographical context to integrate the concepts of individual's life-cycle changes and dissatisfaction with place of origin. The measure of *goal attainment* is called utility, and place utility

reflects an individual's subjective evaluation of a place and overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with that place. When an individual either is unsatisfied with the current residence or perceives the possibility of an improved utility by moving, place utility becomes central to the decision-making process, as the individual seeks a new residence with the highest utility (Lewis, 1982). According to place utility theory, in voluntary migration, the migrant tends to resettle at a destination that offers the highest level of utility in comparison to the place of origin as well as other alternative destinations. This highest utility may be expressed in terms of actual, objective qualities of the place, or it may represent the potential of the place as perceived by the likely migrant. Additionally, the likelihood of migration depends on the information available to enable the individual to assemble a utility profile of various destinations as well as the individual's ability to adjust to such a utility profile (Lin-Yuan and Kosinski, 1994).

Moreover, the place utility model maintains that an individual tends to choose locations of relative certainty, which involves a preference to postpone the move or acquire more information through a wider search and solicitation of feedback (Wolpert, 1965, 1966). Although an individual may possess knowledge of various locations, only a small number of these locations will be relevant to the migration decision. This immediate subjective environment to which the individual (or family unit) responds can be referred to as an "action space." The search for more information tends to enlarge the individual's action space and to help the individual to develop a ranking of the place utility of various options.⁶ The individual can also reduce uncertainty by joining a well-established migration channel. Meanwhile, this migration channel constrains the individual's perception of surrounding structures, as information is transmitted through "communities," or what Leiber calls "mean information fields" (Leiber, 1978).

⁶ The notion of the expansion of action space is also based on Simon's idea of the satisficing strategy (Simon, 1958). Simon assumes that the existing set of behavior alternatives considered by an individual (\hat{A}) is a proper subset of all possible alternatives (A); that is, $\hat{A} \subset A$. The individual's failure to find a satisfactory alternative in \hat{A} may lead to a search for other alternatives in A that can be adjoined to \hat{A} , thereby expanding \hat{A} . In Wolpert's place utility theory, \hat{A} represents the individual's action space which includes the number of locations considered in the migration decision.

Unlike the push-pull model and the human capital model implying objective optimization in migration decision making, the place utility model acknowledges the internal constraints in migration decision making. It argues that in reality, limited human capacities to acquire and process information and the subjectivity of human judgments hamper the search for the objectively optimal location. In this aspect, the model is influenced by Simon's *satisficing* strategy to examine migration decision making. It is based on the assumption that individuals, rather than aiming for the optimal outcome, employ a *satisficing* strategy in making decisions. According to Simon, people rarely adopt an optimizing strategy due to constraints on time, effort, and resources to collect and examine the huge mass of available information (Simon, 1972, 1976, 1983). More importantly, people have limited mental capabilities for processing all the information (including the limited computation capacity as well as the disjunction between an individual's perception of his or her environment and the objective environment) and maximizing rewards. Therefore, a decision maker *satisfices* (or *suboptimizes*) rather than maximizes (Miller and Starr, 1967; Simon, 1976). That is, a decision maker looks for a course of action that is "good enough," that first meets his or her aspiration level or satisficing threshold (which defines a satisfactory alternative).

Wolpert's place utility theory provides an important approach for studying individual migration decision making, and several models of migration decision making have been subsequently developed based on Wolpert's concept of comparative subjective place utility (e.g., Brown and Moore, 1970; Roseman, 1971). Nevertheless, several issues are involved in implementing this model. First, although Simon's concept of "satisficing" was incorporated in the place utility model, it does not simply substitute for the concept of gain maximization. Rather, place utility theorists maintain that, in employing the satisficing strategy, most decision makers are simultaneously attempting to maximize. In this aspect, the incorporation of such a concept still does not adequately resolve the problematic assumption of gain maximization underlying rational choice theory. Second, the model's other fundamental assumptions – including the individual's rational calculation of place utility and ability to prioritize options without encountering possible decisional conflicts – still raise doubts about the model's capacity to fully describe or explain individual decision making. Critics argue, for example,

that in reality decision makers tend to use non-linear, non-compensatory methods to combine information in making decisions (Einhorn, 1971). Third, the model has been criticized for failing to produce empirical support for its conceptualization of human decision behavior. Dissatisfaction with the place of origin does not necessarily result in the decision to migrate. The individual (or the family) may utilize other strategies – such as adjusting the level of aspiration or need, or changing the conditions in the place of origin – to make the place of origin more satisfactory. Lastly, the model has failed to specify how overall place utility can be assessed or measured (Lin-Yuan and Kosinski, 1994).

Value-Expectancy Model

De Jong and Fawcett (1981) propose the value-expectancy model to examine the micro-structural aspect of migration decision making. This model adopts the basic elements of rational choice theory and essentially casts in the cost-benefit framework. It views migration as an instrumental behavior, and that migration decision making is based on a rational cognitive calculation that involves a “subjective, anticipatory weighing of the factors involved in achieving certain goals” (De Jong and Fawcett, 1981: 47). The model postulates that a potential migrant makes a conscious decision to migrate or not through a process by which perceived consequences are weighed and evaluated, and he or she must possess some degree of knowledge about the choices of possible destinations. In addition, it assumes that multiple values or goals may be involved in the migration decision-making process.

Two basic components are involved in the value-expectancy model: personally valued goals (values) and subjective probabilities (expectancies) assigned to the potential consequences. The model can be represented in a mathematical format as follows:

$$MI = \sum_i V_i E_i$$

V is the subjective value of the outcome, and E is the expectancy that migration will lead to the desired outcome. The strength of the intention for migration, MI, is a function of the sum of the value-expectancy products. Drawing from the

literature on motives of migrations, De Jong and Fawcett compose seven categories – wealth, status, affiliation, comfort, stimulation, autonomy, and morality – which reflect commonly held values or goals. These categories, in combination with place-related expectancies, may motivate migration with the purpose to improve or maintain the quality of life. With this formulation, multiple values and expectancies can be converted in numerical terms to assess the subjective cost-benefit calculation in migration decision making. This model further links micro-level decision making with macro-level causes and constraints. It indicates four components under which individuals' values and expectancies are formed: individual and household demographic characteristics, societal and cultural norms, personal trainings, and the opportunity structure.

As De Jong and Fawcett state, the value-expectancy model was developed as a response to the inadequacies of existing knowledge of migration decision making. Nevertheless, this model has yet to provide a satisfactory solution to this problem. First, the theoretical core of “rational” cost-benefit calculation makes it vulnerable to the criticisms of neoclassical rational choice theory. Second, the model is concerned with migration decisions made by one person, and yet it has been clearly shown in the literature that migrants do not necessarily reach the decision to migrate by themselves (e.g., Mabogunje, 1970; Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991). Third, the model presumes that people with high efficacy and the ability to take risks are more likely than others to express values and expectancies favoring migration, which indicates the correlation between the trait of risk-taking and migration behavior. However, this assumption is empirically unfounded and has received mixed empirical support (Findley, 1977). Although migration may be a risk-taking behavior by taking the adventure and facing the uncertainties in the area of destination, it may also be a risk-avoiding strategy to escape the potentially threatening situations in the area of origin.

Neo-Marxist Model

The neo-Marxist model takes a historical, structural, and globalist view on migration. It focuses on the structural factors through which international migration is perceived to create and maintain international imbalances of power and the division of labor in favor of the rich and the powerful (Zolberg, 1989). Research based on this model illustrates the ways migrations are regulated and

facilitated through the macro mechanisms of both sending and receiving states, and it shows how international migration both results from and impacts domestic economic and political conditions (Burawoy, 1976; Portes and Ross, 1976; Piore, 1979; Petras, 1981; Portes and Walton, 1981; Georges, 1990; Cinel, 1991). For example, working from a neo-Marxist perspective, Burawoy argues that the separation of processes between labor renewal and maintenance functions to support the status quo of the developed countries in a global hierarchy (Burawoy, 1976). Georges demonstrates that domestic shifts in occupational structure and patterns of consumption, especially in sending countries, can be (and often are) stimulated by international flows of migrants and capital (Georges, 1990).

This view of migration is greatly influenced by several neo-Marxist theories – including labor market segmentation theory, dependency theory, and world-system theory, all of which feature the relationship between states and the world economy. Wallerstein's world-system theory is of central importance to the neo-Marxist model of migration. According to world-system theory, the capitalist world economy is comprised of core (including highly industrialized countries), periphery (consisting of countries in the Third World), and semi-periphery (encompassing a set of regions somewhere between the exploiting and the exploited). Through geographic expansions and the maintenance of a worldwide division of labor, the core dominates and exploits the rest of the system, and the periphery provides raw materials – including human resources – to the core and is heavily exploited by the core (Ritzer, 1992). While the stratification of the economic system is deeply rooted, the world economy is not a static system, and there is a trend toward greater balance as a result of the upward and downward mobility of various countries (So, 1990). For example, empirical findings have shown that the phenomenon of “brain drain” corresponds to the placement of countries in the world system. In the case of the international migration of high-level manpower, the developed countries benefit by absorbing the most skilled individuals from the developing countries, and the latter suffer from the loss of human capital. Likewise, studies on “reverse brain drain” state that the return of the highly educated to newly industrialized economies (such as South Korea and Taiwan) has been mostly, if not solely, spurred by economic growth in those regions (Choi, 1995).

Based on this theoretical model, the operation of the world system and the shifting statuses of the countries within the system control the population flows therein. Similar to other resources in the global political economy, human capital is viewed as a commodity, and its distribution and movement are tied to the stratified world. Based on this structuralist position, human actions and decisions are extremely marginal, if not completely inconsequential, in the international movement of population. In this context, individual migration decisions and subsequent behavior represent no more than mechanical responses to global structural conditions.

Although the neo-Marxist model provides a sound explanation of the structural forces that induce and regulate the movement of human and financial capital, this perspective overlooks people as *individuals* in its search for large-scale, long-term transformations of the global political economy. Resembling the macro aspect of the push-pull model, the assumption that migration arises spontaneously out of the sheer existence of inequalities in the hierarchical world economy cannot explain the differences among nation-states in the size and direction of migrant flows (Portes and Böröcz, 1989). While the model can often be usefully applied to the study of specific flows that have already taken place, it cannot account for the fact that emigration tends to concentrate in certain regions and not in others within a sending country. The model also is incapable of explaining why similar patterns of population movement in some countries do not arise in other countries of the same status in the world system, or why emigration from developing countries tends to be directed toward some "core" destinations and not others. Furthermore, the neo-Marxist model falls short in explicating differences in individuals' reactions to similar structural factors and their propensities to migrate (Portes and Ross, 1976). People are perceived as mere "agents" of social change, carrying the necessary attributes of labor to satisfy the abstract requirements of the general law of capitalist accumulation (Bach and Schraml, 1982). This model not only disregards individual autonomy under structural constraints, but also fails to consider the potential impacts of social and cultural contingencies on people's migration decision making and subsequent migration behavior. It fails to explain how people, as individuals living in particular social and cultural milieus, come to understand and interpret the larger structural, economic, and political conditions that gird their lives. Such contexts

are argued by some to be of key importance for understanding international migration (Bottomley, 1992; Simmons and Guengant, 1992).

Network Model

Although the importance of networks in initiating and facilitating migration can be traced to early work in the field such as Thomas and Znaniecki's *Polish Peasant in Europe and America* in 1918, it was not until the 1970s did some scholars begin to notice the importance of social networks in migration. On one hand, it was noted that social networks at origin often function to restrain migration. This specific focus on social ties at origin as deterrents to migration is often referred to as the "affinity" hypothesis, which suggests that the presence of relatives and friends is a valued aspect of life that constrains migration (Ritchey, 1976). Persons with strong ties within the community – through friends, family, social organizations, and economic investments – are less likely to break the ties by moving, and if they do it is often within the same general community (Goldscheider, 1971; Uhlenberg, 1973; Graves and Graves, 1974). Likewise, changes in or disruptions of life-cycle patterns (such as initial family formation, divorce, separation, or death of a spouse) may have important implications for the decision to migrate.⁷ On the other hand, social networks – such as family and friends – in potential areas of destination were found to be able to exert a significant influence on the decision to move and particularly on the decision where to move. For example, Ritchey suggests that family and friends at a distant location may encourage and direct migration through increasing the potential migrant's awareness of conditions and opportunities there, as well as by increasing the migrant's potential for adjustment through the availability of aid for relocation (Ritchey, 1976).

In the 1980s, the network model emerged as a major paradigm for studying international migration. The network model seeks a middle ground between perspectives that focus on individual dimensions and those that focus on

⁷ Some scholars also postulate that the key element in the mobility transition is the social and economic change inherent in the modernization process. For example, Zelinsky (1971) states that a corollary of modernization is the enhancement of personal freedom, with the consequent easing of the difficulties in breaking ties with the traditional area of origin.

structural dimensions (Salt, 1987; Stalker, 1994). More importantly, it compensates for the inability of other theoretical models to explain the resilience of migrant flows once the original economic inducements have waned or disappeared (Balán, 1992; Garson, 1992; Simmons and Guengant, 1992; Wilpert, 1992). Unlike other theoretical approaches, the network model eludes the emphasis of economics on migration – through individual calculations of gains, the capitalist laws of supply and demand, or the status of a country in the world economy. Instead, this model states that the phenomenon of migration is primarily social in nature, and that the success or failure in the migration process is largely dependent on the availability of social networks and access to such networks (Mullan, 1989).

According to the network perspective, social networks constructed through the movements and interactions of people across space constitute the center of microstructures that sustain migration over time. The existence of these networks helps to explain the enduring character of migrant flows. In addition, the differential availability of and access to networks that maintain migration channels further elucidate differences in individuals' propensities to move (Portes and Böröt, 1989; Kritz and Zlotnik, 1992). Research based on this model focuses on how migrants develop and use transnational family and social networks to migrate and settle, as well as how these networks function to transmit financial and information resources, mediate macro-structural changes by facilitating or constraining an individual's response to such changes, and perpetuate migration as a self-sustaining social process (Boyd, 1989; Fawcett, 1989; Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Pohjola, 1991; Gurak and Caces, 1992). Moreover, it explicates the role of institutions in setting the rules by which migrations networks function (Salt, 1987; Kritz and Caces, 1992). Network researchers have also explored the role of gender in migration trends and experiences, including how gender is related to migration patterns and modes of absorption into the labor market, and how migration experiences affect gender relations in the domestic sphere (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991).

This model has been strongly influenced by network theory, which is concerned with the objective patterns of ties that link individuals and groups in society. One important aspect of network analysis is to examine how different ties

among people operate to distribute various resources and information, leading in turn to both collaboration and competition. For instance, Granovetter differentiates “weak ties” (e.g., links between mere acquaintances) from “strong ties” (e.g., links between family members) and asserts that both perform important yet different functions. On one hand, “weak ties” between actors can serve as a bridge between groups with strong internal ties, and thus prevent groups from becoming isolated and allow for individuals to be better integrated into the larger society. People with “strong ties,” on the other hand, have greater motivation to assist one another and are more readily available to one another (Granovetter, 1983). Migration studies that apply the network approach often ratify these ideas. Their findings accentuate the key importance of “family chains” (including immediate family and extended kin) over other types of social networks in selecting destinations, creating and sustaining the migrant flows, serving as a financial safety net, and providing cultural and political information (Browning and Rodriguez, 1985; Massey, 1987). It has been further suggested that the importance of different types of networks in the migration process follows a hierarchical order: immediate family, extended family and kin, friends, people from the same area of origin, people with a shared ethnic interest, and people with a common organizational affiliation (Boyd, 1989; Mullan, 1989).

Like network theory which itself is relatively new and far from representing a well-built paradigm, the network model of migration has yet to be fully elaborated. For example, while networks are considered an integral element of established migrant flows, their role in the genesis of flows as well as their dynamics are less clear (Kritz and Zlotnik, 1992). Furthermore, even though the functions of networks seem universal in influencing migrant flows, scholars have not given enough attention to differences across groups or policy contexts in network formation and outcome (Gurak and Caces, 1992).

More importantly, the model’s focus on households (or social networks in general) does not itself resolve the tension between individual and structural approaches, nor does this approach necessarily solve problems internal to other models. After all, migration decisions can be equally viewed as products of history – the necessary outcome of pre-established social networks influenced by macro-structural forces, or as products of individual choices through dynamic

social relationships. Because it does not explicate the link between group behavior and individual migration decision making, the network model tends to rely uncritically on the familiar elements of neoclassical cost-benefit analysis to conceptualize migration decision making. In addition, this model does not tackle the issue of how an individual deals with conflicting views or information from different networks in the process of making a migration decision. While current studies assume the networks to be in a hierarchical order based on their degrees of importance in the migration process, more needs to be learned about the dynamics among and the roles of different types of networks (or networks at different levels) in an individual's migration decision making.

Theoretical Problems of Migration Decision Making

The preceding review indicates that scant attention has been paid to the social-psychological aspect of the migration process. Despite the significant contributions that these theoretical models have brought to the field, they all fall short in elucidating the nature and process of migration decision making. This missing piece of decision making in migration theories and research is manifested primarily in three ways.

First, the rational choice approach that underlies the micro-level of most current migration theories does not seem to present a realist view of how people engage in the decisions to migrate. The rational choice approach, with its long history of theoretical development on utilitarian philosophy and its lucid assumptions about human rationality, has profoundly influenced much of the research on human decision making. Its unusual clarity in its assumptions, implications, and predictions contributes to the theory's resilience, even as it strains under a steady barrage of criticisms. The most forceful critiques have come from psychology, experimental economics, and sociology (Clarke, 1992). These critiques, backed with theoretical knowledge and empirical evidence, not only eloquently challenge neoclassical rational choice theory in its descriptive and prescriptive capacities and adequacy, but also cast doubts on its general theoretical principles. Critics of rational choice theory often point out the narrow, ego-centered assumptions the theory makes concerning human behavior, and how these assumptions often diverge dramatically from real human behavior (e.g.,

Hindess, 1988; Goldfield and Gilbert, 1995). The theory also overlooks the fact that people often experience conflicts in making important decisions. The psychological stress generated from these conflicts imposes its own limitations on the “rationality” of a person’s decision (Janis and Mann, 1977). In addition, it assumes without ground a universal pattern of migration decision making across social and cultural contexts. Human decision making cannot be fully understood by perceiving individuals only as microscopic units of decision makers, for individual decision making does not take place in social isolation and is not immune to contextual characteristics.

Some migration scholars have likewise pointed out the atomistic and reductionist nature of the theoretical perspective on migration decision making. As Abu-Lughod maintains:

Human beings, like iron filings, were impelled by forces beyond their conscious control and, like atoms stripped of their cultural and temporal diversity, were denied creative capacity to innovate and shape the worlds from which and into which they moved. (Abu-Lughod, 1975: 201)

Second, these current theoretical models yield a rather static and narrow view of individuals’ reasons to migrate, and they disregard the process of deliberation that may play an important part in individuals’ decisions. Economics and psychology have been the two major fields devoted to the understanding of human decision making. Research on decision making in economics stresses substantive rationality which concentrates on the attainment of goals within certain constraints and the role of these constraints. Psychological research on decision making focuses on procedural rationality which highlights the process by which decisions are made as well as the subjective perception of costs and benefits of alternatives. In respect to migration decision making, current theories of migration has been dominated by the perspective of rationality in economics, which leads to the retardation of theoretical and empirical work on the course of migration decision making. Consequently, theories of migration either undermine the autonomy of an individual by considering an individual’s fate as being determined by structural circumstances or available networks, or they explain

migration in terms of mechanical responses to external stimuli. They take the rationality of decision-making processes for granted, treating them as transparent intermediaries between beliefs, desires, and objectives on one hand, and the actions that result from them on the other. In addition, issues of conflict and inconsistency in an individual's migration decision making – such as tensions among an individual's various goals and the extrication between an individual's beliefs and subsequent migration behavior – are left unexplored.

Third, in analyzing the direction and size of migration as well as individual migrant behavior, existing theories and research place diverse emphasis on the importance of three types of factors: structural (such as economic and political conditions in the sending and receiving countries, the immigration policies in the receiving countries), social-network (including informal networks developed through family ties and regional connections, and formal networks such as ethnic associations), and demographic (such as age, gender, educational level) (Glaser, 1978; Kritz, 1987; Oommen, 1989; Portes and Rumbaut, 1990; Cinel, 1991; Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Muniz, 1991; Chang, 1992; Chang and Deng, 1992). These factors have been studied at the aggregate level of their effects on migration, and yet their logical links to individuals are not clear. Such factors might be viewed as basic to the study of migration *determinants*, but less proximate to the study of migration *decision making*. Obviously, an individual's desires and intentions are based on his or her perceptions and understandings. These perceptions and understandings, differing by personal disposition and shaped by various social mechanisms, often do not correspond to the "objective" reality. The question of how macro factors are conceptualized with reference to individual goals and values has been left unanswered. Furthermore, these theoretical models of migration have rarely dealt with issues of value formation, including the importance of macro-level determinants of values. In the field of migration, little has been done to determine whether and how cultural mechanisms may influence an individual's migration decision making.

How can these current theoretical problems be solved? In order to enhance the knowledge concerning the social-psychological aspect of migration, scholars in the field of migration ought to reexamine the nature and characteristics of migration decision making. More importantly, we need to look for theoretical

concepts alternative to neoclassical rational choice theory in order to provide a more comprehensive and unbiased view of decision making in the context of migration. In response to this call, I suggest that decision theories and empirical work accomplished in psychology, economics, and sociology may provide alternative directions to examine migration decision making.

Alternative Theoretical Directions of Migration Decision Making

To resolve the problems in neoclassical rational choice theory and the mounting evidence challenging the “information processor” image of human beings and the assumption of optimization, many scientists advocate that models sensitive to psychological dynamics and social meanings are more promising to describe and explain human decisions (Miller and Starr, 1967; Kratochwil, 1989; Goldfield and Gilbert, 1995). As carefully summarized by Miller and Starr:

There has not been an attack on the proposition that individuals should act so as to achieve a maximization of their utility. Rather, there has been sufficient evidence and supporting reasons to show that they do not act in this way. Among the reasons suggested have been the following: the inability of the individual to duplicate the rather recondite mathematics which economists have used to solve the problem of maximization of utility; the existence of other values (the higher values originally excluded by [Adam] Smith) which, though not readily quantifiable, do cause divergences from the maximization of utility in the marketplace; the effect of habit; the influence of social emulation; the effect of social institutions.

...The work of psychologists would certainly tend to confirm the assertion that human beings have a variety of diverse motivations which do not lend themselves to maximization of utility – at least so long as utility is defined in terms of the *satisfactions* resulting from marketplace phenomena... Similarly, sociologists have accumulated considerable evidence to demonstrate the enormous influence of social institutions, habit, and tradition on the choices and decisions made by individuals. The effect of these psychological and sociological factors

leads individuals to make decisions and to take actions without recourse to maximization of utility in the classical economic sense. Alternatively phrased, it can be said that these factors cause people to act irrationally – but it should be noted that this is simply a matter of definition, rationality having been defined as maximization of economic utility. (1967: 24-25)

Scholars in psychology, economics, and sociology have developed theories and concepts to better articulate human decision making, and among these, three perspectives are of distinct significance here. The first perspective pertains to several theoretical modifications of neoclassical rational choice theory, which take into account the “irrational” aspects of human decision making in reality. The second perspective concerns the importance of context in decision making. The third perspective is based on the role of social norms in constructing individuals’ decisions. Despite their growing influence in decision science, these theoretical perspectives have not been brought to the field of migration in exploring the subject of migration decision making. I will begin by examining these three theoretical perspectives. Based on these perspectives, I will subsequently suggest alternative directions in developing the theoretical knowledge of migration decision making.

Modifications of the Rational Choice Approach

In response to the numerous criticisms of neoclassical rational choice theory, several researchers have proposed various modified versions of this theoretical approach in order to more adequately describe and explicate how people actually make decisions. In addition to Simon’s theory of bounded rationality and satisficing strategy briefly mentioned earlier, two other modifications of neoclassical rational choice theory are also of potential significance in enriching our understanding of migration decision making: Kahneman and Tversky’s prospect theory holds that decision makers evaluate options in relative terms, and Janis and Mann’s conflict-theory model focuses on how psychological stress that results from making decisions affects the ways individuals make those choices. These theories all provide sound accounts to describe and explain human decision making at the micro level. In investigating the nature and process of migration

decision making, these theoretical concepts may serve to search for the micro factors affecting people's migration decisions, and to find answers for the differences among individuals and groups in their propensities to migrate.

Bounded Rationality and Satisficing Strategy

In Simon's theory of bounded rationality, utility maximization is replaced with utility satisfaction. According to Simon's satisficing strategy, a person aspires to that which he or she has a reasonable expectation of achieving. It suggests that "aspiration levels tend to adjust to the attainable, to past achievement levels, and to levels achieved by other individuals with whom the aspirant compares himself [or herself]" (Wolpert, 1964: 543). That is to say, the evaluation of utility is an individual and self-adjusting process, in which the aspiration shifts to accommodate the attainable. Two types of dynamic adjustments can be made to achieve satisficing. First, the decision maker may narrow or broaden the set of behavior alternatives considered within all possible alternatives in accordance with the success or failure of searching for a satisfactory alternative. Second, based on the difficulty of discovering alternatives, the aspiration level may change from point to point in a sequence of trails to adjust to the attainable. The aspiration level also depends on the history of the decision-making system, which includes previous aspiration levels, previous levels of attainment, and the alternatives chosen in previous trails. In some choice situations where there is a well-established procedure that leads through a series of steps to a final decision, the choice may have already been made in advance, and there may not be a genuine process of decision making.

The concepts of bounded rationality and satisficing strategy are very important for researchers to reconsider the nature of migration decision making. While "profit-maximizer" derived from neoclassical rational choice theory is often an unrealistic image for an individual making a migration decision in real life, the image of "profit-satisficer" takes into account the limitations in reality and seems more practical to depict the ways people making migration decisions. With these concepts, we may explore how migration behavior is related to individuals' aspirations in migration decision making. At the personal level, it is worth examining how the history of decision making affects the adjustment of an individual's satisficing threshold in the migration decision-making process. At

the aggregate level, it is important to identify how the collective aspiration level is established, and how it links to an individual's satisficing threshold as well as his or her consideration of alternatives in migration decision making.

Prospect Theory

Kahneman and Tversky (1979) propose "prospect theory" to account for the fact that people more often than not violate the principles of rational choice, even if it is their intention to reach rational decisions. A fundamental assumption in prospect theory is that human perceptual systems focus on the changes in the status quo, as people interpret decision outcomes as gains or losses relative to some reference point. In addition, people evaluate the prospects by the expectation of the subjective values of the outcomes (rather than the expectation of the outcomes themselves).⁸ Prospect theory particularly challenges the principle of *invariance* held in the analysis of rational choice, which claims that the preference order between prospects should not depend on the manner in which they are described. Experimental evidence confirms that changes in the description of outcomes alter people's preference order, which violates the requirement of invariance (Kahneman and Tversky, 1982; Tversky and Kahneman, 1986).

Prospect theory attributes the failure of invariance to the interaction of two factors: the nonlinearity of decision weights and the framing of probabilities. The theory asserts that people tend to underweigh moderate and high probabilities, while overweighing low probabilities (Tversky and Fox, 1995). Consequently, people are generally risk seeking while dealing with unlikely gains and risk averse while dealing with unlikely losses. For instance, purchase of lottery tickets demonstrates the overweighing of improbable gains, and purchase of insurance exemplifies the risk aversion of an improbable loss. Prospect theory also emphasizes the importance of framing effects in understanding choice behavior and explaining the failure of invariance. It asserts that people tend to evaluate options in relation to a reference point that is suggested by the way the problem is

⁸ Prospect theory proposes an S-shaped value function to describe how people's risk-seeking and risk-averse tendencies are related to the evaluated losses and gains. For details, see Kahneman and Tversky (1984), Tversky and Kahneman (1986).

framed. Therefore, gains and losses are assessed in *relative* rather than absolute terms based on the framing of decisions (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979; Whyte, 1991). Framing is controlled by the manner in which the choice problem is presented as well as by norms, habits, and expectations of the decision maker (Tversky and Kahneman, 1986). The reference point is hypothesized to be largely determined by the objective status quo, but also may also be affected by expectations and social comparisons (Kahneman and Tversky, 1984). The framed prospects are evaluated in comparison to the reference point: the advantages of prospects are evaluated as gains and their disadvantages as losses, and the prospect of the highest value is selected. The difference in the framing of problem leads to the difference in the ways possible consequences of each option are appraised, which explains the difference in choice making.⁹

The notions of nonlinear decision weighing and framing effects can facilitate our understanding of the nature of migration decision making. First, researchers may examine the relationship among the ways individuals evaluate migration as a risk-seeking or risk-averse behavior, the perceived degrees of risks involved in their migration decisions, and their propensities to migrate. Second, researchers may operationalize these concepts and hypotheses to explore the micro- and macro-level factors that affect individuals' adoption of migration decision frames and the associated reference points, and the ways framing effects influence the processes and outcomes of migration decision making.

Conflict Theory of Decision Making

Janis and Mann (1977) develop a conflict theory of decision making to supplement the rational choice approach (Janis and Mann, 1977). Based on the

⁹ Prospect theory also points out that the cost-loss discrepancy can lead to the failure of invariance. A disadvantage sometimes can be framed as a cost or a loss. In the case of insurance purchase, the price of the insurance can be seen as a cost of protection or a sure loss of money. The preference order can thus be reversed in these two conditions due to loss aversion. Hence, an individual's subjective state can be manipulated by framing negative outcomes as costs or as losses. These framing effects may further complicate the relationship between decision values and the evaluation of experiences. The theory suggests that the framing of decisions sometimes affects not only the decision but also the experience. The evaluation of decision outcomes may not only preclude but also shape the subsequent behavioral experience.

postulation of Simon's satisficing approach, Janis and Mann incorporate the concept of decisional conflict into the theory to describe the decision-making process from a motivational perspective. The conflict theory of decision making states that an individual's goals include social approval, self-approval, and attaining desirable outcomes for oneself and for significant others. Conflicts arise when all of the available alternatives in a choice are seen as uncertain means for achieving such goals or as leading to potential failures, which often brings unpleasant feelings of distress (Janis and Mann, 1977; Mann and Janis, 1982).

There are five basic assumptions stating the functional relationships between psychological stress and decisional conflict. First, the more goals expected to be unfulfilled and the more important the needs to which these goals correspond, the greater the stress. Second, when a person encounters new threats or opportunities that motivate him or her to consider a new course of action, the degree of decisional stress is a function of the degree to which the person is committed to adhere to his or her present course of action. Third, when decisional conflict is severe because each alternative poses a threat of serious risks, loss of hope about finding a better solution than the least objectionable one will lead to defensive avoidance of threat cues. Fourth, facing salient threat cues in a severe decisional conflict and with insufficient time to find an adequate solution, the decision maker tends to have an extremely high level of stress and is likely to resort to the strategy of hypervigilance. Fifth, a moderate degree of stress in response to a challenging threat induces a vigilant effort to painstakingly examine the alternative courses of action and to work out a satisfactory way to resolve the decisional dilemma. By identifying factors that determine the major modes of resolving a decisional conflict, the conflict-theory model focuses on how psychological stress from decisional conflicts affects the ways individuals make consequential choices in real life.¹⁰

¹⁰ The conflict-theory model consists of hypothetical linkages among the antecedent conditions that produce conflicts, the mediating processes and the levels of stress generated in such processes, and the coping patterns subsequently adopted. According to the model, only one out of five coping patterns – "vigilance" – corresponds to the pattern of rational choice described in the rational choice approach. Inadequate degrees of stress hamper the search and processing of information that are related to outcome expectations and values as well as the evaluation of alternatives, which lead to other defective decision patterns (Janis and Mann, 1977; Mann and Janis, 1982).

Three concepts in the conflict-theory model are of special significance for understanding migration decision making. First is the *procrastination* and *rationalization* of decisions. A decision maker under pressure to make an important decision affecting his or her future welfare typically finds it painful to commit himself or herself, for there are always some expected costs and risks involved in each option. Therefore, people are inclined to procrastinate in making such a decision in order to cope with such a dilemma. If procrastination is not possible, rationalization of a decision will be invented for ignoring the feeling of uncertainty or doubts that causes decisional conflicts. Since migration decisions – such as a decision to migrate or not and where to migrate to – often involve substantial consequences concerning the decision maker and/or the significant others, we may expect to find that decisional conflict is a general experience among people making such decisions. To avoid the potential losses implied in the choices forsaken, an individual may procrastinate about making a migration decision and to rationalize a hastily made migration decision.

The second concept concerns the *fluctuation* of decision making. The decision pattern that is temporarily dominant during the decision-making process depends on external and internal cues that affect the decision maker's response to the choice situation presented at that time. Thus, fluctuations of decision patterns should be a general characteristic of any decision maker. In the process of making a migration decision, an individual often faces the changes of external (such as living and work environments, sources of information, members involved in the decision-making process, etc.) and internal (such as the individual's general psychological state, perceptions, experiences, etc.) factors that are included in such a process. Therefore, people may tend to adopt different decision strategies in accordance with the changes of external and internal factors involved in the migration decision-making process. As researchers, we should take into account of the fluctuating nature of decision patterns to understand the nature of migration decision making. In addition, we could examine how changes of external and internal cues correspond to individuals' changes of decision patterns.

The third concept is the *commitment* prior to decision making. The theory maintains that a major obstacle to switching to a new course of action lies in the threat of violating prior commitment to the original course of action. Decisions

are considered socially committing because they require efforts at implementation if people are to fulfill their social roles and to maintain their public reputations as well as self-images as reasonably reliable persons. As a result, the more committed a decision maker is, the greater the stress there is when a challenging communication or event motivates him or her to search for a better course of action, and the more decisional conflicts the decision maker will experience when making such a decision. The importance of commitment in decision making suggests a migration decision be controlled at least in part by the commitment made beforehand by the decision maker. In this aspect, it will be interesting to explore whether and how a migration decision can be affected by different types of commitments (e.g., formal vs. informal) and different people to whom the decision maker is committed (e.g., self vs. others, significant others vs. non-significant others, in-group vs. out-group).

In short, the application of the notions of decisional conflicts should be of help to illumine how individuals manage internal conflicts in the process of making migration decisions, and how unresolved decisional conflicts affect the patterns and outcomes of migration decision making.

Context Dependency

The perspective of context dependency focuses on the importance of the social environment for giving meanings to choices. Advocates for this perspective claim that the dependence on behavioral data alone obscures the importance of the social context of choice, and that it is misleading to assume that "core cognitive processes" are immune to the constraining forces that social structures exert on individual behavior. For example, Jenkins (1981) urges researchers to adopt a "contextualist" model of human information processing to investigate how people make decisions and judgments when confronted with various types of tasks in various types of environments. Clarke (1992) argues that the search for "fixed human characteristics" neglects the situationally dependent nature of behavior.

The context-dependency perspective asserts the capacity of people to adopt different decision-making strategies and information-processing types in

accordance with changing contexts. It views rationality as embedded in institutionalized decision-making procedures and contingent on situational exigencies. Scholars supporting this perspective tend to focus specifically on the effect of social networks on individual decision making (Short and Clarke, 1992). Granovetter (1985) contends that the atomization implicit in under- and over-socialized theoretical frameworks neglects actors' network embeddedness, and more broadly their groundedness in social structures. He emphasizes that a sophisticated account of human behavior must consider its embeddedness in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations. Clarke (1992) also states that preferences are shaped by social networks rather than independently formed by atomized individuals, and networks of meaning and association are important even at the individual level of analysis.

This emphasis on social networks echoes the centrality of social relationships in the network approach. Nevertheless, to further our understanding of the dynamic relationships between individuals' migration decision making and the situated contexts, we need to go beyond social networks and broadly examine how other contextual factors – such as cultural factors – operate to mold the processes and outcomes of people's migration decision making. Recent studies indicate that the very construct of choice may be conceptualized differently in different cultures. Whereas the exercise of choice may reflect the independent self's struggle for uniqueness in individualist cultures, the act of choosing may represent opportunities for conformity for interdependent selves in collectivistic cultures (Iyengar, and Lepper, 1999; Kim and Markus, 1999). Research also shows that the differentiation between personal and in-group choices varies across cultures. In a culture emphasizing individuality and personal autonomy, the difference between personal and in-group choices may represent the distinction between choice versus no choice. In a culture emphasizing collectivity and group autonomy, the difference between personal and in-group choices may reflect the distinction between personal agency versus group agency (Menon et al., 1999). With these research findings, it will be reasonable to find cross-cultural differences in people's experiences of migration decision making. Thus far scholars in the field of migration have not explored this area. Therefore, researchers should be encouraged to engage in cross-cultural studies to compare how differences in cultural elements affect the courses and consequences of

migration decision making.

The theoretical and empirical work on context dependency renders an important prospect in developing theories of migration decision making. Such a prospect may help to discover how the patterns of migration decision making are embedded in social networks and institutions, and how social and cultural contexts grant meanings to the factors considered in migration decisions as well as the evaluation of possible decision outcomes. More generally, it may suggest the ways macro-level factors are translated to an individual's goals and values in making his or her migration decision.

Social Norms

With an acknowledgment of human cognitive limitations, many social scientists focus on the concept of social norms in understanding human decisions. While some (particularly game theorists) take a behavioral approach, arguing that some norms can be understood as the result of rational calculations, others propose an alternative to the game theoretical formulation (Cook and Levi, 1990). For example, Elster (1989) defines social norms mainly by their nonoutcome-oriented character. Norms are social if they satisfy two future conditions: they are shared among members of the community and they are sustained in part by members' approval and disapproval.¹¹ He also emphasizes the irreducibility of social norms to optimization and the interaction between social norms and self-interested motivations. Social norms are not merely *ex post facto* rationalizations of self-interest; they are capable of being *ex ante* sources of action. Both norms and self-interest, in his view, jointly shape human actions.

Among the notions pertaining to the connection between social norms and decision making, two are worthy of note here. First is the emphasis on accountability in decisions made in real-life situations. Tetlock reasons that a ubiquitous feature of natural decision environments – but not of laboratory

¹¹ Elster distinguishes social norms from other related concepts such as moral norms, legal norms, convention equilibria, self-imposed rules, habits, and traditions. For a detailed discussion, see Elster (1989).

experiments on cognitive processes – is the fact that people are potentially *accountable* for the judgments and decisions they make. In addition, most important decisions are the product of intensive interactions among members of groups rather than that of isolated information processors (Tetlock, 1985). The notion of accountability has two dimensions. One dimension of accountability is its function as a critical norm enforcement mechanism (ibid.). Specific norms, values, and ideologies to which people are held accountable vary in different situations. Therefore, people need to adopt new rules and values for generating socially acceptable explanations of behavior when they are situated in new circumstances or join new groups (Mills, 1940; Beyer, 1981). The other dimension of accountability is its relevance to and contingency on social relations. People seek the approval and respect of those to whom they are accountable (Blumer, 1969; Johnson, 1974; Tetlock, 1981; Baumeister, 1982). On one hand, people generally prefer the “least effort” strategy to simply adopt positions likely to gain the favor of those to whom they feel accountable. For example, people often feel so uncertain about the outcome of what may be the best course of action that they avoid it in order to play safe. In other words, people tend to make a more conventional choice that will cause little immediate disturbance or disapproval because it will be seen as “acceptable” by others, even if it may not be the best choice (Johnson, 1974). On the other hand, demands for accountability in contexts that provide few cues for acceptable behavior seem to motivate vigilant information processing in order to identify the most defensible strategy (Tetlock, 1983, 1985; Tetlock and Boettger, 1989; Tetlock, Skitka, and Boettger, 1989). From this viewpoint, decisions can be considered as dramaturgical accomplishments (Goffman, 1959; Langley, 1989).

The second notion concerns the cultural and social specificity of decision rules. In Majestki’s view, norms have considerable explanatory power to account for an individual’s preference ordering and consequent decision making (Majestki, 1990). Norms are decision rules that are culturally and socially specific, and they can be observed separately from the behavior they explain. They are cognitively and socially constructed on the basis of precedents. By perceiving a decision-making situation as similar to previous situations and by employing precedents and analogies to interpret it, individuals and groups “prestructure” the situation. This prestructuring creates a propensity to understand the situation and

interpret the decision in a particular way. It reduces the amount of information required for decision making, limits the views of plausible alternatives, and promotes the precedent interpretation and associated action. If the evaluation of the precedent action is positive, and the analogy and associated action is widely supported by the relevant group, then the likelihood of perceiving or generating plausible alternatives is very low. As a precedent becomes more established in a group, it not only narrows plausible and acceptable alternatives for the individual, but also narrows what appeals to the group and what can be justified to the group. Established precedents, as historically and contextually specific accounts, contribute and constrain choice making and the interpretation of decision outcomes.

The perspective of social norms offers important insights on migration decision making at both individual and collective levels. Because accountability acts as a social psychological link between individual decision makers on one hand and the social systems to which they belong on the other, it provides an important cue to discover the micro-macro dynamics in migration decision making. Scholars in the field of migration should investigate how people's perceptions of their accountability to others influence the ways they, as individuals and groups, make migration decisions and explain their decisions to whom they feel accountable. The other important point of inquiry concerning accountability is how accountability manifests the underlying social norms and ideologies in people's migration decisions. Furthermore, it is imperative to know how social and cultural mechanisms prescribe specific norms by which individuals and groups make migration decisions, and how these norms construct distinct decision contexts in which individuals and groups comprehend their choices and evaluate their decision outcomes. It is also worth examining how changes in decision contexts may influence the adoption of new rules and values in making migration decisions.

Conclusion

In order to enhance the knowledge of the social-psychological aspect of migration, we need to (re)examine the patterns and characteristics of migration decision making which have long been taken for granted in current migration

theories. Drawing from three important theoretical perspectives in decision science, this paper proposes alternative ways to reconceptualize migration decision making and to further explore this subject empirically. These proposed theoretical directions are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, they should be intertwined to express the dynamic nature and process of migration decision making. This paper also suggests that to reach a more comprehensive understanding of migration, future development of migration theories should attend to the issue of migration decision making, especially the ways individuals perceive and respond to situational constraints and opportunities in their migration decision-making processes, the complexity of collective behavior and social relationships entailed in the decision-making process and manifested in decision contexts, and the ways migration decision making is influenced by various social and cultural mechanisms.

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