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THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF MIGRATION FROM CHINA TO KAZAKHSTAN

The migration process from China to Kazakhstan is complex, poorly understood, and requires a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to fully understand its dynamics. For this purpose, this paper applies theories of international migration to gain a better understanding of the movement of migrants between the two countries.

The study focuses on macro-level migration theories to identify the political and economic implications of migration in the context of Kazakhstan–China relations. The study highlights the need for integrated methods, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches such as surveys, interviews, and case studies, to capture the multifaceted nature of migration. It also highlights the need for improved data collection methods and suggests that a combination of administrative data, expert assessments, and sample surveys can provide a more accurate understanding of illegal migration. The paper pays particular attention to irregular migration, given the high numbers of migrants from PRC to Kazakhstan, primarily for economic reasons. Thus, the paper attempts to map out the dynamics of Chinese–Kazakh migration by highlighting its history, development, sources, and factors, using findings from Western and domestic scholars.

Key words: migration, neoclassical theory, macro-level theory, theory of new economics of migration, theory of migration networks, global migration.

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Қытайдан Қазақстанға көші-қонды зерттеудің теориялық және әдістемелік тәсілдері

Қытайдан Қазақстанға көшу процесі күрделі, аз зерттелген және оның динамикасын толық түсіну үшін әртүрлі теориялық және әдістемелік тәсілдерді қолдануды талап етеді. Осы мақсатта мақалада екі ел арасындағы көші-қон қозғалысы процесін жақсырақ түсіну үшін халықаралық миграция теориялары қолданылады.

Зерттеу Қазақстан мен Қытай арасындағы қарым-қатынастар контекстінде көші-қонның саяси және экономикалық салдарын анықтауға мүмкіндік беретін макродеңгейлік миграциялық теорияларға назар аударады. Зерттеу көші-қонның көп қырлы сипатын түсіру үшін сауалнамалар, сұхбаттар және жағдайлық зерттеулер сияқты сапалық және сандық әдістерді қамтитын интеграцияланған әдістердің қажеттілігін көрсетеді. Сондай-ақ, деректерді жинау әдістерін жетілдіру қажеттілігін көрсетеді және әкімшілік деректердің, сараптамалық бағалаулардың және іріктеме сауалнамаларының үйлесімі тұрақты емес көші-қонның себебін дәлірек түсінуді қамтамасыз ете алатынын ұсынады. Мақалада Қытайдан Қазақстанға негізінен экономикалық себептерге байланысты мигранттардың көп болуына байланысты заңсыз көші-қонға ерекше назар аударылған. Осылайша, жұмыста батыстық және отандық ғалымдардың зерттеулері барысында алынған нәтижелерді пайдалана отырып, оның тарихын, дамуын, көздері мен факторларын көрсету арқылы қытай-қазақ көші-қонының динамикасын құруға әрекет жасалды.

Түйін сөздер: миграция, неоклассикалық теория, макродеңгейлік теория, жаңа экономика миграциясы, миграциялық желілер теориясы, жаһандық көші-қон.

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Теоретико-методологические подходы к изучению миграции из Китая в Казахстан

Процесс миграции из Китая в Казахстан сложен, малоизучен и требует применения разнообразных теоретических и методологических подходов для полного понимания его динамики. С этой целью в статье используются теории международной миграции для более полного понимания процесса передвижения мигрантов между двумя указанными странами.

Исследование сосредоточено на миграционных теориях макроуровня, позволяющее выявить политические и экономические последствия миграции в контексте отношений между Казахстаном и Китаем. Исследование подчеркивает необходимость комплексных методов, включая как качественные, так и количественные подходы, такие как опросы, интервью и тематические исследования, для охвата многогранной природы миграции. Также подчеркивается необходимость улучшения методов сбора данных и предполагает, что сочетание административных данных, экспертных оценок и выборочных обследований может обеспечить более точное понимание нелегальной миграции. В статье особое внимание уделяется нелегальной миграции ввиду высоких показателей численности мигрантов из КНР в Казахстан преимущественно по экономическим причинам. Таким образом, в работе была предпринята попытка выстраивания динамики китайско-казахстанской миграции путем выделения ее истории, развития, источников и факторов с применением результатов, полученных в ходе исследований западных и отечественных ученых.

Ключевые слова: миграция, неоклассическая теория, теория макроуровня, теория новой экономики миграции, теория миграционных сетей, глобальная миграция.

Introduction

The economic growth of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has profoundly reshaped its political and social landscape, fueling both domestic and international migration. This shift is largely driven by the increasing global economic and political influence of the PRC.

Since the independence of Central Asia, China has emerged as a major power, significantly bolstering its presence in the region. China continues to apply a variety of tools to expand its influence, such as economic, social, cultural, and geopolitical strategies. Kazakhstan, with its strategic location and abundant natural resources, attracts Chinese investment, leading to significant infrastructure projects and joint ventures. These developments strengthen bilateral relations and create a dynamic environment for collaboration.

Historically, China has been a major source of international migrants, and the movement of people to Kazakhstan and other Central Asian nations persists, fueled by the resurgence of historical, trade, economic, and ethnocultural connections.

Movement of people between China and Kazakhstan is a significant social and economic trend impacting both nations. However, the influx of migrants also brings challenges. China's expanding economic influence and the increasing number of Chinese nationals in Kazakhstan continually raise

concerns about its powerful neighbor. Today, Chinese migration can be seen as a political tool of Beijing. Most members of the Chinese diaspora do not assimilate; they preserve their identity and maintain strong connections to their homeland.

Migration between PRC and Kazakhstan remains a complex and poorly understood phenomenon, despite considerable efforts by both domestic and foreign researchers. In their scientific work, researchers employ various theoretical and methodological approaches to understand the influx of Chinese migrants to Kazakhstan. Currently, there is no unified theory of international migration. Instead, multiple approaches and theoretical models exist to explain the motivations behind why migrants move from one country to another. Each major migration theory offers unique concepts and explanations to identify the driving forces behind international migration.

To study this issue in depth, it is necessary to use different theories and methodological approaches. A comprehensive analysis should take into account the advantages and limitations of each theory. The number, composition, and location of migrants from China influence the demographic indicators of Kazakhstan and the labor market, and they also cause problems of social and cultural integration. The study of migration flows between China and Kazakhstan is important in the context of geopolitical changes in Central Asia. In such a situation, a com-

prehensive study of migration processes from China to Kazakhstan is vital for shaping the country's domestic stability and foreign policy. Problems such as insufficient data and low data quality are emerging in migration research. Therefore, it is important to improve the research methodology and increase the reliability of the data.

The objectives of this article include: analyzing existing theoretical approaches to migration from China to Kazakhstan and their applicability; identifying key concepts and models that are used in studies of migration processes; and evaluating the effectiveness of various data collection and analysis techniques in the context of migration from China to Kazakhstan.

Description of materials and methods

Methodologically, the study examines macro-level theories including neoclassical economics, migration dynamics, dual labor market theory, new economics of migration theory, and migration chain theory. The main emphasis is on the economic factors driving movement between the two researched countries, as these are pivotal. Given that most migrants hold a working status, special attention is paid to international labor mobility. This study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods include surveys and questionnaires to gather data on Chinese migrants and analyzing government data to understand larger trends. Qualitative methods involve interviews, focus groups, and observations to capture personal stories and social interactions.

Results

The research highlights the limitations of world system theory in understanding international migration, particularly in light of the increasing migration flows between developed and developing countries. This theory traditionally views international migration as primarily a movement from peripheral to developed nations. However, current trends indicate that the dynamics of migration are influenced not only by the global capitalist market structure but also by international economic policies, labor mobility, and globalization (Massey et al, 1993). While labor shortages in destination countries and surpluses in origin countries are still central reasons for migration, variations in educational attainment, quality of life, and socioeconomic opportunities also significantly contribute to migration patterns.

Moreover, shifts in the economic and social conditions of developing countries, along with fluctuations in the international labor market, influence China's migration policy. The significance of these countries to China is closely tied to its foreign policy strategy, which prioritizes strengthening relationships with developing nations (Oganessian, 2020).

There are five main types of migration from China to Central Asia (CA): labour, entrepreneurial, transit, educational and marriage (Vazirov, 2019). Most Chinese temporarily residing in Kazakhstan are long-term migrants. The main groups among them include those employed in small family businesses and trade, as well as contract workers. So, economic factors are a significant driver of migration from China (Sarqyqan et al, 2021).

A major factor driving the deepening of Kazakhstan's collaboration with China is the significant funding directed toward infrastructure development, including railways, road networks, power generation, and telecommunications. These financial contributions have played a crucial role in accelerating Kazakhstan's modernization and boosting its economic progress. By leveraging strategic partnership agreements, China is consolidating its presence and expanding its influence and capital share in Kazakhstan. Additionally, this dynamic has led to an influx of Chinese labor into the region, making labor migration a significant aspect of the investment policy in Kazakhstan.

Theories of international labor migration are examined from both macro and micro perspectives. Macro-level theories analyze migration between countries by examining the political, economic, and cultural structures of both the sending and receiving countries. In contrast, micro-level theories focus on the individual motivations that drive the decision to migrate (Melkonyan, 2015).

The most prominent model of international migration, which encompasses both macro and micro-oriented theories, was developed to explain labor movement in the context of economic development. According to Todaro (Todaro, 1976), a representative of the neoclassical model based on macro theory, disparities in the availability of labor and job opportunities between countries drive migration. Workers from low-wage, labor-abundant countries move to high-wage, labor-scarce countries, equalizing wages until only migration costs account for the wage gap. Similarly, capital flows from wealthy to poorer countries seeking higher returns, including skilled workers moving to maximize their earnings. Recognizing the difference between general labor migration and skilled professional movement is crucial.

In poorer countries, the potential for high returns makes capital investments attractive, drawing not only financial resources but also human capital. This process helps reduce economic imbalances, boosting employment and educational opportunities in developing regions. Skilled workers migrate to take advantage of high returns in areas lacking human capital, which often results in the movement of managers and technicians as well. Therefore, it's essential to differentiate international labor migration from human capital flows, acknowledging the diverse skill levels of migrants, even in macroeconomic models (Massey et al., 1993).

According to data from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as of March 2023, only 14,400 foreigners were working in the country. Of these, 3,500 were Chinese citizens, making up approximately one-quarter of the foreign workforce (MLSPP RK, 2023).

For Chinese people considering migrating to Kazakhstan, this may include expected income, such as average wages, employment, and career opportunities, as well as expected expenses, including relocation, adaptation, housing, and health care costs. China has high population density and competition for jobs, while Kazakhstan, with its lower population density, may offer job openings in the agriculture, construction, and manufacturing sectors. The model acknowledges that decisions can be made even in the face of uncertainty, including the risk of adaptation difficulties, language barriers, and cultural differences. Trust in Kazakhstan's economic stability and long-term growth significantly alleviates uncertainty for migrants. To streamline migration processes, it's essential to account for both economic factors and the social and political conditions that foster favorable employment opportunities. This includes strong diplomatic relations between nations, safeguarding migrant rights, and promoting cultural and social integration. Moreover, Kazakhstan's investment appeal and infrastructure improvements act as additional motivators for migrants.

When exploring theoretical frameworks for analyzing migration between the given countries, Michael Piore's dual labor market theory (Piore, 1972) offers valuable insights into the social and economic inequalities driving such migration. This theory divides the labor market into two key categories: the high-wage sector, which is known for job security and opportunities for career growth, and the low-wage sector, which is marked by job instability and limited chances for professional advancement. The core premise of the theory is that structural barriers

— such as skill requirements, discrimination, and access to education — impede workers' movement from the secondary to the primary sector. The theory highlights that these two distinct labor market segments contribute to social and economic inequality. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of government policies and regulations in reducing these barriers and mitigating inequalities between the sectors, making it pertinent for developing policies aimed at improving working conditions and opportunities for all workers.

The migration theory, which introduced by Oded Stark and David Bloom (Stark et al, 1991), provides a framework for analyzing migration flows from China to Kazakhstan. Unlike earlier theories, this approach shifts the focus from individual decision-making about migration to collective choices made by households. This change in focus highlights the role of families working together to send a member abroad to diversify income sources and manage risks.

Despite the overall well-being of developed countries, rural parts often lack access to insurance and social welfare. By sending a relative to work in another country, households secure alternative income through remittances, providing a financial safety net in times of crisis. This model suggests that migration isn't driven solely by absolute poverty but by the desire to improve one's status compared to others in the community. When families see their neighbors benefiting from remittances sent by relatives working abroad, they feel relatively deprived and motivated to send their own family members abroad to achieve similar benefits.

This is especially important in rural China, where economic instability may prompt people to seek better opportunities abroad. One reason for their migration could be the families' wish to enhance their economic conditions. For example, some family members may remain in China to work or conduct business, while others move to Kazakhstan to access the resources and opportunities available there. This allows the family to share risks and sources of income, which is consistent with the approach of the new economy of migration.

Douglas Massey's "migration network" theory explains the process of migration as a self-reinforcing mechanism, where early migrants facilitate the path of subsequent migrants through the creation of social networks and the provision of information and resources (Massey, 1988). This migration model covers both broad and detailed levels of analysis. It explains how social networks and connections between migrants and their family and friends back

home stimulate and support the migration process. The theory emphasizes the importance of social networks and personal connections in the migration process, providing insight into why people decide to migrate and how they do so. Migration chains mitigate the risks and expenses associated with migration, making it more feasible for newcomers and ensuring a steady stream of migrants. Over time, it can lead to the institutionalization of migration, with sustained migration flows between specific regions.

The theory of migration networks provides a comprehensive understanding of how diasporas influence migration patterns. As the connections between countries grow, migration processes become self-sustaining. Consequently, migration rates between countries are increasingly driven by the presence of migration networks and diasporas, rather than economic factors such as wage or employment differences. Maintaining links to the country of origin helps create social networks that facilitate job finding and quick adaptation in host countries (Walmsley, 2015), thus accelerating migration rates. Thus, countries with significant or established diasporas usually see a higher influx of new migrants.

In this research, the authors aim to apply new methodologies to explore the relatively under-researched area of China-Kazakh migration. A new approach to the study of the process of migration from China to Kazakhstan in the 20th century is the introduction of an innovative approach through the oral history method (Clark et al., 2004). This method was used by W. Clark and A. Kamalov presented in his research, in particular, it allows for an in-depth exploration of migration processes via the personal memories and experiences of the migrants themselves. This new approach complements the traditional methods of historical data collection and analysis and allows for a comprehensive consideration of the migration process. While oral history originated in post-war America and was initially regarded as unreliable in post-Soviet countries, it has recently gained recognition in Russia as a valuable academic tool. The strength of oral history lies in its ability to provide insights into historical events through individual perspectives.

Among Kazakhstani scholars, G. Mendikulova and B. Atantayeva have significantly advanced the understanding of migration between Kazakhstan and China (Mendikulova et al, 2008). Their research delves into migration patterns across different historical periods. N. Ablazhey's work is also vital, as it examines the movement of the Kazakh population between Kazakhstan and Xinjiang, covering emigration during famines, return migration,

and various aspects of migration such as the migration policies of Russia and the USSR, as well as issues related to repatriation and migrant adaptation (Ablazhey, 2015). E. Sadovskaya provides a fresh perspective by outlining the migration events of the 1960s and 1970s. S.B. Kozhirova has also made a notable contribution by providing a detailed analysis of migration processes in the mid-20th century (Kozhirova, 2017).

Discussion

The largest community of Kazakhs outside Kazakhstan is found in China. Furthermore, E. Sadovskaya has discovered that the majority of those migrating from China are Kazakh repatriates, known as oralmans – ethnic Kazakhs who are coming back to Kazakhstan from abroad (Sadovskaya, 2008). The historical context significantly influences this migration, as ethnic Kazakhs move from China to Kazakhstan permanently due to the country's repatriation policy. Many of these migrants are motivated by the desire to return to their ancestral homeland and believe that their children will have better opportunities in Kazakhstan compared to China.

Table 1 – Immigration of Chinese Citizens to Kazakhstan. January-December | Thousand People

Year	Total	Kazakhs
2017	3.02	3.00
2018	1.36	1.34
2019	1.49	1.46
2020	1.55	1.53
2021	0.25	0.24
2022	0.42	0.40

Source: *Ranking.kz* based on data from the Bureau of National Statistics of ASPR RK (*Ranking.kz.*, 2023)

The peak of Chinese migration to Kazakhstan occurred in 1993-1994, when about 40-50 thousand Chinese traders lived permanently even in Almaty itself (Sadovskaya, 2008). Due to the restrictions of their commercial visas, which prohibited employment, many of them had to leave

According to data from the National Statistics Agency of Kazakhstan, the majority of migrants from China to Kazakhstan are ethnic Kazakhs, who are actively encouraged to return to their homeland by both relatives and the state. For this purpose, special government programs have been developed to

support the Kandas, which corresponds to the concept of “pull” factors, when the existing diaspora attracts new migrants.

Kazakhstan frequently and re-enter the country on a short-term basis. However, some oralmans prefer not to change citizenship after moving to Kazakhstan in order to save their other half, to be able to return back to China or to freely engage in a joint business or visit relatives. The formation of informal migration networks has facilitated the further movement of Chinese citizens to Kazakhstan, where established migration channels already operate and fraternities and communities are developing. These networks are highly effective in connecting Chinese communities within a single city, across different cities, and between China and other regions. They are based on interpersonal and familial relationships. While most interactions occur among people within the same locality, these networks can also span across various geographic areas. The formation of these migration networks is driven by the self-organization of migrants or the help of intermediaries. Chinese migrants seeking economic opportunities often rely on intermediaries who have expertise in local business practices and are knowledgeable about commercial transactions and job placements. This arrangement not only helps them gain entry and settle in new areas but also assists in navigating local systems and establishing successful careers.

These networks operate effectively both within Chinese communities in individual cities and across different cities, as well as between China and other places. They are built on personal and family ties. Although interactions are generally more common among those in the same locality, these networks can extend to individuals from various geographic areas. The creation of these migration networks is due to either the self-organizing efforts of migrants or the support provided by intermediaries. Chinese migrants, primarily looking for economic opportunities, frequently turn to intermediaries who possess local business knowledge and are familiar with commercial transactions and job opportunities.

To apply world systems theory to migration flows between China and Kazakhstan, it is necessary to consider how the international capitalist framework influences migration processes. World systems theory, originally developed by Immanuel Wallerstein and expanded by other scholars, views international migration as a result of the global capitalist system. This theory suggests that when capitalist economic systems are introduced into non-capitalist and peripheral societies, it results in increased population mobility and a greater tendency toward

migration. Essentially, the integration of capitalist changes into a society with a different economic framework drives people to move in search of improved economic prospects (Wallerstein, 1974).

The same capitalist processes that displace workers in peripheral regions simultaneously generate labor demand in core countries. Improvements in transportation and communication systems facilitate the movement of goods, capital, and people, which in turn supports migration. Cultural ties, often legacies of colonialism, further promote migration by fostering familiarity with the languages and lifestyles of core countries.

Most of the migrants who came to Kazakhstan, especially migrant workers from China, come to the country without an official contract. Kazakh researchers have shown in their works that statistical data in Kazakhstan about Chinese business are controversial. Illegal work of small and medium-sized businesses complicates this situation. In most cases, these enterprises are not registered and are closed in a short time without submitting a tax declaration (Sadovskaya, 2008).

These problems in the migration process can be determined by conducting sociological surveys. However, proper monitoring of migration is important for the actual implementation of this survey. Typically, this information is compiled based on visa and border statistics, as well as opinions from industry experts. Combining information from different sources helps to fight against illegal migration, to apply effective measures, and also to legalize migrants (Zayonchkovskaya, 2007).

Conclusion

Despite ongoing research, there is no unified theory of international migration. This problem shows the importance of using not only one theory but several to fully understand the issue of migration between China and Kazakhstan. This study highlights the importance of using different theoretical and methodological approaches to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese migration to Kazakhstan. The most important factor in the issue of migration between the two countries is the economy. That is why the analysis of economic theories of international migration was carried out. In particular, neo-classical economics, migration chain theory, double labor market theory, new economic theory of migration.

Although economic and investment opportunities are a great help to Kazakhstan, they have negative consequences. The increase of Chinese migrants

in the country is alarming, and their illegal work in the country threatens the stability and security of the labor market. To prevent and solve this problem, a comprehensive analysis of data collection methods is necessary.

It can be said that the China-Kazakhstan migration situation is an important socio-economic process affecting both countries. Effective management

of migration requires a comprehensive approach that contributes to solving problems affecting the development and stability of Kazakhstan.

This research is funded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (project "Migration Factor in the Kazakhstan-Chinese Relations", IRN AP 19679244).

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Previously sent May 24, 2024.

Reregistered June 26, 2024.

Accepted August 27, 2024.