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### David Ley, Millionaire Migrants: Trans-Pacific Life Lines

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## Reviews

David Ley, **Millionaire Migrants: Trans-Pacific Life Lines**

Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 328 pp., pb. £24.99/€30.00 (ISBN: 978-1-4051-9292-7)

*Millionaire Migrants* synthesises two decades of David Ley's research on transnational migration between East Asia and Canada. It touches on important contemporary topics including international migration, transnationalism, multiculturalism, political geography, urban struggles and identity politics. Ley demonstrates that geography (still) matters even for the well-off elitist mobile persons studied. He interrogates the migration trajectories at different geographical scales, ranging from the nation to the city, the neighbourhood, the family and the individual self. This multi-scale approach succeeds in bringing forth the complexity of transnational migration. Compared to the other scales, the nation is emphasised; this makes sense, as the nation (and nation-state) is crucial in this social field due to numerous determining processes and struggles operating at this level. In demonstrating that Asian migrants transcend national borders, Ley uses transnationalism as the conceptual anchor. This choice is logical—indeed, it can almost be considered conventional nowadays. But since Ley's empirical analysis of Hong Kong–Vancouver trajectories is fundamentally translocal, I ponder how a stronger conceptual engagement of a translocal perspective would shed new light theoretically. Considering the processes *also* as translocal—I do not suggest rejecting the transnational perspective—would push us to think more seriously about the mobility corridors that link distinct localities where an array of actors and communities are involved in the making and shaping of the transnational life lines under study. How and why is the Hong Kong–Vancouver translocal space similar or different to the Hong Kong–Toronto one? What about Montreal as a destination for business migrants? As we open up the 'nation' and hence 'trans-nation' categories in our thinking, we may

recognise more clearly other important geographies that are subsumed in the transnationalism paradigm. A translocal perspective would, for instance, allow more space for thinking through relationships between groups—migrants or otherwise—embedded in different localities. What do we know about the relationships between Hong Kong or ethnic Chinese migrants from different migration generations settled in various parts of Vancouver, and spaces beyond Vancouver? And how have places outside of these mobility corridors been affected by the emergence and development of these trans-Pacific life lines?

*Millionaire Migrants* provides rich narratives and insightful analyses on the trans-Pacific life lines among wealthy Hong Kong migrants in Vancouver. While the early chapters present balanced statistical data on different Asian groups, the Taiwanese and Korean stories remain unexplored empirically. A more substantiated comparison across mobility trajectories would help in identifying parallels and contrasts, and in bringing in new materials for thinking through notions such as transnational embeddedness, integration and multiculturalism.

In this book Ley demonstrates well how members of the millionaire migrants' families establish and maintain their transcontinental life lines, though more reflections on how they are embedded in the two (or more) societies along their life lines would be useful. Some relationships are illustrated with solid evidence, such as how rich East Asian migrants insert themselves into the Canadian economy as property investors, pushing up real-estate prices and instilling pressure on landscape harmony in some neighbourhoods. How about the relationships between these wealthy migrants and other Chinese or Hong Kong migrants from different class backgrounds? How has their very-class-specific consumptive and mobile lifestyle been received by other co-ethnic migrants? And how do the relationships between these millionaire migrants and the 'host society' affect those between non-millionaire migrants and

the broader Canadian society at large? I believe that a critical discussion on inter-class interactions within the Hong Kong migrant communities and their respective class-differentiated relationships with the Canadian 'host society' would be useful in connecting the experiences of the millionaire migrants to the broader migration and multi-cultural landscape in Canada.

In Chapter 6, Ley provides an update on the political and academic discourse surrounding the 'monster house' affair. By laying out the changes in academic discourses on this politicised issue, Ley reminds readers of the changeful nature of politics and hence the need for renewed interpretations of them. The author ends with a positive note regarding multiculturalism by showing how the conflict was resolved. While one can celebrate that a solution has been found for this particular urban conflict, it is questionable how far this optimism can be carried. Considering that migrants with wealth are in general in a comfortable position when negotiating for respect from the host society, the happy ending here probably cannot serve as a confident indicator for other conflicts.

*Millionaire Migrants* is well illustrated, written in an approachable style and supplemented with an extensive bibliography. Scholars and students in migration studies, especially those who are interested in the Vancouver case, will certainly find this book enjoyable and useful.

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Peter Adey, **Mobility**

London: Routledge, 2010, pp. xx + 267, £84.00 hb. (ISBN 0-415-43399-0); £24.99 pb. (ISBN 0-415-43400-3)

Michael Samers, **Migration**

London: Routledge, 2010, pp. xvii + 374, £84.00 hb. (ISBN 0-415-77665-1); £24.99 pb. (0-415-77666X)

These books both belong to the Routledge 'Key Ideas in Geography' series, the aim of which is to 'provide strong, original and accessible text on important spatial concepts for academics and students working in the fields of geography,

sociology and anthropology, as well as the interdisciplinary fields of urban and rural studies, development and cultural studies'. The student market is clearly targeted, since it is claimed that the books are 'written in an engaging and accessible manner for an undergraduate audience' (both the above quotes are from the publisher's blurb).

Although supposedly written to a common format, the two books are quite different. Adey's *Mobility* fits the marketing formula closely, with its chatty, direct style, many illustrations and frequent textboxes on 'key ideas'. Samers' *Migration* is more 'academic' and heavy-going for the student reader: it is more than a hundred pages longer than *Mobility* and its five main chapters are around 60 pages each—hardly digestible fare for an undergraduate. For the migration scholar—student or more advanced reader—both books have excellent qualities, but also some drawbacks.

Adey's book taps into a growing school of thought—the 'mobilities paradigm'—pioneered by sociologist John Urry in his *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge, 2000) and *Mobilities* (Sage, 2007). It is fair to say that the 'mobility turn' has not been universally welcomed by 'mainstream' migration scholars, nor for that matter by geographers (for instance, Samers gives it short shrift and does not reference Urry's books). But in my view the mobilities approach does much to enrich our understanding of new (and also old) forms of migration (circulation, business visits, hybrid forms of tourism/migration etc.). At the same time, it makes us realise that migration remains a distinctive social phenomenon which is not just subsumed within the mobilities typology; indeed, if anything, the stasis of migration (remaining fixed in one place after a move has taken place) makes it distinct from mobility.

Adey's book provides a thorough and entertaining overview of the field of mobility studies. The issues covered range across the migration of refugees, transportation, communications, the politics of mobility, food miles and disability rights, to name just a few. Adey argues that mobility is a 'fundamentally important process that underpins many of the material, social, economic, political and cultural processes operating in the world today' (p. 31). Mobility, he says, is everywhere, from the 'little mobilities' of (for example) sheep moving in a field, to the 'big mobilities' of globalisation.

Adey sees mobility in relational terms—in relation to self and other human beings (and