Cities attract migrants. The relationship between the two can be symbiotic, with the city acting as a magnet for opportunity and also benefiting from the hard (and often quite badly paid) work migrants do. When properly managed, this can be a win-win situation; when misunderstood or mismanaged, it can cause social and economic problems that become entrenched and hard to fix. The papers in this Focus section examine several migrations in Asia (in China, India, and Indonesia) and also Asian migration to the West (in the form of Amsterdam’s Chinatown) to see what the current unprecedented wave of migration means for the people themselves and for the cities they move to.

**Arrival City**

Monica L. Smith identifies “the human propensity for migration [as something that] continually enables our species to adapt to new circumstances.” She thinks that urban migration is not only “the only viable form of concentrated human population but also enabled cities to be incubators for other new phenomena,” which sees relationships between economies of production and consumption, the development of infrastructure, and the emergence of the middle class.

Peter J. Taylor sees cities as places of opportunity because while “migrants may start at the bottom [...] they had hope, if not for themselves for their children, of a better life.” They want to stop living there “either by making money and moving their families and village networks out or by turning the neighbourhood itself into something better.” Socially and economically, they are constantly in flux. The only thing that remains, if the Arrival City is functioning in a healthy way, is the bedrock of social networks that sustain and which enable new waves of migrants to find a foothold in the life of the city. Saunders urges us to “devote far more attention to these places, for they are not just the sites of potential conflict and violence but also the neighbourhoods where the transition from poverty occurs, where the next middle class is forged, where the next generation’s dreams, movements and governments are created.” This is exactly what the following papers try to do.

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Connecting the city to the regional traffic of areas. This seawall will also serve as a highway region as well as the shoreline and mangrove water source depletion. To address these alarming rate (six to seven centimetres per year) this city is facing. The capital and largest city of Central Java, Semarang is sinking at the face of climate change. Migrations that result from environmental disasters in Low Elevation Coastal Zones (LECZs) see developing countries most adversely affected, with marginalized populations being the most vulnerable. Her paper looks at the Sundarbans, a mangrove area in a delta formed by the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers in the Bay of Bengal. Circular migration has been the dominant adaptation measure here for decades, but the movement of people puts pressure on both destination cities and the development of the region. Informal urbanization and a “floating” population put excessive pressure on resources and cause uneven development. Moreover, the undocumented nature of these people’s movements makes them invisible to governments who would be in a position to help. This paper proposes a strategy to bring urban clusters, and relate both to the villages of the Sundarbans.

Cassie Sun Woo Kim’s paper, “Establishing a Regional Framework for Migrants in Semarang,” highlights the serious problems this city is facing. The capital and largest city of Central Java, Semarang is sinking at an alarming rate (six to seven centimetres per year, with up to 19 centimetres in some places). There is also a major problem with water source depletion. To address these issues, the city is constructing aandler system as part of a coastal defence master plan, with a large dyke circumscribing the urbanized region as well as the shoreline and mangrove areas. This seawall will also serve as a highway connecting the city to the regional traffic of East and West Java. Semarang’s population is increasing, but the city is running out of land to develop in order to house it. People are also migrating to the hinterland, wanting to get away from the flooding danger zones by moving to higher elevations (which also have fresh water supplies and more greenery). Kim’s paper proposes a regional framework for this migration. Choosing a site in suburban Semarang, it explores the possibilities of increasing green and blue areas within an urban context, as well as preserving the natural qualities of the mountainous areas to create safe new areas for the city’s residents.

We move to China with the next two papers, beginning with “Planning for African Migrants in Guangzhou” by Qijie Hu, Globalization, and the transnational migrations that are part of it, have begun to see foreign settlements take root in China’s cities. This paper highlights an interesting and little-known phenomenon – African enclaves in Guangzhou – to show how they have formed and what problems they are facing, particularly that of spatial-segregation. The paper proposes a strategy for dealing with these problems through spatial design and takes account of realistic planning to try and produce a more socially-minded adaptation measure. By allowing African migrants participate better, live better, and stay better, we see how actions for improving the living environment, and for promoting the integration of the Xiaobei Road community, are based on five basic principles: accessibility, quality, efficiency, diversity, and identity. The goal is to transform the entire city of Guangzhou into a place friendly for African (and other) migrants, with spatial regeneration and governance strategies actively mobilized to help them participate in the life of the city. This is an urban development strategy that thoughtfully considers the living habits and cultural background of the Africans themselves to ensure that their new home in the city is a friendlier and better place to live.

Our second Chinese paper is Xiaojuan Liu’s “The Impact of Hong Kong’s Urban Renewal on Chinese Migrants,” which brings us to the Sham Shui Po district, a magnet for Mainland Chinese migrants, particularly females, children, and the elderly, most of whom are non-skilled workers. Lacking economic or other resources, these migrants tend to cluster in central areas, where building quality is poor but where they can find strong social networks. Urban renewal, however, is threatening these networks. This paper questions Hong Kong’s current development-led urban redevelopment, which is leading to gentrification. It identifies four main elements that are particularly problematic. First, in the name of housing and commercial renewal, old buildings are torn down and, despite household numbers increasing, small affordable residential units are reduced. Second, new projects’ commercial podiums limit low-skill job opportunities because, while the number of shops remains the same, their average size increases such that migrants can no longer afford them. Such shops also face inwards towards the shopping malls, not the street, meaning they no longer function as a public space supporting informal social networks. Third, developers provide public services (as they are obliged to do by the authorities), but they locate them on upper floors and behind gates so that migrants do not even know they are there. Fourth, there is a spillover effect from nearby gentrification (especially on Haitain Street), whereby small businesses are pushed out by higher rents. Migrants who come to places like Sham Shui Po see them as an Arrival City, a place that helps integration. Redevlopment, even when well-intentioned, is damaging the very networks on which these people rely. This has the danger of turning Sham Shui Po into what Doug Saunders calls a place of “failed arrival.”

Staying on the topic of Chinese migration, but this time to the West, “You Wu’s” “The Death and Life of Amsterdam’s Chinatown” looks at ways of giving this fascinating yet disappearing part of the city a vibrant future. Her paper begins by looking at Chinatowns generally, observing that they tend to appear very similar wherever they happen to be in the world, yet they cannot be associated with any particular location or time period in Chinese history. Amsterdam’s Chinatown, known as Zeedijk, was once a reputable area populated by wealthy merchants. It then degenerated into a migrant district in the 19th century and is now next to the city’s red-light district. Identifiable by its decorative characteristics, mostly in the form of exaggerated Chinese-style ornamentation, the number of Chinese store has decreased in recent years. This is tied to the fact that the face of Chinese migration to the Netherlands has changed in the 21st century, with newcomers tending to be better educated and better off than their predecessors, and so without the need to cluster in an Arrival City. The question of what to do with this characteristic but threatened district is answered by a vibrant proposal that frees itself from the stentorotical image of Chinatown. Wu proposes replacing it with a vision that is contextualized and varied and which could transform the area into a series of collaborative public spaces, rather than the current tourist-oriented destinations, where locals (Chinese and other) can be involved in the transformation itself. The proposal’s collaborative public spaces promote peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding among these different groups, which make a refreshing change from the distinctly Orientalist view of Chinatowns that we are used to.

Conclusion

All of these investigations, some with their planning and design proposals, offers new insights into the increasingly important issue of migration. They show the continued importance of exploring these issues through education and, more importantly, disseminating that research to as wide an audience as possible so that their new ideas have a better chance of being implemented.

Notes

6. Ibid: 70.
7. Ibid: 89.
11. Ibid: 11.
15. Ibid: 21l.
17. Ibid: 3.