

## **How Contexts Matter: Rethinking Modes of Incorporation in Migration Studies**

### **Abstract**

Globalization and drastic social changes in the contexts of immigration and emigration over the past half century have shaped contemporary trends of cross-border movements, socioeconomic origins of immigrants, and immigrant social mobility. The segmented assimilation theory highlights the significance of human capital, modes of incorporation, and family structure in explaining variations on integration outcomes of immigrants and their children (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). The mode of incorporation, as a core analytical concept, is defined in two sets of interacting components: the context of exit and context of reception. While the context of exit generally refers to pre-migration human capital (e.g., education, job skills, and language proficiency) both at the individual and group level, the context of reception is measured by four layers of contextual factors pertaining to an immigrant group in the host society: government policy, labor market, ethnic/racial stereotyping and discrimination, and pre-existing ethnic community. The segmented assimilation theory posits that the modes of incorporate determine intergroup disparities in integration outcomes. But critics often view the concept of modes of incorporation as merely a typology. As any typology, this one fails to capture some of the important specifics of an immigrant group's historical experiences, particularly ethno-cultural characteristics (Perlmann 1998). Other critics also point to the concept's operational limitations (Waldinger & Catron 2016; Waters et al. 2010). Based on a descriptive analysis of the trends and patterns of intra-Asian migration and migrant incorporation in different Asian societies, Professor Min Zhou critically assesses the utility and applicability of the concept of modes of incorporation in migration studies and raise questions for future research.