Localities of the Global: Asian Migrations between Slavery and Citizenship

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Migration has been a central concern of many areas in the writing of European history, and even more so when dealing with the histories of the white settler colonies of North America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.[1] In contrast, migration overseas constitutes a mere footnote (if it is mentioned at all) in densely populated China and India, where the total number of those who migrated out of the country in the last couple of centuries was a relatively small percentage of those who did not. In his thought-provoking and far-reaching essay, Adam McKeown challenges us to look beyond the normative model of "global" migration that focuses solely on European migration. Through innovative research and the compilation of range of data on China, India, central Asia, Japan, Siberia, south-east Asia that are seldom collated and analyzed together, McKeown demonstrates that Asian migration from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries was comparable in volume to the trans-oceanic migrations from Europe. The term "global" as the theme of McKeown's essay, used as an adjective, evocatively captures the migration patterns and circulations of the modern world. But the concept of global is also the definition of the process underlying the modern economic and political system that through its very logic of reproduction creates unequal and uneven terrains. My comments explore some aspects of this unequal terrain.

MIGRATION AND EMPIRE

The re-evaluation of the total numbers of people involved in Asian migration in McKeown's model rests on incorporating intra-Asian and intra-regional migration, particularly Manchurian migration, into the totals. Leaving aside the question of whether migration to Manchuria, a integral part of the Qing empire, should be singled out for raising the tally, McKeown clearly establishes that populations all over Asia were on the move at the same time that Europeans were migrating to the Americas. While Euro-American scholarship elevates transatlantic migration to the

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1. E.g. Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham, NC, 2002).

foundational framework of national history, particularly in North America, there is, however, also a curious silence in this literature about the Native Americans dislocated by the migration of thousands from Europe. From Argentina to Alaska, from east to west in North America, not to mention South Africa and Australia, global migration had two faces.

The same processes of the development of capitalism that led to Europeans leaving and arriving in these different parts of the world also affected the peoples in the lands they came to. If ethnic Han migration to Manchuria made it "more Chinese", and thus a more integral part of the empire, European homesteaders in the American Midwest and West did no less for the American state and capital. The forced relocation of the native peoples in the Americas to climates and economies that they were unfamiliar with is part of the same history of nineteenth-century European global migration and would complicate the story of opportunity and choice that is also part of the normative model of transatlantic migration histories. While McKeown questions the first part of this narrative of European exceptionalism, he implicitly accepts the voluntaristic choice and opportunity model as the logic of global migration. In contrast to the uniformity of global migration patterns suggested by McKeown, a comparative analysis of the two different types of state forms of the Qing imperial and American republican empires would elucidate the underlying divergent patterns of the migrations to their respective territorial frontiers.

MIGRANT LABOUR WITHOUT CITIZENSHIP

Across the oceans, the historiography on migration in China, India, and other Asian countries typically has little to say about the amply documented intra-regional migrations that Mckeown brings to the fore in his tabulations. The focus of the national narratives in textbooks remain Beijing, Delhi etc, and migration is referred to only in connections with indentured labour migration overseas. Although the Qing imperial state, like every other imperial state before it, sponsored ethnic Han migrations on a regular basis to its frontier (non-Han) regions, narratives on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China remain premised on frameworks of localized agrarian populations. The second half of the nineteenth century also saw millions crossing provincial boundaries and relocating to south-east Asia and elsewhere in the wake of massive rural rebellions. This history is also sidelined. Consequently, notions of travel-adverse Chinese villagers are still an accepted baseline from which to approach studies of Chinese migration.[2]

2. E.g. Wang Gungwu, *Don't Leave Home: Migration and the Chinese* (Singapore, 2001), argues that migration abroad started reluctantly only after the Opium War. Migration across the Indian

Intra-regional migrations have a long history for all parts of Asia. Annual migrations and sojourning abroad for ten or twenty years was a normative pattern for generations of men from the seventeenth century onwards in particular areas of China, such as the Pearl River Delta districts of Guangdong, Chaozhou, and Shantou districts in eastern Guangdong, and the coastal districts of Fujian province. In addition to labour migrations to Dutch holdings in Taiwan and Batavia, there were legions of Chinese traders living throughout south-east Asia. These were the same regions from which the migrants to the US and many other parts of the globe originated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[3] In the Indian context, reiterations of supposed Hindu caste taboos which existed against travelling across the black waters (*kalapani*) notwithstanding, the historical evidence shows that thousands of traders from a variety of religious communities, including Hindu, routinely travelled to and lived for decades in south-east Asia, central and west Asia, and eastern Africa both before and after the nineteenth century and formed secondary families.[4]

There are other histories of intra-regional migration starting from the late eighteenth century. The intra-Asian slave trade has not been well studied. The Indian Ocean slave trade that included Asians and East Africans certainly expanded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the active role of the Dutch in this trade.[5] In the nineteenth century thousands of Indians moved in convict transfers to British penal colonies in south-east Asia ranging from Bengkulen, Malacca, Penang, the Straits Settlements, Amboyna, and Java. The infra-structure of Singapore, acquired by the British in 1819, was largely built through Indian convict labour. Besides Chinese convict labour also arriving in these penal colonies from Hong Kong after 1843, the other major labour group in south-east Asia were African slaves, predominantly female, from Madagascar.[6] The Chinese and Indian convicts were predominantly male and their relation-

subcontinent in the pre-British period is largely under-researched. Intra-regional migrations sponsored indirectly by the state took place. For example, troop movements across the Indian subcontinent, a fairly continuous affair for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, involved the entire family and such camps of several thousands resulted in new settlements after every military campaign. See David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton, NJ, 1985).

3. June Mei, "Socioeconomic Origins of Emigration, Guangdong to California", in Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich (eds), *Labour Immigration under Capitalism* (Berkeley, CA, 1984), p. 234. See also, Sucheta Mazumdar, *Sugar and Society in China: Peasants, Technology and the World Market* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), pp. 206–210.

4. For Sindhi migration, see Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants 1750– 1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge, 2000).

5. Marcus Vink, "The World's Oldest Trade: Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century", *Journal of World History*, 14 (2003), pp. 131–178.

6. Anand Yang, "Indian Convict Labour in Southeast Asia in the late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries", *Journal of World History*, 14 (2003), pp. 179–208.

ships involved both African and Malay women. Indeed, the empire came together in the Straits. Convicts in the Straits Settlements were described in 1853 as including people from "all the tribes of Asia from the Punjaub to Ceylon, but also men from many of the provinces of China, Jews, Parsees, Seedi Caffers and Malays".[7]

But then, why did this model of a forever non-migrant Asia emerge in the literature on global migration? To some extent it is perhaps the legacy of colonial processes in the shaping of categories of knowledge production. The equation of an immobile peasantry with a static society where Chinese peasant sons supposedly did not leave home, and caste taboos that barred travel was part of nineteenth-century Orientalist constructs of China and India positing a stagnant unchanging "East" versus a dynamic "West" of mobile youthful Europeans willing to cross oceans to fulfil their dreams. These ideas also received support from local social elites, who saw their own positions destabilized by those who could opt out of their social control through migration. But why has this model of minimal Asian migration persisted in the post-independence period? Is it because the saga of grounded peasant producers and ethnic differences provide the basis of postcolonial neo-nationalisms throughout Asia?

Although intermarriage with locals and resettlement were as integral a part of the peopling of Asia through the centuries as of other continents, today, regardless of the generations that have passed since the first settlement, Peranakan in Indonesia, Muslims in India and China, Tamil Sri Lankans, and Japanese Koreans in Japan are constructed as "outsiders" for ever after. The more recent histories of border formations and the nation, written first during the colonial period, have been read backwards to create imagined identities of exclusivity and purity upholding the priority rights of sons of the soil and the "authentic national." Americans were not the only ones to deny Asians citizenship rights. While citizenship through naturalization rights in the country where one works, contributes taxes, and grows old in has become possible in north America, Asian governments continue to be singularly hostile to the immigration of other Asians and the granting of citizenship rights through naturalization is almost impossible. Multi-cultural histories of all the diverse peoples within a nation-state do not exist in any of the school textbooks anywhere in Asia. While much work remains to be done, Adam McKeown's contribution by high-lighting significant intra-Asian migration in the recent past begins to destabilize one of the salient narratives of Asian nationalist historio-graphies.

7. India Criminal Judicial Consultations, 1853, as quoted in Anand Yang, n. 6. "Seedi Caffers" refers to the Hadramut and Yemen; "Caffers" was used for all Africans.

AFTER SLAVERY: RACIALIZATION AND EXCLUSIONS

If Asian migration was comparable in volume to European migration, does it follow that they occurred under similar labour conditions? What were the cultural legacies of slavery? Periodisation is always a tricky affair but, generally speaking, the beginning date of McKeown's survey of 1846 marks a decade of momentous global transitions in the history of colonization. As a result of the Treaty of Nanjing, Britain acquired Hong Kong in 1843, which emerged as a central node in all trans-Pacific Asian migrations. The 1840s marked a new era of colonialism for, with the conclusion of its campaigns in Punjab and much of India under control, Britain turned its attention to adding to its already significant holdings in Southeast Asia. The US marched west and gold was discovered in California in 1848. Industrialization, the railway, followed by steamships in the 1860s enabled larger numbers of people to move than ever before. As this checklist shows, the 1840s marked a transition out of the pre-Industrial Revolution world to a world of European hegemony and uneven economic development.

Simultaneously, as McKeown points out, the 1840s world marked the beginning of the transition out of slave trade and slave-labour-based economies. While slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1838, Sweden abolished slavery in 1846, France in 1848, and so on in Europe, in the Americas it lingered on as a legal institution. In the US it was abolished only in 1865, Cuba in 1886, and Brazil in 1888. More relevantly to the argument here, the nineteenth century became a more variously racialized world in which biological racism and racial hierarchies acquired a new salience *alongside* the dismantling of slave labour. The legal, cultural, and social institutions that had segregated and created hierarchies based on race did not disappear but were reinforced. Regardless of origin of the migrants and points of entry, the diverse legacies of slavery and apartheid inflected *all* labour and social relations. The changes that followed were slow, uneven in impact, and with unanticipated outcomes. Empire followed the end of the slave trade with particular forms of unequal power that were absent in the case of migrations from Europe to other parts of the globe. Above all, new states and institutions marking borders and and passports developed only after the slave trade ended.

The history of racialization of migration is also a part of the history of global migration of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. McKeown's normative model of "free" migration as a distinctive feature of all global migration from the mid-nineteenth century in which the Asians participated along with Europeans in equal numbers is therefore problematic. What would the totals on global migration have looked like if there had been no restrictions then or now on the number of people who could migrate and settle from China to the United States? In the highly

racialized American, Australian, British, Canadian, Caribbean, European, and South African societies Asian migrants faced racial discrimination, immigration exclusions, restrictions on land and housing purchases, marriage, and segregation in schools and union membership.

For the mid-nineteenth-century Chinese migrants in Cuba, which alone had more Chinese than all of the US in 1860, in the guano fields of Peru, in the Mississippi Delta and Georgia in the post-Civil-War American South, in the tin mining camps of Sumatra, in the cane fields of Guyana and Surinam and so on, everywhere where Asian migrants came in as indentured workers on the heels of slavery, they faced conditions directly inherited from those of slavery. Migrants to localities that had not had slave-labour dominated economies undeniably had different experiences. In Hawaii, where many Chinese men came in as artisans in the 1840s and 1850s, they married local Hawaiian women and became merchants. But this did not mean that racialized hierarchies were irrelevant to the migrants. When the plantation economy developed in Hawaii various racial hierarchies were used as strategies of labour control. Later, Hawaii's admission to statehood as the fiftieth state was repeatedly stalled by southern lawmakers who did not want an Asian-American-majority state as part of the normative notion of the US. Similarly, while the experiences of the Chinese in San Francisco were arguably different from those in the Caribbean or the American South, there was nonetheless racialization of the Chinese in California in the anti-Chinese movements.

McKeown's essay takes up the temporal juncture of Asian migration commencing in the period after slavery, in his discussion of "period-ization" but without a discussion of the new system of global hierarchies of race that emerged in tandem with empire. Slavery marked more than a system of labour, since in its wake biological and cultural hierarchies developed to justify the institution and its legacies. "White Australia forever" and other similar exclusions limited Asian migrations, and in other cases slotted Asians into unequal racial hierarchies alongside all other peoples of the colonized world. European and North American nations constructed their national identities in racialized terms.[8] In this sense, the idea of global migration for the period 1846–1940 turns out to be a very selective narrative. Then, and now, if an individual happens to have the wrong passport, moving beyond the borders of the country that one is born in is not easy. We do not see newspaper accounts of Europeans drowning while trying to cross the Mediterranean to Africa or of Americans dying while trying to cross the desert to Mexico. The reverse happens weekly and oftentimes everyday. The significance of the institution of slavery as underlining the formulations of racial geographies

8. Vasant Kaiwar and Sucheta Mazumdar (eds), *Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orient, Nation* (Durham, NC, 2003).

transcends the closures of periodization as long as racialized narratives of the nation-state and national culture continue to create exclusions within global migration.

LABOUR ARRANGEMENTS AND GLOBAL MIGRATION

In the section on "periodization" McKeown takes up the key theme of "free" versus "indentured" labour migration, a distinction that has largely been used by scholars to delineate patterns of Asian migration from those of European migration. His discussion on the role of governments in both sponsoring and curtailing certain types of coolie migration is a welcome addition to the literature. But the role of local domestic social-property relations in framing the labour arrangements of the migrants remains to be explored in this model.

For example, Chinese children who worked as domestic servants in both North America and south-east Asia were most, as likely as not, like the sex workers, bonded workers. China did, after all, in 1949 have what has been described as "one of the largest and most comprehensive markets for the exchange of human beings in the world", and in many parts of China "nearly every peasant household was directly or indirectly affected by the sale of people".[9] The widespread phenomenon of bonded or enserfed (*dianpu and dian'nong*) farm workers in China through contracts that were generational relationships of subservience have been studied by historians of the Qing.[10] Subservient social arrangements bonded ethnicized groups such as the *danmin* or "boat people" in the Guangdong region to the more powerful. The contracts used for bonded Chinese sex workers in San Francisco were similar in terms to the contracts used for bonded farm workers. A larger percentage of Chinese women in 1870s San Francisco were bonded in comparison to the men and worked as sex workers.[11] This raises the question of the extent to which local social relations were reproduced as unequal labour arrangements among the migrants.

Rather than separating the labour relations of Chinese migration as McKeown does into diametrically opposite models of "free" migration versus indentured labour, it is perhaps more productive to articulate the labour relations of this period as ranging between the two systems. The Chinese grocer in San Francisco or Vancouver who paid for his own ticket was part of the larger social landscape of China. His own personal

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9. James Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley, CA, 1980), p. 223.
10. Ye Xian'en, *Ming Qing Huizhou nongcun shehui yu dianpu zhi* (Anhui chubanshe, 1983).
11. Lucie Cheng, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth Century America", in Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich (eds), *Labour Immigration under Capitalism* (Berkeley, CA, 1984), p. 421.

arrangements might have simultaneously reflected a range of labour relations that covered the spectrum from indenture to self-employed.[12] To discard the distinctions that underlay the social relations that allowed for extra-economic coercion in many parts of Asia for the simplified dichotomy of free-waged labour versus indentured-bonded labour of migration history runs the risk of replacing one myth of unfettered European migration seizing the American dream with another myth of Chinese migration driven by choice shaped by uniquely efficient social networks.

TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES: NETWORKS OR FAMILY ECONOMICS

In the last segment of his essay, McKeown turns to a discussion of migrant networks. Drawing on the seminal work of Donna Gabbacia on female migration, he touches on the subject of female labor migration and European male sojourners. The rediscovery of the Chinese family at the core of the migrant network in the language of market economics, as an "investment portfolio"[13] as McKeown puts it, however, amplifies the assumption of market opportunity and calculation that is established by the parameters of free migration models from the nineteenth century onwards. But how much choice did individuals or their families exercise when in the mid-nineteenth century roughly one-third of all workers in many parts of Europe were too poor to marry and raise children?[14]

Overall, global migration to the Americas in this period was marked by repatriation, not settlement. "Returning home after a season, a year or a few years"[15] was a long established pattern for several groups in the European migration streams to the Americas.[16] Nugent calculates that between 1857–1914, the number leaving was 43.3 per cent of the number arriving in Argentina. For Brazil, it may have been as high as 66 per cent. From the US, in spite of nationalist mythographies that those who arrive never want to return, departure figures for the years 1908–1914 show that the number leaving was 52.5 per cent of the arrivals. An Italian government study done in 1926 found a 63 per cent return rate for the years 1902–1923, and an overall percentage of about 50 per cent return between the 1880s and early 1920s. There was a 46 per cent return rate for the Greeks between

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12. See for example, Denise Chong, *The Concubines' Children* (New York, 1994), or the role of snakeheads operating in New York Chinatown today.
13. Adam McKeown, "Global Migration 1846–1940", *Journal of World History*, 15 (2004), p. 178.
14. Michael Mitterauer and Reinhard Sieder, *The European Family* (Chicago, IL, 1982), p. 132.
15. Walter Nugent, *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations* (Bloomington, IN, 1995), p. 35
16. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

1908–1930. The average rate of return for most national groups was between 20–30 per cent.[17] This suggests that, rather than migration dissolving the social relationships of the homeland, networks built up through migration were essential to sustain because relocation was only a phase in the lives of some migrant groups.

Like their European counterparts, about 25 per cent of Chinese males also could not afford to marry in late imperial China. In addition, there was clan and lineage warfare, as massive rebellions were endemic throughout south China from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. Migration became a strategy for acquiring the funds for a bride price, for getting young men out of the region in time of war, and also for sustaining the family farm. Since I have detailed this elsewhere, let me just mention here that in the case of Guangdong and Fujian, the low level of migration of Chinese women reflects the importance of their labour in comparison to that of men. Women's work comprised working in the fields raising subsistence food crops for daily food, raising and spinning silkworms, spinning cotton, tending pigs and chickens, gathering fuel, hauling water, and cooking, not to mention raising children and looking after the elderly. Female labour was indispensable to the maintenance of the family farm and household while the labour of the male, who did none of these jobs, was dispensible in southern China.[18] The absence of women as deviation in migration patterns is an ideological construct. The transnational family of Taishan may not have been all that different in their concerns from the family in Calabria. In both locations, their aspirations would have been shaped by their common desire to keep their small farms and subsistence resources out of the market, and resist the dispossession and proletarianization that happened earlier in northern Europe. That this process of dispossession reached an earlier maturation in England than anywhere else, leading to the colonization of North America and the new economic and social arrangements of Atlantic capitalism, then becomes crucial to understanding the differential impact of migration on different parts of the globe.

Perhaps the challenge awaiting the writing of global history is to move beyond efforts at parallelism in a Europe-versus-China model of global history. Reliance on the superficial numerical parity of European and

17. Mark Wyman, *Round Trip to America* (Ithaca, NY, 1993), pp. 9–14. For even higher figures of return from Canada, see Nugent, *Crossings*, p. 35.
18. For an overview of the literature on "sojourner Chinese", see Franklin Ng, "The Sojourner, Return Migration and Immigration History", in *idem, Chinese America, History and Perspectives* (San Francisco, CA, 1987), pp. 53–71; Sucheta Mazumdar, "What Happened to the Women: Chinese and Indian Male Migration in Global Perspective", in Shirley Hune and Gail Nomura (eds), *Asian American and Pacific Islander Women: A Historical Anthology* (New York, 2003), pp. 58–74.

Asian migration noted by McKeown perhaps disguises rather than elucidates the very different locations of the two regions in global capitalism as a consequence of which the 30 million migrants from China had relatively little impact on the world at a particular juncture in history.[19]

19. McKeown, citing the work of Qiu Liben, "Global Migration", p. 145.