

11-1-2015

Biao, X., Yeoh, B.S.A., Toyota, M. (Eds.) Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in Asia. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

D. Parthasarathy Ph.D.
Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, India, dp@hss.iitb.ac.in

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Parthasarathy, D. Ph.D. (2015) "Biao, X., Yeoh, B.S.A., Toyota, M. (Eds.) Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in Asia. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 33.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol7/iss1/33>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact phuffman@lindenwood.edu.

Biao, X., Yeoh, B.S.A., Toyota, M. (Eds.) *Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in Asia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

The book under review is an exciting new addition to the growing literature, debates, and theorization on migration, borders, and transnationalism; it is exciting also because the book offers a set of essays that displays the editors' commitment to a comparative approach that brings to the fore phenomena, processes, and problems of Asian countries and regions. In comparing developing countries in Asia across the colonial and post-colonial periods, the book transcends regional ethnography and offers a cross-cultural comparative volume that is not only deeply and richly empirical but also theoretical in a non-hegemonic sense. Comprising a set of eight essays with an excellent introduction by Xiang Biao that sets the tone and provides a theoretical context to engage with the diverse case studies, the book also benefits from the multiple disciplinary locations of the authors. In studying the "nationalization" of transnational mobility in Asia, Asia itself comes to be defined and redefined both in reference to itself and its constituents, as well as in relation to global north and the global south. The volume includes essays that study and interpret return migrants from North America to India and Cambodia, as well as studies of Japanese migrants in Brazil and Korean Chinese return migrants.

Spanning a historical time-space of over a century, the articles engage both with the historical transformations that affect migration and transnationalism and critically debates changes in the meanings of concepts as they have evolved both in academic discourse and in popular descriptions. The essays are primarily ethnographic in nature, but rather than rest on thick descriptions, every author attempts a distinct theorization that prevents an easy absorption and use of the studies as "empirical grist for Western theoretical mills" (Deshpande, 1999).

Return migration, Xiang Biao argues in an excellent introduction, is manifestation of a new global political order and is influenced by the rise of an Asia "redux." The introductory chapter theorizes the phenomenon of return migration from western to Asian countries, intra-Asian return migration, and migration from other non-western countries. Explaining the new ways through which Asian states are facilitating "mobility through mobility," that is, by facilitating movement, he argues that return migration "tames mobility," while at the same time "nationalizing transnational mobility." A significant insight that emerges from the introduction and the different essays is that transnational return migration contributes to the diverse ways in which nations regulate migration, and, as such, rather than challenge state sovereignty, return migration ends up strengthening it. Of particular significance is Biao's highlighting of the book's contribution to methodological issues in global studies; he suggests that return migration in Asia is an analytically important phenomenon, as it underscores the notion of "Asia as Method" and thereby makes us view the global conceptual lens from an Asian perspective.

The first three chapters, dealing with the return to Japan of Japanese Brazilians, Japanese Imperial Army soldiers after the Second World War, and Japanese sojourners (*guiqiao*) to China after the revolution, deal with the historical period before the onset of current processes of globalization; the remaining five chapters describe aspects of return migration relating to the current phase of globalization. Issues of generation, class, inequality, state power, identity, modernity, and resistance are all raised and elucidated in the different papers, offering a more sociological, geopolitical, and political economy perspective on return migration despite the clearly ethnographic nature of research and writing. The book emphasizes the fact that return discourses of NGOs, governments, and media tend to coalesce; they naturalize the phenomenon of return – and even celebrate it. Underlying all of the different experiences and experiments of

the return migration phenomenon lies a new architecture of institutions that organize, channel, regulate, and process these movements.

Chapter one, by Koji Sasaki, studies the changing perception and meaning of return among Japanese migrants in Brazil and juxtaposes this with the rise and fall of the Japanese empire across three time periods, from the beginning of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty first. From a concern with issues of empire, nation, and collective identity in the first half of the previous century, contemporary migrant return has moved on to focus on issues of working conditions, lifestyle, and social relations and from intense moral reasoning to economic reasoning. Chapter two, by Mariko Asano Tamnoi, examines the return of defeated soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army over a prolonged period. Soldiers' mobilities are rarely a subject in migration studies, and hence this study of the prolonged return over several decades of Japanese POWs or those left behind in South, South-east and East Asia, and the ex-Soviet Union is welcome. Chapter three is again a historical study, scrutinizing the ways in which the political subjectivity of *Guiqiao* – return migrants who were born and had lived outside of China – was constructed in the PRC between 1949 and 1979. Wang Cangbai argues that the political invention of this category of return migrants played a role in the making of a “class-based rather than race-based Chinese nation” (p. 65). Cast as class enemies during politically turbulent times, these return migrants faced frequent discrimination during the Mao era. This changed quite dramatically as China opened up towards the end of the 1970s, and the *guiqiao* became a positive category, pitching them in racial terms as part of a global China that has common racial, linguistic, and cultural roots.

Chapter four, by Xiang Biao, theorizes and deploys the term transnational encapsulation, two aspects of which – international rupture and transnational policing – are used to examine compulsory return policies applied to transnational migrant workers in East Asia. Through in-depth interviews with over four hundred informants in four countries, the chapter focuses largely on unskilled and semiskilled Chinese workers who, as a result of state policy and practice, are forced to return home as a response to economic fluctuations and in order to minimize welfare responsibilities and defuse political, class, and ethnic tensions. In the process, institutional aspects of compulsory return are highlighted, with a focus on private repatriation firms, recruitment agencies, and state agencies. In chapter five, Sylvia Cowan examines a different kind of forced return: that of Cambodians with permanent residency rights in the United States who were repatriated back to Cambodia on grounds of their purportedly constituting threats to internal security. As much as a study of the United States' foreign policy as of the forced “redisplacement” of war refugees, the chapter offers a stinging critique of the enormous global consequences of American aggressive military intervention abroad, which creates international refugees, many of whom end up in the United States only to be forcibly sent back on grounds of threats to domestic safety and security. Johan Lindquist is concerned with the emergence of a bilateral deportation regime between Malaysia and Indonesia in chapter six. For Indonesian migrants to Malaysia, return is implicated in the very idea of migration, as seen in the cultural logic of the term *merantau* – “to go out into the world before returning home again” (p. 124). The chapter draws connections between labor rights and the human rights of trafficking victims, particularly women and how state intervention in protecting the rights of migrants and “returning” (deporting) them home is part of a larger strategy that aims to preserve the interests of neo-liberal economic growth.

Carol Upadhyia in chapter 7 researches elite, professionally educated upper middle class migrants who return home to India after making successful careers for themselves in the United

States. While the book in general also attempts an examination of space-place entanglements through a study of return migration, this chapter, with its location in the south Indian city of Bangalore, most explicitly addresses practices of place-making in an urban context through the lens of returning information technology knowledge workers. These workers “emplace” themselves in specific social matrices upon return, reiterating their class locations but not shying away from ethnic and caste positions. Like a few other chapters, this one also examines the entanglement of return migration of professional workers with new projects of modernity and nation building, one that excludes native, lower caste, poor citizens while projecting the “global Indian” as a central agent in the reinvention of India. The last chapter, by Melody Chia-Wen Lu and Shin Hyunjoon, charts the transformation of South Korea since the 1980s from a country of emigration to one of immigration, towards a multi-cultural society. A key point that is made is that the lack of an explicit articulation of “return” in Korean state policy, along with the state’s minimal engagement with the homecoming of the Korean diaspora signifies the “tensions between nationalism and globalization, and the contradictions between ethno-nationalism and civic nationalism” (p.162-3). Identifying three strands of ethnicizing, capitalizing, and nationalizing of the return migration process in reference to Korean Chinese, the authors posit that the deliberately ambiguous character of the return notion in South Korea is productive for refashioning and repositioning the nation-state in an era of globalization.

Most chapters and the introduction go with a combination of approaches derived from post-structuralist critique and the critique of neo-liberal globalization and capitalism. Given the strong theoretical analysis of rich comparative transnational ethnography, the volume would have done well to engage with classical structural problems of gender, patriarchy, caste and ethnicity, and class relations. These themes slither in and out of the interpretations, sometimes taken seriously other times dealt with somewhat superficially. Power, however, is a central theme of each essay, critically interrogating changing state practices towards citizens and diaspora against a background of the pervasive capitalization of nations, economies and cultures. This book will be useful to scholars in sociology, anthropology, history, geography, urban studies, politics, and global studies, particularly to those with empathy for studying regions from a transnational perspective.

Reference

Deshpande, Satish. *Mapping a Distinctive Modernity: "modernization" as a Theme in Indian Sociology*. Institute of Economic Growth, 1999.

D. Parthasarathy PhD
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, India
dp@hss.iitb.ac.in