Melancholy Order

ASIAN MIGRATION AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF BORDERS

Adam M. McKeown

MELANCHOLY ORDER

Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders

ADAM M. McKEOWN

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS   *New York*

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
Publishers Since 1893
NEW YORK   CHICHESTER, WEST SUSSEX

Copyright © 2008 Adam McKeown

melancholy order

Columbia Studies in International and Global History

The idea of "globalization" has become a commonplace, but we lack good histories that can explain the transnational processes that have shaped the contemporary era. Columbia Studies in International and Global History will encourage serious scholarship that is not confined to a single country or continent. Grounded in empirical research, the titles in the series will provide fresh perspectives on the making of our world.

Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia; Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought*
Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture*

For Gina,
  my treasure of coerced migration

Acknowledgments

Writing is painful. Thinking and research are pleasures. A National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend, junior faculty development grants from Northeastern and Columbia universities, and a Social Science Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship in International Migration allowed me to indulge my pleasures. Visiting fellowships at the Russell Sage Foundation in New York and the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore greatly eased my pain.

Many people have assisted in the development of this book through a diverse range of contributions, including commenting on drafts, pointing out errors, providing logistical support and sources, or making offhand remarks that crucially shaped my thinking. After writing a book about identification and categorization, I am acutely aware of the inadequacy of any attempt to properly classify their contributions. So I will express thanks through the simplest and most egalitarian method that I know, alphabetical order:

Jerry Bentley, Lauren Benton, Ulbe Bosma, Adrian Carton, Pär Cassel, Henry Chan, Diego Lin Chou, Matt Connelly, David Cook-Martin, Nicola Di Cosmo, Peter Dimock, Nicholas Evans, David Feldman, John Fitzgerald, Lisa Ford, Donna Gabaccia, Julian Go, Mike Grossberg, Eric Han, Dirk Hoerder, Walter Huamaní, Paul Jones, Ira Katznelson, Doug Knox, Adam Kosto, Philip Kuhn, Marilyn Lake, Eugenia Lean, Erika Lee, Steven Legomsky, Liu Hong, Leo Lucassen, Greg Mann, Patrick Manning, Sucheta Mazumdar, Leslie Page Moch, Prabhu Mohapatra, Brian Moloughney, José Moya, David Northrup, Pablo Piccato, Meha Priyadarshini, Qiu Liben, Anupama Rao, Humberto Rodríguez Pastor, Anthony Reid, Anne Routon, Saskia Sassen, John Scanlan, Elizabeth Sinn, Lok Siu, Neil Thomsen, Charles Tilly, Tiffany Trimmer, Mika Toyota, Gray Tuttle, Theresa Ventura, Michael Williams, John Witt, Xiang Biao, Yang Bin, and Henry Yu.

Of course, even the most rationalized method of classification cannot systematically recognize every feature of a complex reality. Thus a mass expression of gratitude must go out to the many audience members who have listened and commented on various manifestations of this book. The students of my graduate seminar, "International Orders," also read a rough draft of the entire manuscript in the fall of 2005 and influenced my thinking more than they probably know. Finally, a special expression of nepotistic gratitude must be reserved for Cecily and Gerri McKeown. I am afraid that the final product will not even partially make up for their sacrifices in making it possible.

B efore the Law stands a doorkeeper. To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country who begs for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot admit the man at the moment. The man, on reflection, asks if he will be allowed, then, to enter later. "It is possible," answers the doorkeeper, "but not at this moment." Since the door leading into the Law stands open as usual and the doorkeeper steps to one side, the man bends down to peer through the entrance. When the doorkeeper sees that, he laughs and says: "If you are so strongly tempted, try to get in without my permission. But note that I am powerful. And I am only the lowest doorkeeper. From hall to hall, keepers stand at every door, one more powerful than the other. And the sight of the third man is already more than even I can stand." There are difficulties which the man from the country has not expected to meet, the Law, he thinks, should be accessible to every man and at all times, but when he looks more closely at the doorkeeper in his furred robe, with his huge pointed nose and long thin Tartar beard, he decides that he had better wait until he gets permission to enter. The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at the side of the door. There he sits waiting for days and years. He makes many attempts to be allowed in and wearies the doorkeeper with his importunity. . . . The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, parts with all he has, however valuable, in the hope of bribing the doorkeeper. The doorkeeper accepts it all, saying, however, as he takes each gift: "I take this only to keep you from feeling that you have left something undone." . . . During all these long years the man watches the doorkeeper almost incessantly. He forgets about the other doorkeepers, and this one seems to him the only barrier between himself and the Law. In the first years he curses his evil fate aloud; later, as he grows old, he only mutters to himself. . . . Finally his eyes grow dim and he does not know whether the world is really darkening around him or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. But in the darkness he can now perceive a radiance that streams inextinguishably from the door to the Law. Now his life is drawing to a close. Before he dies, all that he has experienced during the whole time of his sojourn condenses in his mind into one question, which he has never yet put to the doorkeeper. He beckons the doorkeeper, since he can no longer raise

his stiffening body. The doorkeeper has to bend far down to hear him, for the difference in size between them has increased very much to the man's disadvantage. "What do you want to know now?" asks the doorkeeper, "you are insatiable." "Everyone strives to attain the Law," answers the man, "how does it come about, then, that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance but me?" The doorkeeper perceives that the man is nearing his end and his hearing is failing, so he bellows in his ear: "No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended for you. I am now going to shut it."

—Kafka, *The Trial*

melancholy order

Contents

Tables and Figures

Tables

Figures

Introduction

The Globalization of Identities

The modern passport is a palpable manifestation of an idealized global order. It is a tangible link between the two main sources of modern identity: the individual and the state. It specifies a unique individual within a matrix of standardized physical categories, and it guarantees that identification with the marks and seals of a recognized nation state. It embodies both the most private and the most bureaucratically alienating of identities, being an object of intense personal attachment even as it is a tool of global regulation and standardization. The photograph, accumulated visas, seals, and amendments further enrich it as a token of personal history even as they entrench the bearer more deeply within the files and machinery of state surveillance.[1]

The modern passport is addressed to a global audience; other documents can establish the link between nation and individual for domestic purposes. The passport announces to other states that the issuing state will take responsibility for the identified individual. To cross international borders without such a document (in the absence of special agreements to the contrary) makes one "illegal," "irregular," or a stateless person who must depend on the mercy of others. The efficacy of the document depends on recognition of the issuing entity as part of an interlocked order of nation states. The ability to generate standardized forms of identity is, in turn, an important part of obtaining this recognition. Although the passport claims merely to be official recognition of a preexisting individuality, the act of documentation itself makes nations and individuals into realities.

Of course, this model obscures as much as it reveals. Both individuals and nations still reserve many powers for themselves. Every person thinks there is more to himself or herself than can be embodied in a document. And nations rarely consider passports to be conclusive proof of nationality. Most accept passports only as a matter of comity and insist that they are under no legal

compulsion to do so. Passports provide few guarantees other than a state's promise to accept the bearers when they return. This model is especially misleading in its insistence on the equality of individuals and of nations.[2] Entry visas (or the privilege of moving across borders without one) and residence permits make finer distinctions beneath these formal claims of equality. They enforce distinctions of wealth, politics, and occupation and categorize individuals according to kinship, marriage, education, money, job, language, race, religion, intentions, and experience of persecution. Much of the actual documentary proof of identity is produced not by states and individuals, but by companies, political parties, friends, families, brokers, and lawyers. But despite these ever-proliferating participants and categories, the possible public identities are remarkably standardized around the world. The individual remains the final object of identification, and states still monopolize the authority to stipulate forms of evidence and make final decisions.[3]

What kind of world has made possible these passports, visas, and permits? They do not merely record a preexisting reality. They emerged as part of a global process of creating stable, documentable identities for individuals, and dividing those individuals across an international system of nation states. More specifically in terms of regulating global mobility, a multitude of new institutions, technologies, legal structures, and categories have constructed international borders as the primary site of regulation. Indeed, the ideas that border control is a foundation of sovereignty and that sovereignty entails a power to unilaterally regulate human entries have become basic principles of the international system, even as the institutions and techniques to exert this control have diffused and standardized across those borders. The very possibility of identifying an immigrant at the border, before he or she has been inserted into a web of domestic identification, depends on the legibility and reliability of documents and identities produced by foreign nations. In turn, the ability and willingness to produce such documents has become one of the many qualifications necessary for recognition as a state within the international system.

The global system of migrant identification and control is not inherent to the existence of an international system. It was a fairly late development, the specifics of which emerged from a series of historical contingencies in the continuing suppression of nonstate sources of identity and unregulated cross-border mobility. In particular, most of the basic principles of border control and techniques for identifying personal status were developed from the 1880s to 1910s through the exclusion of Asians from white settler nations.[4] In other

words, migration control did not emerge as a logical or structural necessity of the international system, but out of attempts to exclude people from that system. But by the 1930s these practices that were developed to fortify the edges of the international system had become universalized as the foundation of sovereignty and migration control for all states within the system. And far from being the repression of natural freedoms, this universalization was grounded in the expansion of institutions and ideals that have made it possible for us and even compel us to imagine ourselves as free, autonomous, self-governing individuals.

Globalization of Borders

The history of modern international identity documentation is a global history, inseparable from processes of human mobility and the proliferation of modern nation states. As such, it should be part of the history of globalization over the past two centuries. This assertion is not as simple as it may first appear because globalization is often understood as a process of increasing interaction. Passports, borders, and migration controls are often perceived as obstacles against integration and the very principles of free exchange that are at the foundation of an interactive world. But regulation and flows are inseparable. Identity documents and migration regulations were often established with the intention to both protect and hinder movement, or, to put it more precisely, to facilitate and block certain kinds of mobility.[5] Indeed, to be a "free" migrant is possible only in conditions of extensive government suppression of private coercion and other activities that may hinder safe passage. Much of the work of passports and bounded national territories is to provide precisely this kind of suppression and encourage mobility. The history of globalization as interaction is inseparable from the globalization of borders.

Globalization is a fundamentally time-based process. But most understandings of globalization distort the relevance of history, precisely because of the tendency to see globalization as something that overcomes rather than interacts with borders. Globalization is often defined as increasing flows, expanding interconnections and fragmentations, or time-space compression that overcomes older separations and distinctions. In this perspective, flows and interactions are historically dynamic. Cultural and political borders are static and unitary, necessary foils to globalization. They mark off "traditional" units that are prior to and outside of globalization, bereft of any significant

historical dynamic other than as obstructions that are increasingly transcended, penetrated, or undermined. This kind of global history—whether written in 1848, 1898, 1948, or 2008—often begins in the recent past of no more than twenty to thirty years, leaving earlier history to the hegemony of national territorialism, immobility, stable identities, and tradition.[6] "As a result," explains David Ludden, "we imagine that mobility is border crossing, as though borders came first, and mobility second."[7]

Scholarship on globalization has generated a powerful vocabulary of networks, diasporas, nodes, fields, unbundling, deterritorialization, scapes, and systems to describe interactions across diffused and transregional spaces. But these concepts have remained static, situated within the unhistorical epoch of the "new."[8] Defined against the static past of borders, debates over globalization have often revolved around question of whether flows of goods, information, and especially people are undermining the sovereign state. From a historical perspective, this is an odd question because migration and the consolidation of an international system of nation states have emerged symbiotically over the past two hundred years. They were and still are complementary processes. To be sure, flows and borders are often in tension, but it is precisely this tension that is the most important source of historical dynamism.

Attempts to write a deeper history of globalization usually describe a linear process that germinated in Europe as far back as the medieval period and then gradually expanded to engulf the world.[9] These are histories of unilateral diffusion rather than globalization. They leave no place for the processes of mutual interaction that are key to most understandings of contemporary globalization, as if the digestion of intervening contacts with the rest of the world had little impact on the processes themselves. Histories of the international nation state system also take this tack, finding its origins in medieval cities, the Protestant Reformation, and the establishment of a "Westphalian System" of territorial sovereignty in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. The subsequent global spread of this system without significant modifications is then a fait accompli.[10]

Interest in globalization has nonetheless stimulated pathbreaking historical research on the global movement of goods, people, and ideas beyond Europe. There is a growing awareness that writing history from the perspective of nation-based containers has obscured historical processes of interaction. Even in terms of simple measurement of interactions, the flows of goods and people from the 1890s to 1910s reached per capita levels similar to the present.[11] These histories tend not to describe a linear process, but cycles of expan-