Chapter 9
The Return of Return: Migration, Asia and Theory

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Does it still make sense to talk about "return" at a time when population movements become multi-directional, identity is replaced by hybridity, the local community is entangled with transnational space, and "home" and "away" are both destabilized and the division between are blurred? The notion of "return," once a deeply desired, life-changing event for many migrants, may inevitably give way to transnational mobility and circular exchange (Baubock and Faist 2010, p. 13; Brubaker 2005, p. 2).

Yet, precisely at the same time as return seems to become meaningless, return migration of different types are on the rise in Asia and beyond, ranging from returning forced and trafficked migrants to temporary labor migrants and the highly skilled. According to a survey by Hong Kong Baptist University in 2002, three percent of Hong Kong residents chose the category of "returnee" as their cultural identity (Hong Kong Transition Project 2002, p. 13).[1] These types of return migration take place both within Asia and from outside the region.

Return has, to a great extent, become a defining and patterning factor of transnational migration. Circular migration—whereby migrants are expected to return home by the time their visa expires in order to be allowed to return to the host

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[1] When Washington-based Migration Policy Institute (MPI) asked a number of leading migration experts what surprised them most in 2006, Howard Duncan, executive head of the International Metropolis Project identified the return migration of professionals to Asia as the most striking. "Although return migration is a common phenomenon, the number of returnees, especially to Hong Kong, is significantly higher than one would expect," he commented. (*See* Migration Information Source. Migration Experts Size Up 2006. December 2006. Available at www.migrationinformation.org. accessed on 10 October 2009.) At least 120,000 returned in 1999 alone (Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong SAR 2000:48; *see also* Ley and Kobayashi 2005, p. 116).

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countries to work again—is not only the main channel for non-EU citizens to enter western Europe, but also "functions as the rhetorical lynchpin and the conceptual glue that holds together the EU's larger migration management system" (Feldman 2012, p. 24). In Asia, such return-oriented circular migration has dominated labor migration since the 1970s. Regarding the highly skilled, the Asian tigers and, more recently China, shifted their policy priority from stopping outmigration to encouraging return. Refugees are also returning and have returned. The refugee agency, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), identified voluntary repatriation as the optimal durable solution for refugee problems and designated the 1990s as the "decade of repatriation" worldwide (Koser and Black 1999).[2]

The "return" of return migration poses new challenges to researchers. The movements covered by the rubric of "return" are extremely heterogeneous, and the meaning of return becomes very ambiguous indeed. If return migration was previously neglected (Koser 2000, pp. 56–60), it seems to have become an impossible subject to study. One response to this is for the researcher to maintain a sharp distinction between the "emic" and the "etic" perspectives, and to focus solely on the "real" return as defined by pre-set criteria. Such a distinction is provisionally useful for organizing basic information, and a normative differentiation between voluntary and coerced returns is also important in some policy discussions. However, the distinction may also obscure as much as it reveals. Migration and particularly return migration today are characterized by deep entanglements between emic and etic perspectives. For instance, by "return," we conventionally mean the movement from overseas to one's nation of origin, and probably very few returnees truly return to their place of birth (*see* Unger 1986; de Haas 2006; Labrianidis and Kazazi 2006). Why do we privilege the *nation* over the village, the dialect region, or religious community? No matter how technically neutral we strive to be, even the most basic definition of return tends to reinforce the established world system of nation-states. The word *return* itself has become a vocabulary of the nation. There are no such things as purely neutral terms that a social researcher can use.

In other cases in which the "emic" and the "etic" can be easily distinguished, such divide may not be theoretically productive either. Since Marcos' "Operation Homecoming" (Espiritu 2003, pp. 81–82) in the 1970s, the presidential ceremony held at the Manila airport to welcome returning overseas workers has become a firm political tradition in the Philippines. However, the migrants are encouraged to go overseas again once the holiday season is over. We would be missing the point by fixating on whether the return should be seen as real return; what matters is the fact that both the government and the migrants invest an enormous amount of energy in making the journey a kind of return. The more pertinent questions may be: why is this fictive return regarded as necessary, appealing, and productive? Why has the notion of return become politically significant in this particular historical period?

[2] Parreñas (2001) documents how return became a major theme of Filipino migrants' literature in Hong Kong, and the preparation for return dominated the life of Filipino entertainers in Japan beginning with their arrival.

Difficulties with conventional theorization urge us to seek new ways of conceptualization. This chapter explores how the heterogeneity of the experiences of return and the ambiguity of its meaning can be turned into sources of theoretical innovation. To do this, we will first need to move away from epistemological behavioralism. Borrowing from political science in the US, I use the term behavioralism to describe a common approach in migration studies that sees migration as a distinct individual behavior that has its own characteristics and regularities. Epistemological behavioralism assumes that we can, or have to, understand migration by examining migrants' activities (e.g., when and how individuals move or return), based on which, we can develop general theories about migration behavior.[3] I instead advocate an approach that regards migrations as phenomena co-constituted by different actors including not only the migrants, but also the receiving and sending states, the NGOs, the public media and international organizations. The co-constitution processes are fundamentally context-specific and may not be generalizable. Return is an action, as well as a discourse, a policy concern, a point of political contention and a strategic moment when the intersections between bounded state power and transnationally mobile subjects are particularly visible. By examining how the intensification of return movements in Asia since the 1990s is deeply tied to other larger socio-political changes, this chapter theorizes return as a mode of order-making in the world that formally consists of nation-states but also faces ever-escalating transnational movements. Asia is significant here not because it is different from the "West" or the "rest," but on the contrary, the region typifies some aspects of the relation between return migration and social transformations that are potentially global.

9.1 What is Migration Theory For?

Return migration is a norm rather than an exception.[4] It was historically commonplace that migrants moved back and forth before the erection of national borders.[5] This is widely recognized in the literature, though not systematically examined.

[3] Behavioralism differs from behaviorism. The latter is a school of psychology of learning that suggests that human behavior is socially acquired and thus socially malleable, while the former was largely a positivist movement in political science, particularly in the US, since the 1930s. For the differences between the two, *see* Berndtson 1997.

[4] The three ports of Xiamen, Shantou, and Hong Kong in South China, for example, recorded 14.7 million departures between 1869 and 1939, and 11.6 million returns between 1873 and 1939 (*see* Sugihara 2005). On the other side of the world, one-fourth to one-third of transatlantic migrants returned from North America to Europe between 1870 and 1940, amounting to ten million (King 2000, p. 29). For a careful research on the high level of return migration from the United States to Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, *see* Wyman (1996). For a recent review of return as a historical phenomenon, *see* Ley and Kobayashi (2005, p. 112).

[5] For a revealing case study of how Indian seafarers had moved back and forth without the intention of settling in the UK for a long period of time, *see* Balachandran (2012).

Ernest Ravenstein's (1885) "laws of migration," for instance, stipulated that every migration stream is accompanied by a counter flow, and that the migration-system theory of the 1970s identified return as an integral part of all migration systems (Mabogunje 1970; *see also* Nijkamp and Voskuilen 1996). However, apparent historical similarities should not blind us from discontinuities. Contemporary returns are no longer a "natural" demographic phenomenon as Ravenstein had argued. Returns are inextricably tied to the politics of nation-states. As Wang Gungwu (1981) has clearly established, overseas Chinese had been either unmarked or thought of as traitors until the Qing court in the late nineteenth century officially named them *huaqiao* (Chinese sojourners)—temporary migrants who waited to return. The overseas Chinese acquired this name not because they suddenly became inclined to return but because the Qing government began to perceive China as a nation instead of a civilizational empire potentially covering the entire world, and the government therefore felt compelled to define its relation with its overseas population in explicit terms as a way of defining its relation to the world. The nationalization of the notion of return can thus be seen as a discursive strategy with which the state laid claim to mobile subjects.

To appreciate historical specificities and to theorize return in relation to larger social changes, we first need to deconstruct what I call "epistemological behavioralism" that has dominated migration studies. Epistemological behavioralism sees migration as a distinct behavior, that is, a particular class of intended human actions taken in response to external stimuli and constraints. The behavior is predictable and susceptible to interventions. Questions as to the who, why and how of return are regarded as the main concerns (Gmelch 1980, *see also* Cassarino 2004 and 2013, which provide an excellent summary on how mainstream migration theories have conceptualized return). Underlying epistemological behavioralism are two fundamental yet largely implicit assumptions: first, migration results from individual behavior although it almost invariably becomes a concern as an aggregate issue (thus, it is different from other typical behavior, such as alcoholism or stealing). A free, capable and rational individual is the primary unit of inquiry and the standard figure in theoretical reasoning. Sharp divides between free and unfree subjects and between voluntary and forced actions are not only foundational for moral judgment, but are also a methodological necessity. The constructed nature of both free will and coercion tends to be neglected. Secondly, epistemological behavioralism lumps disparate human flows into a singular subject that can be analytically isolated, including the uncovering of externally discernable patterns and the internal, stable essence. The mobility of students, pilgrims, diplomats, soldiers, wondering intellectuals, beggars, which were historically treated as *qualitatively* different,[6] are now imagined into a single subject ("migration"). The first movement can be called individualization, and the second, totalization. It is only through individualization

[6] Prominent historian Wang Gungwu has expressed similar views on different occasions. He pointed out that, until recent time, the English word "migration" referred to the mobility of manual labor only. The wideningin scope of the term "migration" to include other groups was a result of the generalization and bureaucratization of migration control.

that totalization is possible. For instance, it is only by perceiving sleeping as an individual human behavior, regardless of how different people sleep differently in different time and space, that biologists can study all human's sleep as a total whole. For epistemological behavioralism, we should discover enough laws and rules in order to measure migration the same way biologists measure sleeping, eating and drinking.

Both individualization and totalization are epistemological movements that are probably specific to the twentieth century. The trend of individualization may have been caused by (1) the liberal ideology that foregrounds individuals as the main social actors and its associated assumption that effective policy interventions must enhance individual interest (migration cannot be simply stopped as a collective phenomenon, it instead must be managed by affecting individual desires and calculations); (2) modern positivist scienticism, which is largely methodologically individualistic; (3) nation-states, which are supposed to be responsible for all individual citizens directly (as opposed to being mediated by nobles, gentries, or manors), and therefore policies should address individual needs. As Adam McKeown (2008) has brilliantly demonstrated in his work on the history of Chinese migration, US authorities had perceived migrations as social processes and journeys, and it was only at the turn of the twentieth century that the question of "who the migrant is" superseded the question of "how a migrant got where he/she is." Migration has been thought of for a long time without constructing individual migrants as the central subject of analysis.

The trend of totalization may be attributed to the following: (1) The development of welfare states and democracy in receiving countries in modern times rendered it necessary to turn migration from amorphous, constantly changing, unstable flows into a measurable and transparent statistical artefact in order to calculate costs and benefits and to make policies accountable to the public; (2) The entrenchment of citizenship and nationalism made immigration a favorite topic of national debates, which by definition presents migration as an aggregate phenomenon; (3) The establishment of a specialized state apparatus for migration management brings about a conceptual boundary that marks out migration as a distinct subject for regulation. Demography and development studies, possibly the two most influential and rapidly growing sub-disciplines after WWII, both have significant influence on migration studies and both tend to reify migration as a generic phenomenon in itself.

Simultaneous individualization and totalization creates a range of contradictions. For instance, voluntary migration is viewed as a spontaneous behavior driven by individual will; on the other hand, the government management of migration has become so sophisticated and deeply penetrating into migrants' lives that "spontaneous migratory behavior" hardly exists. At one moment, we may be talking about migration as an individual behavior, and the next moment as a collective phenomenon.

This does not mean that we have to become nihilists when trying to understand migration and return. An analogy can be drawn between diaspora and return. "The universalization of diaspora," as Brubaker remarks (2005, p. 3), "means the disappearance of diaspora." But instead of jettisoning the concept of diaspora altogether, Brubaker suggests that scholars use diaspora not as a "category of analysis," but as a

"category of praxis," namely "an idiom, stance and claim" that the subjects of study attribute to themselves (2005, p. 12; *see also* Cohen 2008). Rather than speak of a "diaspora" as an entity, a bounded group and ethno demographic or ethno cultural fact, we should speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices and so on (Brubaker 2005, pp. 12–13). In my view, the "return" of return is inviting similar theorization strategies.

Taking return as an action, an idea or a claim does not mean that we will take what the actors say and what they do at face value. Different actors have different actions and claims surrounding return, and interactions between the multiple actors should be our focus. These interactions can be messy, but this is how social relations evolve and how history is made. The contradictions, ironies, incoherence and inconsistency in what people say do not mean that they are wrong and need to be corrected by scientific terminologies and methodologies. The contradictions are what real life is about. As Anna Tsing (1995) reminds us, a wheel would simply spin in the air and go nowhere without encountering the rough surface of the ground. Friction and contradiction produce movement, action and effect. Researchers cannot position themselves outside messy interactions. As mentioned earlier, we may have to be methodologically nationalistic when discussing return. This is certainly problematic, but it is conditioned by basic problematics in real life. Researchers cannot erase these problematics, but need to be critically aware of them. Methodical pursuits of neutrality and technical clarity without such awareness may well create more confusion.

Such theorization may not produce neat schemas or typologies; it aims to bring to light specific dynamics of history in the making. It does not predict what happens tomorrow, it seeks to engage with the changing reality now.

One of the biggest problems with positivism lies with its pretension that the researcher can stand outside of history. Epistemological pretention is crucial for imperialism, especially in its late, more sophisticated stage that we are going through now. Imperialism pretends provisional as the universal, projecting some of the European emic view as the universal etic. As feminist scholars pointed out a long time ago, all knowledge is knowledge from somewhere and all knowledge is situated knowledge. Theorization is, in a way, about articulating the situatedness. As such, the question of positionality became central for theorization. Asia provides a critical epistemological position from where we study the world.

9.2 What is "Asia"?

Asia is not only what I study; it is where I stand. In his seminal work, "China as Method," Mizoguchi Yuzo (1989) urged us to reverse the conventional approach in China studies that took the "world" as the method (reference point) to measure China as the subject. Since there is no such thing as a truly global standard, the "world" often means particular European experiences in practice. In contrast, "China as Method" examines specific historical developments in China as part of global

history, and thereby rethinks the world as the subject matter from the perspective of Chinese experiences. In this framework, China and the world become dynamic, entangled processes instead of static entities in isolation. However, what Yuzo argued for is obviously not specific to China studies. Recently, Chen Kuan-Hsing (2010) extended the proposition into an advocacy for "Asia as method." "Asia as method" encourages scholars in Asian countries to take each other as reference points, and by doing so, develop a scholarship that is free from Western colonialism and imperialism, and one that is both locally rooted and generalizable (Chen 2010).

Asia as a method certainly does not assume that the rest of the world is becoming like Asia or that societies worldwide are adopting "Asian methods" of development. Rather, it is an analytical strategy. By developing new perspectives based on experiences in Asia, we hope to discern problematics in the world that are otherwise less obvious or dismissed as aberrations. Modern social research is, to a great extent, a product of the practice of using Europe as *the* method. Mainstream scholarship on international migration, for instance, has long been overshadowed by the European experiences of refugees, especially the Holocaust, and this explains why certain concerns and concepts (e.g., individual rights and formal citizenship) are prioritized while others are marginalized (e.g., collective orders). It will not take us very far to simply critique this scholarship for being biased; we may instead appreciate its value as well as limiting it more by explicating its relation to the specific historical context. Rather than jettisoning established theories for being Eurocentric, it may be more productive to develop multipolar, decentered ways of knowledge production. Asia as a method aims at exactly that not because it is special or superior, but because it enables an extrication of migration research from Western concerns and, at the same time, provides a solid ground for developing substantive theories.

Asia is a method instead of a case of global studies because the relation of Asia to the world is not that of a part to the whole. Asia is actively interacting with the world rather than simply reflecting it. When we take Asia as a method in theorizing return, we need to take into account two levels of co-constitutive relations. First, return movements and other developments constitute each other in Asia. Second, Asia is itself an outcome of co-constitution between practices in the region and forces beyond.

9.3 The Return of Return and The Return of Asia

The rise—or the "return"—of Asia is a defining feature of the changing global order today (Mahbubani 2008). The rise of Asia not only denotes a geopolitical shift in economic gravity and political power, but also represents new institutional architectures and modes of governance. Central to the Asian institutional configuration is a particular articulation between state interventions and the free market, and between national regulation and transnational flows. Most Asian countries strive to globalize their economies, but at the same time, these countries jealously guard their national sovereignty and state power. The combination of strong and often au-

thoritarian states with free-market economies was a crucial condition under which the so-called East Asian economic miracle could take place in the 1970s and 1980s (Evans 1995). Postdevelopmental states that emerged in the 1990s are even more entrepreneurial and market-oriented, but they remain uncompromisingly nationalistic (Ong 2006. The so-called Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) way of regionalization is driven by two objectives of pursuing region-wide economic integration and safeguarding member states' political autonomy and sovereignty. ASEAN member states encourage international migration, and it is precisely for this purpose that they make it an explicit rule that each member must consider others' concerns on sovereignty when determining its own policies.[7] Thus, there is no surprise that return migration is commonly encouraged and effectively enforced in the region.

From this view, the intensification of return migration indicates a sociopolitical order that is emerging from transnational mobility: constant in-and-out circulatory flows order and fit movements into the framework of nation-states. Return thus nationalizes transnational mobility. Following Georg Simmel's celebration of the "miracle of road" for its "freezing movement in a solid structure" (Simmel 1997, p. 171), we may liken return programs to roundabouts. Roundabouts do not directly control the movement of each vehicle, but they channel the traffic into certain patterns that can be monitored and regulated from a distance. Movements on the ground do acquire their own momentum, and drivers do break rules from time to time; but the movements are shaped into flows that are governable by nation-states. "Nation-state" here stands for particular operational frameworks and organizational principles, not for closed territorial containers. Nationalization is a way of ordering transnational mobility instead of a means of territorial fixing. In contrast to the common proposition that transnational migrations challenge state sovereignty (e.g., Sassen 1996, pp. 67–74) and defy national policies (e.g., Castles 2004), transnational circulation in Asia serves as a (national) method of migration regulation.

The intensification of return migration is not uniquely Asian. On the contrary, experiences in Asia are analytically important precisely because they cast in high-relief some general developments across the world. The return of trafficking victims and refugees has been a common concern in Europe and other parts of the world. In terms of labor mobility, the EU has promoted "circular migration" between Europe and non-EU countries since the late 2000s. Return is a defining feature or even a precondition of migration (*see* Castles 2006; Commission of European Communities 2007; Martin et al. 2006). Economist Paul Krugman (2006) dubbed the proposal for permanent guest-worker programs in the United States as "the road to Dubai." National sovereignty in the twenty-first century is no longer solely based on territory, but also via the management of mobility.

[7] Association of Southeast Asian Nations, "ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers." (Available at http://www.aseansec.org/19264.htm, accessed on 14 April 2012.) Battistella and Asis (2003, p. 10) conclude that the ASEAN "regional approach [to migration management] remains at the consultative level, with minimal impact on policy process and decision-making in the individual countries."

9.4 Return and the Underlying Turns

Return migrations in contemporary Asia are driven by, and are in turn constitutive of, at least five sociopolitical turns. These five shifts are depoliticization, the formal informalization of labor relations, the formalization of mobility, the ascendance of outward-looking nationalism, and finally an integrative turn in the governance of mobility that brings sending and receiving states, state and non-state actors, and government policies and public perception into loose alliances.

Depoliticization indicates a shift in which, by the end of the Cold War, international affairs were no longer primarily framed by ideological divide and political antagonism, and meanwhile, supposedly neutral principles, particularly that of national sovereignty and human rights became the new hegemony. Depoliticization was responsible for the first large return flows after the Cold War, specifically the return of refugees. As refugee issues during the Cold War were deeply politicized and were attributed to Communist authoritarian regimes, the decisive victory of capitalist liberal democracy was supposed to have reduced the number of refugees dramatically. In Asia, the return of five million refugees from Pakistan and Iran to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2009 was "the single largest return program" in the history of the UNHCR (Integrated Regional Information Networks 2009). If the provision of protection for refugees during the Cold War was based on apparently universalistic, but deeply politicized, humanitarianism, the return of refugees was predicated on the belief that the nation-state, now supposedly free of ideological struggles, was the natural and neutral institution that every person should belong to.

The depoliticized perception about the world order also underpins the return of victims of human trafficking. The four Rs—rescue, return, rehabilitation, and reintegration—are recommended by international organizations as well as national governments as the optimal solution to human trafficking. The "Bangkok Declaration on Irregular Migration," signed by nineteen governments in Pacific Asia in 1999, recommended that: "(t)imely return of those without right to enter and remain is an important strategy to reduce the attractiveness of trafficking." Return is perceived as such a desired outcome that international organization staff are sometimes reluctant to identify a person as a victim who may not have a place to return to, because where there is no point of return, there is no solution (Lindquist 2013).

9.4.1 The Formal Informalization of Labor Relations

The liberal market model that has dominated the Asian economy not only made short-term contract employments prevalent, but also created a structural condition in which capital and labor were decoupled from each other and employment relations became fundamentally destabilized in the processes of subcontracting and outsourcing (Xiang 2012). Labor relation is informalized, and temporary workers became an economic necessity. The overwhelming majority of the 15 million workers who migrate from one Asian country to another are on strictly temporary terms

and have to return home once their contracts are due (Martin 2008). This can mean that about three million migrants are returning to various Asian countries from the Gulf alone every year. In some sectors such as entertainment, the rotation of foreign workers is built into the nature of the business to the extent that the migrants perceive their migration as a journey leading to return (Parreñas 2001; 2010).

Informalization is, however, implemented and sustained by formal state policies about return. Compulsory return is central to the control of unskilled labor mobility in East Asia. Migrant-receiving countries across the region commonly adopt a "no return, no entry" policy. That is, they determine the number of new arrivals from a particular country according to the returns to that country. Compulsory return effectively renders the relations between migrants and the host state as nothing more than a labor contract. A number of countries identify pregnant women and sick migrants as primary subjects of repatriation precisely because these "problematic" bodies bear the danger of developing social relations beyond economic contracts with the host nation. Compulsory return is also central to the simultaneous informalization of labor relations and the formalization of migration control.

9.4.2 The Formalization of Mobility

Despite the public outcry that irregular migration is running out of control, a formalization of migration has stood out as a clear trend in Asia since the late 1990s. Migration channels became more clearly defined, migration control strengthened and irregular migration decreased in proportion. Deportation, in which irregular migrants are forced to return to their country of citizenship, often from one Asian country to another, has been taken up as a main step towards formalization. This became particularly evident after the financial crisis in 1997. When the crisis broke out from June 1997 and continued until January 1998, Malaysia sent back more than 10,000 Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers, while South Korea expelled between 150,000 and 300,000 migrants and Thailand repatriated 6,000 Burmese migrants (Varona 1998). Initially an emergency measure, forced return was soon turned into a routine. Malaysia has deported tens, or even hundreds of thousands of migrants in each of the half-dozen crackdowns since the end of the 1990s. Japan expelled an average of 54,000 migrants a year in the 1990s and early 2000s (Ministry of Justice, Japan 2005). The scope and density of forced return in Asia are striking when compared to other parts of the world: in the 2000s, Australia removed and deported about 10,000 a year, the United Kingdom more than 60,000, and the United States nearly 400,000 (double the level 10 years ago).[8] In fact, Malaysian Home Affairs Minister Azmi Khalid called the Ops Tegas (Operation Tough) campaign in March

[8] For Australia, *see* the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Annual Report for the 2000s. For the UK, *see* UK Home Office. (2009). Control of Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom 2008. August 2009. Available athttp://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1409.pdf. For the United States, *see* US Department of Homeland Security (2011). 2011 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics (p. 94). Available at http://www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/publications/yearbook.shtm.

2005, which expelled 600,000–800,000 irregular migrants,[9] as "one of the biggest transmigration programs in the world" (Holst 2009). Commenting on the campaign, then deputy prime minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, warned that no category of irregular migrants would be spared including those with documents issued by the UNHCR (The Star, 4 March 2005). Forced return is now regarded as an effective means to reduce irregular migration and the number of unsuccessful asylum seekers worldwide (*see* Ghosh 1998; Koser 2000, pp. 69–70; Lakzco 2000).

9.4.3 Outward-Looking Nationalism

The highly skilled are perhaps the most visible returnees in Asia. Starting with the flows to Taiwan and South Korea in the 1980s, the return of the skilled became phenomenal in the late 2000s, partly driven by the decline in the economy in Europe and the US. For instance, a reported 186,200 Chinese students returned home in 2011 after the completion of higher education overseas, primarily in the US, Europe and Japan, an increase of more than 38 % compared to 135,000 student returnees in 2010 (People's Daily, 16 March 2012). The return of West-based professionals and entrepreneurs is perceived as a "return to the future"—in the rush ahead of global business and technology curves. Return is a project driven by enterprise rather than by nostalgia.

The return of the highly skilled is also celebrated because it re-energizes nationalism. Although portrayed as a manifestation of global market forces, flows are, to a great extent, facilitated and incentivized by states. China, for example, has invested tremendous amounts of financial resources to encourage return, and has turned return events into political rituals (Xiang 2011). In a world where imagined communities reach far beyond the national border (*see* Appadurai 1996), returnees from overseas are probably more capable than the supposedly quintessential, deep-rooted peasants or tribesmen of energizing nationalism. If the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is one of most arresting emblems of nationalism, as Benedict Anderson (1991, pp. 50–51) pointed out so aptly, in the time of globalization, the returnee is a powerful embodiment of nationalism. If the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier combines the senses of the sacred and the profane essential to modern nationalism, the returnee reconciles territoriality and extraterritoriality, which is crucial for nationalism in the globalizing age. This is, however, a new type of nationalism that bases national pride on the nation's position in the global market instead of on independence and self-sufficiency, defines national belonging in cultural terms, and considers economic redistribution and political participation less important. It is outward looking, culturalist, and often elitist (*see* Upadhya 2013).

[9] The campaign mobilized up to 500,000 officials and volunteers, and sent 600,000–800,000 migrants home, including 400,000 who left voluntarily for fear of harsh punishment and 200,000 to 400,000 who were deported. *See* Daily Express 2005. *See also* Chin 2008.

9.4.4 The Integrative Turn

There is discernible coalescence between sending and receiving states on return migration. The highly skilled are desirable for the country they return to partly because they are desirable in the country of residence. Unskilled or irregular migrants are unattractive to both the receiving and the sending countries; nevertheless, the countries agree that return is a migrant's right that cannot be denied and an obligation that cannot be easily waived. Compulsory return has been a basis for intergovernmental agreements on labor migration in East Asia since the end of the 1970s (Xiang 2013). As for victims of human trafficking, it is now an obligation for legitimate sovereignties to repatriate the victims and to admit the returned. Since the late 1990s, multilateral governmental agreements such as the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT), have created the infrastructure as well as pressure for national governments to enforce the return of victims of human trafficking. Sending states are willing to collaborate with receiving states because this enables them to establish closer relations with their overseas citizens and to tap into outmigration for national development. Receiving states share some authority in regulating immigration with the sending states (for instance, by delegating power to government and private agencies in the sending countries for selecting and screening would-be migrants. *See* Xiang 2013) because, given that immigration control is being tightened across the world, "the labor-sending state is perhaps the institution most able to effectively resolve the contradictory forces of labor demand and immigration restriction" (Rodriguez 2010 p. xxiii). Malaysia and Indonesia have developed relatively effective transnational operational systems to enforce return (Lindquist 2013). Instead of resisting the pressure from Malaysia to receive deportees, Indonesia as the country of origin in fact has used this momentum to tighten its regulations of outmigration.

Such interstate institutional coalescence means that return programs enable nation-states to enhance their sovereign power transnationally and mutually. Both sending and receiving states become more powerful in relation to migrants. This may shift the central tension in international migration from those between migrants and the receiving society and those between the sending and receiving states to that between migrants and alliances of states. An unskilled migrant worker violates regulations of both the sending and receiving countries if he or she fails to return as required, which can be punishable by both countries. In contrast, a highly skilled or a successful entrepreneur can become more valuable to multiple countries by moving back and forth between them. It is important to note that such institutional coalescence between states is largely an intra-Asia phenomenon. The repatriation of migrants from Europe and North America to many Asian countries remains cumbersome and is subject to ad hoc bilateral negotiations due to the lack of general consensus.

There is also an ideational coalescence regarding return migration. The fact that the notion of "return" is used to refer to migration journeys of vastly different natures should not be seen as a problem of misnomer. It instead indicates the construction of a hegemonic framework, a good common sense, that gives migration

particular meanings. Return discourses deployed by governments, NGOs, and public media on different types of migrants echo each other and collectively naturalize return and home. Since everyone is supposed to love home and is protected at home, return is assumed to be unproblematic for all migrants. What is wrong with asking someone to go back to where he or she "really" belongs?

The naturalizing effect of return is of course nothing natural in itself. The natural appearance of return is constituted by particular international agreements, and by the participation of NGOs, public media, business associations, and private agencies that specialize in recruitment and transport. It is these institutional arrangements that underpin the dialectics between differentiation and coalescence, between the national and the transnational, and thereby contribute to the ordering of mobility without hindering it. What it shows is that a hegemonic order is being constituted.

As Gregory Feldman (2011, p. 17) recently pointed out, one of the main challenges for migration studies as well as for global studies in general, is: "how to conceptualize global configurations of institutionalized power that absorb disparate policy domains, policy actors, and policy targets without central control or even a conspicuous desire to control in the maniacal sense of the term." Return migrations can provide a concrete point of entry for exploring how an overarching order emerges from seemingly decentralized, disorganized and disparate practices and discourses. The diversity and complexity in return migration become a productive source instead of obstacles to overcome.

9.5 Conclusion

The question of "how we can theorize migration" should be secondary to questions of "why we theorize" and "what theorization is." The "how" question cannot be addressed productively without the "why" and "what" questions being thought through. The answers to the "why" and "what" questions are always historically specific and politically informed. This chapter argues that the epistemological behavioralism as the currently predominant way of theorization is specific to the twentieth century. Its limitations are increasingly apparent when migration flows become more intensified and complex. We may never be able to capture the dynamics of migrations and their multifaceted social consequences if we treat migration as a behavior that can be described and predicted according to objective quasi-natural laws out there.

Influenced by feminist and socialist thinking, this article advocates that theorization should and can serve as a means of engaging with concrete reality and participating in the history. As concrete reality is always changing, theories should not look for stabile patterns and certain futures only, but should fully embrace contradictions and messiness. Looking from this angle, return migration as a predictable *type* of migratory behavior has indeed disappeared, but the diverse return flows as co-constituted by multiple actors cast sharp light on an emergent socio-political order. The figure of the returnee not only reconciles territoriality and extraterritoriality, but is

compellingly rendered as a trope that energizes and rearticulates nationalism in an era of increasingly fluid and indeterminate national sovereignty. Adopting the seminal ideas developed by Yuzo and others, the article suggests that Asia, a co-constituted and constantly changing region, provides a special position to theorize migration. Where we stand determines what we see. How we are aware of where we stand conditions how we see things. In sum, this chapter suggests that we should take return as a lens and Asia as a method for studying global changes. In doing so, we will hopefully bridge migration studies and Asia studies with broader concerns and therefore contribute to building a genuinely robust global scholarship.

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