Shipping Companies as Carriers and Barriers to Human Mobility: The Atlantic and Pacific Border Regimes of the United States

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The maritime impact on global migration is often overlooked despite the defining role of oceans on human mobility. Water surfaces initially posed barriers to migration, directing flows overland. Yet technological innovations turned rivers, lakes, and oceans into vehicles for all kinds of human interactions, including migration. Networks connecting hinterland and foreland converged in ports and spurred the exploration of new trade and migratory routes. They increased the connectedness between maritime and terrestrial life around small seas at first, then bridged the immensity of the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean from the fifteenth century. This marks the beginning of a new global era in which oceans no longer divided the world. The transatlantic triangular slave trade established the first long-distance maritime networks to transport human cargo on a large scale. In its wake, other forms of indentured and free migration movements developed across the oceans worldwide. By the 1850s, the stage was set for the age of global mass migration. Unprecedented mobility resulted from the combination of rising liberal regimes, steam-driven transport technology, and the demand for labor spurred by industrialization. Yet the high density of the flow as well as the growing ethnic diversity drove the major receiving countries to question the benefits of unrestricted mobility. This age of high imperialism and accelerated globalization offered a fertile ground for nationalism and eugenics. The global, cross-border interactions that characterized this era also contributed to the creation and consolidation of nation-state borders in which migration control played a central role. The function of the sea as a barrier was reinstated, in particular as states integrated private shipping companies as key actors in their efforts to develop state controls on human mobility.

This paradox of turning carriers into barriers of migration in the United States is the central topic of this article. The narrative shows how states tightened their maritime frontier zones and to what extent these influenced the consolidation of land borders, installing a control system based on exclusion that spread globally. The rise of the modern borders, here defined as lines delimiting political units, was more than a fragmentation of the world into nation-states. As Aristide Zolberg put it, the system also served to consolidate a world order, as it set "the first stones of a global wall erected by the rich industrial states to protect themselves from the 'invasion' by the world's poor." Through world-system analysis, growing attention has been focused on frontier zones, where two different systems meet: frontiers are considered as areas of interaction and overlap, in contrast to the border's function of differentiating places. Currently, in particular since the Fence Act (2006), the most iconic expression of such a frontier is the Mexican-American
This article analyzes the maritime origins of this global wall, from 1880 to 1920, through the eyes of the shipping companies that played a first-hand role in enacting, enforcing and evading these borders. The business perspective on border development gives a fresh look at the interplay of nationalism and globalization, while at the same time highlighting regional and local differences. Scholars have emphasized that laws excluding the Chinese from white-settler nations developed a legal rationale for barring the entry of certain groups, as well as the basic principles of border control and the administrative organization to execute these. For the U.S., it is claimed that that rhetoric and tools developed to exclude Asians were later copied to greatly restrict the entry of Southern and Eastern Europeans and subsequently mass migration as a whole. Adam McKeown thus concluded that standardized templates of migration control had diffused globally by 1910. Yet few studies have analyzed these transfers explicitly, while most research on migration to the U.S. is based on congressional sources that are restricted to a top-down perspective. Some recent studies, by using the case files of detained and deported migrants, provide a new, micro perspective, highlighting the gap between enacting and enforcing migration laws. This micro-perspective polarizes the history of rising modern barriers on human mobility, turning it into a two-sided battle between the migrant and the state.

This study shows that other actors—especially passenger transport companies—interposed themselves in determining the flows of migrants. For the North Atlantic, several recent studies point to the role of steam shipping companies in establishing the U.S. maritime frontier, serving as go-betweens for migrants and the state. This article extends these studies by exploring the connections, similarities, and differences between Atlantic and Pacific maritime frontiers of the U.S., along with their terrestrial ramifications. It deconstructs the notion of a U.S. border regime rooted in excluding Chinese and then expanding to obstruct the influx of other ethnic groups. Instead, this article argues that two different U.S. border regimes took shape simultaneously on the Atlantic and the Pacific: I thus question the existence of a U.S. national border-control system in the years before 1920.

Enacting the 'nationalization' of U.S. migration legislation: Atlantic versus Pacific

The business perspective on migration policies of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries permits reassessment of narrow, nation-based historiographies. Migration history, initially studied in major receiving countries, focused on policies of admission, integration, and assimilation from a top-down, state-based perspective. Subsequent studies started to integrate the agency of the migrants: they showed how migrants moved across porous borders. This approach reversed the initial distortion in the paradigm: it drew attention to the countries of departure, as their policies influenced the travel and settlement of migrants, and their ties to the home country. This revised paradigm allowed for the integration of emigration and immigration into an interconnected process, enhancing our understanding of transnational spaces in which individuals move and of the international relations which shape state policies.

Still, complementing immigration with an emigration perspective fails to grasp the full scope of migration policies, in that the role of transit countries remains discounted. Thus,
many thousands of migrants left Russia, Austria-Hungary or Scandinavia and then sailed from Germany or England to the U.S. As Donna Gabaccia argues, migration policies may be better debated from a global rather than a domestic perspective. This observation reveals that, during the long nineteenth century, many authorities were more interested in regulating and attracting the business of transporting migrants than they were concerned about who entered or left their boundaries. For a long time, migration policies remained subordinate to trade and maritime policies. The growing significance of trade and maritime policies influenced the dynamics through which the modern global border system took shape—dynamics in which the shipping companies claimed a key but overlooked role.

To exemplify this point we can refer to what became known as remote border-control policies. This refers to the principle that states seek to push migrant controls back from their own terrestrial borders as far as possible and preferably to the home country, before a person chooses to migrate. Aristide Zolberg emphasized that the first American Passenger Act (1819) pioneered the principle of selecting migrants before they left Europe rather than on arrival in the United States. Concretely, policymakers believed that imposing bigger space requirements for migrants on shipowners would increase the cost of transportation and reduce the arrivals of the poorest class. This hope proved illusory because, with the developing patterns of "chain migration," the cost of relocation was not necessarily borne by the individual migrant but often by family and friends who had moved previously. Moreover, as the migrant developed into a lucrative commodity on the North Atlantic, the competitive pressures for the migrant trade quickly cancelled out any restrictive effects of the Passenger Act. By the time the act came up for revision in 1840s, the European mass-migration movement was booming. To help American shipowners claim a dominant position in the lucrative market, the revised Passenger Act allowed American sailing ships to build a third deck, hence increasing their capacity. As with its pioneering predecessor, the British Passenger Act (1803), the main concern of the American Passenger Act was not the regulation of who left or arrived, nor in what conditions the migrants travelled. Instead, the act was to protect national shipping interests against foreign competition. By the mid-1850s, two thirds of the European migrants were brought in on American boats.

The abolition of slave trade had reconfigured the triangular patterns of transatlantic trade into two-directional ones, bringing timber, grain, cotton and tobacco from the U.S. There was little cargo to ship back to America from Europe until the mass migration movement developed. Migrants maximized profits and strengthened shipowners’ position on the market for American goods: shipowners were now able, to quote lower prices for American goods than ships arriving without passengers. This triggered a keen competition among shipowners, ports, and government authorities, all seeking to lure migrants. In the 1830s, the Bremen Hanseatic authorities successfully pioneered legislation directing migrants to certain routes and ships, rather than checking who left or entered. Similar legislation spread quickly to Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark, bringing a defining impact on transatlantic migrant routes. The Belgian case underlines the geopolitical interest in the trade. To consolidate the recently obtained political independence (1830), rulers sought to promote Belgium as a nodal point for international commerce. Through these trade relations, the young nation wanted to create goodwill from states to defend its independence against any challenges. They negotiated trade agreements and spurred the development of maritime networks, especially on the North Atlantic. Ties with the United States and the German states were judged essential to fight off the Dutch, then considered as the "natural rival." Authorities invested in infrastructure, in particular in
rail and waterways improving the connections with the hinterland. They negotiated reduced fares for Swiss and German migrants to reach Antwerp. Consuls advertised the port as "the emigration gateway to the New World," where laws and special officials protected the migrants on their inland and overseas journey. The government also subsidized the first transatlantic steam shipping line from continental Europe to the U.S.\textsuperscript{15}

In most European countries the only restrictions limiting emigration by citizens concerned the fulfillment of military duties for men. Aliens in transit to overseas destinations could travel freely after passing minor controls on health and financial means. The free movement of people was closely tied to the liberalization of trade and the ideas of reciprocity. Up to World War I, migration policies in Europe became steadily more linked to maritime policies: legislation directed migrants to national ports and national shipping companies, for economic but also military purposes. Ships flying under the national flag could be used for naval purposes if conflicts arose. For instance, when in 1894 the German Reichstag established eastern border control stations to check transatlantic migrants, the government entrusted management of the stations to German steamship companies. The German companies thus gained a powerful tool in directing the emerging eastern European migratory movement to their ships instead of foreign lines. The initial drafts of the German emigration law banned all foreign shipping lines from selling steamship tickets to German migrants on German territory. Under diplomatic pressures, the 1897 law eventually limited the exclusion to Dutch companies.\textsuperscript{16} However, the German shipping lines saw these policies backfire when other countries adopted them. The case of Italy was very clear. Within eight years of adopting its 1901 Emigration Law, Italy's shipping companies on the North Atlantic rose from one to five, relying largely on Italian-built ships. The proportion of Italians migrating aboard ships flying the national flag nearly tripled, from 18% to 51%. This experience underlines the effectiveness of using the migration stream to develop the national merchant marine.\textsuperscript{17} It also shows that adopting national policies to regulate human mobility had become generally accepted when global migration peaked.

In the United States, however, migration and maritime policies became dissociated during the 1850s, not least due to a problematic transition from sail to steam shipping. Congress initially subsidized various transatlantic steamship lines as part of the familiar policies to retain a dominant position on the passenger market. Yet it lost this technological battle of national prestige to Great Britain, allowing the latter to acquire a dominant position on the migrant trade. The Civil War brought decline of the American merchant marine. Authorities turned to protectionist maritime policies, defending shipbuilders over shipowners and coastal shipping over long distance maritime routes—thus withdrawing into continental isolation. Congress did not expand the navy, and neither did it associate its military needs to the developments of the merchant marine. As the major receiving country, the U.S. had a privileged position from which to steer the immigrant flow to the benefit of its merchant fleet, but the American Congress never did so. Regulations to advantage American ships, such as charging an extra $50 head tax to immigrants arriving on foreign ships, were never seriously considered. By the 1880s, the share of the once-dominant American merchant marine on the North Atlantic had fallen to 16%. Not even the Spanish-American war, which laid bare the weakness of U.S. imperial pretensions, convinced Congress to build a strong fleet.\textsuperscript{18}

Let us turn now, in this study of American maritime and migration policies, from the main Atlantic route to the Pacific. The trans-Pacific migration route opened much later and
began to expand just as the American merchant marine entered its Atlantic decline. American authorities turned to the Pacific to give their last significant pre-World War I appropriation to long-distance shipping. The subsidies given to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSS) allowed the first transpacific steamship line to be opened under the stars and stripes in the 1860s. Both trade and migration prospects were promising, as China was forced to relax restrictions on the movement of goods and people. Pacific competition was nearly inexistent, as compared to the Atlantic, where, by the 1870s, seventeen steam shipping companies operated 173 vessels in battling for a share of the market. The PMSS had only to reckon with the Oriental and Occidental Steamship Company (OOSC), also American. Each shipping initiative was connected to powerful railroads and operated a dozen ships. However the disassociation of maritime and migration policies by American authorities quickly compromised the growth of both lines. Just as on the Atlantic, steamship companies drew most revenues from third-class migrant transport, followed by cabin class transport, goods and mail. Yet by the mid-1870s the government restricted the Pacific migration movement by prohibiting the entry of (Chinese) prostitutes, convicts, and coolies with the Page Act. This restriction expanded strongly with the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. The companies managed to remain afloat because of the exceptions allowing travel for merchants, diplomats, and students; in addition they benefited from patterns of return migration, repeat migration, and illegal migration. But the exclusion jeopardized any prospects for growth. These laws marked a turning point in both American and global migration policies, as migration would increasingly be considered as a matter of national sovereignty. Previously, policymakers had showed reluctance to take unilateral decisions considering migration. They believed migration to depend on international trade agreements, fearing that restrictions on human mobility would obstruct the trade in goods. For the Pacific, diplomats carefully renegotiated the Burlingame Treaty with China before passing the Exclusion Act. This treaty generated the dual policy of keeping an open door for transpacific trade while closing it for migrants, with exceptions. On the Atlantic the gates remained open for both migrants and commodities, even though Congress passed an 1882 general immigration law directed at controlling transatlantic flows. It was open to all migrants, with the exclusion of idiots, convicts, and people likely to become a public charge; contract laborers were added to this list in 1884. When Belgian authorities sought allies to protest against this act for infringing trade agreements, it found no support. Officials of contacted nations declined to protest, stating that it was a nation’s own right to decide who it let in or not. As President Grover Cleveland put it in his State of the Union address, years later: “The right to exclude any or all classes of aliens is an attribute of sovereignty. It is a right asserted and, to a limited extent, enforced by the United States, with the sanction of our highest court.” By then this notion was generally accepted among nations.

The dichotomy between the Atlantic and Pacific immigration policies has been attributed to the bigger racial differences of the Pacific newcomers, generating stronger nativist pressures in the West. Conversely, in the East, the industrialists' power to oppose restrictions among immigrants was more effective. Amid these large firms, shipping companies had the most direct interests at stake and took up a leading role to advocate liberal migration policies. Several authors have argued that shipping interests influenced the American Passenger Acts, regulating how people moved from the beginnings up to their reviews in the 1850s, 1882 and 1907. The shipping interests weakened the implementation of the existing measures by playing out the rivalry among Atlantic
American ports to attract passenger traffic. Until New York established itself as the nodal American port for transatlantic travel, this strategy proved successful. In the meantime, to prevent restrictive measures from being passed, shipping interests stalled the adoption of new unilateral regulations by stressing the need for international agreements. Foreign diplomats, in particular German and British supporters of big shipping interests, made sure that negotiations lingered and that the eventual 1882 Passenger Act resembled existing European laws.

With the shift to the "nationalization" of migration policies, however, shipping interests realized that the "international trade" argument no longer stood. General immigration laws now posed the biggest threat to their business. The arguments used against restrictions shifted to a national rhetoric, underlining the benefits of migration for the United States. But such a message was undermined if expressed by an interest group consisting mainly of foreign interests that gained financially from unrestricted migration. The shipping interests turned to major railroad companies and industrialists to support the campaigns, concentrating at first on Capitol Hill. Their main goal was to retain a status quo, favoring the least possible regulation. Lobbyists kept shipping lines posted on the debates, created goodwill among congressmen, and used various strategies to prevent actions on immigration bills. If adoption of immigration acts proved unavoidable, they provided amendments to weaken the acts.24

The only recognizable interest groups opposing the shipping lobby on the Atlantic were labor unions. The labor unions were initially divided on the immigration issue but, by the mid-1890s, all unions endorsed restrictions and were joined by a rapidly growing nativist movement. The nativists, who formed the Immigration Restriction League (IRL), gained momentum as migration from new Eastern and Southern European regions overtook the traditional influx from Northern and Western Europe. The IRL advocated a literacy test to curb the new stream, while leaving the literate 'old-stock' flow undisturbed. If adopted, this restriction threatened to reduce the traffic by thirty percent.

The shipping companies responded by closing their ranks and redoubling their lobbying efforts. With the transition from sail to steam during the 1860s, the previously fragmented business had become concentrated in the hands of a limited number of multinational shipping companies. By the 1880s, the North Atlantic shipping companies had assembled into three major shipping cartels: the British-Scandinavian, Continental, and Mediterranean shipping conferences. The cartels stimulated cooperation among the companies, improving the effectiveness of their lobbying campaigns. Their top-down lobbying efforts in Washington intensified and were complemented with bottom-up campaigns to influence public opinion. Shipping companies hired journalists and academics to screen the press and scientific journals, countering restrictionist stances with liberal arguments. They built strong ties with the press, especially the foreign-language papers, through advertising and because some newspaper owners sold ocean passage tickets.25

As the economic crisis of the mid-1890s led American employers to reduce their support of pro-immigration campaigns, the shipping lobby turned to organizing migrant groups to voice their claims. They funded and established ethnic and cross-ethnic associations representing immigrant communities. In the growing trust-busting climate, these associations gave the shipping companies a much-needed mouthpiece. The well-established ties of the shipping companies with the "old-stock" immigrant communities
helps to explain why the Irish and German communities initially obstructed the literacy test. Although these ethnic groups would hardly be affected by these measures, the shipping lines needed their political leverage, which newer immigrant communities could not yet match. Immigrant communities that organized mass meetings were much more visible to politicians and in the public eye than were the elitist restrictive interest groups. The ethnic associations also became increasingly important for top-down lobbying strategies in Washington, with their efforts coordinated by the shipping companies. The impact of these lobbying campaigns is hard to measure, yet it is a fact that a literacy test for immigrants passed one of the houses of Congress seventeen times and endured four presidential vetoes between 1896 and 1917 before being enacted. The outbreak of World War, however, totally disrupted the shipping lobby and destabilized the immigrant communities, while patriotic nationalistic sentiments gave nativists wings. For enactment of the Atlantic migration regime, shipping interests played an undeniable role. For the Pacific, the absence of a similar lobbying power accentuated the gap between the immigration regimes of the two oceanic basins. This is not to say that the two American lines, OOSC and especially PMSS, lacked all influence on Capitol Hill. That the PMSS knew the ropes for influencing congressmen was illustrated by a mid-1870s corruption scandal about their state subsidies. How much this scandal weakened the PMSS lobbying efforts against Chinese exclusion remains to be explored. There is no indication that PMSS had close ties with the much more significant Atlantic shipping lobby, dominated by European companies. Pacific shipping interests, although based in the U.S. and supported by big railroad corporations, had to contend with nativist groups of a strength that was not to develop until later on the Atlantic. In addition, the Pacific corporate interests lacked the leverage of established migrant communities. Chinese immigrants, excluded from naturalized citizenship until 1870, were only a fraction of the numbers of European migrant groups who contested restrictions. Finally, the reciprocity of U.S. trade and diplomatic relations with European countries, for which there was no real equivalent in the Pacific, contributed to the divergence. During this period of accelerated globalization, the U.S. did not stand alone in adopting national migration policies rooted in racial and ethnic prejudices. Adam McKeown brilliantly described how the U.S. influenced and shared policies of other white-settler nations to exclude Asians. Other studies have noted connections of American and European immigration policies. For instance, the British Alien Act (1905) and the German migration policies regarding Poles and Chinese highlight this interplay. These studies underline that the "nationalization" of the migration policies came not only from within the U.S. but was shaped by polices of other nations and by actual and possible global migration patterns. These macro-level studies, however, are mainly based on a top-down state perspective showing how the exclusionary rhetoric spread through the enactment of laws. The micro-level studies comparing how these were interpreted and enforced in local border control stations are yet to be completed. Attention to the shipping lobby underscores that third parties played an important role in construing policy debates and influencing legislation. Dorothee Schneider noted that the shipping lines also played an equally important role in enforcement. European states gladly delegated de facto border control to transport companies and their agents, forcing migrants to negotiate their exit with them up to the 1930s. During this period, nation-states still in process of bureaucratization relied greatly on third parties to implement their policies. What Schneider labeled as "commercialization of border control," for exit, also
applies to policies of entry. By focusing on this role of shipping lines in U.S. border enforcement, it will now be argued: 1) that during the "nationalization" process of migration policies, the polarization between Atlantic and Pacific regimes intensified rather than diminished; 2) that the exclusion of Europeans through Quota Acts was much more a consequence of the Atlantic regime than of the Pacific; and 3) that the unification of the two regimes that did occur was two-directional. The focus on border enforcement also stresses the much-neglected importance of the local within migration policies. Immigrant control stations operated as isolated dots before being connected into a borderline (and later a full blown fence), but always retained their specificities.

**Enforcing migration policies and border control regimes**

The maritime origins of most nineteenth-century U.S. immigration facilitated the concentration of American border enforcement at key ports. New York and San Francisco attracted ninety per cent of the registered transatlantic and transpacific immigrants respectively. These became the laboratory of new enforcement measures that gradually spread to other maritime ports of entry and terrestrial border-control stations. Yet the gap between Pacific and Atlantic border regimes was reinforced from the start not only because of diverging laws but also because the control stations were entrusted to two different institutions. For both coasts, the laws of 1882 underline how little consideration policymakers gave to the enforcement of their laws. On the Pacific side, the Chinese Exclusion Act was entrusted, without guidelines, to specialized customs officials who formed the Chinese Bureau and worked closely with port authorities and health officials. Previous measures such as the Page Act had been entrusted with *carte blanche* to the Hong Kong consuls. This remote-border-control principle of stopping undesirables before the ship voyage was a long-pursued ideal that encountered many practical impossibilities. The main problem was that these controls undermined the authority of custom inspectors at the gates to reject a migrant who previously had been approved by the consul. The difficulties arising from the initial experiments with remote border control pushed the American authorities to prioritize the enforcement at its own terrestrial borders. On the Atlantic side, Congress took even less responsibility for the implementation of the general immigration laws, leaving enforcement to state-government initiatives already in place. Only in 1891, after mounting denunciations of irregularities and lack of uniformity, did Congress create a federal administration to implement the laws in main Atlantic ports. The Immigration Bureau was headed by a commissioner general in Washington, who was to supervise commissioners of immigration in charge of control stations staffed with civil servants. Pacific control stations remained under the Bureau of Customs and only came under the full purview of the Immigration Bureau in 1903. Only then were the general exclusion laws extended to apply as well to the Chinese, to whom the special exclusion acts and inspection regime still applied. The local administration of the laws on Chinese and other aliens remained bifurcated until 1909. This created a dual administration of immigration laws, with little apparent exchange of the methods used among control stations. The annual reports of the commissioner general of immigration make clear that Chinese and later Japanese immigration continued to be treated totally separately, with different regimes of administration persisting well beyond the period under consideration.
HOW JOHN MAY DODGE THE EXCLUSION ACT.
A Chinese migrant is kicked off the dock by Uncle Sam, but accompanying vignettes and text show how Chinese might enter the United States illegally.

This was linked to the entry of undesirable European immigrants: "As an industrious anarchist for example. Or disguised as an humble Irishman. Let him come as an English wife-hunter. If not these, let him come to us as a cup-challenger [in yacht racing]. Or a peaceful, law-abiding Sicilian."


For inspectors at the gates, enforcement was a learning-by-doing process. The laws gave them a lot of margin for interpretation and for introducing new measures. For instance, concepts such as "likely to become a public charge" (LPC) or "merchants" remained undefined by law, leaving categorizing these to inspectors. Commissioners of immigration liked this leverage, as Joseph Senner (New York, 1893-1897) observed for the LPC-clause, as it allowed inspectors to reject migrants they deemed undesirable without requiring too much evidence. This ambiguity, however, reinforced the differences among immigrant control stations. On the Atlantic, New York was known for its stricter implementation of the laws as compared to the secondary ports of Baltimore, Boston or Philadelphia. This knowledge circulated through shipping companies, migrant agents, and migrant letters, who directed those passengers already rejected or running the risk of exclusion to the secondary ports. For shipping companies, this distinction was even used as one of the business arguments to open a line to such secondary ports. On the Pacific, San Francisco had a reputation similar to that of New York. Seattle was the only port to have a direct shipping line for a period, whereas other ports such as Los Angeles and Portland received occasional ships or indirect traffic. Some individual immigrants
were consciously guided by migrant agents to secondary ports for the more lenient inspections. Sometimes this was organized on a larger scale for certain groups that showed higher risks to be deported, as for instance the migration of Syro-Lebanese through Philadelphia.36

With the imposition of legal barriers, the federal authorities were instantly faced with illegal migration. This problem was reinforced by ever-increasing transport efficiency, which heightened the fluidity of boundaries, drastically reducing the time and cost of smuggling. Meanwhile, the U.S. federal government, by battling smuggling activities, greatly extended its policing powers at home and abroad. According to Peter Andreas, illicit flows of goods and people, together with the campaigns to police them, shape and define the nation. In this view, the state creates smuggling, but in turn smuggling remakes the state.37 The present study, while adopting Andreas's approach, argues in addition that the state does not necessarily pursue uniform policies. The exchanges and connections that linked the divergent Pacific and Atlantic migration-control regimes appeared most visibly, however, in the course of fighting illicit migrant entry. Early enforcement in the U.S. was facilitated by the fact that nearly all immigration targeted by the laws had to cross major oceans. Nevertheless, the U.S. could not prevent ships from disembarking, in neighboring countries, passengers who sought to cross into American territory. Conversely, the enforcement system created business opportunities that stimulated the opening of shipping lines. The Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) opened a steamship service from Vancouver to Hong Kong in 1887. That the Canadian government also introduced obstacles for the landing of Chinese laborers did not impede the line's success: an important part of its clientele used the service as a back door enabling immigration to the U.S.38

The press denounced American port inspections as void if they were not enforced at the land borders. Eastern papers reported that Irish and Germans of the lowest classes abused the Canadian back door, criticisms which were echoed about Chinese in the West. In theory, customs officials were supposed to check for undesirable migrants; in practice they only checked luggage for contraband.39 The sheer volume of European immigration, greatly exceeding that of Chinese, made the problem more pressing on the Atlantic than the Pacific. A small percentage of excluded migrants still represented an important flow, as compared to the Pacific. Between 1853 and 1914 the registered migrant traffic from the Pacific totaled 600,000 (60% Chinese, 30% Japanese, 10% other), which amounted to a little over 2% of the 26,000,000 registered Atlantic migrants.40 Moreover, there were many more established shipping lines connecting Canada to Europe, facilitating indirect entry to the U.S. Passenger shipping companies calling at Canadian ports were already competing for a share of the American migrant market. Among shipping companies, the Beaver Line was reputed to specialize in illegals, until it was taken over by the CPR in 1903. From this point the CPR became the first and only company to be active in both oceans.41

Faced with the immensity of the 4000-mile-long U.S.-Canadian border (not counting Alaska), U.S. authorities took more than a decade to start remedying illegal migration through the commercialization of border control and border diplomacy. The diplomacy entailed imposing American laws on Canadian authorities, for instance by imposing U.S. laws at Canadian ports of entry. Just as in the U.S., transport companies such as the CPR led the lobbying campaigns to prevent Canadian immigration restrictions. They were therefore ill-disposed to allowing American authorities to impose new restrictions. Nevertheless, to avoid compromising the cross-border rail traffic of Canadian laborers, CPR was forced into some concessions. In 1901, Canadian authorities granted American
inspectors the right to check all passengers who listed the U.S. as their final destination when they arrived in Canada. Those who did not list a U.S. destination could easily bypass the measure. The Immigration Bureau tried to standardize inspections at main terrestrial cross-border points. Still, every measure of the unwieldy administration was easily bypassed by the flexible smuggling networks whose organization and business grew as the barriers on migration at the gates became harsher. Border diplomacy bore some fruits, as the Canadian Parliament copied certain American laws to avoid getting stuck with U.S. rejects. Canada's efforts, however, centered more on stimulating immigration rather than monitoring it, as laws remained less restrictive and more leniently enforced: success of this policy brought dismay to U.S. officials. For instance, despite the prohibitive Canadian head-taxes of 500 dollars for Chinese laborers, three times as many registered Chinese migrants arrived in Canada as arrived in the U.S. between 1908 and 1914. Some made their way south, as did European illegals who drove smuggling activities to new heights after the introduction of the U.S. Quota Acts during the 1920s. The Canadian Chinese Exclusion Act (1923) trailed the U.S. version by more than four decades, confirming the mixed success of border diplomacy. Only the global economic crisis of the 1930s eventually forced Canada to become fully integrated into the global wall that created frontier zones between the industrialized nations and the peripheries.

The mechanisms that came to consolidate present-day policies in one of today's most contested frontier zones, the U.S. southern border, were also pioneered to counter transpacific and transatlantic illegal migrants. This system arose during the Porfiriato (1876-1911), the political regime which took Mexico out of commercial isolation, opening up new transatlantic and transpacific steamship connections. Through passenger transport lines, authorities encouraged labor migration to spur new industries. Apart from minor health checks, no immigration restrictions existed. Further, mistrust towards the northern neighbour prevented the appointment of U.S. inspectors at Mexican ports. As part of the periphery, Mexico did not buy into U.S. border diplomacy and became attractive to smuggling networks, in parallel to Canada. The same went for Cuba, which also functioned as an important hub in this southern back door. The Gulf and the nearly 2000-mile-long land border provided plenty of opportunities. Staffed with just over a hundred inspectors, isolated immigrant border control stations at nodal transport points remained powerless. The founding of the Border Patrol (1924) changed little, and by that time Mexican journeymen had started substituting for transoceanic migrant labourers. The results led gradually to today's militarization of the southern U.S. border and the portraying of illegal immigration as one of the main threats undermining the favoured U.S. position in the world-system. The language used in the rhetoric suggests that the core countries are presently engaged in a war to neutralize the porousness of the global frontier with the peripheries.

The contrast of the U.S. southern and northern borders cannot be more sharply illustrated than by the "Peace Arch Border Crossing" monument joining Washington State to British Columbia. It carries the inscriptions "Children of a common mother," "Brethren dwelling together in unity," and "May these gates never be closed." At the time of its construction in 1921, however, smuggling networks converged at both the northern and southern land borders, bringing transatlantic and transpacific migrants into the U.S. Little is yet known on the history of the local border control stations and how they dealt with enforcing laws stemming from two different immigration regimes. Research on local stations should also shed more light on the extent to which they operated as isolated dots or were connected with other stations to form a borderline, as generally perceived. The re-
opening of Ellis Island and Angel Island as museums has drawn new attention to the maritime origins of migration enforcement practices at these main ports of entry. The exhibits lack explicit comparisons but highlight the different methods: the Pacific system of exclusion with exceptions vs. the Atlantic system of inclusion with exceptions. The distinctions were dictated especially by differences in the volume of immigration. New York welcomed major passenger steamers daily, whereas for San Francisco the arrival of such vessels was occasional. During the record year of 1907, 2700 immigrants were processed daily at Ellis Island, a number which exceeds the average annual admittance of all Chinese between 1883 and 1917. To avoid congestion, the screening of migrants in New York was superficial, withholding only a small percentage for further investigation. Conversely most Chinese underwent thorough interrogations and cross-examination with witnesses.44

On the east coast, the only papers identifying the entering migrants were the passenger manifests provided by the shipping lines, until 1914. On the west coast, various sorts of certificates and documents, often photographed, were required. Such papers were to establish the eligibility to enter and also the right to stay with the introduction of certificates of residence. Medical inspections varied with ethnic groups and the distinctive diseases they were assumed to carry: inspections of Chinese were commonly exhaustive. When speaking in generalizing terms about the Pacific and especially for the Atlantic it should always be borne in mind that race and gender played a crucial differentiating role. Women in general and people from eastern and southern Europe were scrutinized more thoroughly. How much racial prejudices played a role depended a lot on the person in charge of the immigration control station. When the puritan William Williams managed Ellis Island, his disdain for the "racially inferior" was reflected in increased detentions and deportations, in particular for eastern and southern Europeans. Williams imposed new measures including financial tests and health tests, putting great effort into rationalizing and standardizing controls. While he marked the organization of Ellis Island, it remains unclear to what extent his influence reached other border stations. Similar impact of key administrators, notably John Wise and James Dunn, has also been denoted for the Pacific. One difference was that, because of racial prejudice, no Chinese-American would ever direct a control station, whereas first- or second-generation European immigrants, such as Austrian-born Joseph Senner (1893-1897) or English-born Robert Watchorn (1905-1909) led Ellis Island with more lenient views.45 Williams' rationalizing efforts were supported by his superiors, Commissioners General of Immigration such as Terence Powderly and Frank Sargent, who centralized information, standardized categories and systemized examinations at the ports. These were increasingly racialized and reliant on eugenic beliefs. Due to the personal impact of those in charge of control stations and other key functions in the immigration administration, the shipping lines lobbied with divided success for the appointment of moderates at these positions.46

Besides standardizing their own bureaucracy, government officials expanded the responsibility of the shipping companies for bringing over undesirables. This strategy of incorporating transport companies to compensate for the shortcomings of the bureaucratic apparatus had been common practice from the start. The extent to which shipping lines were an integrated part of border enforcement is symbolized by the fact that, until the inauguration of Angel Island (1910), all detained migrants to San Francisco were first held on PMSS ships and later in a warehouse of the company.47 A good working relationship benefited both parties, as the shipping lines tried to create mutual goodwill to land as many passengers as possible, while the immigration authorities depended on the lines to operate.
Border officials relied on the shipping lines both to spread and obtain information. Their
dependence on passenger manifests to acquire information on passengers has already been
pointed out. The Immigration Bureau used the shipping lines to have the immigration laws
posted in all offices of migrant agents in Europe and the U.S. Changes in the
implementation of the laws moved along the same networks, as did ways to circumvent
inspections. The head-tax, which was levied per immigrant and used to fund the
immigration administration, was collected through the shipping lines. The companies
lobbied to keep head-taxes as low as possible, to limit the expansion of border
enforcement, but could not prevent rises with the passage of every new general
immigration law (1893 $1, 1903 $2, 1907 $4, 1917 $8).48

Authorities increased the involvement of shipping lines in particular by increasing their
financial responsibilities. Shipping companies risked fines of $100 for failing to present
third-class passengers for inspection. Fines of $10 were introduced for grave mistakes on
the passenger manifest. This improved the accuracy of the documents. This strategy was
employed especially to penalize companies for bringing over undesirables. In 1882, the
shipping lobby managed to strike out a clause billing the costs of transportation of rejected
and ejected migrants to the companies; in 1891 the clause was adopted over their
objections. Congress also billed the shippers for the maintenance costs of all passengers
detained at the control stations. The transatlantic transportation cost, balancing at around
$10, kept this financial burden relatively low. What really cut into shipping companies’
profits were the hospital bills for migrants with "loathsome and contagious" diseases, at
daily rates between $1 and $3, depending on the illness. This class of immigrants was
added to the excluded list in 1891 and gradually expanded to exclude polygamists,
anarchists, prostitutes, procurers, the insane, and epileptics. In particular, favus and
trachoma (skin and eye infections, respectively) inflated medical bills. Shipping
companies tried to recuperate these expenses from passengers or their families, though
with limited success. The companies tried to ship these cases back immediately, yet
immigrant authorities sometimes deferred deportations, to swell the bills as a penalty for
bringing them over. This practice was formalized into a 1903 law empowering immigrant
authorities to fine shipping lines $100 for bringing passengers with contagious diseases
that should have been detected before departure. The number of ejected migrants also
swelled as the period of deportability extended for arriving passengers falling under one of
the excluded categories. If deportees came from remote places, the cost of rail transport to
the port could weigh especially heavily.49 These measures had repercussions well beyond
America's gates, as shipping companies hired extra doctors (including dermatologists and
ophthalmologists) to screen passengers before leaving Europe. The Dillingham
Commission noted that more migrants were being refused for medical reasons in Europe
than in the U.S. This combined success of "remoting" and "commercializing" border
control culminated in the Quota Acts (1920s), which put numerical limitations on
European migration by nationality, based on census data. As the quotas were adopted with
little consideration for enforcement, the Immigration Bureau left the issue to the shipping
tabernacles, the companies set up an information system to keep track of the immigrant quotas
per nationality before departure, limiting the excess passengers to a minimum.50

Yet shipping companies did not passively undergo the imposition of increased
responsibilities: they often challenged new measures in court. Test cases, financed jointly
by all cartel members, sometimes forced the U.S. immigration authorities to revoke
measures. More than immigrants themselves, the main forces contesting border restrictions
were the shipping companies bringing in immigrants. But while restrictions on immigration cut into the shipping companies' profits, they also created business opportunities. For instance, restrictions boosted the transatlantic second-class service. This class cost between 25% and 50% more than third class and targeted better-off migrants and budget travelers. Second-class passengers were initially absolved from passing through border-control stations. In 1903 they were subjected to a very superficial onboard screening, in which rejection rates were one tenth those for third class. The Immigration Bureau repeatedly denounced this back door, which remained open until World War I, mainly thanks to the shipping lobby. In some cases shipping lines stimulated the passage of second class by giving fare reductions to certain excluded groups, such as Mormons. Shipping lines also assisted third-class passengers. The screenings at the ports before departure were designed not so much to send back excludables as to increase their chances of getting through border controls. The sick were held in observation to be cured. The incurable chose other destinations, alternative routes, or returned home.51

On the ship, the purser managed the passenger manifests to track down excludables. He screened the answers and adapted those that might raise suspicions. For instance, groups of single men having the same final destination would be subject to suspicion as being contract labourers. Shipping personnel coached these passengers on how to pass controls. Some companies hired translators to prepare passengers on board for inspections. Before arrival, all passengers were encouraged to wash up, to make the best possible impression on inspectors. Names of passengers showing potential risks for being detained were telegraphed to New York for special assistance upon arrival. Relatives and friends were tracked down to send money, post bond, or appear before the immigration authorities to facilitate entry of the travelers. The shipping lines followed these cases, providing support to appeal decisions to reject. If relatives or friends could not be traced, shipping companies contacted charity associations to assist detainees. To generate good will among immigration inspectors, the shipping lines sometimes gave them gifts, reduced or free ocean passages. All these efforts were made while balancing the fine line of maintaining good working relationships with the Immigration Bureau. Opposing interests often placed shippers and inspectors at odds, but the interdependence of their operations created a sound working relationship between them. Thus, fines for violations were more often waived than collected.52

Shipping companies stayed true to their first nature as carriers of human mobility rather than barriers, sometimes even beyond their own will: stowaways were a growing phenomenon in the early twentieth century. Others bypassed immigration controls by taking jobs as cattlemen or sailors on ships and deserting upon arrival. This was also a notably cheaper way to migrate. Some groups, such as the Norwegians traveling to Brooklyn, even used this relocation strategy structurally—crossing as seamen, then deserting to settle in the U.S. without passing through immigrant inspection. Not before 1917 did the Immigration Bureau obtain any authority to intervene in the landing of seamen.

Efforts of the American immigration administration to close back doors ran into constant difficulties. Its own measures often created loopholes to get in. For instance, the imposition of all kinds of documentation to facilitate the distinction between citizens and aliens created opportunities for undesirable migrants to travel on American passports or falsify them. The addition of a naturalization department to the Immigration Bureau in 1906, to standardize the fragmentized state procedures, did not put an end to this practice.
This brings us back to the Pacific where the use of personal documentation to distinguish desirable from undesirable Chinese travelers was pioneered. This documentation instantly became a valuable commodity and counterfeit or altered documents quickly circulated. A common path for illicit entry was by buying a legitimate entry permit held by a U.S. resident retiring and returning to China. Also part of this phenomenon were the "paper sons," referring to those who fabricated familial identities to take advantage of the loophole allowing immediate family members of Chinese merchants to immigrate. Photographs introduced as objective evidence were quickly altered or substituted by illegal entrants to construct false identities, further undermining the value of paper documents as evidence.53

The distinctive nature of the Pacific border regime created different means of contesting it. For instance, cabin-class travel was not an option for Chinese migrants, as they were scrutinized much more thoroughly on the Pacific. Second-class passengers encountered even higher deportation rates than the so-called Chinese steerage-class migrants. Deportation averaged about 10% of the arrivals on the Pacific, as compared with 1% on the Atlantic. To contest rejections, Chinese appealed their cases in court—a right denied to Europeans under the general immigration laws, which limited appeals within the immigration administration. Courts allowed 90 percent of the Chinese appellants to reverse the decision to reject. The Supreme Court started closing this loophole around the turn of the century. By then, the Chinese Bureau had started to deport Chinese under general immigration laws, in order to avoid long court procedures. Some strategies of contesting borders on the Pacific were similar than those on the Atlantic. Stowaways made their way illegally, even though ships coming from China faced very strict controls. The loophole of desertion by seamen, still neglected by scholars, is of interest because Chinese seamen were a cheap and popular workforce on ships plying the Pacific and beyond. Chinese crews were monitored closely by the authorities, for instance by imposition of bonds to be paid by Chinese seamen seeking the right to land and change ships. The system was far from waterproof, however: it was open to change of identity among other Chinese looking for a trip back home. The administrative energy and resources expended on limiting Asian illegal migration enabled larger numbers of back-door entries for Europeans.54

Conclusion

To enable a more complete comparison of Atlantic and Pacific migration, this research in progress needs more archival research to fully uncover how shipping companies positioned themselves between the migrant and the state for the Pacific. Research on the Atlantic provides a solid base to work from and will shed new light on this dual border regime. Here also further research, in particular in the richly preserved immigration records of the U.S. National Archives, can provide more information on the experience of these immigration control stations. How much did these stations respond to local situations? To what extent were they in contact with each other directly or indirectly through the central administration? How much did the alleged rhetoric and gatekeeping measures to exclude Chinese really transfer nationally and globally to exclude all migrants nationwide on the ground, thus creating a frontier consolidating a certain world order? Should we really envision U.S. border enforcement as a linear demarcation with transfers of restrictionist rhetoric and gatekeeping tools mainly from west to east or rather as isolated dots with limited connections in both directions at best? This article suggests the latter and calls for more research that localizes the roots of the modern-day border
enforcement system to uncover how it spread globally, consolidating the frontiers and increasing gaps between the core and periphery. National frameworks remain central in this process, as regulating human mobility became one of the catalysts to confirm national sovereignty of the emerging nation states. Early migration policies were often more concerned with how people moved than who migrated. As this article emphasizes, the commercial interests behind mass transoceanic migration remain very much overlooked in both migration and maritime history.

This article places the transport companies at the heart of global mobility, where they naturally belong. It calls for interposing these third parties into the often-narrow view treating migration legislation and enforcement as a dual dynamic, limited to the migrant and the state. Transport companies helped shape the directions and volume of global, mass migration and played a central role in the enactment, enforcement, and evasion of migration policies. The Atlantic shipping lobby successfully opposed such U.S. immigration restrictions as the literacy test, even as the American authorities gradually integrated shipping companies into the mechanism to exclude undesirables. While to some extent American authorities converted these carriers into barriers to human mobility, in particular for unhealthy migrants, shipping lines stayed true to their nature by turning restrictions into business opportunities, stimulating migratory flows through back doors via Cuba, Canada and Mexico. As Peter Andreas argues, however, most smuggling activities paralleled the routes and methods of legal commerce, as illustrated by passenger use of second cabin class to dodge immigrant inspections. Government officials understood that measures to stimulate the legal flow of goods and people unintentionally spurred smuggling while, at the same time, strict measures to crack down on illicit traffic obstructed the legal flows. Exclusion of undesired migrants not only affected the entry of desired migrants, but also of tourists, diplomats, businessmen, and even of goods transported on the same routes. Throughout the period discussed here, therefore, the American authorities showed reluctance to implement harsh restrictive measures, moreso on the Atlantic than the Pacific, and thus created many opportunities for illegal entry. Legal and illegal mobility clustered around nodal transport points, such as New York and San Francisco, where modern border and frontier zones arose. These transport nodes represent very useful foci of analysis for world historians, as places of interaction among and within scales, social spaces, and social systems. Focusing on such nodes in connection with outlying control stations will give new insights on how frontiers take form and shift and place some question marks on the militarization of borders.

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**Notes**


7 McKeown, Melancholy Order, 16-18.


9 Per-Kristian Sebak, "A Transatlantic Migratory Bypass: Scandinavian shipping companies and transmigration through Scandinavia 1898-1929" (Unpublished dissertation: Bergen University, 2012); Drew Keeling, The Business of Transatlantic Migration between Europe and the United States, 1900–1914 (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2012);


14 Ibid.


16 This was in retribution for the Holland America Line's solicitation for emigration to German men facing military.


Ironically, German shipping interests and the German-American community contributed greatly to enabling Polish-American community (among others) to gain importance—at the same time that the Reichstag adopted a restrictive immigration policy against the "Polonization" of Germany's eastern borderlands.


34 Joseph Senner, "How We Restrict Immigration," *North American Review* 58, 4 (1894), 499; Feys, *The Battle*, 228-29. This policy was still in force forty years later, when President Herbert Hoover argued that there was no need for new laws to restrict immigration because strict enforcement of the "likely to become a public charge" clause would enable the influx to be easily regulated. Zolberg, "Matters of State," 75. For the categorization of merchants, see McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, 226-230.


40 Heffer, "The United States," 180-182.


46 McKeown, Melancholy Order, 218-222.

47 Blue, "Finding Margins," 1-2; Barde, Immigration, 57-62; Erika Lee and Judy Yung, Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).


55 Andreas, Border Games, 20.