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Assimilability of Internal Others across Time, Space, and Culture

ABSTRACT: When is a policy of assimilation possible, and is it ever justifiable? Majority cultures in modern nation states, themselves a creation of a Western liberal modernity with universalist pretensions, increasingly claim a right to preserve, protect, or even favor their own culture over those of minorities, bringing to mind rhetoric about hierarchies better left behind in the colonial era. This paper examines a familiar “trichotomy” between semi- or sub-human barbarians, fully civilized people, and the modern liberal as most humanity’s most advanced, transposes it with a traditional Chinese one, and claims that these justify less than liberal institutions which structure most majority/minority relations. For evidence and application within a policy spectrum, it mines European commentators on the conquest of America, American elites on excluding Chinese immigrants, and contemporary China’s minority policies.

Much scholarly attention has been given to the question of what to do with a cultural “other” within one’s midst, a question which, due to large inequalities of power, has a number of answers, depending upon the extent to which the wishes of the weaker party are recognized. Liberal expectations rising with modernity have not yet made us all relativists, but as all cultures stake rights to exist, normative pressure to accommodate minority demands has almost always existed.¹ This paper suggests that most powerful groups in history and the present engage “internal others” in terms of different “civilizational discourses”, always with the majority culture atop the developmental hierarchy, however conceived. A pair of such hierarchies, one broadly Western, another traditional Chinese, will be offered and compared briefly with special regard to being fully human, partially human and salvageable, or irreconcilably barbaric. After asking why powerful groups may choose to assimilate or not to, three cases of large-scale encounters with alterity will be examined from the

¹ While Kymlicka, 2010, may be in shrinking company among those denying that we live in a world of post-multiculturalism, favoring the often illiberal protection or favoring of majority cultures which feel threatened, it is less controversial that minority rights claims will never disappear.

narrow question of whether “the other” was or is assimilable into the culture of the majority. First, in perhaps the most radical example, the question will be posed by Europeans about Native Americans. Next, Chinese immigrants in the 18th century are considered by the newly constituted national majorities of North America. Thirdly, and outside the context of Western liberalism, the 100 million or so national minorities of contemporary China are given attention from the view of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Barbarity, Civilization, and Modernity. Encounters with a radically different “other”, especially in early modernity, have tended to be framed in dichotomous terms of barbarians/savages and the civilized.² With modernity, European liberal views, well before they were considered modern, may have come more in line with traditional Chinese (Confucian) beliefs that every person can be perfected or at least cultivated. With this expanded consciousness and increasing use of technology, traditional or ancient civilizations could be recognized as being populated by humans with their own cultures, yet they fell far short of the nation-state as the ultimate polity.³ In short, “savages” are said to be in or near the “state of nature”.⁴ In Wendy Brown’s terms, culture “has them”, while we “have a culture”. Civilized people use money, build cities, have a monotheistic religion, etc. Being modern, especially from the contemporary view in which this too has been supposedly surpassed or transcended, is notoriously difficult to define, but industrialization within a secular nation-state is a good macro-level indicator, though falling short of being *the* standard. FIGURE 1 below is an attempt to capture and expand on some of these distinctions which might be held by Western liberals.

² Barbarous claims are quite rare in the contemporary era, reserved for examples perceived as truly “beyond the pale”, as if audaciously atavistic, backward, or primitive, poorly preserved relics from another time altogether.

³ As will be shown shortly, however, status as a human in the Chinese view either required one to be Chinese or to have an organized military. The Chinese “state of nature”, from my tenuous grasp of political theory on either end, would seem closer to Hobbesian than Locke or Kant’s. Leigh Jenco has much to say on such broad comparisons.

⁴ The distinction between a barbarian and a savage is slight indeed, with the latter perhaps being more idealized or patronizing by the existence of concepts such as the “noble savage”. While both are raw and violent, savages at least have some endearing qualities like loyalty.

Barbarian	Civilized	Modern
tribes, villages	cities & city-states	nation-states, metropolises
"oral traditions"	written language	great novels & canonical literature, encyclopedia
pagan beliefs	organized religion (likely devout, fundamentalist)	secularism
particularist	hierarchical	universalist
naked	clothed	fashionably clothed
hunter-gatherers, nomads, herders	sedentary agriculture w/ animal husbandry	industrialized w/ machines, pets
barter or steal & pillage (take things by force)	currency (buy and sell things)	capitalism (or a market or controlled economy), invest in commodities
"ceaseless aggression" (Pagden)	organized militaries, war with rules	total annihilation is possible
rule by brute force	rule by law backed by force	rule of law (itself, supposedly)
Natural Slave (Aristotle, Sepúlveda)	Natural ruler (Aristotle), slavery OK	Abolish slavery! The people should rule.
Others are gods	Others are barbarians (unassimilable)	Others are assimilable & civilizing missions are necessary/good
instinct	habits, tradition, beliefs	reason & logic, scientific empiricism
cannibalism & human sacrifice	symbolic rituals which invoke past sacrifices	?
different original ancestors (Pagden, pg. 22)	Adam & Eve	evolution from apes
dirty/filthy but unable to grasp this concept	have a concept of "dirty" versus "clean"	cleanliness, sanitation, and hygiene are maintained

FIGURE 1: The product of an admittedly loose brainstorm with broken citations, blatant speculation, and questionable uniformity across columns. I'm not sure which of these are more or less defensible.

This simple trichotomy can be further divided by any number of individual thinkers, within eras (i.e. before the modern era this wasn't necessarily just a dichotomy), and cultures. While it may be tempting to see it as a static "chain of being" akin to the view prevailing in the Renaissance⁵ or among modern and contemporary primordialists, the pendulum has likely swung permanently to the side of nurture over nature, at least for groups of people. Although the concept of a people's "essence" is rightly unfashionable, it is relatively well accepted that patterns of modernization which are completely a-cultural in Taylor's terms are neither universal nor possible. All traditional cultures lose something when they modernize.

Chan and Fiskesjo might suggest a different formulation for traditional Chinese views, in which barbarians are firmly in a subhuman category more akin to animals. Distinctions are also made between "wild men", hill tribes, and barbarians who are able to mount a military challenge to civilization. Fiskesjo even speculates that this last point is the reason that the Chinese names for various "Southern Barbarians" generally contained "orthographic pejoratives" which placed them within the animal kingdom with bugs, dogs, and snakes, while it would have been "unwise" to designate the Mongols and Manchus who would conquer and rule China as the Yuan and Qing Dynasties as such.

⁵ While I'm sure it's outlined in greater detail elsewhere, I mean to use it as Fiskesjo does, in contrast to more fluid conceptions, be they traditional Chinese or "modern".

Also worth noting is a distinct conception of what status as a human requires, the potential improvement or even perfection of the individual, and the implications for what is less than human (i.e. everything else). Calling someone inhuman in Chinese society has the same or greater weight as in the West, but personal experience leads to the belief that the accusation is made far more frequently, for everyday as well as egregious moral transgressions.⁶ Similarly, the phrase “conduct oneself” or “to behave oneself” is given as 做人 *zuo ren*, literally to make or produce humanity, so civilized behavior is both explicitly connected to and inextricable from one’s status as a human being or something far less. More consequentially, Chinese culture’s sense of human entitlement is at the center of Jonathan Watts’ 2010 book, *When a Billion Chinese Jump*, a faltering attempt to remain optimistic about environmental protection in the PRC when centuries of tradition have ingrained in society the belief that the entirety of the natural world should be exploited for the benefit of an exalted mankind.⁷ In short, Chinese misanthropes of the kind who populate the halls of Western academia must feel especially disconnected from their societies. FIGURE 2 below is a stylized attempt at summarizing this section so far.

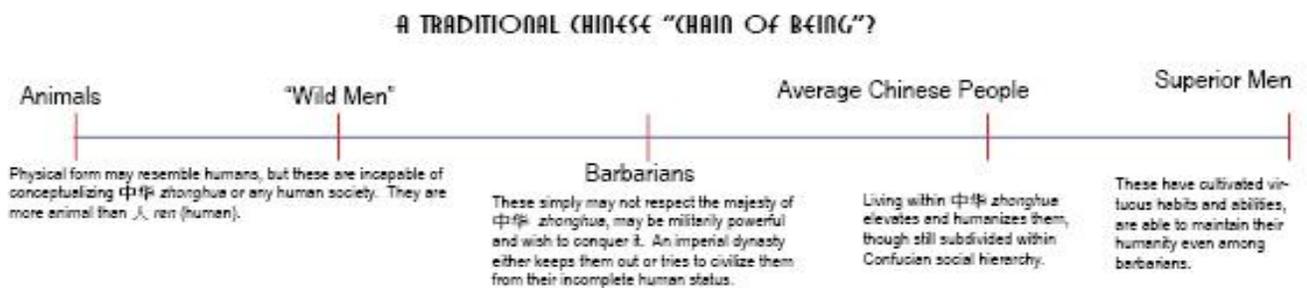


FIGURE 2: Probably better expressed elsewhere by Chinese scholars, this is asserted still to hold some resonance in contemporary China, to the extent that Confucianism is a respected cultural foundation, taken very seriously if not always literally.

⁶ Insults like “你不是人 *ni bu shi ren* (You’re inhuman!)” and “你是什么东西? ! *ni shi shenme dongxi* (What kind of thing are you?!)” are hurled with much malign intent when proper relationships are on the rocks.

⁷ Western, especially Christian, culture is by no means exempt from this outlook, but it’s not the focus of Watts’ book. Presumably, a modern pagan society would be quite a lot more environmentally friendly than either Western or Chinese.

Tingyang Zhao, whose articulation of a modified traditional “all under heaven” worldview has attracted much attention in today’s rising China, has suggested provocatively that the search for a Confucian “other” who is still considered human will be fruitless. He claims that any attempt to update or apply Confucianism to a modern or non-Chinese context ceases to be Confucian.⁸ As the philosophy was articulated centuries before China had any contact with other civilizations, the primacy of the “center kingdom” was not only undisputed. *Zhonghua* 中华 (Chinese Civilization) was a civilized “self” whose self-regarding definition of alterity precluded pluralization of culture and civilization—there was only China or barbarity.

This section does not mean to suggest, in dichotomizing Western or Chinese conceptualizations of human social evolution, that they are wholly unified or that they are the only two examples worth studying. Rather, they should be kept in the background for the analysis of the limited but diverse cases this small project will examine. As all civilizations and now nations inevitably encounter other groups within territories they claim as sovereign, what exactly is to be done with them is one of the major problems of modern politics. Assimilation of minority others will next be conceptualized as a position within a spectrum of possible institutions arranged by governments or those with a preponderance of power.

Assimilation in the Spectrum of Minority Policies. Contemporary theorists such as Yagcioglu have delineated a range of policy options for how a national majority, presumed to hold power in state government, deals with a minority within its national borders. From the outset, recognizing minority status makes their national membership questionable, often asserted publicly by governments but denied in private by officials and commonfolk in the majority population alike. From the majority’s perspective, such divisions are inimical to a strong nation for want of unity, making it imperative that minority others, regardless of their origin, be made essentially like the

⁸ Confucianism is, for Zhao, essentially Chinese (or possibly Asian), ancient or at least pre-modern.

majority or expelled from national territory. As changing minds and behaviors might initially seem less problematic or costly than deportation, even liberal democracies tend to favor somewhat coercive, unification policies which only liberalize as the security of the nation, or its level of democracy, reaches maturity. Assimilation, which Webster's defines as the absorption of smaller groups "into the main cultural body", resides decidedly in the illiberal side of the spectrum, though hardly an extreme.



FIGURE 3: How can governments engage an "internal other"? Accommodation is conceived of as the recognition of the minority group's right to be culturally or politically different from the majority. This is conceived from distinctions made from Yagcioglu's article, with help from O'Leary (in Paul et. al), Simeon and Conway (in Gagnon & Tully), outlined as such in a graduate seminar on nationalism taught by Lowell Barrington at Marquette University.

Special attention should be paid to the differences between integration and assimilation, the focus of this essay, as they are fundamentally the same in expecting the minority to be incorporated into the majority culture, with the potential for the minority culture to fade from existence over generations. In both cases, this potential would be seen as a positive development by the state which has selected either strategy, while minority nationalists and liberals advocating cultural preservation would evaluate both negatively. Why separate the two?

A government's active attempt to "melt" its entire population into an interchangeable mass flies in the face of the liberal norm to respect the rights of individuals⁹, whose diversity is the basis for a robust, modern society. Almost always accompanied by assertions of moving a people forward in a normatively desirable process of modernization, acculturation into a higher state of humanity or simply a superior culture, assimilative policy considers the forgetting of "old" languages and cultures as at most collateral damage in pursuit of a noble objective. More likely, shedding these pre-modern vestiges is itself a requirement for the modern majority to tolerate some people's presence, if not existence. Thus, assimilation might require the conversion to the majority religion or at least the acceptance of a secular public sphere, intermarriage might be officially encouraged or forced, etc. All of this is conducted with a much greater coercive element, with denigration of the culture to be excised, whereas integration itself, by no means inactive or necessarily embraced by the minority to be integrated, does not insist that an individual change his or her cultural practices at home.¹⁰ Whether either policy is actually liberal is a debate beyond the scope of this paper, so it will proceed by considering the reasons assimilation is chosen over the aforementioned alternatives.

Why Assimilate? The motivations and benefits behind assimilative policy are closely related. In the modern age of supposedly cohesive and united nation-states, homogeneous populations behave more like nations than highly diverse ones.¹¹ Furthermore, few national populations fail to see themselves and their own culture as at least slightly better than others, well worth emulating or— even better—adopting some essential beliefs and practices unproblematically and in line with a national, teleological imaginary in which everyone is a national member who believes in said nation's

⁹ Drawing on an Aristotelian foundation which excludes the likes of women, "natural slaves", and children from designation as individuals, critiques of the social contract by Pateman and Mills have provocatively suggested that liberal society treats women as sub-individual members of society, that the entire system has been built to benefit the white race at the expense of the vast majority of the world's people.

¹⁰ See Joppke, pg. 46-7 for liberal prohibitions of dual citizenship. Multiculturalism is given as an "aloof" rather than active alternative to government's role in integrating immigrants on pg. 98. Perceived failure of Europe to integrate new generations of (Muslim) immigrants over two or more generations is given as the reason behind recent shifts toward more active policies on pg. 112-3.

¹¹ For example even when Korea was both populous and poor, it was probably more governable than the perennial opposite, Yugoslavia, for having a strong Confucian sense of social order and, just as importantly, a population which identified itself as Korean—currently around 99% and the envy of many a multicultural state government.

moral righteousness. In the extreme, as critics of liberalism point out, such high self-esteem can translate into a universalization of notions particular to the West but largely unacknowledged as such.¹² As Taylor notes, modernization can either be tied to a particular culture or not, but especially within the borders of a nation-state, there can be no tolerance of non-modern “others” if diversity is taken as akin to disunity, threat, and weakness.

Claiming that diversity is not a good in itself, Stephen Macedo’s 1995 article is careful to construct a minimally threatening, most tolerant, and pro-diversity argument for liberal assimilation. “Assimilation is an inescapable and legitimate object of liberal policy: it all depends on the justifiability of the values toward which institutions assimilate and the reasonableness of the means.”¹³ Problems with this counterintuitive stance are only minimally evident in the somewhat circular contention that minors living in liberal democracies must be exposed to different lifestyles. This effectively assimilates all citizens to be intolerant of intolerance, in favor of a mainstream “marketplace of ideas” where intolerant, isolationist extremes are crowded out. Real challenges for society begin when intolerance is not so cautiously circumscribed and specifically targeted at a universally despised gremlin. Assimilative demands are made far more often by powerful groups of concerned citizens claiming a threatened majority, and the values they represent are not nearly so universal as those given by political philosophers.

Derek Heater’s *What Is Citizenship?* is valuable for pointing out a modern divide between citizenship as consisting mainly of rights, as articulated by T.H. Marshall in the UK of the 1950’s in terms of wealth redistribution to citizens which would level the socioeconomic playing field, and of duties. Providing an ideological backbone for the latter position, given as “civic republicanism”, are “communitarians” who criticize contemporary citizenship consisting mainly of material entitlements and “liberal” immigration policies for diluting the citizens’ sense of national community. There is

¹² A most basic presumption of liberalism which is falsely universalized is the inviolable rights of the individual.

¹³ Macedo, pg. 470.

less sense of duty to one's country, argue the communitarians, if the country contains increasing numbers of "others" who are seen as taking far more than they contribute.¹⁴ In short, if immigrants are to be allowed, a proposition accepted even by many communitarians, they must at least be put through a rigorous gauntlet of naturalization to instill proper loyalty and a clearly evident worthiness to be seen as "one of us". While justifications such as these have been made in terms of maintaining a nation in an age of migration, likely more familiar to a contemporary reader, the initial establishment of a nation also clearly requires the goal of assimilation to be stated, at least as an alternative to a grimmer, more immediate fate.¹⁵

Stepping back in history, Christianity was seen as one of the primary markers of civilization, unabashedly tied to and viewed from the West, and the imperative to proselytize took on highly assimilative characteristics with the conquest of the "New World". Certainly, assertions that "the other" has too much land, isn't using it right or to its full potential are with us as much today as in early modernity. If the goal was really imperial conquest, suggested by Todorov's title and the thesis that Native American assimilation was a distant afterthought in a massive European land-grab, only then does the dire observation that assimilation and ethnic cleansing were preferable to Brunstetter's "physical othercide" become relevant.¹⁶ As the first case will argue, conversion to Christianity was only one prominent example of an assimilative motivation with universalist ambitions. Liberalism, behind the even more expansive power of the contemporary West, has come far closer to realizing its pretensions to universality, for better and for worse. But, as the next section asks, how many hearts and minds are really being won as opposed to bodies merely going through the motions?

¹⁴ Robert Putnam's work on social capital being reduced in diverse neighborhoods and Huntington's *Who Are We?* corroborate these effects and provide much agitation, if not ideological ammunition, to opponents of multiculturalism. Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, not incidentally both Canadian, appear to be convincing academics but few policymakers and average Western citizens of diversity's enduring value and non-threat.

¹⁵ In terms of cruelty, which at least one scholar (Scularek? Sp?) has suggested must be eliminated for modern liberalism to attain, it's not entirely clear whether pogroms and other violent campaigns bent on total ethnic annihilation are more cruel to its disadvantaged objects and victims, or whether it is more cruel to let politically defensible policies accomplish the same over generations or centuries in a slow, drawn out but obvious march toward extinction.

¹⁶ Brunstetter defends his use of this neologism and its assimilative "cultural" counterpart for the specifically modern and legal connotations of the term "genocide".

Why Not Assimilate? Full assimilability an “other” requires the belief that fundamental if not essential change is possible and the political will to use the power of state and society to achieve an assimilated outcome.¹⁷ Two barriers to the pursuit of an assimilative policy are the belief that it is firstly impossible, as well as secondly the matter of normative desirability given the permissiveness of particular temporal and cultural contexts. Before going in too much depth, this section should note from the outset that a belief among a more powerful group that others can change, develop, or become civilized is not the same as believing that they are assimilable. As mentioned previously, assimilation entails the molding, conditioning, and otherwise forcing of some people either to become or to see themselves as another kind of person, usually the same as the assimilators. Actual “absorption” into a blob-like, amoebic majority is not possible if fundamental differences between composite units are allowed to remain.

Belief that making one kind of person into another is impossible runs into an initial roadblock if the targets of such an experiment are not seen as human, but rather as subhuman barbarians or even human-like animals. Many in each case examined here undoubtedly harbored some doubts about their subjects’ humanity, and this may have precluded a whole-hearted assimilation effort, in turn producing poor results, reinforcing doubts in a vicious cycle. Turning a non-human into a particular kind of human is a definitional contradiction, though it relies on subjective definitions of humanity.

The second reason for impossibility is simply that people are incapable of change. For much of history a primordial outlook of natural and immutable traits was held by thinkers such as Aristotle, later resurrected in the thoughts of early modern Europe via the Muslim world which had preserved his philosophical works. Within this mindset, if it was not in a person’s nature to be a ruler or a slave,

¹⁷ The difference between something fundamental and something essential is worth noting in cultural terms. Some traits or traditions may be considered to form the basis of a distinct culture but are likely to change over time while the culture remains intact. In the controversial concept of a cultural essence, changing it would result in the culture becoming something else, no longer recognizable (by either outsiders or those within it, depending on who is making the essential claim) as the original culture. While generally seen as a poor practice in academia, as bad scholarship, the world does not lack for people who still think in essentialist terms.

he could not be made into one. Some, such as women, children, and barbaric “natural slaves” simply lacked the capacity to transcend their naturally low position in society. Related to the first case, even among Europeans who believed in the possibility of assimilation, any setback in the long and costly process might cause one to revert to the classic position, especially as the process of civilizing the Native Americans showed at most mixed results over the course of centuries.

Contemporary ethics oppose assimilation for reasons entirely different, namely that all cultures are equally worthy of protection. Advocates of cultural preservation have generally adopted the rhetoric of endangered species—Western liberalism is now so pervasively powerful that even otherwise vibrant ways of life such as traditional Islamic and Chinese civilization are gravely threatened. The modern expectation that sovereign nation-states have more or less settled the issue of cultural protection makes the expansion of any culture normatively questionable, though by no means prohibited. Within state borders, however, virtually all states have “internal others”, likely poor minorities seen as less modern or otherwise inferior. Liberal norms of tolerance contain an assumption that assimilation, if pursued as a state policy, could be entirely too effective, trampling on individual rights to preserve different cultural beliefs and practices. Not surprisingly, accusations of such illiberal transgressions are usually directed at other countries, especially non-democratic states, while either rationalizing or ignoring one’s own past or present on the wrong side of the accommodation spectrum.

At long last, it is time to delve into the historical record for more in depth illustrations of these points. Each case will attempt to make clear who is the “internal other” and who is the potential assimilator. Special care will be taken to represent prominent views among philosophers with differing views on others’ assimilability, including motivations, means, and assessments of just how illiberal such attempts were or are.

Case One: Native Americans up to the 18th Century. Since the “discovery” and subsequent conquest of the Western Hemisphere by Europeans, the question of what to do with the natives gradually faded from rhetorical centrality to one of great debate and finally inconvenience as the largest skeleton in liberalism’s closet. Despite Paul III’s papal bull declaring Indians to be fully human in 1537, the following centuries of far more ethnic cleansing than systematic or successfully maintained efforts at assimilation suggest that the idea never caught on fully among conquistadors, colonialists, or settlers.

Conversion to Christianity, the primary concern of most Spanish thinkers in the century after 1492, only required Native Americans to learn about the true faith and profess their belief in it as opposed to their own savage beliefs. Saying that one believed in Christianity was a necessary first step on the path to civilization, relatively easy compared to the herculean task of reforming natives’ entire ways of life. Viewing Native Americans as in a completely ignorant, rather than corrupted, state of nature initially gave Europeans the impression that they were *tabula rasa* on which the truth could be written little by little.¹⁸

In terms of the first truth to be inscribed, Brunstetter’s consideration of Francisco de Vitoria describes his goals as dividing the Other into two groups, one assimilable and one not. Writing in the early 16th century, Vitoria believed that although these “barbarians” had true dominium, a pre-modern cognate of sovereignty traced to Aristotle, any refusal to “accept the faith of Christ” was “a legitimate title for occupying land of the barbarians” and might even “legitimize a just war of annihilation against this Other”.¹⁹ They had, in short, rightful possession of the land which prevented Spaniards from simply taking it by rights of “discovery”, but this right would be waived whenever they revealed their recalcitrant barbarity in rejecting the universal truth of Christianity. Furthermore, as

¹⁸ Vitoria, pg. 266, describes their unbelief as a punishment rather than a sin. Those who’d never heard of Christ were not sinners and didn’t become so until, like more familiar Muslim others, they formally rejected the truth. While Vitoria stated clearly throughout that acceptance needn’t come instantaneously, virtually all who actually set foot in the Americas appear to have been considerably less patient at first.

¹⁹ Vitoria, pg. 265, for the first two quotations in this sentence, while the third is Brunstetter’s conclusion, pg. 40.

Brunstetter highlights, if the obvious superiority of these truths were insufficiently attractive to the natives, “a little force may be necessary...to bring them in line with natural law”, preventing such barbaric practices as cannibalism and as punishment for their resistance to assimilation.²⁰

In the fourth chapter of *Tensions of Modernity*, Brunstetter addresses Bartolomé de las Casas’ much heralded defense of the Native Americans, in opposition to Sepúlveda before the Spanish court. Like Todorov, who problematizes the idea that because de las Casas lived among the Native Americans he knew them better, the account in *Tensions* portrays the defense as partial at best, as it contained the faith that the natives would voluntarily assimilate—or commit “voluntary cultural othercide”.²¹ The egalitarianism of de las Casas is said to rest on assertions of “potential sameness” to Europeans. As both possessed rationality, contrary to the claims of Sepúlveda, Europeans could eventually convince their uncivilized American neighbors to give up their customs, to build them up from the state of nature which even the civilized Europeans once shared. Similar means of assimilation by persuasion or attraction to apparent superiority were also thought best by Voltaire, some of whose popular plays in the French Enlightenment mirrored the voluntary process espoused by de las Casas.²² As implied by Brunstetter’s contrast with De Pauw in the same chapter and de Tocqueville’s dire observation that Native Americans were doomed to extinction, the first American assimilation project was apparently far less successful in reality than the second, of the U.S. “melting pot”. While many natives were assimilated “successfully”, de Tocqueville notes keenly that they can only enter the new American society at its lowest level, always longing for and often returning to the rapidly receding frontiers where native cultures still maintained some coherence.²³

²⁰ Brunstetter, pg. 38. He finds Vitoria’s views both unstable over time and contradictory, as the Indians generally rated above Aristotle’s natural slaves, despite many beastly practices.

²¹ Brunstetter, pg. 71-2.

²² Should this paper be updated, I promise to do a better job of summarizing and citing.

²³ De Tocqueville, pg. 317, on the “lowest rung”. Later, on pg. 320-1, he echoes Vitoria’s temporal concerns with the observation that the Native Americans need more time to adapt than the Europeans are willing to offer.

Case Two: Chinese Immigrants in the Americas in the 19th to early 20th Century. The overall success of first creating a unified American identity and then assimilating so many European immigrants into it can be challenged on any number of grounds. This section will show that non-white, Asian immigrants challenged the new state's nation-building goals fundamentally because they presented the culturally European nation-in-formation with an internal "other" whose rising numbers might reverse the relationship between assimilator and assimilated. The relatively independent and possibly more strange, inscrutable Chinese immigrants can also be compared to the natives and blacks of the time, whom Miller notes were already excluded from the melting pot.²⁴ While labor historians are particularly incisive in reframing this issue between natives and settlers as one of protecting trading ports and poor, white laborers, rhetoric used by advocates and policy-makers in the U.S. Congress frequently asserted that Chinese should be excluded from America because they were uniquely unassimilable. Arguably, this issue remains more salient today—and globally—than that of domestic laborers' responses to Chinese immigrants.²⁵

By the time of the mid-to-late 19th century no less an authority than President Rutherford B. Hayes exemplified the popularly held belief that fundamental, immutable "social characteristics" had rendered attempts to incorporate blacks and Native Americans fully into American society a failure.²⁶ The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was intended to stem the rising flow of Chinese laborers from the rapidly declining Qing Empire into the American West before another group of slavish, "semi-barbarians" of another race and civilization became a regional majority. Anti-Chinese rhetoric to

²⁴ Miller, pg. 192, notes this. Other authors like Helen Jun have shown how the new Chinese immigrants, absent from de Tocqueville's three races who inhabit America, were eventually "negro-ized".

²⁵ This is to say that as China rises, suspicions that Chinese immigrants will remain Chinese no matter where they are or what policies host governments use to naturalize them. For some nativist observers, the Chinese national essence (or diaspora, or migrant networks) is simply too strong to make into something else.

²⁶ Miller quotes the president in this regard on pg. 190, while the terms from most of this sentence are stated on pg. 159.

justify the Act focused on either their incapacity for or resistance to “moral improvement”, their “careful segregation” from white majority culture, clinging instead to their own inferior culture.²⁷

As their numbers increased, a case was made beyond unassimilability toward a reversal of the proper cultural hierarchy—this was “ethnic swamping” by inferiors. The effects of this de-evolutionary process was an offense to the new, modern racist theory which added a biological dimension to the Chinese “lack of cultural fitness”.²⁸ Examples abounded in the *New York Times* and other media of fears that the Chinese would “paganize” the superior white race, overthrow American customs in California, perhaps even subverting civilization itself.²⁹ Young’s early 20th century piece exemplifies the perceived vulnerability of the superior majority. He quotes the San Francisco board of education’s warning not to let children’s “youthful impressions be affected by association with pupils of the Mongolian race”, thereby justifying segregation of the schools.³⁰

Earlier in his article, Young bemoaned the western U.S.’s fear of “competing with an equally capable race” that had been inured to hard labor over centuries, as this amounted to cowardice not befitting white people. Interestingly, while white laborers and businesses demanded protection against Chinese immigrants on nativist grounds which must have been especially shrill to the ears of the region’s remaining Native American inhabitants, similar dynamics played out in Mexico. Romero’s book shows that Mexico’s anti-Chinese propaganda, while more accurately described as nativist, were made more in the revolutionary language particular to the era. The Chinese immigrants were grouped with the rich, foreign class who subjugated the native Mexican masses. Particular attention is paid in the book to public campaigns discouraging Mexican intermarriage with the Chinese, which might usually be seen as a means to assimilate the immigrant. Instead, this

²⁷ Miller, pg. 169, sums all these faults up as a perceived inability to be “melted”. The consensus was that the Chinese could be servants but never equal.

²⁸ Miller, pg. 194.

²⁹ Miller, pg. 176 for the first half quotes anti-coolie rallies on the East Coast, pg. 191 and a *New York Times* editorial for the second.

³⁰ Young, pg. 16.

reduced the native Mexican race to the degraded Chinese level, produced “mongoloid” children, and made for slavish and abusive relationships between usually Chinese husbands and Mexican wives.³¹

Where some hope remained of voluntary assimilation on seeing the superiority of Western, now American, culture, views held by those seen as more informed or experienced dealing with the Chinese insisted otherwise. The ironically named Rounsevelle Wildman, American Consul General in Hong Kong up to 1900, for example, penned an entire book of condescension toward the Chinese as at once backward but “different from other nations”, including the difficulty of persuading the “Chinaman to discard the chopsticks for the knife and fork” and increasing trade, with the assertion that China would never buy carriages without first being taught the advantages of good roads, having lived thousands of years without them.³² Such intransigence is also denounced, perhaps amplified in the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1889 statement on the constitutionality of the Exclusion Act, sidestepping the constitution to defend the Act on grounds that Chinese immigrants had “remained strangers in the land”, self-segregated, and thereby were impossible to assimilate or change in any way to join the American mainstream.³³ In short, the Exclusion Act ushered in the modern era of restricted migration, a sort of pre-emptive ethnic cleansing largely justified by claims of unassimilability.

Far more recently, Tritia Toyota suggests that the issue of Chinese being unassimilable into white (or, presumably, Latin American) majority culture has largely been mitigated by the creation of a “model minority” myth. Asians are now expected to aspire to this status, officially sanctioned for its moral, family-centric orientation which can show other more troublesome minorities the proper way to contribute to an immigrant society without being completely (racially) white. Chinese national strength and questionable assimilability are also front and center in the next and final case.

³¹ Romero, pg. 251. Economic nationalism was the key to this rhetoric overall, as outlined on pg. 284, but the Chinese economic threat was said to portend the degeneration or ruination of “the Mexican race” generally. Unfortunately, the new and expanded book version of the dissertation which this cites was not found in the library.

³² The main argument of the excerpted chapter from Wildman’s book is not that the Chinese are barbarians or otherwise sub-human, merely that they are inferior and proudly conservative, needing to adapt to Western modernity but also requiring force or graphic illustration of its superiority even to consider changing. The quotations are in Grayson, pg. 143.

³³ From Grayson, pg. 131.

Case Three: Minorities in the Contemporary People's Republic of China. In a self-described “multinational” state which nonetheless has great reservations about liberalism, the leading Communist Party of China (CCP) formulated its minority policy soon after founding the nation, though there has been considerable variation in the views and policies toward them. Although traditional Chinese philosophy places high standards and prerequisites on what kinds of animals can be called “human”—barbarians are decidedly below this—modern China has gone through several cycles of rejecting its ancient sages in favor of something new, whether modernity itself, nationalism and communism (often combined), etc. Policy toward the PRC's 55 non-Han Chinese “minority nationalities” who number in total between the population of Mexico and the Philippines, is one of the most prominent remainders derived from the Marxist dialectic: ethnic nationalism is still officially treated as “epiphenomenal” or “suprastructural” when compared to class and economic determinism which creates the more important divisions in society.³⁴ Based on these decidedly illiberal assumptions, minority nationalities most resembling nations, especially the Mongols, Tibetans, and Uyghurs, are taught to despise co-ethnics pretending to any non-Chinese national leadership, while the main goal of the PRC's national integration project is to instill a both a self-identity as Chinese and a duty to serve the Chinese nation. That only the first has its own nation-state, itself compromised by Russian influence which has fostered an intra-Mongolian debate on whether the independent Outer or Chinese Inner is the true bearer of Mongolian national culture, makes their potential assimilation all the more urgent.

The several sources listed in the bibliography enumerate the problems contemporary China, especially in its revolutionary guise, has faced when addressing its imperial past (and how much its current territory resembles that of its last, conquering dynasty). Interestingly, the Manchu former rulers of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) offer one of the most successful examples of assimilation in the

³⁴ Being less important or fundamental, they are presumably also more subject to change, even erasable. As mentioned in the first section of this paper, Confucianism and traditional Chinese philosophy also emphasize the malleability of lesser individuals, the moral rectitude in attempting to spread knowledge of virtuous Chinese civilization.

20th century. Still nominally distinct from the Han majority when the Qing fell, there are now said to be only a few dozen native speakers remaining of the language in which centuries of imperial records were kept.³⁵ The Manchu model may thus be what the PRC has in mind for its more nationalist minorities, though it would hope to be accomplished without handing over the country to them. A national survey of who is considered Chinese is greatly wanting (and practically impossible), but it is generally assumed that most Han would not accept an independent or even more autonomous Tibetan or Uyghur states, while they are openly envious of the preferential policies these groups receive within the PRC.

Increasingly, with the perceived “ingratitude” shown by recent Uyghur and Tibetan protests and riots³⁶, members of the Han majority are growing resentful about Chinese affirmative action programs which allow national minorities to have more children and get into universities with lower test scores. Daniel Bell’s book, especially the chapter on minority rights within authoritarian systems, is best read as an apology for avowed policies of national integration which effectively veer into assimilation. While ostentatiously celebrating Chinese national diversity, Kymlicka, Gladney, and Suisheng Zhao point to the “Great-Han Chauvinism” behind the colorful exhibition of minority dance and dress, asserting a universal Chinese equality which violently equates groups with and without other national consciousnesses, all while implicitly placing all below the Han tasked with modernizing its animist or animistic internal others. Wang Hui, by contrast, accuses the West and especially its media of constructing and reinforcing a pernicious divide between Tibetans and Han, a New Left defense of stated integration goals. Smith and Sadiq, in still further contrast with an eye on pacification of highly volatile populations who feel threatened by defacto assimilation among

³⁵ See Lague’s 2007 article from the *New York Times*. Presumably the CCP’s sensitivity to issues regarding minority nationalism in the PRC is the reason why more academic journals haven’t taken up this fascinating topic.

³⁶ The recent suspension of all foreign tourism into Tibet is generally seen as a direct response to the rise in self-immolation in protest of what is seen by some as a military occupation. Oddly, these self-immolators, of whom there have been more than 30 since March of 2011, have been labeled terrorists by the ruling CCP. With only superficial tactical similarity to more obviously terroristic suicide bombers, their actions could be viewed as evidence that “national integration” isn’t going well, that the actual effects of the “Western Development” program are the provocatively stated “cultural genocide”, in other words, assimilation.

internal migrants seen as colonizers, offer several practical alternatives on the accommodative side of the spectrum, amounting to the realization of regional, ethnic autonomies declared soon after the PRC was founded. Much more could be said about each of these cases, but alas, this has taken on the form of rambling pontification over careful scholarship.

Discussion and Conclusion. Care must be taken to avoid treating the second case as only a bridge between the first and the third, but there are several fruitful avenues of comparison available. A primary lesson to be drawn from the three cases is that policies declared by those in power generally and perhaps inevitably contain elements of other, less palatable ones. It would be interesting to examine why numerical superiority as a requirement for assimilation plays a more important role in the second and third cases than the first.

The cliché that “where there’s a will there’s a way” applies to the actual assimilation of others, however “the other” must accept or internalize his own inferiority before choosing to transform into a full member of the majority culture. There does not appear to be anything inherent within any particular othered group which makes one assimilable and another not—the choice to resist unto death or to commit suicide is a horrible choice indeed, but a choice which many have made and not an objective indication that they could not have been assimilated, had they chosen to submit to the more powerful group.

Short of accommodation, which may be the most difficult policy option domestically, due to likely disagreement among the national majority, the extent to which options from integration to genocide differ in the long run may be questionable. Even where the majority culture does exude an aura of superiority (as for reasons of greater economic opportunity), few individuals would willingly do more than integrate themselves into it, yet over time and generations the majority absorbs the minority entirely. Where the minority has no state of its own to fall back on or protect itself, entire cultures are lost forever to the modern assimilation machine.

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