Spring 2012, Polisci 219: Migration and Citizenship, Prof. Sadiq Research Proposal, Julian Lee

Lost Distinctions: Chinese Migration Patterns as Imperial Alternatives

When is migration just a movement of people from one place to another, and when does it indicate the presence of more controversial, possibly antiquated but still pernicious processes, namely imperialism and colonialism?[1] While few would be so naïve as to claim that any population movements are completely free of political effects, the opposite extreme—of threats to national identity, and thereby security—is subject to much speculation, often antagonistic, difficult to verify empirically, and always based on differing perceptions. If explicit colonialist intentions are normatively prohibited by the contemporary "global community" (or by the universally recognized concept of sovereign states of which the current world system is said to comprise), how is power nonetheless wielded by nations beyond their ethnic borders? The proposed study examines subtly distinct processes connected to human migration which vary only slightly by the type of border crossed, each holding constant the "sending nation" and provoking consequential nativist responses.

This proposal will compare and contrast contemporary Chinese migration into the "multiethnic frontier" of the PRC's "far West" and into another country with which Chinese national interests clearly intersect, Burma.[2] Each case has provoked a strong anti-settler response among native populations, but these differ in important ways, connected to the subtle distinctions in new forms of alleged colonization and colonialism. Tibet is well-known and most contentious, while Xinjiang and Burma have attracted attention, both journalistic and scholarly, in light of recent events. In general terms, Chinese migrants' motivations, intentions, relationship with the Chinese state, and citizenship status differ, yet the response by native populations is predictable: fear of becoming a minority and/or a second-class citizen in one's homeland, and possibly a feeling of threat to the culture of the native population. The first case is an example of internal colonialism or internal colonization, depending on one's frame of reference.[3] The second blurs the line between economic colonization by migrants—"market-dominant minorities" in Chua's terms, who remain Chinese but whose decision to emigrate and whose activities outside of China are not directly connected to the state--and the explicit intent to form a client state. While both cases might be treated simply as a matter of making state citizenship more salient than national membership in developing countries whose nation-states exhibit all the conflicting

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[1]While certainly related and difficult to define in exclusion of the other, imperialism is treated here as any exercise of influence of one state over another. Colonialism, a form of imperialism, refers to the creation of extraterritorial colonies in other states, governed or at least under alleged control of foreigners. The main focus of this proposal, China, challenges these definitions as an example of (economic) colonization without colonialism, more dependent on Chinese migrants than explicit support from the People's Republic of China (PRC, the Chinese state).

[2]Rossabi's title highlights an often-made assertion that "nation-states have borders and empires have frontiers". While recent reforms in what is officially called Myanmar appear promising, my refugee students and the exile-published *The Irrawaddy* have continued to refer to the country as "Burma", in non-recognition of the SLORC, then SPDC, now USDP rule (whose constant has been leadership and mismanagement of the country by a military junta).

[3]Contentious reasons aside, the territorial breadth and governing depth of Chinese sovereignty remains contested. Ethnic separatists and many in the West (both accused of being anti-China, and the latter of hypocrisy, for this belief) see (ethnic) Chinese migration into Tibet (both "Proper" as the "Tibetan Autonomous Region" or TAR and "Greater" including large portions of four other Chinese provinces) and an "East Turkestan" of dubious existence as a transgression of a more powerful nation upon weaker ones (traditional imperialism and colonialism). Migration in these contexts constitutes "internal colonization" of the kind mentioned in Sadiq's 2009 study of Malaysia, in which a regional majority gradually becomes a national minority (facilitated by immigration of the national majority into the region). The internal restrictions he finds, if more effectively administrated, might go a long way to soothe ethnic tensions, but instead the PRC has actually incentivized Han migration into these sensitive regions. The PRC is adamant in claiming an overarching objective of civic, national integration, to which all sovereign states are entitled. Minority counterclaims are of 1. imperialist conquest & colonialism, 2. colonization by migrants, and 3. violations of promised autonomy, in approximately chronological order and decreasing magnitude of indignity.

symptoms of pubescence, especially identity crises and wild swings of rebellion, increasing Chinese migratory flows are key to understanding both. In the contemporary context of highly mobile populations, problems of minority-majority relations collide with the assumption that state sovereignty protects the demographic status quo from intervention by other nations. In fact, as the table below suggests, powerful states know that their ethnic cores can achieve imperial goals which states themselves can no longer pursue openly.

CONTEXT	PROPOSED PROCESS	MIGRANTS / NATIVES	Internal or International?	PRC IS...
Western PRC (Tibet, Xinjiang)	Internal Colonialism	Chinese (mostly from western provinces like Sichuan, Gansu, etc.) / Tibetans, Uyghurs	Internal	Encouraging it b/c it serves national integration and development goals
"Upper Burma" & possibly Rangoon	Economic Colonization (Neocolonialism)	Chinese (mostly from Yunnan) / Bamar (ethnic majority of Burma), stateless minority nations of Burma (esp. Kachin, Shan, Wa, etc.)	International	More involved with development projects with Burmese gov't than with Chinese immigrants

FIGURE 1: A comparison of two contexts of migration involving Chinese people and the PRC to varying degrees.

In what follows, the first and second contexts will be examined in terms of Chinese migratory processes, followed briefly by a research agenda to test the claims of this proposal in the field. In such a sensitive context, there is little hope of scholarly distance or neutrality, but for a multitude of reasons, one hopes that one's reading of this proposal will not depend on one's status as a Hutu or Tutsi, to borrow from Mamdani's observation and reframing of ethnic conflict as that between "native" and "settler".

Converging Chinese Objectives: Western Development and National Integration. As a sovereign state, the PRC, like any other, is entitled to build a sense of national identity and belonging among residents within its borders. Such an internalized identity is likely necessary for any sense of duty to the state in terms of citizenship. Without it, residents of national territory may be suspected of harboring other loyalties than those the state encourages. Call it the need to instill a civic republican notion of citizenship, but under an authoritarian rather than democratic regime. Yet China's own idiographic self-image as a "multinational state" complicates the picture considerably: even among the Han majority who make up over 90% of the population and who are what most think of as Chinese, local loyalties (and rivalries) often preclude a duty to the PRC as a whole.[4] Indeed, this apparently straightforward statistic belies not only divisions within the Han majority; one can easily forget that the 6-8% of PRC citizens who are not Han (many of whom thereby do not consider themselves to be Chinese, and who often use racial slurs to describe Chinese people) number about 100 million, altogether about the same population as Mexico or the Philippines.

Given so many internal, national divisions, economic factors which the PRC state explicitly

[4]Zhao's 2004 book is indispensable for showing how a unified Han nation was constructed out of local identities, even to the point of becoming "Great Han Chauvinism".

intends to leverage as national unification strategies, such as the longstanding objective to "develop the West", can often have the opposite effect.[5] Especially as cities on the PRC's east coast come to rival the prosperity of developed countries, the vast interior has fallen behind economically. This is evident in the fact that internal migrants from poorer, inland towns and provinces like Sichuan are generally seen as unsophisticated, while even poorer ethnic minorities face the stereotype of being dangerous, even criminal.[6] Tibet and Xinjiang are illustrative.

At a recent conference on religion and nationalism held at UCI, Perry Anderson noted that Chinese migration into Tibet, starting from a very low baseline since the flight of the Dalai Lama to India, has by now thoroughly Sinicized most Tibetan cities, with only bilingual signs and a Tibetan ghetto to distinguish them from anywhere else in the PRC.[7] Health concerns about the Himalayan altitude ensure that few Han actually settle on the plateau permanently, but the number of poor sojourners has ensured a steady supply of eager, migrant labor to make the Han a rotating but overwhelming and year-round majority in urban areas, saving money and then returning with it to friendlier climes. At the time of writing, dramatic self-immolation protests have led the CCP to close the TAR to foreign tourists indefinitely, and it has never been easy for journalists, let alone scholars, to gain access to China's most restless region. It can be concluded, however, that the PRC's plans to open Tibet to both Han immigration and tourist revenue have not yet aided national integration goals as hoped. Gains made in terms of mobility and exposure to the PRC's diversity have, in short, come at great costs.

While tourism is much lower in Xinjiang, Uyghur communities may under greater threat to Han settlers.[8] Interestingly, what this proposal is taking to be a primary example of nativist defiance of settlers in the case of Xinjiang's capital city riots on July 5th, 2009, is said to have been incited by acts of violence against Uyghur migrants in China proper. Captured infamously on video and circulating online beneath China's "Great Firewall", a riot in the migrant-magnet southern province of Guangdong was triggered by rumors that a gang of Uyghurs had raped a pair of Han Chinese women.[9] With word inevitably reaching the Uyghur homeland, an isolated riot took on regional and global significance when Ürümqi protesters became rioters bent on racial revenge, after local police attempted to disperse the protests by force. The causes and consequences of the events , in terms of who participated and why as well as who died or was "disappeared" by police, may never be known for sure. Western observers are quick to connect these events to those in Tibet in 2008, under a unified rubric of anti-settler violence. Official PRC accounts, by contrast, have attempted to co-opt a pre-existing framework of terrorism. While Van Wie Davis' chapter "Retribution and Retaliation: Uyghur Separatism and Chinese Security in Xinjiang" finds significant links between Uyghur separatists outside the PRC and

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[5]See, for examples of economic development initiatives backfiring on goals of national unity, see the Tibet Information Network's *China's Great Leap West*, especially pg. 25-35 on migration, and Campaign for Tibet's *Chasing the Steel Dragon*, on railways through the Himalayas. Partisan sources such as these question the basic objectives of the western development program, calling it instead a pretext for assimilation of minority peoples, expropriation and exploitation of their lands.

[6]Uyghurs in particular are singled out as a criminal element in Chinese cities, each of which has a noticeably poorer Muslim quarter. In addition to the Uyghurs, the largest Muslim minority, the Hui (whose very name means "go back" or "return"), are ethnically Chinese Muslim descendents of ancient Silk Road caravan traders. Often devout, even over centuries they have yet to assimilate fully into Chinese society and may bear some comparison with metics, the eternally present outsiders which concerned Walzer (via Bosniak).

[7]Tibet Information Network, pg. 25-35, attributes much of this Han immigration to a 2000 change in the household registration (*hukou*) laws allowing internal migrants to register where they work—but only in the far West. This allowed them to have all the benefits of local citizenship, unavailable on the more affluent East Coast, while higher wages and abundant employment opportunities gave many incentives to make a sojourn.

[8]Millward's later chapters on contemporary Xinjiang suggest that the government has placed harsh restrictions on Islamic culture, while Han settlers and migrants continue to be favored in the economy.

[9]See Radio Free Asia for a good summary of the events at a Shaoguan toy factory soon before the Ürümqi riots.

transnational extremist groups, she leans slightly to the Uyghur's defense on "whether China is victimizing the Uyghur minority or whether China itself is a victim of Uyghur militants."[10]

Regional Microcosm? Chinese Immigration and National Interests in Burma. Chinese presence, even domination, of the Southeast Asian regional economy can be traced back centuries, to the Ming and Qing empires, persisting even under European colonialism. Unlike most European empires, however, each had an ambivalent relationship with its would-be colonialists. Cycles of wholesale opening and autarkic, anti-foreign closure meant that the Early Modern Chinese state neither had full control nor even made sustained attempts to "embrace" the Chinese diaspora.[11] Burma's ethnic Chinese population had, until recently, been no more than average for the region and perhaps less inflammatory than in Indonesia or Vietnam.[12] The country did see riots in Rangoon in 1967, related to the Burmese Communist Party's links to the CCP's Cultural Revolution, and the Sino-Burmese border was officially closed to trade until both countries found themselves global pariahs after cracking down on their populations in the late 1980's. While outcast status may have rekindled feelings of being *pauk-phaw* , cousins with a shared ancestry, many Burmese now express feelings similar to Tibetans and Uyghurs—dissatisfaction that the many infrastructure projects built with Chinese investment are benefiting immigrants and China rather than natives and their own impoverished country.[13] Thant's interview with a Chinese doctor in Mandalay suggests a looming fear that a peaceful future is by no means guaranteed, as the new immigrants don't mix with either the Burmese or ethnic Chinese and have forcibly relocated many locals for their many construction and development projects.

Several authors have argued that one of the main effects of Western sanctions against the SPDC regime, continuous since it lost the 1989 election to the NLD and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has been closer international ties to the PRC. Thant's 2011 travelogue makes an extreme claim that China intends to use Burma as its own "California" to bring goods from inland provinces to sea (along with oil pipelines bypassing the security bottleneck in the Strait of Malacca), while Lubeigt's chapter "The Chinese in Burma: Traditional Migration or Conquest Strategy?" concludes provocatively that Burma is being assimilated as the "24th Chinese province". In other words, no one denies that Chinese migration into Burma has a long and ambiguous history, as in any SE Asian country. What differs, suggesting a shift from the disconnected process of economic colonization toward a more state-directed and formal establishment of a Chinese client state, is the alignment of Burma's isolation, China's interests in the Indian Ocean, and burgeoning investment and migratory flows.

In the center of Burma, Mandalay has seen an influx of Chinese immigrants in the past twenty years: the population has swelled to over a million and likely leaves out many illegal immigrants, and the city's population is said to be nearly half Chinese—mostly not the ethnic Chinese who've lived in Burma for generations, but rather new arrivals known for sparking nativist reprisal. Compared to the demonstrations in Western China, however, anti-Chinese sentiment in Mandalay is either anecdotal or assumed, despite its more formally international nature, i.e. between two internationally recognized states. Thant's account of recent Chinese immigrants' efforts to attain citizenship resemble those in Sadiq's *Paper Citizens*, for outright purchase of both real and counterfeit documents, while Lubeigt suggests that wealthy immigrants are more apt to establish themselves as morally upstanding residents (though not necessarily citizens) with patronage of local Buddhist temples. Given the region's "rapid Sinicization", the considerable costs and limited benefits of naturalizing as Burmese, one wonders why

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[10]In Wirsing and Ahrari's 2010 *Fixing Fractured Nations*. The quotation is from pg. 192 of Van Wie Davis' chapter.

[11]Wrote a paper on this for a "global history" course. Ragazzi's article treats the attempt to harness diasporas in detail.

[12]Indonesia faced severe anti-Chinese riots in 1998, while 1979 war with Vietnam, resulting in the expulsion of nearly half a million ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, is all but forgotten by most Chinese citizens. Wikipedia's entry on "Sinophobia" is actually quite comprehensive, though of course limited in historical depth.

[13]Rejection of a dam which would have sent 90% of its electricity to the PRC, McDonald reports in *The Irrawaddy*, has been interpreted as a reassertion of sovereignty, paired with military actions sending scores of Kachin refugees into the PRC's southwest and generally showing more inclination to the political reforms long advocated by Western countries.

exactly these new arrivals bother to do so—the ability to return to the PRC at will might well be more valuable. The number of illegal immigrants who don't bother to naturalize may even serve as an indicator of shifting migratory consequences from economic to political power.

Burmese citizenship presumably confers very few benefits on an immigrant, and perhaps only the stateless Rohingya are truly desirous of it.[14] That the Burmese government has waged simultaneous, active wars of insurgency upon many of its internal, stateless nations over the past fifty years is likely more a product of the Burmese state's lower capacity and weaker claims to economic development and national unity than the PRC. As separatist claims are actively militarized, however, questions of citizenship are also less likely to be tractable by means of the minimal affirmative action benefits granted to Chinese minorities. If inclusion of territory and population in the state are still very much contested on a military level, addressing structural inequalities is understandably less of a priority. With the added, challenging dimension that many of Burma's minority populations are Christian, it is possible that the Burmese state needs to deal with its native minorities before its Chinese migrants. When the time comes to address its increasingly Sinicized north, however, critical junctures such as when both local economies and urban populations become predominantly Chinese may already be crossed. Below is an attempt at theorizing relationships between immigration and sovereignty, to be explored in Burma.

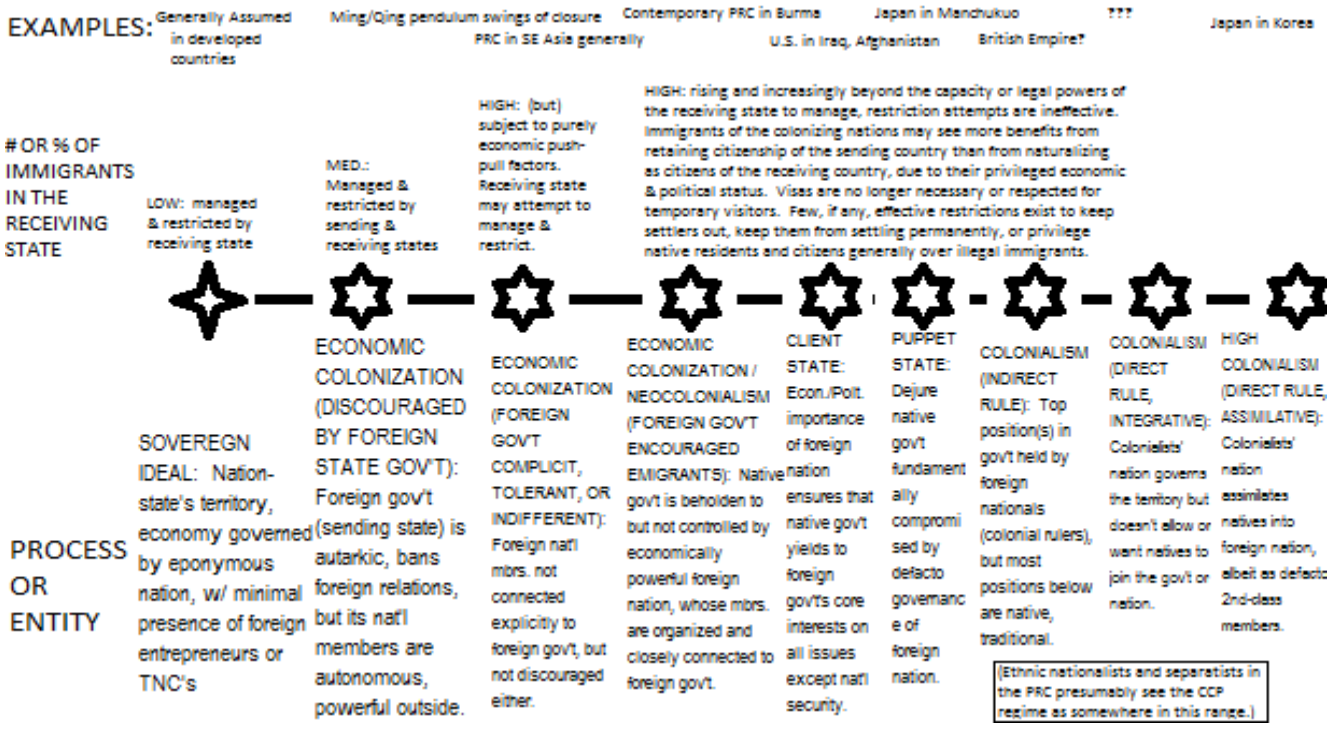

FIGURE 2: A stylized, speculative spectrum of sovereignty, relative to the role of immigrants in the receiving country. A primary goal of this study would be to see whether natives and settlers in the two contexts accept such distinctions or view foreign influence dichotomously. Presumably this is too sensitive to study in the PRC, but as Burma slowly liberalizes and/or reasserts its sovereignty, it may be possible to pursue this question there.

To conclude this section, a puzzle remains as to why so many Chinese immigrants choose to settle in a country with so few official benefits allocated to its citizens, which creates so many refugees

[14]Rohingya's status as Muslims in a largely Buddhist country make allegations of Bangladeshi origin and therefore denial of indigenous Burmese citizenship quite convenient. One could hardly think of a more unfortunate, stateless nation, caught between two of Asia's poorest states, with neither giving them citizenship. Assuming that a non-native origin could be ascertained in their case, the Burmese government clearly has more interest in naturalizing Chinese immigrants who may be seen as investors rather than another troublesome "hill tribe". Should Chinese come to be seen as a threat, this preference might shift or become a unified nativist movement.

intent on fleeing it, and which actively encourages so many of its citizens to move abroad and send back remittances. In obvious contrast, few Chinese settle in the DPRK, despite a similarly cozy or dependent bilateral relationship. An explanation which needs testing is that Chinese immigrants in Burma see clear connections with their residence in the country, increasing Chinese dominance of the economy, and the PRC's geopolitical goals to make trade routes into the Indian Ocean (and India itself) as direct as possible. Whether or not the state encourages or connects itself to these migrants, Chinese entrepreneurs see clear benefits in setting up operations in Burma, with economic opportunities almost indistinguishable from those in Tibet and Xinjiang. In closing, the following section more closely resembles a research proposal, in lieu of more speculation.

Field Strategies. Apparently contested or at least fluid conceptions of Chinese sovereignty suggest that, from a regional perspective, international relations in these parts of Central, South, and Southeast Asia may best be seen as between nations rather than between fully functional and coherent nation-states. Their geographic distance is reduced by a common embroilment in Chinese migration processes, both state-led and independent but facilitative of Chinese national interests. In terms resonant with Hui Wang's categorization of the Chinese polity as a traditional empire which should strive to attract tribute (or at least subordinate obedience) by means of its virtuous authority, both the PRC and Burma's ethnic problems might be evaluated as failing federalisms due to native populations' accusations of imperialism and assertions that national self-determination rights are being violated by "ethnic swamping". It is unrealistic to pretend that these states are in full control of all citizens' migration, but it is also naïve to think that either state believes its own propaganda about benevolent national integration, or that no colonization is occurring in Burma. In the familiar, conflictual terms of natives versus settlers, one might expect that the distinctions between migratory processes—what is state-directed and intentional versus a natural result of large but independent migration flows—are wholly lost on native populations.

If field work is possible in a liberalizing Burma, without overstating the limited reforms on freedom of speech, I hope in the coming years to interview both Chinese immigrants and local, displaced Burmese in Mandalay, perhaps with the assistance of my former Burmese students as translators among those who don't speak enough English or Mandarin. In addition to self-identification questions and practical, procedural questions of naturalization, I would probe their knowledge and opinions of past anti-China violence in SE Asia, how they conceptualize the role of the Chinese state in Burma, whether China has helped Burma or itself more. And returning to the title, I want to know the extent to which Burmese and Chinese distinguish between economic power or dominance and political governance. Are Chinese immigrants colonizing local economies, entire nations, or are these distinctions too fine for those who see themselves as losing their native lands and cultures to foreign control?

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