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ABSTRACT: Despite loudly spoken, nationalist assertions not to cede “an inch of Chinese territory,” the PRC’s practices on its many, lengthy borders show a great deal of flexibility and innovation. Use of foreign currency, soft and unregulated external borders supported by hard internal ones, gambling havens, and the entire concept of “autonomous minority regions” are not merely concessions to a reality of unenforceable laws. These non-standard policies and institutions advance China’s national interests and often acknowledge the difficulties of developing country migrants. Not only territory but people are central to the PRC’s (re-)establishment and defense of Chinese sovereignty, and when people cross international borders illegally, in large numbers, national sovereignty is at stake. Differences in border defense may strike legal scholars as weak rule of law, but they actually reflect differences in securitization, according to whether immigration, illicit trade, or any other threat is present and “securitized.” Based on preliminary fieldwork on the Chinese borders with North Korea and Burma¹ in 2013 and Russia in 2014, this study finds that the PRC has pioneered bilateral currency policies, selective regulation of international migration and illicit trade, and relations with unrecognized, reprimanded, and “rogue” regimes, including non-state-sponsored economic colonization.



ABOVE, FROM L TO R: Sambo’s number one ambassador adorns a dojo in Suifenhe, Heilongjiang. A sign in Linjiang, Jilin, warns against providing food and shelter to illegal Yalu River crossers. Half a mile downstream from the official Sino-Burmese border post at Wanding, Yunnan, a bamboo bridge offers youth recreation and expedited, undocumented crossing for all.

¹ This essay sometimes uses North Korea’s official name as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), as it refers to itself in English, and both the PRC and UN often call it this in English. Recent events have led more media to use the term “Myanmar,” but the author is waiting for his former refugee students to do so. “Burma” will be used in this essay.

“边境地区的每一寸土地和每一块礁石，都是国家主权和尊严的具体体现；边防的每一个重要行动，都反映着国家的意志。”²

“Every inch of land and every reef in the border areas are a concrete manifestation of national sovereignty and dignity; every important action taken by the border defense is a reflection of the will of the state.”

What does sovereignty mean to China? How does this question impinge upon theories of migration and international relations? Two current concerns of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), blurring the line between domestic and foreign politics, are stability and sovereignty. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) worries more about the former than most developed, liberal states, and sovereignty is an issue seen as largely settled for the majority of Northern (in developmental terms) and Western (in terms of geographic location) counties. China is an idiographic case rather than a nomothetic one, hardly comparable even to other BRIC states in this regard.³ Its government-sponsored campaigns to foster technological innovation and regional trade should be viewed as part of a larger “charm offensive”⁴ to alleviate concerns about China’s rise, and the sometimes overbearing desire to create “win-win” situations can be seen in the often intractable arena of sovereignty as well.

Rather than judging China as insincere in its commitments to international institutions, it should be seen as a pragmatic innovator in terms of sovereignty, balancing a limited state capacity with its interests in improving bilateral relations with difficult neighbors.⁵ While innovations are far from unilaterally positive in terms of human rights and other liberal values, they are not solely reflections of the PRC’s interests alone; they provide leverage to gain concessions in states where the West has had very little success historically. By the authoritative account of Drew Thompson and Carla Freeman, since the end of the Cold War, China’s relations with its territorial neighbors

² *Baidu Baike* entry for 边防 *bianfang*, border defense. Baidu is the leading search engine in the PRC, and it provides Baike as a popular, collaborative web-based encyclopedia, with over ten million articles as of Dec. 2014.

³ Feng Zhang’s chapter on Chinese exceptionalism, pg. 44 of Foot’s edited volume, highlights several points of China’s uniqueness. Two of these, “Neo-*tianxia*ism” and the “China model” of political and economic development will be discussed later in the paper. Other new concepts like the “peaceful development” of Zheng Bijian and previous CCP chairman Hu Jintao’s “harmonious world” assert that China won’t use its growing power to make war, provided that the world remains stable and enabling enough for its development to continue. Few, if any, other countries find it necessary to give such assurances while at the same time trying to reconceptualize development and the entire world itself.

⁴ See Kurlantzick, whose concerns about China gaining influence in fragile states are shared especially in this study’s cases of Burma and North Korea.

⁵ In stating concerns that the U.S. has chosen a policy of containment against China, rather than engagement, presumably China’s own behavior—usually phrased in terms of economic cooperation—can be taken to represent what is meant by engagement. See Chien-peng Chung for a thorough examination of China’s “Good Neighbor Policy.”

are, overall, “the best they have ever been.”⁶ By no means does this imply that China will use its hard-earned rapport for the same goals the West has in mind, especially where issues of sovereignty are concerned.

This essay will compare China’s northeast and southwest, situated in the regions of Northeast and Southeast Asia, focusing on how the PRC’s sovereignty is conceptualized, realized, and protected. Diverse populations and geographic areas influence what it means to govern regions of the PRC, and what the CCP is doing on its borders offers abundant opportunities to study policy and build theory, yet the sheer size and inaccessibility of these areas has made them hitherto understudied. The essay will make every attempt to eschew value judgments, treating divergences from norms of the modern nation-state as pragmatic innovations. International migration via land borders will be a frequent point of reference, and empirical points will be made in terms of how state authorities and local residents interpret the concept of sovereignty and what it means to live in frontier and border regions.⁷

This essay also argues that China should play a more integral role in generating theory, that the concept of sovereignty has largely neglected Asia as a whole and particularly the Chinese concept of *tianxia* or “all under heaven.” As other examples, the concept of the “crustacean state” with hard outside borders and soft internal ones is strongly challenged by the titular concept of *neidi* and ongoing restrictions of internal migration by means of the *hukou* system and highly selective provision of “border resident passes”.⁸

Sovereignty is here defined as multifaceted and more than just political control over territory.⁹ How does it relate to borders and frontiers? Stephen Krasner’s 1999 book focuses on the concept’s many flaws and contradictions, but his explanation of the four ways sovereignty has been used is a fine theoretical departure point. It’s also worth pairing each concept briefly with the PRC’s contemporary concerns.

⁶ Thompson & Freeman, pg. 84., note that China’s relationships have had to be cultivated slowly over time to rebuild trust, and open borders have been a major sign of the PRC’s commitment to settling even the most intractable bilateral conflicts.

⁷ A frontier is defined as a geographic area different from the national core, especially where ethnicity is mixed, levels of economic development and possibly law enforcement may be lower. Border regions are those within approximately 50 miles of an international dividing line and which experience much cross-border traffic. While bilateral trade is often studied within a framework of international political economy, this essay is more concerned with migration, whether voluntary or coerced.

⁸ *Hukou*, or internal residence registration, has been well studied by Solinger in terms of the large “floating population” of internal migrants. This essay, again, is more concerned with migration across and nearby international borders, in China’s northeast and southwest frontiers. Major reforms of the *hukou* system are underway, and it’s not yet clear if this may include paths to becoming a naturalized Chinese citizen.

⁹ Border conflicts play a significant role in this analysis, though China’s disputes, past and present, have been well covered by Fravel, Washburn, Mushkat, Goma, and Sul.

The first, international sovereignty, “refers to the practices associated with mutual recognition, usually between territorial entities that have juridical independence.”¹⁰ The PRC’s late acceptance of and into the UN and other international institutions leads many, like Wang Gungwu, to question the extent to which China fits within global history, which has culminated in the international system of nation-states.¹¹

The second form, Westphalian, “refers to political organization based on the exclusion of external actors from authority structures within a given territory.”¹² China’s concerns intersect in this regard with the third form, domestic sovereignty, which allows for “the formal organization of political authority within the state and the ability of public authorities to exercise effective control within the borders of their own polity.”¹³ In recent decades, the “Third Wave” of democratization and China’s rise to become the world’s largest economy have greatly affected China’s domestic concerns and international assertiveness in making sovereign claims. The PRC has consistently criticized both “humanitarian intervention” and promotion of liberal democracy around the world and within China, stating that these are interferences in a state’s “internal affairs.” The PRC’s sovereign claims to disputed borderlands, Taiwan, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and almost the entirety of the South China Sea have been made more loudly in the past two decades, as the CCP has increasingly relied on nationalism for its legitimacy.¹⁴ Just as China has revisionist sovereign claims, however, the PRC faces renewed challenges within its internationally recognized borders in the form of independence movements and other nations’ irredentism.¹⁵ Critical to such movements, according to accusations of foreign interference by the CCP, is the fourth way Krasner outlines sovereignty, related explicitly to national borders and the topic of this essay. In claiming the final form as primary, however, it should be kept in mind that each is related and perhaps inseparable or even meaningless in complete isolation.

¹⁰ See Krasner, pg. 3-4, and the opening chapter generally for a fuller explanation of all four forms listed in the following paragraphs.

¹¹ This form, fundamental to system-level theories of international relations, is not the main focus of this essay. However, China’s own traditional, Sino-centric global system of *tianxia*, will be discussed in later sections.

¹² Later on pg. 4, Krasner uses an example relevant to this study, noting that “[a] state such as Taiwan can have Westphalian sovereignty, but not international legal sovereignty.”

¹³ While not a failed state to the extent of Krasner’s example of having international sovereignty but lacking domestic sovereignty, Somalia, many of China’s problems on the Burmese border stem from the many areas controlled by entities other than the Burmese government.

¹⁴ See Gries for the claim that the “victory narrative” of the revolutionary PRC has given way to the “victim narrative” of the post-Deng Xiaoping reform era, whereby China must push to redress imperialist wrongs done to it in its “century of humiliation,” a concept promoted in PRC school textbooks.

¹⁵ Tibet and East Turkestan independence movements seek statehood. It is not clear whether Inner Mongolia movements should be categorized as independence movements or, like the Gando issue with Korea, attempts to join land to enlarge a single Mongolian (or Korean) state. The CCP categorizes each as separatism, though the CCP’s near equation of the term with terrorism and the broad application of the term are controversial, as there is often little distinction made between calls for independence and greater autonomy within China.

Krasner's fourth is "interdependence sovereignty," which "refers to the ability of public authorities to regulate the flow of information, ideas, goods, people, pollutants, or capital across the borders of their state." This last form, unlike the previous three, is concerned only with how movements across international borders are controlled, *not* with the *authority* to control them. As Freeman and Thompson note, both China and its fragile, neighboring states can be gravely threatened by the movement of people and the ideas they carry with them across Chinese borders, yet the PRC is firmly committed to keeping its borders open. Border control along multi-ethnic frontiers directly implicates this final form of sovereignty, and it is in this arena that the PRC's commitment to regulation of migration and citizenship, engagement with difficult neighbors, and all-around economic development as a panacea offer ample room for policy experimentation. Each experiment can put China at the forefront of theory-building, rather than a marginal or revisionist latecomer, and these exciting possibilities are the primary focus of this essay.¹⁶

Of secondary concern is what states care about most of all, a topic about which a study like this can only speculate. A corollary to the PRC's innovations in sovereignty is the uniquely Chinese understanding of how interdependence sovereignty, specifically in regards to migration, may affect control of a local, state, or regional economy.¹⁷ Many states on China's borders are finding that the strategy of paramount economic development, regardless of how strong or savory a ruling regime may be, increases a state's dependence on Chinese investment and manufactured goods, often purveyed by Chinese migrants.¹⁸ Should economic dominance and a growing presence of ethnic Chinese migrants lead to Sinophobia, nationalists of neighboring states invoke sovereignty and control of territory as the issues at stake. Whether intentional and state-supported or not, the extension of Chinese power beyond the PRC's sovereign borders via emigration, potentially leading to new areas of Chinese influence and control, may be the Middle Kingdom's most ancient "innovation".

¹⁶ The spirit of this analysis lies in the same vein as the changing relationships between state and society, albeit on a path not obviously (and occasionally opposed to) political liberalization of state institutions, outlined in Ann Florini's *China Experiments: From Local Innovations to National Reform*.

¹⁷ See Amy Chua for the concept of "market-dominant minorities," which the Chinese certainly are in SE Asia and increasingly in other parts of the world.

¹⁸ As in early modernity, Chinese traders are more likely to be supported by kinship networks, then and now called *gongsu*, than the Chinese state. The Chinese state may or may not come to the aid of overseas Chinese merchants—historically in SE Asia it has not—but increasing demand for Chinese goods is always in the state's interests.

The structure of the essay is as follows, based roughly on the title. First, the issue of sovereignty will be examined in detail, from a theoretical perspective and later in terms used explicitly by the PRC. The next section focuses on the unique, domestic concept of *neidi*, roughly equivalent to “China proper”. Borders and frontier regions in the Global South will be discussed next. The two regions in question will serve as case studies to illustrate these concepts. Befitting a preliminary study such as this, the final section offers comparative discussion in lieu of broad or firm conclusions.

The case selection within the PRC can be justified in theoretical and practical terms. Certainly, there are more controversial and sensitive areas of the PRC which directly concern the topic of this essay, namely Tibet, Xinjiang, and perhaps still Inner Mongolia. While vitally important, none offer themselves safely to foreign researchers, and it is virtually impossible to avoid both speculation and polemics when writing about these areas and populations. Furthermore, China’s northeastern and southwestern frontiers offer theoretically interesting extremes of “securitizing” sovereignty while being at once more accessible and relatively understudied.

A word on methodology is also in order, given the difficulty of conducting field work in the PRC, particularly on sensitive topics like border security.¹⁹ Empirical data mentioned in the case study sections is drawn from the author’s own travels in the summers of 2013 and 2014 and is quite preliminary.²⁰ While less sensitive than Tibet and Xinjiang,²¹ interviews conducted near Russia, North Korea, and Burma have thus far been informal and undocumented, as much interested in subjects’ safety and willingness to speak to a foreigner as actual data collection. Excepting Dandong, China’s largest border city with North Korea, local residents and occasionally border guards were generally willing to share basic information about their lives, views on the neighboring country, and how non-Chinese citizens enter and leave China across the border. Given the lack of systematically collected data, this study

¹⁹ See Heimer et al., Bruns et al., Smith, and Turner for methodological points on sensitive topics, as most are, in the PRC’s social sciences. Notably, foreign researchers are officially required to partner with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) to conduct research with the CCP’s blessing in the PRC. The first step is supposed to be contacting relevant CASS authorities according to the discipline of study, such as history, anthropology, and sociology. There is, not surprisingly, no division of political science, politics, or government. In terms of methodology, China’s notoriously guarded and/or unreliable statistics have made it something of a cottage industry for scholars with epistemological objections to positivism and large-N statistical studies. While this may be crumbling as the PRC integrates itself with the global mainstream, “things illicit” and other topics with data strongly wishing to remain concealed will likely remain largely untouchable by sophisticated quantitative methodology.

²⁰ Several other reports on China’s borders have been made, but I’ve not found any focusing on Chinese interdependence sovereignty. These range from scholarly, policy, and human rights-centered to tourist pictorial primers. The most useful for this study, not least for showing that access can be gained to these areas and officials interviewed, is Freeman & Thompson’s “China on the Edge”. Frecklington’s “Spotlight” for the *Insight into China iDigest* is a helpful and brief example of the latter kind. Several others, usually focused on a border with a single country or a single issue like women’s rights, are listed in the bibliography and will be referenced throughout.

²¹ I make this judgment based on the fact that no permit is required to visit any of these areas, and there have been no known *yan da* (“Strike hard”) campaigns conducted by state authorities in these areas.

must refrain from drawing strong conclusions on some aspects of the research question. Academic literature and popular media accounts greatly supplement the analysis, and it is hoped that future editions will sample Chinese language sources in greater depth and number. Should reception of this paper be positive and funds be granted, the author intends to return to these areas for more intensive field research in the summer and fall of 2015.²² The central terms of this study are now lined up for examination...

主权 *Zhuquan*, Sovereignty. Political theory has much to say about sovereignty as a state's right, equally shared among nations in their national homelands. As stated in the introduction, this essay's primary concern is with what Krasner calls "interdependence sovereignty," but a few further points must be made about the term in general.

Expanding on the threat to interdependence sovereignty in Cox et al.'s *Empires, Systems and States*, Krasner echoes oft-stated conclusions that states' ability to control movement across their borders is "being eroded" by globalization. With decreasing costs of communication and transportation, "[s]tates cannot regulate transborder movements of goods, capital, people, ideas, or disease vectors."²³ Almost no state has embraced and benefited as much from globalization as the PRC, but the mainly developmental benefits have come at considerable costs of control. Few developing countries have the desire or capacity to manage domestic order to the extent China does, but it's clear from China's commitment to open borders and good relations with all of its difficult neighbors that this form of sovereignty is one which the CCP is actively willing to compromise.

How China defines the term and makes sovereign claims is dependent on what kind of political entity we take the PRC to be. Common units of analysis in history and political science include the terms "nation-state", "empire", and with dubious gratitude to Samuel Huntington, "civilization". Like many great powers, the contemporary PRC could well be categorized as any of these terms, and limiting one's analysis to any *one* of them would be highly problematic.²⁴ Historians are far more academically responsible than social scientists determined to

²² I intend to submit this research project as part of an application for a Boren Fellowship.

²³ Cox et al., pg. 19. On pg. 20, Krasner continues, "The issue here is not one of authority but rather of control. The right of states to manage their borders is not challenged, but globalization, it is asserted, has eroded their ability to actually do so."

²⁴ It is a standard in the field of political science to assume that the world is made up of nation-states, for which the term "state" may be a general shorthand. The distinction between the three is far from trivial, as most contemporary theories of international relations assume that the behavior about which the field theorizes is between states. Each may be expected to behave very differently, and the assumption that all actors in the international system are *only* nation-states would be one made out of convenience and equality rather than reality. Wang Gungwu's closing chapter grapples with these terms well but far from conclusively.

make China fit in a model, theory, or dataset, each of which requires uniformity, if not immutability, and recent works by Esherick, Fiskesjo, and Leibold are indispensable for tracing China's messy transition from empire to nation.

Notably, of the three political entities just mentioned, only states are clearly demarcated and legally protected by international boundaries.²⁵ The age of empires was marked by “great games” and “spheres of interest” with deliberately violated or at least blurred and overlapping lines of sovereignty.²⁶ These were based on which national empire held control over territories but rarely the subaltern “hearts and minds”. Civilizations, even more than empires, are so unwieldy and intertwined as units of analysis that any pretense of precision in marking the beginning of one and the end of another must be completely abandoned. As seen in China's domestic and, increasingly, international behavior, the state known as the PRC may best be described today as “the last great multi-ethnic trans-continental empire left in the world.”²⁷ Official PRC rhetoric vehemently denies this, claiming instead to be a “multi-national state,” formed explicitly to repel the forces of imperialism.²⁸ While revolutionary dogma only plays in frontier theaters of the PRC today, the multinational point remains essential, as empires can enjoy no legal sovereignty—only dominion.

Even if the PRC is taken to be a state like many others, however, its anti-liberal regime²⁹ requires some scholars to modify its statehood. In 2004, Wayne Bert wrote an article comparing China and Canada, contributing

²⁵ I agree with Baudet's titular argument that nation-states are necessary for sovereignty, but he comes to this conclusion a different way, in that a higher form of sovereignty intertwined with legitimacy is achieved with representative government and rule of law. Ultimately, we could both be arguing something like scholars of the 1990s and early 2000s who insisted that China's economy couldn't grow without political liberalization and a retreat of the state from the economy.

²⁶ Even today, Krasner notes that sovereignty is often deliberately ignored. Short of full violations, states voluntarily compromise their sovereignty or have it compromised by other states when they sign on to international conventions and contracts or face imposition and coercion (in Cox et al., pg.23). The “enduring and flimsy” idea, according to Lee Jones' examination of Southeast Asia, is far better at reproducing itself in “sovereignty regimes” than enforcing its fundamental principal of inviolability.

²⁷ Zhao's consideration of the constructed Chinese nation-state (2004), on pg. 68-9, notes that it was the father of modern China, Dr. Sun Yatsen, who initially formalized the multinational concept of China, claiming that since ancient times the lands of China had been populated by the “five great nations” of the Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui (sometimes including all Muslims such as Uyghurs), and Tibetan. Sun is revered on both the Mainland and Taiwan, not least for rescuing the Chinese nation's multinational status from enemies both foreign and domestic, to be discussed in the following section.

²⁸ Such claims were more internally coherent during Mao's rule in the revolutionary era, with the official adoption of Marxist interpretations and shared Chinese characters of the terms “imperialism” 帝国主义 *diguó zhuyi* and “empire” 帝国 *diguó*. Marxists, and the ruling CCP, define imperialism as a stage of capitalism (that being its most advanced, global stage) at which great powers force their exploitative economic system on poorer countries while competing amongst each other for markets and resources. While remaining firmly in the camp of those in the global South who denounce “the West's” economic relations with the developing world as imperialist or “neo-colonial”, the PRC treads on very thin ice both domestically and abroad to characterize its current economic system as “socialism with Chinese characteristics” and its skyrocketing involvement in Africa and other areas as “win-win” transactions based on special South-South understandings.

²⁹ To say the PRC is illiberal or non-liberal, as if its national institutions merely lacked liberal values, would be to overlook the fact that the PRC has described its trajectory as “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” standing in explicit opposition to the wholesale adoption of liberal values and institutions. In doing so, sometimes also aligning itself in the “Asian values” camp of Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew, the CCP asserts that a combination of traditional Chinese culture and socialism best fits the PRC's special needs. With somewhat affected modesty, the CCP claims that China is not a model for other countries to emulate, despite the coining of terms like “The Beijing Consensus” as a developmental alternative to the “Washington

the theoretical distinction between a “traditional” and a “virtual state,” as evidenced in attitudes toward separatist movements. He noted that, while both “parent countries” see their “separatist territory[ies] as legitimately under [their] control,” differing forms of statehood render separatism either completely intolerable or a matter of popular opinion. Canada allowed its citizens to vote on whether Quebec should remain within the state.³⁰ In stark contrast, China remains close to the “traditional” ideal type “still obsessed with the ‘historical atavism’ of territory” and willing “to use all means including force to ensure the territory remains part of the parent country.” To be sure, China is actually among the majority of states in this regard, and while retaining and regaining territory is a particularly strong obsession of Chinese nationalism, viewing the PRC from its frontiers paints it as far more progressive than atavistic.

Greatly varying in practice by region, the way the CCP describes border protection may be a case of the bark being worse than the bite. Defending sovereignty and territorial integrity is central to the PRC’s national security strategy and the primary purpose of its armed forces, as outlined in the 2013 National Defense White Paper.³¹ As an attempt at transparency, the document could be clearer about what protecting sovereignty actually entails. Along the PRC’s international boundaries, for example, one paragraph suggests that border protection is the sole responsibility of the “border public security force,” while the following, briefer one introduces a “militia” whose duties largely overlap.³²

Mark Leonard’s *What Does China Think?* proposes a near absolute sovereignty favored by the PRC, a “walled world” in which the UN’s prohibition of interference in the internal affairs of other states is far more strictly

Consensus” long proffered by the IMF and other neoliberal institutions. Under vestigial Marxism perhaps, the CCP believes that economic development solves ethnic and international conflicts.

³⁰ And more recently, Britain offered the same to Scotland.

³¹ See Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China.

³² The Information Office... paragraphs are worth reproducing in full, from pg. 5-6: The border public security force is an armed law-enforcement body deployed by the state in border and coastal areas, and at ports. It assumes important responsibilities of safeguarding national sovereignty, and maintaining security and stability in border, coastal and sea areas, as well as entry and exit order at ports. It carries out diversified tasks of maintaining stability, combating crimes, conducting emergency rescues and providing security in border areas. The border public security force establishes border control zones along the borderlines, establishes maritime defense zones in the coastal areas, establishes border surveillance areas 20 to 50 meters in depth along land border and coastline areas adjacent to Hong Kong and Macao, sets up border inspection stations at open ports, and deploys a marine police force in coastal areas. In recent years, regular strict inspections, management and control in border areas and at ports have been carried out to guard against and subdue separatist, sabotage, violent and terrorist activities by the “three forces” or hostile individuals. The border public security force takes strict and coordinated measures against cross-border fishing activities, strengthens law enforcement by maritime security patrols, and clamps down on maritime offenses and crimes. Since 2011, it has handled 47,445 cases, seized 12,357kg of drugs, confiscated 125,111 illegal guns, and tracked down 5,607 illegal border-crossers.

The militia takes an active part in combat readiness duties, joint military-civilian-police defense efforts, post duties, and border protection and control tasks in the border and coastal areas. Militia members patrol along the borders and coastlines all year round.

enforced. The counterargument that sovereignty forms a protective shield around despots and even genocide is one that likely does not resonate greatly in regions of Asia which reject all forms of humanitarian intervention. The PRC itself ascribes “separatist acts,” including riots and terrorism, to foreign influences, and it has good reason to doubt whether foreign intervention in the several weak states on its border could possibly improve matters.

The PRC’s “patriotic education” ensures that today’s citizens remember China’s colonial era as the “century of humiliation,” stretching roughly from the first Opium War to the establishment of the PRC. While foreign powers would no longer dare to slice China “like a melon,” average citizens in the PRC have a keen awareness that many perceived wrongs remain to be undone.³³ Nationalists in particular are keen for the CCP to use its growing power to make sovereign claims more forcefully in areas like Taiwan, the South China Sea, Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and along the remaining land borders under contention.³⁴ Nation-building will always be incomplete until a state’s territory is fully intact and under a single regime’s control. If sovereignty is indivisible, Wang Gungwu asserts that “a country is not fully sovereign until every part of it is united under a single state.”³⁵ Robert Bedeski also finds the “incompleteness” of Chinese sovereignty to be “a key variable in understanding the policy and strategy of modernization, both within China and among neighboring East Asian states.”³⁶ Unclear international borders may arouse thoughts of a bygone era in the developed West, but China’s rise is clearly returning the issue of sovereignty to the forefront of global affairs. Yet China’s conception of itself and the world holds many novelties, to be outlined forthwith.

内地 *Neidi* (China Proper), Greater China, and 天下 *tianxia* (All Under Heaven). “China proper” has not been the sole focus of any known academic work, but its irredentist cousin, “Greater China” stirs strong emotions of nationalism and the late Qing Dynasty’s belated attempts to “embrace the diaspora.”³⁷ The term *neidi* (literally,

³³ See Ross’s chapter in Foot’s edited volume for more recent claims that nationalist sentiment is spreading beyond young men in internet cafes to businessmen and broader segments of PRC society.

³⁴ Fravel notes that the PRC has shown considerable restraint in solving most of its disputed borders with diplomacy and negotiation rather than by force. With so many neighbors, each with their own moderate and extreme factions, all claimants may never be satisfied by any territorial agreement.

³⁵ Wang Gungwu, pg. 74. He believes that, until 1971, Taiwan’s occupation of China’s seat at the UN “cast...serious doubt on the meaning of the word ‘sovereignty.’” While this emphasis on legal membership in the UN over actual, “territorial sovereignty” made both the term and the organization a mockery to the ruling CCP until Nixon’s monumental visit, Wang finds that China has since found much use for its UNSC veto and the UN as a whole.

³⁶ Bedeski conceptualizes human security as state provisions of the means for people in a particular territory to survive. Human security is a major theoretical angle which this essay could incorporate better, but Bedeski’s book is rather difficult for this author to understand.

³⁷ As noted by historians of Southeast Asia and Chinese emigration, China of the Ming and Qing dynasties frequently closed itself off to international trade and forbade emigration.

“internal territory” and also preceded in Chinese by *zhongguo neidi* or “Chinese internal territory”) does not translate directly into what Westerners have called China proper, at least partially because it is a highly value-laden term.³⁸ Its application is the very antithesis of precision, and the concept will only survive as long as the PRC’s ongoing project of national integration fails to eradicate regional differences within the country. Greater China is no more precise than *neidi*, but its prominence in discourse and familiarity in other countries is likely to rise with the PRC’s power. In conversation with each other, the larger terms help to define the smaller ones.

Greater China, or “Greater *Any Nation*,” refers to the belief among national members that the true, sovereign nation extends beyond internationally recognized territorial borders. For China, this can mean two different things: restoring all land that has ever been part of a Chinese empire³⁹ or including lands now populated in the majority by diasporic *huaqiao* or “overseas Chinese.” Any “overseas” or ex-pat population is likely to be claimed or at least monitored by the sending state, even sometimes including cases where the diaspora opposes the ruling regime.⁴⁰ Burgeoning diaspora studies are beyond the scope of this paper, but the concept of Greater China establishes bordered territory as a middle ground between the expansive imaginations of irredentist nationalists and the concept of *neidi*.

Neidi was conceptualized in the Qing Dynasty, referring originally to land which was later divided into eighteen provinces, or *shiba sheng*.⁴¹ The territory was inherited or otherwise retaken from the preceding Ming, or in the case of the Southwest, campaigns of expansion were continued by the Qing. As one of China’s “conquest dynasties,” the Manchu Qing also expanded beyond the Great Wall into areas which were traditionally beyond Chinese control.

³⁸ It suggests that lands over which China claims sovereignty, outside *neidi*, are questionably Chinese. Even distinguishing whether *neidi* could refer to areas predominantly populated by the majority Han Chinese is quite problematic. Whether “Chinese” is an ethnic or civic category is taken up at length by the authors of *Critical Han Studies*, by Mullaney et al., along with serious consideration of how widely varied peoples of China came to a single, national consciousness as Han.

³⁹ Some in China believe that Outer Mongolia, a Qing possession much like Tibet and Xinjiang, was deviously wrenched from China with Russian collusion. “Great Ming” revivalists lay claim to parts of Vietnam which not even the Qing ever held, and of course some countries like Korea have disputes with China about the lands of former kingdoms.

⁴⁰ See Ragazzi’s “Governing Diasporas” for the complexities of claiming and managing nationals who may have emigrated explicitly to escape their states.

⁴¹ See R. Kent Guy for a discussion of how the Qing formalized the provincial system which remains very much intact in the PRC. The book also goes into great detail about the dynasty’s strategies for selection and placement of provincial governors, based not only upon ability but who would be loyal to the center and who would use power for their own, possibly separatist interests. Such problems are every bit as relevant in China today as centuries ago. *Baidu Baike* has an entry for the eighteen provinces linked to the one for *neidi*, and both imply that these terms are historical relics which no longer apply to the integrated PRC.

When Western observers talk about China proper, the mind is immediately drawn to the Great Wall as the world's most visible, longstanding border.⁴² Traditional conceptions of China may have excluded barbarians beyond it, but the ideal of *tianxia* explicitly includes them and dates much farther back in history than the reality of *neidi*. Several scholars note that the question of who and what territory is a part of China can be traced to a Confucian cultural core. Daniel Bell repeatedly finds awkward the consultation of Confucius and other Chinese classics for application of where the limits of China ought to lie, but he claims there are elements of these texts with much contemporary resonance. According to Bell, Confucians, valuing unity, would prefer that there were no territorial boundaries between states, favoring an all-inclusive *tianxia* instead.⁴³ There was, in short, no secession from the universalist cosmology of *tianxia*, but the reality of rulers and peoples which did not cultivate their virtue did not allow inclusion in the near redundancy of Chinese civilization, what later became *neidi*, in deliberate contrast to recently conquered lands and territories.

Yet conquest doesn't explain nearly as much of the expansion of *neidi* and China as acculturation, what many patriotic Chinese call the attractive process of barbarians becoming civilized. In the same volume as Bell, L.H.M. Ling's account goes deeply into both exceptionalism and possibly essentialism to explicate this process. Ling suggests that the entity called China was able to expand and contract, not to mention endure occupation by foreign powers, because the question of "who is Chinese" is not based on race or territory, but culture. In the time when knowledge limited *tianxia* to Asia, Ling believes that "[t]erritorial borders...operated as instantiations of *social* borders."⁴⁴ In China's pre-modern frontiers, a traveler would reach points beyond which Chinese cultural practices, Confucian values and rituals in particular, ceased to hold sway among the local residents. As such populations gradually mixed with and entered civilization, their lands and households became part of China, ideally without conquest.⁴⁵

The "cultural practice" definition of Chineseness holds up much less well in the modern era, especially as Han nationalists sought to overthrow the "foreign" Manchu Qing around the turn of the 20th century. Esherick's

⁴² The lack of walls in all cardinal directions renders the symbolism far greater than function of designating a comprehensive *neidi* boundary or keeping out invaders.

⁴³ Buchanan & Moore, pg. 73. In his conclusion on pg. 75, Bell draws on Confucius and Mencius for "political principles meant to provide morally-informed practical guidance in a non-ideal world of competing states...[with] clear implications for the drawing of territorial boundaries." These sages, he claims, would support international boundaries only when they promote the value of peace, achieve unity by non-coercive means (and allow secession by conquered states), and only when they protect a virtuous ruler.

⁴⁴ Buchanan & Moore, pg. 89. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁵ This is an ideal much challenged by historical accounts like Herman's and Giersch's.

portrayal of the Chinese thinker Zhang Binglin paints him as somewhat equivocating, compared to the firebrand Han nationalist, Zou Rong, but both assert that *zhonghua* (Chinese civilization) is a strictly ethnic term, with only Han emphatically included.⁴⁶ When it came time, after the Qing and dynastic China's end, to make a Chinese state, peoples and territories so recently cast aside were hastily reincorporated by Sun Yatsen's conception of modern China. Sun's depiction of a modern Han Chinese national core leading backwards nationalities into modernity remains vividly engraved in the minds of *neidi* citizens, and as once peripheral minorities find themselves outnumbered by Han in their own homelands,⁴⁷ time seems to be on the side of an expanding *neidi* which will eventually obviate itself. In other words, China's rise may yet "complete the process of nation-building to the outer limits of its territorial sovereignty."⁴⁸

Neidi, while clearly derived from Chinese, could be useful to describe core territories of other nations, especially those which have expanded and contracted throughout history.⁴⁹ Center-periphery tensions are not limited to large states like the PRC, but to acknowledge differences between the center of a state and its borderlands is to invite demands for different, preferential treatments for one or the other.⁵⁰ Sometimes, as when discussing national unity or the sovereignty protected by territorial integrity, the PRC is particularly disinclined to mention *neidi*. Even when the term is used publicly or in laws regulating migration, the party's clear preferences are for an actively pursued process of national integration, a future day when distinctions between the entirely *neidi* provinces of China and those having international borders are erased.⁵¹ The PRC remains a non-federal, but highly-decentralized state,⁵² and this adds to the very different experiences residents and tourists find in different regions of the PRC, usually attributed to ethnic and other geographic differences.

⁴⁶ Rhoads' book is invaluable for bringing Zou Rong's racist categorization to light and, more broadly, the inflammatory differences between Manchu and Han by the end of the Qing, all the more startling as the Manchu have almost completely assimilated in the PRC, with almost no native Manchu speakers still alive a century later.

⁴⁷ Migration in the PRC has been criticized by international Tibetan and Uyghur rights groups as "internal colonization," leading catastrophically to "cultural genocide." Again, the CCP infinitely prefers the term "national integration" to these terms, for obvious reasons. Sul's article is notable both for using the term "internal colonization" and for odd misspellings.

⁴⁸ Thompson & Freeman, pg. 2.

⁴⁹ No patriotic American would likely allow this term for the U.S., but other obvious comparisons could be made with Russia and the former Ottoman Empire, not to mention European imperial nations.

⁵⁰ Among many Han in *neidi* both unfamiliar and unsympathetic to the professed plight of minority nationalists in the frontier, there is a belief that minorities are ungrateful for the considerable economic aid Beijing has invested in the frontier and also preferential policies like being exempt from the one-child policy and being able to attend university with lower *gaokao* (college entrance exam) scores.

⁵¹ As the *NY Times'* Jane Perlez points out, expansion of high speed rail will make all frontiers more accessible and integrated with *neidi*. For Ruili in particular, even the regular railway under construction when I visited would cut travel time significantly, as the bus ride there was long, expensive, and uncomfortable enough to make my travel companion regret the whole ordeal.

⁵² See Wu for how the CCP hopes it will work and how it actually does. It would be helpful to know how much say the local governments have in how/whether international borders are regulated.

Seen from the frontiers of a nation like the contemporary PRC, *neidi* can take on very tangible meanings for migrants, especially those China has historically sent to remote areas to establish Chinese sovereignty. As the next section points out in contrast, *neidi* is a place where members of the national majority can feel completely at home, where sovereignty is completely uncontested. “Internal others” of a different nationality whose homeland lies within state borders would find themselves feeling quite out of place in *neidi*, perhaps even excluded from living or traveling in it. The frontier, seen by the vast majority of China’s population in *neidi*, can seem almost peripheral to the PRC, a backward world of the past to much of the affluent eastern coastline. At once poorer, less modern, more traditional, and of great interest to the intrepid academic, the frontiers and borders of the PRC are where China’s innovations in sovereignty take shape, and ideals of cultural harmony and rule of law collide uncomfortably with reality.

边境 *Bianjing*, Borders and Frontier Regions in China and the Global South. The opening quotation of this essay comes from the PRC’s *Baidu Baike*, an online encyclopedia fashioned somewhat after *Wikipedia* but effectively a state-sponsored, censored, and patriotic source of information. Its entry for “border control” states that the concept has existed since antiquity, but the contemporary era calls for a new understanding of frontier regions which is at once more orderly and open to exchanges. Furthermore, the “new meaning” of China’s frontier expands beyond traditional security into matters of economic development and cross-cultural understanding. The border areas are called the “limbs” of the country, again in contrast to the internal organs of *neidi*.

The *Baidu Baike* article closes ominously with the statement that “hostile forces” are constantly gathered around the nation’s borders, gathering intelligence and conducting subversive activities which harm China’s interests.⁵³ Orderly, modern borders are justified to protect China against these forces, but at the same time, the exact locations of borders have not been fixed or even clear, due to “historical reasons.” Building positive relationships with neighboring countries requires that borders be administered in a “civilized” manner, according to national policies and laws, but vast and sparsely populated frontiers make this very difficult.⁵⁴ The patriotic encyclopedia admits these challenges, but no mention is made of the reality that the PRC, like other developing countries, does not

⁵³ In section A of “basic tasks” of the border defense, these “unstable elements” constitute a “significant threat...to our country and people.”

⁵⁴ Public campaigns to make Chinese citizens more *wenming* (civilized) are one policy which spans both *neidi* and the frontier, a new focus of propaganda signs.

have the capacity or interest to ensure that all cross-border transactions are lawful. Interdependence sovereignty, the observant China-watcher will note, is only prioritized where national security and other forms of sovereignty are threatened.

Even as borders between developing countries come to resemble those between developed ones in terms of security, ethnic similarities which make it difficult to differentiate citizens from non-citizens will never be erased.⁵⁵ In a book focused primarily on Central Asia, Gavrilis suggests that institutional design is more important than state strength to ensure secure borders. Relatedly, militarizing borders may encourage skirmishes which can escalate into full scale border conflict. A more effective “boundary regime” will surrender or delegate authority to “boundary administration” on both sides to encourage cooperation, pooling of resources, and “innovative policing methods to cope with emerging security problems”.⁵⁶ States’ temptations to micromanage their borders require more centralization and, in turn, makes militarization more likely.⁵⁷

The opposite extreme, open borders, comes about by different means in the North and South. Firstly, it’s important not to confuse “open” borders with unregulated ones. In a historical context, China’s borders have often been closed, with no officially legal location or way for migrants or even goods to cross. The North-South distinction can largely be made in terms of expectations about what one will encounter at the boundary lines of a state. Unregulated borders with neither markers nor any other obvious state presence, especially anywhere to check passports and visas, were the norm for most developing countries until relatively recently. Most open land borders between any two countries, as an upgrade from a complete lack of regulation, now have at least some official crossing points, but actually enforcing the law across the entire boundary—even if migration is securitized by the state—is likely to remain too great a strain on the resources of developing countries. A further step up from enforcing

⁵⁵ Jayal finds this particularly true of the global South. Sadiq’s work suggests that paper documents to prove citizenship are at once more necessary, authoritative, and subject to falsification in the developing world.

⁵⁶ Gavrilis, pg. 2. Freeman and Thompson suggest that poorer countries are quite content to let China do all the investments in border control infrastructure, and it is difficult to make them care about strictly regulating crossings.

⁵⁷ Gavrilis, pg. 159.

migration laws across the entire border, more often present in developed countries but almost always attempted when migration is perceived to threaten security, is fortification.⁵⁸

While building walls along borders is an increasingly common practice, as with political development, it's important to avoid erecting a misleading teleology. States may build border walls and other fortifications anywhere and any time, whether the border is officially open or closed, sometimes as an *alternative* to standard patrols and regulated crossing points. But states have other options for relatively quiet, only marginally "securitized" frontiers.⁵⁹

Leaving borders not only open but largely unregulated has predictable consequences and benefits. As Harlan Koff notes, communities which span international borders "are often seen as resources for economic and political integration within the context of regionalization processes, and thus, they could threaten the sovereignty of nation-states in their peripheries."⁶⁰ An obvious benefit and practical measure to achieve it is visitation between co-ethnic villages which happen to be divided by an international boundary, but this entails toleration of illegal crossings for small-scale trade,⁶¹ or as the PRC chooses on its southwest frontier, moving tighter controls inland.

Migration scholars such as John Torpey and Linda Bosniak talk about "crustacean" states in the developed world which have hard outer borders to deter unwanted immigrants.⁶² Internally, especially within bodies like the EU and U.S., borders soften considerably to the point of being virtually unregulated. China's objective of national integration rather contradicts its ongoing enforcement of *neidi* inspections and denial of benefits to residents without a proper *hukou*. In developing countries, the de facto openness of borders is as likely to stem from lack of regulation as circumvention or subversion of controls.

⁵⁸ Several recent books have treated the phenomenon of border walls, intended for maximum deterrence and reduction of illegal migration closer and closer to zero, especially where crossing begins to present a real threat to the life of the migrant. For examples, see Silberman et al., Vallet, Reece Jones, and most any book on border security.

⁵⁹ Until the post-9/11 era, the U.S. border with Canada was among the most prominent examples of a border that wasn't very rigorously controlled, and the fates of towns which straddle the border will continue to be interesting places to make observations about border securitization.

⁶⁰ Gilles et al., pg. 20. Koff notes that this is a common thread across the developed and developing world. Regionalization is a mixed issue for the PRC, as it's obviously able to gain more concessions when negotiating on a bilateral basis than with a regional organization like ASEAN. Being a vital, perhaps decisive, part of so many regions, however, becomes more obvious, prestigious, and ultimately beneficial the stronger the regional ties and consciousness are. Chien-peng Cheng's 2010 book is primarily focused on regional institutions like ASEAN, SCO, and the Four/Six-party Talks with North Korea.

⁶¹ See Bruns & Miggelbrink's *Subverting Borders* generally for accounts around the world.

⁶² Torpey, pg. 154 doubts that deepening European integration, softening internal borders, will also lower national border defenses for those who aren't obviously European, i.e. "however anachronistically 'white'".

In more anthropocentric terms, Karin Dean believes that borders in the Global South are not “ignored” by locals, but it takes time and often forceful state intervention before they are noticed. In reference to the China-Burma border in particular, she finds that the borders “challenge, disturb, and interpret the local residents’ everyday lives”,⁶³ involving frequent crossings which are only minimally regulated.⁶⁴ There are still stretches of the Chinese border which resemble this, but given recent refugee flows, Dean’s idyllic border scenes are giving way to more regimentation. Fravel’s work on China’s disputed borders, moreover, shows that where the question of territorial control is salient, there has always been a strong military presence in case peaceful negotiations break down.⁶⁵

Only in the past few years has scholarship attended to trends in Chinese immigration, with Frank Pieke and a trio of Chinese scholars, Chung, Qi, and Hou (in Segal et al., eds.) blazing the trail of inquiry. All point out the fact that Chinese immigrants are not just from the developing world or “unstable neighboring societies”, eager to show that citizens of developing countries are going to the PRC in ever greater numbers to work, seek a lower cost of living, and experience the rise of a great power.⁶⁶ As usual, however, it is immigrants from poorer countries who constitute a greater threat to interdependence sovereignty, and their experiences are less well understood than those of the affluent and well-documented.

Chung et al. estimate that the PRC currently holds 400,000 refugees, mostly ethnic Chinese from Indochina, but also from North Korea.⁶⁷ China’s rapidly growing economy has become a pull factor luring “fortune seekers” from around the region.⁶⁸ To some extent this lends plausibility to the CCP regime’s claims that, excepting the 300,000 fleeing famine in the 1990s, North Koreans in China are all economic migrants. Pieke finds the PRC’s immigration policies still “unformed,” mainly handled in terms of public order.⁶⁹ While coherent nativist opposition

⁶³ See Rajaram et al., pg. 191.

⁶⁴ Also noteworthy on controlled borders between Burma and China for Dean is that minority armies such as the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), not the Burmese state, may be manning the checkpoint (Rajaram, pg. 193). Overall, while “[i]n the life-world, lived space is always resiliently borderless,” the lack of police on the Chinese-Burmese border was changing by the early 2000s, and this has meant locals have “learned to see” and utilize it (Rajaram, pg. 197-8).

⁶⁵ Surprisingly, Fravel finds that the PRC has been very restrained in not using force to settle border disputes. Each of the three countries in this study have had a disputed border, with Vietnam being the most serious example, leading to war. Generally, however, Fravel finds that force is truly a last resort for China, as internal threats more often force peaceful compromise. Historically, China has only “used force in six of its territorial disputes,” (Fravel, pg. 2), and only after experiencing a decline in its bargaining power with the other side (Fravel, pg. 300-1).

⁶⁶ Segal et al., pg. 352.

⁶⁷ Segal et al., pg. 353.

⁶⁸ Pieke, pg. 55, Segal et al., pg. 354.

⁶⁹ Pieke, pg. 56.

has yet to form either, Pieke anticipates “popular and administrative resistance” to legalized paths to Chinese citizenship on the grounds that the PRC is already overpopulated.⁷⁰

Before moving on to the geographic cases, the PRC’s “multi-ethnic frontiers” must be offered as a primary example of sovereign innovation. As an acknowledgement of China’s ethnic diversity, the founding of the PRC stipulated that areas with concentrated minority populations would be given autonomous status, including homelands of Tibetans, Uyghurs, and the far less nationalistic but more populous Zhuang and Hui. While many “minority nationalities” have “autonomous regions” well within *neidi*, the majority of them exist, not surprisingly, closer to international borders.⁷¹ Autonomous regions, as the CCP highlights, are governed separately from Han areas and require that a non-Han representative of the minority nationality hold the highest government position. As currently implemented, however, minority nationalists express deep dissatisfaction with the actual levels of autonomy granted by the state, and critics have noted that they are basically façades to suggest that minority rights are being protected and respected while covering heinous oppression.⁷²

The guise of autonomous regions is undeniably innovative, but if residents of these regions are not satisfied with the degrees of autonomy, political troubles inevitably cohere according to whether the minority nationality in question has its own sovereign state or not. Moving on to cases, it should be kept in mind that neither the Korean nor Russian nations would be existentially threatened if all ethnic residents in the PRC were to assimilate completely into Chinese culture. Of China’s 55 officially recognized minorities, at least six are the same nationality as a neighboring nation-state.⁷³ In the southwestern province of Yunnan, however, state borders overlap with what James C. Scott calls the Zomia, a mountainous trans-regional ridge populated by almost countless small tribes and peoples only fully claimed by seven different states in the mid-20th century and not fully subdued even today. As the following cases show, the PRC hopes to address many of its challenges in the borderlands by promoting economic development in the frontier and beneficial exchanges with the states across the border.

⁷⁰ Pieke, pg. 61.

⁷¹ The Soviet Union was actually the source of the concept, which the PRC adopted as a Marxist approach to ethnicity. Ethnic nationalism was expected to fade away gradually as the state achieved socialism. Arguably, the retention of these institutions and the higher prevalence of communist propaganda in state newspapers in areas like Tibet and Xinjiang is one of the strongest signs that the CCP of today hasn’t cast off Marxism entirely.

⁷² The CCP can, for example, claim that no single minority group has the right to secede from the PRC, because each of the 55 minorities is treated equally by assigning autonomous regions. Like the legally required fallacy of treating all states equally, however, the PRC’s nationalities vary widely in size and political goals like national self-determination.

⁷³ The Korean, Russian, Mongolian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek minorities of China each have their own nation-states.

Case 1: Russian and Korean Borderlands. These two areas of Northeast Asia comprise the PRC's only two land borders in the region. This study draws upon personal observations about them in Suifenhe and Dongning, in the far-eastern part of Heilongjiang province, as well as Yanji and Linjiang, both in Jilin Province. The usual precautions against anecdotal evidence certainly apply in all of the cases here, but the logistics and restrictions in conducting more formal surveys, random sampling, or otherwise more systematic methods are almost certainly prohibitive. These case sections diverge often from academic style in favor of personal narrative, and apologies are in order for readers made uneasy by this.

The PRC's border with Russia spans most of Heilongjiang Province in China's northeasternmost extremity, but unlike the other two countries highlighted in this study, relatively few Russians make their homes on the Chinese side. Multiple sources confirm that even Russian traders who are in almost daily contact with Chinese generally rely on them to learn Russian.⁷⁴ Race⁷⁵ obviously makes most Russians stand out starkly in the Northeast, but integration is a real option simply not often taken.

Russians are officially included as one of the PRC's 55 minority nationalities and can therefore be legal Chinese citizens, but Chinese reference sources state that China's Russian minority live mainly in northern Xinjiang.⁷⁶ This rather ignores that cities like Hunchun in Jilin Province are becoming popular destinations for Vladivostok retirees to stretch their rubles as permanent residents,⁷⁷ but in any case, Russians in *dongbei* (the PRC's Northeast) are largely tourists and businessmen.⁷⁸ Rather than posing any threat to Chinese sovereignty, government officials and local residents look to these Russians for an economic boost in a region hard-hit by the privatization of state-owned enterprises in the reform era.

⁷⁴ See Kapitolina Fedorova's chapter in Bruns & Miggelbrink, "Transborder Trade on the Russian-Chinese Border: Problems of Interethnic Communication"

⁷⁵ As Torpey, pg. 154, puts what many scholars are uncomfortable saying, if documents are not required to be presented to verify membership, "visible markers thought to signal membership grow in importance as reasons for suspecting that a person may be liable to movement controls...Skin color, hair, and the other stigmata of racial identity unavoidably move to the fore as means of identifying outsiders."

⁷⁶ For a laugh, see APPENDIX A for colorful portrayal of some of the PRC's 56 official nationalities, including the Russian and Korean representatives.

⁷⁷ China.org claims that hundreds of Russians are coming. 20% more visit every year, and many find the cost of living in Hunchun, where signs are in Chinese, Russian, and Korean, allows them to live entirely off their pensions, which required retirees to get part-time jobs in Russia. Over 200 have moved to Jilin Province in the last decade, 79 families to Hunchun. The People's Government of Jilin Province is also offering incentives for foreign businesses to invest in Hunchun. I should probably visit the city for the second round of research.

⁷⁸ Larin & Rubstova note that businessmen often arrived in China disguised as tourists to avoid the \$50 visa fee, and an entire class of professional "commuters" exists. These are basically small traders who tend to be strong-limbed, middle-aged women who carry heavy bags back to Russia claiming to need different hats and shoes for each day of the week. The authors imply that goods bought in China can still be sold in more remote areas of Russia for significant mark-ups, making many a fortune (Papademetriou & Meyers, pg. 242-3).

Russia is included in this study on sovereignty mainly because of a new policy in Suifenhe which allows the ruble to be used in Chinese stores citywide. This is a complete novelty for the PRC, especially as the rising yuan is increasingly used *outside of* Chinese borders in states with weak or unstable currencies. The goal of the ruble policy was to mitigate decreasing commerce in the city, but informants in commercial establishments did not view the policy change as having a significant impact on sales. Russia's sanctioned status cannot approach those of North Korea and Burma, but the historic lows of the ruble are likely also nullifying any effect this concession might otherwise have had on commerce in Suifenhe.

Suifenhe's hills contrast strongly with Dongning's flatness, but both have their actual border with Russia well outside the urban area. Each border area has a massive, blocky conglomeration of Soviet-style buildings adjacent to well-maintained barbed wire fences, where Chinese tourists can buy souvenirs and Russian goods at inflated prices. Jade and other precious stones from Burma also fill many shops, though the mall on the Dongning border is mostly empty and undergoing renovation as of Aug. 2014. The city of Suifenhe also sees far more tourists, its streets festooned with infinitely more Russian language signs and shops catering to northern neighbors.

On Suifenhe's official crossing, a guard described his job as rather boring. The Russian border, he said, didn't have a lot of drugs coming through, and very few migrants from either China or Russia dared to cross illegally. The guard's home was in another province, and he mainly looked forward to visiting his wife and young son on vacations. Unfortunately, this interview was cut short by an impending rain storm.

Chinese so vastly outnumber Russians that even though long-term residents in China rarely assimilate, they cannot possibly pose a threat. The past few years, however have seen much speculation about whether densely populated China has designs on sparsely inhabited eastern Siberia.⁷⁹ Richard Rousseau, for example, opens his article by noting a major Chinese purchase of Siberian land near the border for Chinese farmers. Whether by purchase or gradual migration, the issue of China's population expanding beyond the PRC's borders is a shared issue in each of

⁷⁹ For affirmative suggestions, see Rousseau, Schepp, and Frank Jacobs in the *NY Times*. Naturally Lyudmila Alexandrova, writing for the Russian News Agency *TASS*, finds this "totally implausible," as does Adomanis for *Forbes*. Schepp and Rousseau note that, to put-upon Siberians, it often seems like China is investing more in the region than the Russian government. The border towns of Zabaikalsk, population 11,000, and Manzhouli, population 300,000 and growing, are one of Schepp's primary illustrations of demographic pressures. Mikhailova finds the implementation of the concept of "twin-cities" across the border between Blagoveshchensk and Heihe to be highly problematic, as cooperation events are artificial, between high-level delegations rather than common folks on either side.

the cases examined in this essay, and it is notable that the Chinese state is in fact struggling to prohibit rather than encouraging the expansion.⁸⁰

According to Larin & Rubstova, Chinese traders in Russia sell their wares in such numbers on the Russian side that border town populations have risen along with “social problems”.⁸¹ Small-scale surveys conducted on both sides of the border show that Russians view the Chinese as more of a threat, and while both sides call the other “unreliable” in business transactions, Chinese can at least see tangible economic benefit from living near the border. Additionally, the perceived threat of Chinese engulfment by migration is used by politicians in Vladivostok to score points with Russian voters. This becomes less opportunistic and exaggerated when Western writers provocatively suggest that, given large differences in population density on either side of the border, China should send its population to claim and colonize Siberia.⁸²

By way of transition from Russia to North Korea, Dongning’s border with Russia is actually several kilometers from the city, while a *Chaoxianzu* township is actually very nearby (See FIGURE 1). Sancha *Chaoxianzuzhen* is a rather drab, rundown town, but its abandoned buildings are surrounded by propaganda signs emblazoned with promises to make Sancha a cutting-edge autonomous town. Down the road, there are a few signs with Korean text on them, a few Korean restaurants and visa offices, but locals claim that there are actually very few ethnic Koreans living in Sancha. Given the town’s location, quite distant from Korea or the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region⁸³ to the south, the township appears to be either a misnomer or an intentional districting prank.

⁸⁰ For historical perspective on the fact that the continuously existing entity called “China” expanded when strong and contracted when weak, see Johnston’s consideration of China’s strategic culture. Both the Ming and Qing prohibited emigration at times, though enforcing bans was not particularly effective, even with decapitation infamously as punishment for those who returned to China.

⁸¹ Anecdotally, I recall a *NY Times* article quoting Vladivostok residents lamenting the mass arrival of Chinese because they missed the sounds of frogs croaking in the surrounding swamps, presumably having been eaten to elimination by the Chinese newcomers. All I can find now is an article by Medetsky in *The Moscow Times*. The authors are referring to the attraction of rural Chinese to the border towns and to markets on the Russian side, somewhat alleviating problems of unemployment in the region. On pg. 251, they claim that poor Chinese have also been known to rob Russian tourists in Suifenhe.

⁸² Again, see Jacobs.

⁸³ This autonomous region in Jilin Province is the largest, but there are several located throughout the province and in Heilongjiang to the north. In a future version, I’ll try to pinpoint all the Korean autonomous zones in the PRC.



FIGURE 1: Southeastern Heilongjiang, from the Dongning County map posted at the Dongning bus station.

In the opaque context of Sino-North Korean relations, Chairman Xi Jinping’s decision to visit South Korea before the North has been widely viewed as a sign that the PRC is “annoyed” by the DPRK.⁸⁴ Writing for *The Diplomat*, Robert Potter suggests that North Korea, for its part, doesn’t want to become economically dependent on China. Bilateral relations between these countries are one of today’s most vital mysteries, as they are perhaps the only hope for denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. More than communist brotherhood, the two states maintain an uneasy alliance because the North provides a buffer against U.S. military presence in South Korea, and the long-predicted collapse of the regime could potentially send millions of refugees pouring into Manchuria. This has been a constant in miniature for the past two decades, and China has consistently repatriated North Koreans on the grounds

⁸⁴ As usual, economic ties are central to the relationship, and many believe that the PRC is not only North Korea’s only ally; it may also be the regime’s economic lifeline. Yoon and Lee are optimistic about joint ventures between the nominal allies, but surveys in Haggard et al.’s article show that Chinese doing business in North Korea have serious doubts about their long-term prospects. Ruediger Frank, writing in mid-Dec. 2014 about the woefully underdeveloped Special Economic Zone at Rason, near the Chinese border in the extreme north of the DPRK, appears to side with the pessimists as he notes much unappreciated and probably never-to-be-realized potential for a kinder, gentler, more open and developmental North Korea.

that they are illegal immigrants, not refugees.⁸⁵ To conduct repatriations, the PLA has been tasked with North Korean border control since 2003, while the People's Armed Police (PAP) are in charge of most others.⁸⁶

Thus, the three potential threats to Chinese sovereignty from Korea are 1) an influx of refugees from the North, likely accompanied by U.S. military stationed on or near the Yalu river in the event of the DPRK's collapse; 2) Korean nationalists' claims of the Gando region; 3) Increased Korean national consciousness among the PRC's Korean minority.

Threat number one is already occurring in miniature, but as the PRC categorizes North Koreans as economic migrants who 越境 *yuejing* (sneak across the border), the region is made quite inhospitable despite the presence of millions of co-ethnic Koreans. The *chaoxianzu*, many of whom have relatives in North Korea, would be expected to sympathize with and aid refugees, but there are no signs that the Chinese government intends to end its policy of deportation. *The Diplomat* reports that North Korean border guards can be bribed to allow refugees to cross for about \$40, and "will literally carry people across the river for an extra \$20."⁸⁷

Various NGOs operate illegally in China⁸⁸ to aid North Koreans' passage to more accommodating countries, as part of the "Seoul Train in the Underground Railway." The issue of whether such migrants are smuggled or trafficked is unclear, but the distances involved in evading Chinese authorities who would have them repatriated can be extreme. Jiyoung Song's 2013 article notes that 75% of migrants since 2006 have been women, and their intermediate destinations en route to asylum in South Korea have frequently involved transit all the way through the PRC and into SE Asia. The flows of refugees have slowed in years without famine and with increased military presence on the border, but even China seems to have joined the West in making contingency plans for up to millions more if North Korea collapses.⁸⁹ As it has been at least since the 1990s, the question of collapse remains not

⁸⁵ For a strong rebuttal of this classification, see Aldrich, who calls for a "rebuke" of China by the international community on the grounds of denying these persecuted migrants asylum (Aldrich, pg. 45).

⁸⁶ Thompson, pg. 16. The 2013 White Paper states that border guards fall under their own category, separate from the military, police, or PAP.

⁸⁷ Bribes are also in order, according to the article by Lee and Gleason, to erase footage from the many surveillance cameras placed along the Chinese border. A policy announcement which seems too extreme to be true, headlining the same article, is a plan to "demolish all structure within 200 meters along a 270-km stretch of the border with China" to make refugees' flight more exhausting and easier to identify. Robinson's article on North Korean migration patterns is also a valuable analysis of what factors might influence the flows to increase or decrease.

⁸⁸ Liberty in North Korea (LINK) and Save My Friend are two currently active.

⁸⁹ In May 2014, British media has covered the "leak" of China's plan for dealing with a North Korean collapse without being able to reveal much, other than a debate about whether the leak itself is bogus. See Ryall for *The Telegraph*, McCurry and Branigan for *The Guardian*, and this forum of NK experts: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/09/is-china-losing-faith-in-north-korea>

a matter of “if” but “when,” though Sanger, Bennett and Lind are now hedging their predictions, given how long the regime has tottered on defiantly.⁹⁰

Korea’s sovereign claims on Mt. Paekdu and the region of Gando amount to what Chung calls a “soft clash” with China, but it’s an issue which crosses the RoK-DPRK divide. Washburn believes the history issue, dating back to the kingdom of Goguryeo in what is now *dongbei* (the Northeast or Manchuria), could play a defining role in Sino-Korean relations in the event of reunification. China attempted to bolster its claims to the region by commissioning its academy of social sciences (CASS) to conduct the “Northeast” research project, but as Chung, Washburn, and Sul note, the project greatly angered South Korean nationalists, and it was canceled in 2004.⁹¹

The Korean border region in China’s northeast has seen drastic changes in the past decades, with much of the Chinese Korean minority of 3 million moving elsewhere.⁹² This minority, called *chaoxian zu* by Chinese and *Chosonjok* by themselves and South Koreans, sees Yanbian as a backwards hinterland.⁹³ Wang-Bae Kim and Fang Gao both point to generational change away from Korean-Chinese traditions and solidarity. Korean-language school enrollment has plummeted, yet both high educational attainment and integration with the Han majority have made ethnic Koreans the “model minority,” similar to Asian-Americans. Nonetheless, several authors note that the Chinese-Koreans cheer the Korean national team when it plays China in soccer, an approximation for the level of minority nationalism tolerated in the PRC.

Andrei Lankov notes that the North Koreans are largely “undesirable brethren” to South Korea, and the South fears damaging bilateral relations with China by accepting too many.⁹⁴ Emigration of Chinese citizens would suggest that there is plenty of room for North Korean refugees to keep Yanbian *chaoxianzu*, but there may not be

⁹⁰ Thompson’s 2009 contingency plan for refugee flows into China in the event of North Korea’s collapse is a fine complement to the more militarily focused one by Bennett & Lind. One wonders whether the PRC’s own, which almost certainly exists, differs greatly from either assessment in ways other than the positive role the U.S. military might play.

⁹¹ Washburn, pg. 14, even suggests that South Korea’s military could soon be directed against China, rather than North Korea.

⁹² Hyejin Kim, pg. 37, notes that the portion of Koreans in their Autonomous Prefecture of Yanbian has dropped by half to only 30% since 1949. She says that the “near demise of Korean-Chinese identity” in the next decade “would not be surprising,” as the Korean villages resemble rural villages elsewhere in China. All the young people have left to seek fortunes in larger cities, but unlike most villages elsewhere, Korean minority youths often have the means and determination to leave China for South Korea and the U.S. Wang-Bae Kim states that an estimated 300,000 Chinese-Koreans currently live in South Korea, many illegally.

⁹³ Again, the Korean minority is depicted colorfully in APPENDIX A.

⁹⁴ Lankov, pg. 863-4. Sul, pg.4, notes that South Korean media portrays the *Chosonjuk* in a negative, criminal light.

many people in the villages to harbor them.⁹⁵ This effectively constrains further the options of North Korean migrants, requiring them to travel first to an intermediate transit country after China to apply for official refugee status.

Dandong and lesser known Linjiang both overlook North Korea from the Yalu River, and their brightly lit waterfronts are a stark contrast at night compared to the unlit residences across the way. It's not clear whether the displays are for Chinese consumption or to make the PRC an irresistible destination for North Koreans who can see them from the other side of the river. In both cities, the riverside is a popular destination for strolls and morning exercises, though gawking at the poverty on the other side is officially discouraged. Posted signs outlaw photography, and in Dandong these laws are strictly enforced.⁹⁶ Residents in Dandong seemed uncomfortable talking about North Korea, perhaps because state authorities are present in greater number in a city with an official border crossing and railway line to Pyongyang. This discomfort led to seeking research sites farther north.

In Linjiang, in southeastern Jilin Province, local residents are more surprised and curious to meet a foreigner, and perhaps this explains why they were more willing to talk about their impoverished neighbors than in Dandong. The newly built Yalu promenade, the owners of a small store claimed, was a response to a massive influx of some hundreds or thousands of North Koreans crossing into Linjiang in 2008. The walkway makes the riverbank quite inaccessible for several miles, except for an island in the river which has been turned into an amusement park and recreation getaway. Google Earth shows the opposite side of the river to be almost deserted, but in person there are many non-descript farm houses dotting the immediate landscape on the Korean side of the river, along with what appeared to be a school. When traffic lulls on the Chinese side, very old motors can be heard on the Korean side, otherwise only seen puffing clouds of black smoke.

⁹⁵ Tertitskiy's article is particularly useful for differentiating, with specialized terms in Korean and Chinese for each, between Chinese in North Korea (mostly businessmen), ethnic Koreans in China, North Korean refugees in China, "overseas Koreans", North Korean refugees in South Korea, and ethnic Korean Chinese citizens who emigrated to South Korea. It can be confusing to keep track of all these groups.

⁹⁶ I was sharply told by a soldierly-looking guard on the Yalu in Dandong not to photograph one of the more graphic posted signs of what happens to those harboring North Koreans. The image is probably available online.

Some Linjiang residents described North Korea as like China thirty years ago, not so free as it is now.⁹⁷ The laws on Korean soil are “very strict.” Tourists do come to rent boats in the Yalu, but not in the numbers of Dandong. One local bus driver claimed to swim in the border waters of the Yalu every day while on lunch break in summer. To a person, local residents did not find it dangerous to live so close to North Korea, even despite the frequency of illegal border crossings. One restaurant owner claimed that whenever the river freezes in winter, lots of hungry farmers cross into Linjiang. Many will stay and work for food, and Linjiang authorities won’t send them back because they know the Korean penalties are harsh, according to one informant.

Neither Dandong nor Linjiang is part of a Korean autonomous region, but the influence of Korean cuisine permeates most of the Northeast.⁹⁸ Other than the occasional restaurant or sign with Korean lettering, there is little in either of these cities to distinguish them from others in the Northeast. Not so for Yanji, the administrative center of the Yanbian *Chaoxianzu zizhi qu*, by far China’s largest Korean autonomous region.⁹⁹

Case 2: Yunnan’s Burmese Border Cities. Where the region of Southeast Asia begins is much less clear than for the Northeast, but it must also contain a large portion of China’s Southwest. China borders Burma, Laos, and Vietnam in this region, and the Yunnan cities of Longquan, Ruili, and Wanding will be the focus of this section.

Frontiers in this vast section of “upland Southeast Asia” have arguably maintained their distinction as one of the last and largest destinations of “state escape.” Apart from the 55 recognized minorities, Yunnan is home to hundreds more which applied for recognition in the first decade of the PRC but were rejected for being too small in number.¹⁰⁰ Avoiding the state’s embrace is all but impossible today, yet the “Zomia” still contains an immensity of ethnic diversity. While Scott discounts the possibility of state escape driving contemporary migration, war escape is certainly still prevalent.

⁹⁷ *Fox News*, as it is wont to do, gets in a pair of jabs at the PRC and DPRK’s expense in Dillon’s article “Chinese on North Korea Border Unaware of Conditions in Secretive Dictatorship.” One doubts whether there might also be some unacknowledged unawareness on the part of the news agency sponsoring the story.

⁹⁸ Korean barbecue is actually becoming quite common in most cities across the country, but the variety of kimchee and availability of ice-cold noodles doesn’t extend as far from the border.

⁹⁹ I seem to have run out of time to describe Yanji. It’ll be in the presentation and future editions.

¹⁰⁰ As the documents collected by Mullaney show, many numbered fewer than one thousand people, and twenty of the applicant “groups” claimed to have memberships of a single person. Before dismissing such “nations of one” as a result of faulty inquiry, it should be considered that some of these were what Mullaney calls “last peoples” of tribes on the verge of extinction, pg. 36-7. Most of the phenomenon of massive numbers of applications for *minzu* status, however, is probably still attributable to the protocol of the interviewers and the vastly different conceptions of what a nationality was, among people who’d never given the matter much thought.

The Burmese border with Yunnan in particular has seen a great deal of conflict in the past five years, with news reports of refugees fleeing into China appearing multiple times a year.¹⁰¹ Karen Dean describes the history of the China-Burma border as being imposed initially by colonial England, then settled in 1960 “with compromises from both states” and dividing many Kachin villages. She says the Chinese state has been generous with economic aid in efforts to keep minority villages in China and not unite with like ethnicities across the international border. Unlike in some minority areas where goals of national integration can require a lot of coercion, Dean finds a lot of flexibility on the Burmese border for local officials to enforce central policies (Rajaram, pg. 188).

Since Dean wrote in the early 2000s, there have been frequent refugee crises as the Burmese Tatmadaw clashed with minority armies of Kachin, Shan, and Karen hill peoples. Each group has internal factions, often based on religion, and vastly outnumbered and outgunned ethnic armies retreating Tatmadaw campaigns into the jungle will leave villages to fend for themselves, fleeing to Chinese and Thai borders. According to Thompson, the Kokang refugee crisis of 2009 caught Chinese authorities particularly off guard, as 37,000 villagers and remnants of the ethnic Chinese Kokang Army fled the Tatmadaw into Yunnan. The Yunnan government responded admirably with 1,000 tents for refugee camps and \$1.5 million for food and water, but nationalists in China did not approve of the sudden imposition. Neither media, INGOs, nor the UNHCR itself was able to access these refugee camps, and since the crisis some in the region have called for refugee camp areas to be designated and at the ready for the next influx.

Interestingly, the PRC’s official news agency, Xinhua, has published at least one article in English to dispel “rumors” about Burmese refugees, while Chinese-language articles fret openly about being caught in a diplomatic quagmire on the Southwestern border.¹⁰² It is difficult to tell from Chinese media how secret or sensitive the refugee issue is with Burma currently. Naing and Pye as well as O’Hara suggest that at least a couple of incidents involving 1,000 or so refugees have occurred in 2013.

Thompson says that Chinese nationalists would prefer to intervene on the Burmese side to prevent additional incidents, but this would go against strongly held PRC principles of not interfering in other countries’ “internal affairs.” Being more active on its restive borders would alarm the U.S. and China’s neighbors about its growing

¹⁰¹ See McLaughlin, Zhang, United Nations, Naing & Pye, O’Hara, and longtime SE Asia correspondent Bertil Lintner.

¹⁰² Xinhua, Zhang.

might.¹⁰³ O'Hara, by contrast, suggests that China is trying to maintain good relations with minorities in the Burmese frontier in case democratic reforms strain the bilateral relationship. Burma is an opportunity for the PRC to gain prestige as a broker for peace between the Tatmadaw and minority armies, and it may also give a preview of how the PRC would handle a far more massive flow of refugees from North Korea. For now, the extent of the Chinese state's intervention is limited to what Kevin Woods calls "cease-fire" capitalism, focused on conflict timber and recently flagging attempts at opium substitution. The Burmese frontier may be the best test of whether economic development can accomplish the harmonizing magic the CCP believes it can, absent nationalist claims threatening Chinese sovereignty.

Economically, the Sino-Burmese border is thriving with trade, though much of it is illicit.¹⁰⁴ Ruili in particular has been described as a boomtown, and nearby Longquan and Wanding appear to be prospering from their locations on the border as well. Like most Chinese cities, Ruili is rapidly expanding and developing, but the number of gem prospecting stores and the variety of ethnicities roaming the streets set it far apart. In immediate contrast to the Northeast frontier, large groups of Burmese laborers in traditional *longyi*, who are economic migrants in the proper meaning of the term, congregate on street corners and at unofficial employment offices. The very idea of China needing to import labor seems counter-intuitive, but rising wages could make the Burmese ever more attractive, at least in the frontier where they are apparently tolerated.

Adding greatly to Ruili's multicultural mystique is the large "border cooperation zone" of Jiegao.¹⁰⁵ Resembling a concession of Burmese land hardly enclosed by rivers and fences, Jiegao is home to the official border crossing with Muse and is a much seedier Sino-Burmese estuary than Ruili or Wanding. Overlooking the border gates is a cross-cultural training center with a library and language classes in Burmese and Chinese. It is a truly remarkable place, well worth extended field work to better understand the place and how it reflects both China's "good neighbor" policy and a surprisingly flexible view of sovereignty.

¹⁰³ Thompson, pg. 19.

¹⁰⁴ See Bail & Tournier, who conclude that Burma and Yunnan are both being reshaped by the border's influences for better and worse. They advise Burma to diversify its exports away from extractive goods like gems and gas, but the ethnic difficulties other than China's growing influence are largely passed over. Echo Hui, writing for the *Democratic Voice of Burma* believes that Burmese gem dealers are evading laws on both sides of the border, getting "billions" from China by opening accounts in the PRC with help from their Chinese buyers.

¹⁰⁵ Others exist in Hekou on the Vietnamese border, and I was amiss to have neglected the two on the North Korean border at Dandong and Tumen. Perhaps a more proper and focused paper could be written by comparing these zones alone. The Chinese term for it is 边境贸易区 *bianjing maoyi qu*.

Freeman and Thompson interviewed Yunnan officials about the Ruili borderland, and there is a keen understanding that the orderly and lawful ideal will not be realized in the near future. They worry about a lack of state coordination and capacity on the border, where police report that “about one third of the robberies in Ruili are committed by foreigners,...they face major problems with illegal border crossings, smuggling, illegal overstays, and migrants illegally employed on the Chinese side.”¹⁰⁶

Amidst all the illegality, it was fortunate to meet some owners of a family restaurant in Ruili who were in China legally, having been issued *bianmin churu jingtong xingzheng* “border residence passes”.¹⁰⁷ They said the war refugees usually arrived farther north. They themselves were Burmese citizens of Chinese ethnicity whose grandparents left China to escape the chaos of Mao’s Cultural Revolution, and their passes allowed them to run a business in Ruili but not to enter *neidi*. As they used the term without solicitation, the question of where *neidi* begins was a natural follow-up. They responded that they would become illegal if they went past the nearest airport in the city of Mangshi, a city that wouldn’t look out of place in the hills of Thailand. Although their travel restrictions were specific, they estimated that *neidi* didn’t really begin until Yunnan’s provincial capital, Kunming. In addition, one of the family members had studied in a college on the east coast, where she said locals looked down on immigrants.

The restrictions on this family’s movement, being legal residents, extended farther than the far more numerous undocumented visitors, who cross illegally but almost within sight of the official gates, would likely be able to travel. Taking advantage of the small number of roads through the mountains between the border cities and the aforementioned Mangshi, the major inspection point is on the highway, and only vehicles coming *from* the border are inspected. After emptying a long-distance bus, one of the guards said that the inland inspection posts were mainly concerned with stopping drugs before they could reach urban markets, but they also apprehended undocumented migrants. Such disorderly elements, it seemed, needed to be screened from *neidi*, but the state was admitting that it didn’t have the political will to make Yunnan’s borderlands resemble the orderliness of Suifenhe or Dongning.

¹⁰⁶ Freeman & Thompson, pg. 77. They say that in Ruili the PLA, PAP, and other agencies meet at least monthly “to manage illegal border crossing issues” (pg. 88).

¹⁰⁷ “China on the Edge,” pg. 16-17, explain that border officials on both sides of the border have the authority to issue these to residents within 20-30km of the border, and carriers of them may have trade duties waived for goods up to a certain volume.

According to locals, Ruili eclipsed Wanding as the preeminent Burmese border city around 1993, and the latter has never recovered its self-esteem or modern sheen. As shown in the photo on the first page, illegal crossing of the shallow river separating Wanding from Burma is very much the norm, despite there being no lines at the official crossing point. Crab processing factories and outdoor markets line the riverfront, and divided families take advantage of the cheap appliances on the Chinese side to take across the photographed bamboo bridge. A wealthier figure in business attire and sunglasses was also seen crossing the bridge with a few associates, chauffeured away by a golf cart which had been called to await their arrival. As a result of a longer stay in these towns, other subjects could be introduced, but space is short.

Should this project receive a second round of field work, the gambling haven of Mong La deserves to be added as a research site, though it is in Shan State, on Burmese side of the border. From three articles in the *NY Times*, *Time*, and *The Irrawaddy*, the town sounds like it has become Chinese in all ways but location.¹⁰⁸ As the following discussion section will consider, innovation in sovereignty does not stop at one's own borders but can extend well into neighboring countries.

Discussion and Conclusions. Despite considerable ethnic diversity in both the Northeast and Southwest, interviewees in the Northeast did not use the term *neidi* to contrast where they resided with clear Han majorities. This may have been different if more ethnic Koreans, especially refugees, could have been interviewed. In seeking out informants, however, sensitivity had to be paid so not to endanger anyone. Other recurring themes can be highlighted in these closing remarks.

A simple comparison of posted signs on the three international borders might bear fruit. Northeastern borders may have been better maintained and more orderly, but the signs documenting the horrors awaiting otherwise innocent Chinese border crossers were also much more graphic. They depict dead and deformed bodies with captions describing in detail the legal transgressions that led to such sorry fates, usually extending beyond the mere crossing itself into drug trafficking and illegal trade. There is a strong implication, however, that the crossing itself was the common cause of each victim's misfortune. One additional difference worth pointing out from the

¹⁰⁸ For the *NY Times*, see Andrew Jacobs, for *Time*, see Steve Finch, and Seamus Martov writes for *The Irrawaddy*. It's curious that all three articles are from the first half of 2014.

signage is not unexpected: only on the North Korean border was the focus of the warnings against harboring or otherwise aiding those who crossed illegally *into* China.

The long history of Chinese migration and whether the state supported it as a means of expanding territorial claims, as an alternative to conquest, bears heavily on this analysis. Chinese sovereignty and citizenship are intimately intertwined along the Korean and Burmese borders, while the Russian border towns appear to be little more than trading posts and tourist destinations. Of the three, only along the Russian border do both states cooperate with joint patrols and drills.¹⁰⁹ *Foreign Policy* places North Korea and Burma in the “alert” category on its 2014 Fragile States Index, and Russia ranks on the more stable half.¹¹⁰ Fragility and poverty do not account for the differences in border control, however.

Eminent migration scholar Aristide Zolberg has stated that California’s restrictive anti-Chinese immigration laws were the watershed moment which ushered in the modern era of sovereignty expressed in the control of national borders.¹¹¹ Clearly, China’s Northeastern borders are well up to modern standards,¹¹² yet unresolved boundaries of nationality and ethnicity related to the Zomia all but require exceptions to strict enforcement to be made in Yunnan. Liberalism, however, must be separated from modernity, as Zolberg further claims that these early moves toward border control legislation also ended the only “liberal” era of international migration policies.¹¹³ States which could patrol their borders increasingly did, and those which still cannot tend to be illiberal and poor.

In contrast to the Burmese border, the Vietnamese border has been relatively quiet since the 1980s, according to Fravel. The Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979 was China’s last major war, though I have heard it is not mentioned in school textbooks. Some Chinese, when asked when the last time China went to war, will say it was the “War to Resist American Aggression in Korea” (The Korean War), and I hope to explore whether the Sino-Vietnamese War

¹⁰⁹ See Information Office... White Paper, pg. 5.

¹¹⁰ See Fund for Peace. Of 170 countries, North Korea and Burma rank #25 and #26.

¹¹¹ See Zolberg’s 2005 article “The Great Wall Against China” in his 2008 book, and specifically pg. 120, 122, 226 for his extraordinary claims. He asserts that the late 19th century was a “turning point” in the history of population movements.

¹¹² I should add, from personal experience with deportation and crossing illegally in 2005, that Mongolia’s border, despite its isolated location in Erlianhot, was quite well regulated.

¹¹³ Zolberg, 2008, pg. 117. The “liberal” era of global migration, he claims, lasted only from about 1815 to 1880, due largely to global labor shortages.

is really so forgotten. Mines along the border were not cleared until 1999, after mutually suspicious negotiations in 1994.¹¹⁴

The lead-up to the Sino-Vietnamese War sent 200,000 ethnically Chinese refugees into Yunnan and Guangxi provinces, most of which were settled on official “state farms.” A 2013 article by Xiaorong Han examines what became of these exiles, not really considered refugees by either the people themselves or the PRC state. Han finds that those originating from rural areas were more likely to stay on the farms, while educated migrants used the PRC and eventually official refugee status from the UNHCR to move to California and other developed countries. Migrants who had thought of themselves as Chinese in Vietnam largely came to realize how Vietnamese they had become after living only a short while in China. Local Chinese near the state farms were poorer than the refugees, and this reduced their pride in being ethnically Chinese. All but those settled in Yunnan were offered a path to Chinese citizenship, but almost all who could afford to go to other countries eventually did so, with only the poorest remaining on the state farms today.

The comparison with Vietnam shows that the PRC has, in the past, responded positively to humanitarian crises under the most “ideal” situations.¹¹⁵ There is presumably much positive publicity to be gained from accepting groups of the stateless Rohingya into Ruili, as occurred in late 2014. This is a positive change from accounts which seemed to suggest that China was covering up and denying refugees arriving from Burma in recent years, both in terms of whether events occurred and physical rejection of their entry into China.¹¹⁶ As Kathleen McLaughlin’s comparative piece from 2010 notes, however, it “pays to be Burmese, not North Korean” as a refugee in China.

Do refugees from Burma fleeing violence really have it better than the North Koreans crossing to escape totalitarianism and poverty, and if so, why? The easy answer is that most of the Burmese borders barriers are easily surmounted or circumvented, and the border towns all seem to tolerate both refugees and economic migrants.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Fravel, pg. 147-8.

¹¹⁵ The PRC was, of course, at war with the sending country, and the refugees were of the same ethnicity of the receiving country. Many have criticized the U.S. for not accepting more Iraqi refugees from a war of its own initiation, and it’s important to point out when much-maligned countries adhere to international humanitarian standards.

¹¹⁶ See United Nations for concerns about refoulement and Xinhua News Agency, Zhang for denial of events as “rumors”.

¹¹⁷ Chinese nationalists online, like their American counterparts, seem less tolerant, judging from the posts on the Rohingya who arrived in Ruili in 2014. See these two forums for the heartwarming story of building them a mosque in their “new home” in China:

<http://www.2muslim.com/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=571979&extra=&page=1>

<http://defence.pk/threads/rohingya-refugess-in-ruili-yunnan.322599/>

McLaughlin not only focuses on the different categorization of all North Koreans as economic migrants; she attributes much of the difference to the tightened border controls and elimination of NGOs from the region.¹¹⁸

Securitization explains much, but not all of the Burmese border's relative permeability. Small-scale trade, even in illicit goods, does not present a grave threat to China's perceived security. Interdependence sovereignty is important to China, as evident in ever-growing attempts to strengthen border control and control what information is available to Chinese citizens online. The possibility of a growing stream of North Koreans flowing into the Yanbian autonomous region or the U.S. military on the Yalu River, above all, reframes border control with North Korea as a threat to control of a wide swath of the PRC's frontier. A massive influx of Koreans, combined with U.S. military presence and an intense surge of Korean unity and nationalism, could potentially raise Korean claims to Gando from a fringe issue to one of severe consequences. As China well knows, even if migrants aren't supported by the sending state, large numbers of them can create or greatly amplify a national(-ist) cause for rallying and conflict. The PRC is clearly willing to expend considerable resources to prevent the long quiet Korean frontier from becoming yet another security concern on the order of Tibet and Xinjiang.

A threat on such a scale from the Burmese border would be difficult to imagine. Though refugee arrivals have been alarmingly frequent, and the same dynamics of cross-border ethnic enclaves are present and marginally protected by autonomous regions, the possibility of losing territory to an irredentist nation-state is not present. The establishment of interdependence sovereignty on the minimally securitized Burmese border remains a low priority, and refugees and economic migrants are, at least in the frontier, able to benefit from this arrangement. Russia's claims to Siberia are similarly secure, but Chinese migration is most certainly on the political radar.¹¹⁹ By some accounts, however, Burma's own city of Mandalay has seen a massive Chinese immigration in the past decade.¹²⁰

If the connections between migration, interdependence sovereignty, and actual control over territory are connected as this study proposes, the PRC's encouragement of its neighbors to be more attentive to border control is

¹¹⁸ She finds that crackdowns and door-to-door inspections in the border region have eliminated Christian churches and Korean villagers from the North Koreans' options for seeking aid. Matthew Bell's more recent article for *Public Radio International* makes similar points and estimates 200,000 Korean refugees currently in the PRC

¹¹⁹ It could be that Thompson's "slow leak" scenario for North Koreans entering China at a gradually rising rate such that local officials won't realize that they have a migration crisis on their hands until it's too late to stem the tide.

¹²⁰ See Tong, Hilton, and Lubeigt's chapter, provocatively titled "The Chinese in Burma: Traditional Migration or Conquest Strategy?" in Faure. Thant's travelogue disagrees with Shannon & Farrelly on whether new Chinese immigrants in Burma are assimilating or integrating at all.

encouraging and honorable.¹²¹ If a strong presence of Chinese authorities on the borders makes Burma and North Korea feel their own efforts would be “redundant,” there is little more China can do other than to fund the operations on the opposite side.¹²² The CCP no doubt understands how both *neidi* and China have expanded throughout history, and all evidence points to a preference that international trade and migration be conducted legally and that gambling havens be shuttered. Strong disapproval of separatism has so far prevailed over claiming ethnically Chinese *huaqiao* communities as part of China, but even a *peaceful* rise could again stir fears that overseas Chinese might become activated sleeper agents for the Mainland, demanding reconsideration of targeted immigration restrictions. In short, sovereignty does not become salient and threatened only by acts of war and conquest.

Thus concludes a sprawling mix of scholarly and popular media with an inconclusive dash of personal experience. With more interviews and other field work in the summer and possibly fall of 2015, this project aspires to something like a Geertzian “thick description” of meaning. The central terms of borders and sovereignty certainly mean different things to international legal scholars, Western cosmopolitans, the Chinese government, and local residents whose lives interact with these concepts on a daily basis. While there is much left to study and explore, one hopes this essay has served as an initial inquiry into these issues and what can safely be studied.

APPENDIX A: COLORFUL PICTURES OF SOME OF THE OFFICIAL 56 *MINZU* OF THE PRC, FROM A CHILDREN’S SCHOOL MAP.

¹²¹ Not sure if Lawi Weng’s article for *The Irrawaddy* is a sign of progress or not. It reports that although Burma claims it can’t control all the illegal crossings, 42 of 60 total rescues of trafficked women conducted by Burmese border guards were on the Sino-Burmese border for the first half of 2014. The author believes most were probably headed for sale as brides to rural Chinese men or prostitution.

¹²² Thompson & Freeman, pg. 17, state that some countries find Chinese control of borders strong enough to make any further investment redundant. They also wonder, on pg. 41, whether current economic engagement with North Korea and Burma is being used to change their behavior at all or just to develop China’s border regions as part of the national integration strategy.



(FROM L TO R): Han (over 90% of the population and more or less synonymous with “Chinese” as an ethnic term), Tibetan, Manchu, Uyghur, Korean

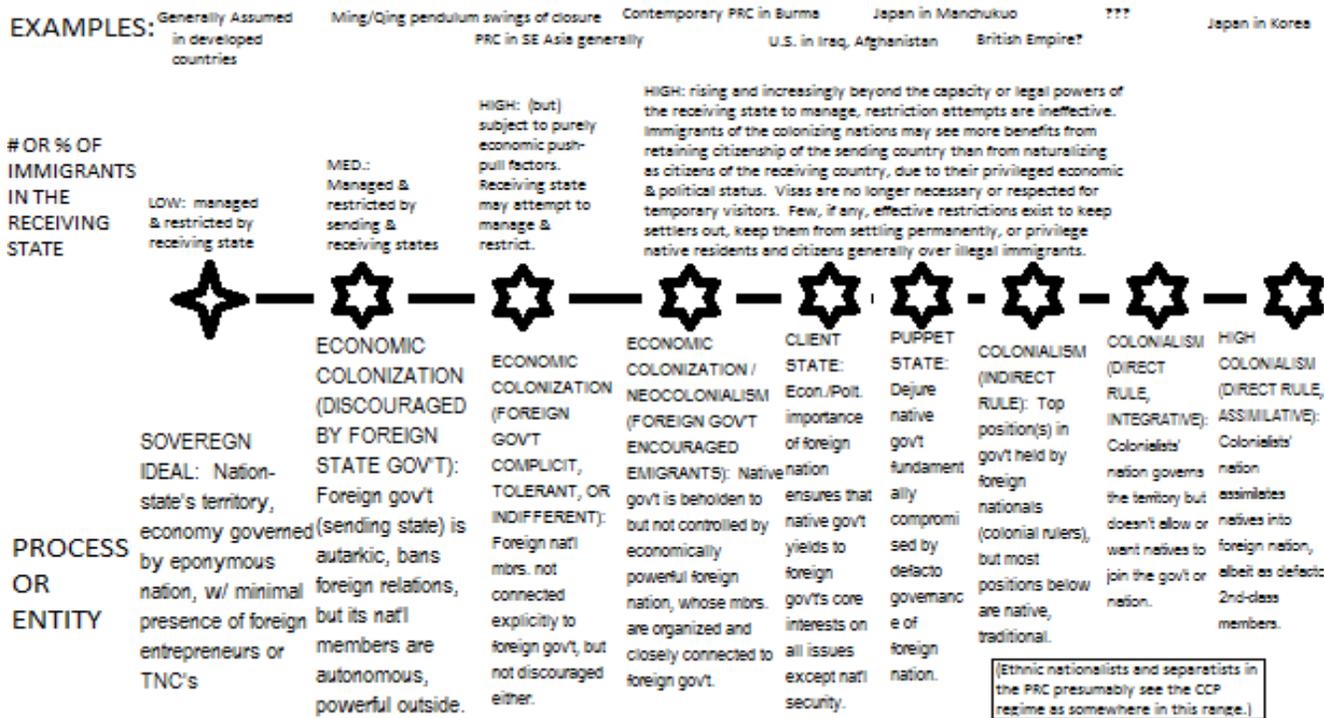


Mongolian
China.

...And everyone’s personal favorite, the kooky, mutton-chopped and tripod-cooking Russian minority nationality of

Source: Cao, 2004.

APPENDIX B: A stylized, speculative spectrum of sovereignty, relative to the role of immigrants in the receiving country. Note that “internal colonization” or, in more normatively approved terms, “national integration” in the PRC’s terms is perfectly permissible under the “sovereign ideal” on the left end of the spectrum.



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