

Chinese Migration to Central Asia:
Contrasting Experiences between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract

This paper argues that state and institutional processes are intertwined with ground-level interactions to create circumstances for Chinese migrants to either accept or reject the authority of their host environments. Contrasting host country models of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are examined to offer predictions about how PRC migration functions on a regional and global scale. Variance in state-level and subnational responses will ultimately impact the environment in which Chinese assets and migrants must function in.

By nature of their political and economic environments, each country has a unique relationship with China. Kazakhstan is a key resource farm and transit zone for China. A substantial Chinese migrant population continues to grow in Kazakhstan, but its presence is not overt. Social disruption is rare. Kazakhstan's central political authority and high per capita GDP usually are effective at deterring public contention.

Kyrgyzstan serves as the region's wholesale market for affordable Chinese consumer goods. Chinese migrants, goods, and investments in Kyrgyzstan interact with society on a much more noticeable level. Violent disputes occasionally arise between Chinese migrants and Kyrgyzstanis. In a decentralized state with weak economic development, uncertainty surrounding China's growing influence continues to channel resentment against Chinese interests.

A sense of urgency compels Chinese interactions with Central Asia from a standpoint of national interest. China's demographic imbalance means that its dense population centers are reaching capacity. Central Asia is a strategic and growing source of energy, market access, and business opportunities. Moreover, cross-border security and development projects between Xinjiang and the Central Asian states are important to China for mitigating perceived risks of separatism, extremism, and terrorism within its geographic rear.

Yet China's ascension to influence in Central Asia is largely inadvertent. Instead of being a single grand strategy, China's actions in the region are organic and market-driven. Change is rapid. The movement of Chinese to and from Central Asia is playing a vital role in determining the future of development and security across the Eurasian landmass. Nonetheless, host countries can and do have an impact on their interactions with China and Chinese migrants in particular. This important observation creates different implications for China's evolving presence both within Central Asia and elsewhere.

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I. Introduction

Chinese Migration and Central Asia

From a vast network of take-out restaurants in North America, to tourist stalls in Rome and family-run shops in the South African suburbs, worldwide Chinese migration is steadily shaping geographic landscapes near and far. An estimated 35 million Chinese now reside outside of the PRC.¹ Within the PRC, over 200 million people are internal migrants in a system ill-equipped to accommodate them (Repnikova & Blazer, 2009, p. 8). Many nations that share a border with the PRC are thus apprehensive about Chinese migration. Acute demographic imbalance, such as that between Far East Russia and neighboring Chinese provinces, where the population is 20 times greater, illustrates such concern (Repnikova and Blazer, 2009, p. 7). In Central Asia, media and populist politics compound these fears due to the perceived significance of China's strategic goals and ambitions there (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 107). Growing Chinese migration² in and out of Central Asia every year represents a tiny proportion of total Chinese movement worldwide. However, the movement of Chinese to and from Central Asia plays a vital role in determining the future of development and security across the Eurasian landmass.

China's growing presence in Central Asia is constantly evolving. Modern history aptly documents three centuries of Russian influence in the region but forgets China's longstanding legacy there. Chinese scholars such as Zhao Huasheng emphasize the "deep historical roots"

¹ "PRC" is used in this paper as abbreviation for the People's Republic of China.

² The term "Chinese migration" in this paper describes the multiethnic migration of PRC citizens to Central Asia. It follows Yelena Sadovskaya's standard for differentiating between ethnic Han Chinese and the Chinese minorities (such as Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik, and Hui, or Dungan) who reside transnationally between China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and the Central Asian Republics (CARs).

between China and Central Asia that commenced in 60 B.C. under the Han Dynasty (Rumer, Trenin, & Zhao, 2007, p. 163). With respect to Central Asia, the end of the Soviet Union offers both opportunities and challenges for China. Central Asia is an important overland source of oil and natural gas to fuel China's growth. It represents a lucrative market for affordable Chinese exports in place of withdrawn Soviet infrastructure and patronage. Most recently, Central Asia is becoming an essential transit corridor for higher-value Chinese goods to the European Union (Weitz, 2013). History confirms that this is not the first time such links exist; Silk Road routes long facilitated trade and migration across Eurasia for thousands of years (Wood, 2002).

China's leadership understands these strategic advantages but also proceeds into the region with caution. The end of Soviet authority in Central Asia is regarded as both a source of opportunity and instability. Decades of war in Afghanistan and a civil war in Tajikistan, the emergence of Islamic extremism out of the Mujahedeen, and the creation of five independent states all concern the Chinese government as it seeks to preserve its social harmony and territorial integrity (China's Central Asia, 2013; Zhao, 2012). Securing Xinjiang, China's northwestern-most administrative region bordering Central Asia, is thus a significant national priority (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, pp. 178-179). Xinjiang encompasses nearly a sixth of China's total land mass and contains vast energy reserves of its own (Xinjiang's Energy, 2010; Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 65). Uyghurs make up nearly half of Xinjiang's population. Together with Uyghurs, ethnic minority Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Dungan ("Hui" in China) who reside there share a history of regional migration which predates the formation of modern borders (Milward, 2007; Beller-Hann, Cesaro, Harris, et al., 2007). Culturally and geographically, these peoples are much closer to their cousins in Central Asia than China's ethnic Han majority.

Yet Beijing credits much of its success in bringing central control over Xinjiang to a half century-long policy of work unit migration. Since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the population of Han Chinese in Xinjiang has increased from 220,000 to over 8.4 million³ (Howell & Fan, 2011, p. 119). Almost every development and security initiative China now makes in Central Asia is an extension of its overall Xinjiang policy, and major projects such as the New Eurasian Land Bridge (see section 4) assume a transnational scope (Gosset, 2006). A sense of urgency drives its investment projects in Central Asia as China strives to maintain economic growth while winning local hearts and minds. Rapid completion of railroads and pipelines by state-backed Chinese companies requires significant labor insourcing from China (Cooley, 2012, p. 87). Unofficially, massive “shuttle trade” to Central Asia’s bazars, though increasingly regulated, represents a perennial tie to China that likewise involves significant movements of people across borders (Spector, 2008, p. 45).

Chinese migration makes a tremendous impact on the Eurasian landscape. The relationship between Chinese migration and investment is mutually reinforcing. Bilateral agreements create trade, security and investment projects that in turn bring over PRC citizens (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 89). As more Chinese citizens reside in Xinjiang and Central Asia, China is increasingly compelled to secure its interests through even more agreements. Although substantial new wealth is available, the dynamics of China’s presence are not always uncontested. Central Asian elites and populations are often at odds over issues such as land leases to Chinese farmers or discriminatory policies against Uyghurs in Xinjiang (Anti-Chinese demonstration, 2010; Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 178). Illegal migration to support black markets and industries is rampant (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 89). Meanwhile, China’s untenable rural to urban imbalance is perceived to encourage further outward migration (Repnikova & Blazer, 2009, p. 10;

³ As of China’s 2000 census.

Miller, 2012). A lack of consistent data assessing the true magnitude of Chinese in-migration complicates the subject while also furthering xenophobic sentiments, which Central Asian politicians and media anxiously exploit.

This paper intends to supplement the growing body of literature on the impacts and global outlook of China's expanding presence and influence in Central Asia. It departs from previous research by establishing direct comparison of PRC migration to Kazakhstan with its equivalent in Kyrgyzstan. In doing so, the paper argues that state and institutional processes in China and Central Asia are intertwined with ground-level interactions to create unique circumstances for Chinese migrants to either accept or reject the authority of their host environments. Such analysis seeks to offer generalized predictions about how current and future PRC migration functions under contrasting host country models.

This first section introduces the main issues concerning Chinese migration to Central Asia. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan represent very different examples of how such activity takes place. The two cases nonetheless show how migration impacts (and is in turn impacted by) a wide range of contextual political, economic, social and historical factors. Section two gives further detail about these factors through selected evidence and applicable migration theories. The second section begins by introducing the broad spectrum of PRC migrants. Following is discussion about how micro-level demographic causes and macro-level prerogatives intertwine to create PRC migration to Central Asia. Section three and four represent the paper's comparative element, looking respectively at China's migrant presence in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Each of the two sections illustrates how the specific host country environment responds to the migratory dynamics outlined in section two. Lastly, section five analyzes implications for future Sino-Central Asian cooperation arising from China's presence in

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Generalized conclusions based on previous sections are offered about how PRC migration behaves in other countries where Chinese investment is gaining traction.

Building a Framework around Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

This paper assesses Chinese migration to Central Asia by looking comparatively at how it currently functions between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Since opening their borders with China under a 1988 Sino-Soviet agreement, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have become China's primary partners in Central Asia (Laruelle & Peyrouse 2012, p. 46). Although different in form and purpose, migration to each informs China's growing Central Asian presence.

Kazakhstan is becoming one of China's most important energy suppliers, offering abundant Caspian oil and helping to facilitate transfers of natural gas from Turkmenistan (China president, 2009; Cooley, 2012, p. 10). Analysts at the Jamestown Foundation predict that China will attain at least 40 percent official ownership of Kazakh oil by the end of 2013 (Pantucci & Petersen, 2013, 10). Additionally, China wants to expand official trade and transit rights with Kazakhstan. Through free-trade zones such as the China-Kazakhstan International Border Cooperation Center at Khorgos, China is forging high-capacity land and rail links to Russia and the European Union for electronics and other value-added goods (Weitz, 2013, p. 8). Kyrgyzstan also offers important transit routes, but it mainly serves as China's trade hub to the region. Up to 80 percent of finished goods in Kyrgyzstan's bazars arrive from China before being re-exported to the rest of Central Asia, Russia and elsewhere (Cooley, 2012, p. 86). As recent as 2008, undocumented Chinese exports to Kyrgyzstan outnumbered official trade by a factor of five (Block, 2013). In 2011, partly due to Russia's Customs Union imposition, unofficial "border

goods” fell to one-third of total exports. Kyrgyzstan remains an important part of China’s Central Asian footprint, but these changes do underscore the rapid changes in China’s relationship dynamic in the region (Block, 2013).

Issues of governance and political climate factor greatly into China’s relationships with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan is firmly centralized under the autocratic rule of President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Its ability to leverage natural resource wealth and raise citizens’ living standards means that Kazakhstan is steadily gaining global diplomatic traction, even chairing the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010 (Kazakhstan takes over, 2010). Kazakhstan experiences little social unrest and the government pays keen attention to anything that might incur citizen protest (Jarosiewicz, Matusiak, & Strachota, 2011). Hence the Chinese relationship and migrant presence there is highly regulated. Kazakhstan actively avoids saturating its market with Chinese products by refusing World Trade Organization (WTO) entry and by enforcing strict border controls (Yermukanov, 2004). Visa issuance to PRC citizens is monitored, as are the movements of anyone perceived to be a PRC citizen (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 113; undisclosed source, personal communication, 2012). Most Han Chinese laborers in Kazakhstan stay in low-key work enclaves and have extremely limited visibility to Kazakhstani (Pantucci & Petersen, 2012).

In Kyrgyzstan, PRC migrants and businesses are highly visible. One case in January reached international media after Han Chinese contractors in Osh Province took local villagers hostage and fought with police over an alleged cell phone theft (Trilling, 2013). Kyrgyzstan experiences decentralized politics, weak rule of law, and significantly higher social unrest than Kazakhstan. Chinese traders and enterprises operate in Kyrgyzstan with little oversight; many of these entities are tied to black market activity. In 2006, there was a ten-fold discrepancy between

total trade figures with China reported by Kyrgyz Customs authorities (\$283 million) and the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (over \$2.2 billion) (Cooley, 2012, p. 156). China's presence in Kyrgyzstan encounters higher mobilized contestation than in Kazakhstan, occasionally leading to violence. Citizens in the town of Aksy protested en masse in 2002 after local politician Azimbek Beknazarov was imprisoned for speaking against a 100,000 acre land concession to China (Kanazarov, 2008).

Examination of Chinese migration to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is valuable for several reasons. First, China's combined migrant population⁴ of approximately 300 million will continue transforming developing market landscapes worldwide. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan offer tested scenarios from which to draw critical insights due to their geographic proximity and shared ethnic and historical (i.e. Silk Road) ties with China. These insights may reveal how Chinese migration will impact burgeoning bilateral relationships in places like Myanmar, Georgia, and Angola. Second, activities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are a launching pad for predicting how China is likely to behave in the greater Central Asian region. China's passivity during summer 2010 when widespread instability erupted in southern Kyrgyzstan suggests that it is not willing to ensure long-term regional security concurrent with its growing presence (Blagov, 2010). How committed will China be in the event that Afghanistan's security deteriorates after significant U.S. withdrawal in 2014? Third, comparison of Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani social and political responses to Chinese migration shows that China's growing developing market presence is not a one-sided affair. Host nation responses to Chinese migration issues vary, but they nonetheless shape the nature of China's foreign presence on a case-by-case basis. By nature of their different political and economic environments, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan each have a very different relationship with China. These relational differences produce contrasting efforts and attitudes

⁴ 35-50 million external migrants and 200-250 million internal migrants

with respect to migration and development from China, and different implications for China's evolving presence in Central Asia.

Literature Review

Most literature on interactions between China and Central Asia focuses narrowly on security and energy issues. To this end, numerous books, articles, and theses over the past decade are dedicated solely to questions about the Chinese-led regional security entity known as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)⁵ (Aris, 2011; Turner, 2005; Kavalski, 2010). Similar themes are covered – what is the organization's purpose? How will it change the balance of power in Eurasia? Such questions are important to ask. Unfortunately, they do little toward understanding the immediate day-to-day environments of Chinese migrants in Central Asia.

Leading Chinese discussants explain the overall subject through top-down frameworks. Analysis is framed by a state-level perspective favoring the SCO as the body for almost all deliberation over issues concerning China and Central Asia (Wu, 2011, p. 336; Rumer, Trenin, & Zhao, 2007; Zhao, 2012). On the other hand, Central Asian perspectives share public concerns about Chinese workers and industry, but with little information about how Chinese migrants are affected in turn (Zhaparov, 2009).

Only recently have scholars begun to go beyond surface-level geopolitics to explore actor-centric considerations. This necessity follows earlier declarations from political scientists that people, not “invisible structures” are also determinants toward social, political and economic outcomes (McFaul, 2002, p. 214). For the first time, readers are beginning to access nationwide

⁵ The SCO, or Shanghai Cooperation Organization, was chartered in 2001 and is the regional security body through which China negotiates policy initiatives with Central Asia. Projects are proposed within the SCO, with finer details worked out later through bilateral agreements. Many existing projects also receive retroactive SCO endorsement as a means to bolster China's diplomatic image and the organization's prestige.

Kazakhstani opinion surveys on Chinese migration (Chang & Rucker-Chang, 2012, pp. 124-126). Firsthand observations⁶ of labor environments, bazar exchanges, and domestic media discourse now reveal subnational thoughts, feelings and actions that would otherwise be neglected by mainstream scholarship (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012; Roberts, 2007; Zhaparov, 2008; Sadovskaya, 2011; Pantucci & Petersen, 2013).

Such work is not without handicap. Emerging research on the subject still must deal with opaque and inconsistent data. Many statistical discrepancies arise out of the sheer pace of change surrounding China's presence in Central Asia. The speed with which people and materials move across borders is nothing short of Silk Road revival. Even detailed publications from the past year include trade or population numbers that are already obsolete (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 88; Cooley, 2012, pp. 86-87). As the circumstances of Chinese interactions in Central Asia are ever changing, it is no surprise that some of the most useful data comes from scholars presently in-region who produce weekly academic blogs (Pantucci & Petersen, 2013; Block, 2013).

Ultimately, emerging actor-centric studies must work with established institutional-level literature. Both bodies codetermine the complete picture of China's regional advances. While this paper is not the first to employ such approach, it strives to reinforce its necessity.

II. Terms of Debate

Defining "Chinese Migration"

Chinese migration to Central Asia is far from monolithic. The term "Chinese migration" in this paper describes the multiethnic migration of PRC citizens to Central Asia. It follows

⁶ These may be documented firsthand observations, if authors did not undertake personal travel.

Yelena Sadovskaya's standard for differentiating between ethnic Han Chinese and the Chinese minorities (such as Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik, and Hui, or Dungan) that reside transnationally between China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and the Central Asian Republics (CARs) (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 87). Beyond ethnicity, PRC migrants share differences in occupation, length-of-stay, and generational status. Most migrants are laborers or entrepreneurs, followed by smaller numbers of skilled technicians, professionals and students (Sadovskaya 2011, p. 106). There are also day traders who contribute to transnational migration, selling cheap Chinese commodities for resale to bazars in Bishkek, Osh, and Almaty (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 92).

Many of these minority groups across Central Asia and China do not have a clear place of origin. Human diffusion throughout the centuries followed historical trade routes, ignoring borders if such constructs even existed. Mass uprisings against Manchu Qing rule in China toward the end of the 19th century propelled Chinese Hui Muslims to flee into Central Asia, where they became known as "Dungan" (Tursun, 2010). In the 1920s and 30s, Soviet collectivization forced countless Kazakhs and other nomadic peoples into China. This movement undoubtedly contributed to the over 1.5 million ethnic Kazakhs living in China by 1991 (Tyan, 2013). China's minority Kazakhs (or Oralman⁷) now make up an important part of PRC migration to Central Asia under independent Kazakhstan's repatriation policies; over 65,000 Chinese Kazakhs have relocated to Kazakhstan since 1991 (Tyan, 2013). Likewise, turmoil in China in the 1950s and 60s during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution led to emigrations from Xinjiang of numerous Kazakh and Uyghur minorities (Benson & Svanberg,

⁷ Oralman is the title given to repatriated Kazakhs by Kazakhstanis. In some instances, the term has pejorative connotations.

1998, p. 104). Most recent waves of PRC migration continue to include various Muslim minority groups, but Han Chinese are increasingly factored in too.

Han laborers and entrepreneurs represent the fastest growing Chinese population to the region (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 116).⁸ The speed of their growth, coupled with weak official data, leads to awkward reporting. Data from a recent publication quoting Chinese government censuses from 2000 and 2004 reflects the presence of only a few thousand Han Chinese working between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 88). However, one informant traveling through southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 noticed dozens of Han migrant work camps along a highway construction project; another few hundred Han Chinese sellers were seen at a single Bishkek bazar (undisclosed source, personal communication, February 2013). Laborers especially tend to rotate in and out of the host country quickly as contracts open and close.⁹

Overall, Han Chinese are more prone toward short-term migration, while non-Han have a tendency to integrate into the local communities with whom they share kinship ties (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 111). Uyghurs in Kazakhstan (around 223,000 total) are allowed schooling in their own language, something that is no longer readily available in China (Laruelle & Peyrouse 2012, p. 21; undisclosed source, personal communication, January 2013). Such benefits in Kazakhstan are one reason why many of China's Kazakhs still seek travel or migration to the country. An informant living in Urumqi¹⁰ in 2011 noticed daily lines of Chinese Kazakhs waiting to enter the Kazakhstani diplomatic office to process travel paperwork (undisclosed source, personal communication, February 2013).

⁸ The author asserts this based on an assumed positive correlation of Han people to recent Chinese inflows into the region.

⁹ This is also a trend of Chinese migrants employed temporarily in the Russian Far East. See Repnikova and Blazer, 2009, p. 12.

¹⁰ Urumqi is the capital city of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Integration is not always simple though. PRC migrants, regardless of ethnicity, are disadvantaged by not knowing Russian, which remains the main business language in Central Asia (Foust, 2011). Generational gaps underscore cultural dissimilarities for migrants coming before and after Communist reform eras, who increasingly separate into their own sub-communities (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, pp. 21-22; Hojer, 2012, p. 5). Uyghur migrants who previously ran vibrant civic organizations and managed sales of Chinese goods are becoming more segmented (Kazakhstani Uighur, 2009). One reason is a distrust of recently migrated Uyghurs who are perceived to work for Chinese security services (Hojer, 2012, p. 8). This recession from public life by the Uyghurs opens vacancies in local business for Dungan and Han Chinese to fill.

Demographics and Micro-Level Analysis

Central Asia has a labor deficit and China has a labor surplus (Aslan, 2008; Li, 2011; Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 90). Acknowledging the corresponding flow of migrants from China to Central Asia is important, but understanding migratory causes and impacts requires looking at the micro-level perspectives of the actors involved. There are severe demographic challenges in the region that need to first be addressed.

The end of Soviet era welfare and key industries in the newly independent states meant that Central Asian workers lost access to traditional state insurances and, often, their jobs (Jones Luong, 2003, p. 14). Russia today remains an important source of remittances to Central Asia from over one million migrant laborers, many of them from Kyrgyzstan (Marat, 2009). According to 2008 World Bank figures, money sent back to Kyrgyzstan from migrants working in Russia equaled 27 percent of the country's GDP (Cooley, 2012, p. 63). Such outward

migration puts a strain on families who are short of caretakers. Working-age men who might normally work in heavy industry are less willing to assume the long hours and low pay that Chinese laborers readily accept (Zhaparov, 2008, p. 87).

Russia's imposition of a Customs Union since 2010 is making an impact on its Central Asian labor population. The number of annual Russian visa permits to Central Asian laborers has fallen by close to 50 percent (Cooley, 2012, p. 63). It remains to be seen whether the return of large numbers of Central Asian workers will complicate the availability of jobs in Central Asia between locals and Chinese migrants.

China, on the other hand, suffers from a growing urban to rural imbalance. If many Central Asians feel little excitement to compete with Chinese for jobs, Chinese themselves rarely harbor ambitions to reside in Central Asia on a long-term basis (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, 189). These difficult decisions are often necessary amid the jarring market changes of post-communism.

China's dramatic achievements in economic progress have not yielded equal dividends to all Chinese citizens. A sharp contrast in wealth and living standards occurs between urban and rural areas, with highest benefit accruing to the urban coastal regions (Kong, 2010). Nation-wide, a household registration system, or "hukou," governs each family's ability to legally live, work, and receive state benefits outside of its place of origin. Those who already have an urban "hukou" hold significant advantages in relocating or finding new opportunities. In reality, most of China's internal migrants, some 250 million people (Miller, 2013, p. 4), do not hold valid registration for their location of work. In spite of the "hukou" regime, China's population ratio is increasingly urban as more and more rural residents attempt to gain city status.

This trend places significant pressure on large towns, where local governments simply do not have the capacity to handle large influxes of several thousand or more people from the countryside. In theory, the national government compensates for this shortfall through direct fiscal transfers to local leadership, something that is not always adequate in practice (Huang & Chen, 2012). In turn, local leaders are relying ever more on rural land sales to bolster their tight budgets, reinforcing both the cycle of rural to urban movement as well as rising agricultural shortages. The majority of China's agriculture is produced from individually-farmed one acre plots of land. Looking at demographics, there is perpetual fear concerning the "Red Line," the rural to urban ratio that must not be crossed if China is to maintain the ability to feed its population (Magistad, 2013).

These structural challenges, coupled with China's scale size, produce ripe conditions to push Chinese laborers and farmers outward across new borders. China's population growth of 74 million people over the past decade far exceeds Kazakhstan's total population of 15 million (Wines & LaFraniere, 2011). These conditions feed very much into the fierce responses by Kazakhstanis and Kyrgyzstanis toward perceived attempts by China to claim ownership over Central Asian land and culture (See sections three and four).

Macro-Level Prerogatives

China possesses no single strategic plan for migration to or settlement in Central Asia. Nor do most Chinese desire to relocate to Central Asia¹¹ (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 122). Yet, macro-level prerogatives regarding security and economics do correspond closely to migration outcomes.

¹¹ Only 350 Han Chinese have stayed on as permanent residents in Kazakhstan from 1992 to 2006. See Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 122.

China deeply fears the prospect of Central Asian instability. Between the transition of Soviet Muslim republics into independent nation-states, the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan and the later progression of the U.S.-led Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) in South and Central Asia, the Chinese government is keenly worried about the impacts of these events on its own Turkic Muslim population in Xinjiang. It therefore maintains the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to counter the perceived triple threat of “terrorism, extremism, and separatism” in the region (Wu, 2011, pp. 240; 323). The SCO is a regional security organization encompassing all Central Asian states. It provides a forum for Beijing to advance its views on regional security and development issues, issues which are usually translated later into bilateral assistance agreements between China and specific SCO members (Peyrouse, 2012, p. 3). China promises large-scale loans and infrastructure projects. In return, Central Asian governments accommodate Beijing by extraditing Uyghur dissidents and curbing the activities of overseas Uyghur organizations.

Xinjiang is consistently used by the Chinese government as a reference point and model for wider Central Asian development under Beijing’s “Open Up the West”¹² campaign and “Go-Out” policy (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 91; Wu, 2012, p. 333).¹³ Critical infrastructure investment and Han Chinese migration to Central Asia over the past two decades have dramatically raised overall living standards for Xinjiang residents at the expense of genuine political autonomy and local trades (Xinjiang displays, 2013; Group Says, 2012). Large-scale industries in Xinjiang are

¹² The Chinese government’s “Open Up the West” (西部大开发) campaign was formulated in 1999 as a means to develop China’s western provinces. Wealthy coastal provinces are paired with poor western provinces to co-develop investments and infrastructure using central government funding. Over recent years, this campaign has grown synonymous with Chinese policies to encourage stable development in Xinjiang.

¹³ China’s “Go Out” (走出去) policy was initiated in 1999 to formulate Chinese investment strategy abroad. Many of the large-scale infrastructure projects in Central Asia under the SCO name involve coordination by Chinese state-owned enterprises. These companies, in turn, must answer to a central State Owned Asset Supervision Administration Commission (SASAC).

tightly connected with China's national economy and specialize in supporting onward trade from the coastal manufacturing zones to Central Asia and Europe. The provincial capital of Urumqi is the site of the newly re-invigorated China-Eurasia Expo (Xinhua, 2012). Kashgar, Xinjiang's westernmost metropolis, is fast developing as a result of several Special Economic Zone (SEZ) partnerships with larger eastern cities such as Shenzhen (Liu, 2012).

A sense of urgency compels Chinese interactions with Central Asia from a standpoint of national interest. Pursuit of cross-border security and development projects between Xinjiang and the Central Asian states is designed to mitigate perceived risks of separatism, extremism, and terrorism. Similar urgency falls on operational facets of Chinese projects in the region to perform in a timely manner, which supports the rationale for steering Chinese migration westward (Cooley, 2012, p. 94). Most Chinese suppliers and employers dealing with Central Asia use favored networks (i.e. laborers, materials, and trucks) coming from China rather than trust in local capital (Sadovskaya, 2011, pp. 96-97). One highway project in southern Kyrgyzstan exclusively used thousands of inland Chinese laborers who lived in roadside tents at great distance from any town (undisclosed source, personal communication, February 2013). Similar elements (see section four) apply to the logic behind shuttle trade networks, where distribution channels are overwhelmingly dominated by Chinese.

Bridging the State and Society Gap

Central Asian and Chinese discourses concerning Sino-Central Asian relations are troubled by a gap between society and state-level discussions. A government does not always converse about its nation's issues in the same manner society does. Likewise, society does not always behave in a manner that government conceives. Before proceeding with comparison of

cases in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, it is important to consider an appropriate theoretical framework that can bridge the state and society gap.

A heuristic framework under migration systems theory attempts holistic representation of migration phenomena. According to Castles and Miller, “migratory movement can be seen as the result of interacting macro- and micro-structures. Macro-structures refer to large-scale institutional factors, while micro-structures embrace the networks, practices and beliefs of the migrants themselves” (Castles & Miller 2003, p. 27). PRC migration to Central Asia is further informed by prior links between sending and receiving countries, such as shared history, political influence, trade, investment, and cultural connections (Castles & Miller, 2003, p. 26).

Analysis through current migration systems theory reveals that Chinese migrants relocate to Central Asia if correlation exists between institutional-level needs of industry and government and the personal or family requirements of migrants themselves. This model is better suited to the actual situation than some alternative frameworks. For example, classical migration theory follows the understanding that migrants travel from developing nations to developed nations in search of greater earning potential (Castles & Miller, 2003, p. 22). Higher wages are saved to remit home, or to establish a foundation for supporting family member relocation in the secondary country. In the case of Chinese migration to Central Asia, individuals abiding by these concepts might take advantage of a higher income scenario to permanently resettle entire family units from China, but this is not happening. According to Massey: “International migrants do not come from poor, isolated places that are disconnected from world markets, but from regions and nations that are undergoing rapid change as a result of their incorporation into global trade, information, and production networks” (Massey, 2003, p. 11). The goal for migrants in Massey’s framework is therefore not permanent migration, but a temporary relocation for dealing with

unsettling market transformations at home. Classical migration theory does not work because it focuses solely on individual agency while disregarding key institutional or historical forces.

Under a historical-structural migration framework, PRC migration to Central Asia is couched in macro-level Chinese capability and needs to fill Central Asian labor requirements (Castles & Miller, 2003, pp. 25-26). These are driven by policies and investments. However, this dominant institutional approach ignores mixed Central Asian emotions about China's presence at the subnational level. In some ways, large quantities of affordable Chinese products to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan played a stabilizing role during the economic shocks of the early-to-mid 1990s (Tinjbai, 2010). Rising numbers of Chinese manual laborers in recent years do fill critical vacancies in key industries (construction and foundry work in Kyrgyzstan; energy and transport infrastructure in Kazakhstan's case). If such arrangements are so fulfilling, however, why does targeted violence against Chinese migrants in Central Asia continue? A migration systems theory approach therefore allows scholars to draw connections and answer these questions.

One factor is the debate on whether large Chinese investment projects in Central Asia should observe local hiring quotas (Tasboulatova, 2013; Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 130). Risk and benefit analyses are necessary to inform both macro and micro level players. Direct insourcing of Chinese workers on a highway project allows for greater centralized direction, efficiency, and workday maximization. Using local labor may require significantly greater complexity due to language barriers and the lack of clear recruiting procedures. Even if local personnel are employed, the economic and political fallout from potential labor unrest against Chinese managers poses bilateral risks that extend far beyond any single operating facility (Jarosiewicz, Matusiak, & Strachota, 2011; Dzyubenko, 2012).

The next two sections will look more closely at the comparative phenomena of Chinese migration to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. As previously stated, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan each represent different political and economic environments for Chinese migration. Kazakhstan's society is highly centralized with limited alternative centers to President Nazarbayev's authority, domestic or foreign. Kyrgyzstan's society is decentralized and experiences recurring instability. Foreign investment in Kazakhstan largely depends on energy extraction and transit; in Kyrgyzstan, business tends to revolve around multiple sectors, especially material production and trading of household goods. Both countries thus have a very different relationship with China. These relational differences produce contrasting efforts and attitudes with respect to migration and development from China, and different implications for China's evolving presence in Central Asia.

III. Kazakhstan and PRC Migration: Confident Regulation

Kazakhstan is self-confident in leveraging its natural resources to its diplomatic advantage. Although China holds increasing sway over its top Central Asian trade partner, what it does within Kazakhstan is met by cautious regulation. Chinese investment and migration to Kazakhstan, despite rapid increases over the past five years, must still adhere to Kazakhstani terms (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 107). In other words, the relationship between Chinese migrants and Kazakhstani society is mutually agreeable. Visa issuance to Chinese citizens is closely guarded. Most Chinese laborers in Kazakhstan (usually ethnic Han) reside in isolated enclaves managed by their respective employers. Even ethnic Kazakhs from China who live in

cities like Almaty are often subject to periodic checks from authorities to ensure the legality of their presence (undisclosed source, personal communication, November 2012).

This section will begin by examining the economic sectors in Kazakhstan that most frequently interact with the Chinese presence there. It will then outline the role that migrants play in these various sectors. Lastly, the section will account for the overall political, social, and economic environment that PRC migrants encounter in Kazakhstan and the nature of responses they receive there.

Chinese Sectors and Migrant Presence

Kazakhstan's relationship with China is centered on providing Caspian energy to its partner through large-scale, collaborative infrastructure and development. China was not the first to enter Kazakhstan's energy industry. However, Chinese state-owned companies such as China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) have strategically purchased a series of small and medium-sized oil fields there since 2003 (Cooley, 2012, p. 91). With CNPC's acquisition of PetroKazakhstan in 2005, official estimates placed Chinese control of Kazakhstani oil at 26 percent in 2007 (Cooley, 2012, p. 91). Most recent surveys suggest that China will have a 40 to 50 percent stake by the end of this year. Pending acquisitions by China's sovereign wealth fund China Investment Corporation (CIC)¹⁴ to buy Kazakhoil Aktobe, Kazakhturkmunai and Mangistau Investments would certainly give Chinese companies at least 40 percent control over Kazakhstan's oil production (Pantucci & Petersen, 2013, p. 10). Kazakhstan does not supply a substantial amount of natural gas to China, but it does serve as an important transit partner for its overland transport from Turkmenistan eastward to Xinjiang.

¹⁴ China's sovereign wealth fund is managed by China Investment Corporation (CIC).

Increasingly, Kazakhstan is becoming an important partner to China for the trade and transit of general goods. In contrast to border or “suitcase” goods that flow from China to Kyrgyzstan, general goods are shipped by official means and are subject to applicable taxes (Block, 2013). Some observers in Kazakhstan even suggest that Chinese finished exports served a crucial role in stabilizing their country’s post-Soviet economy by satiating market demand with affordable and plentiful goods (Tinjbai, 2010). The twin launch in December 2011 at Khorgos of the China-Kazakhstan Railway and China-Kazakhstan International Border Cooperation Center is testament to the continued vitality of the business relationship between the two countries (Tinjbai, 2010).

A primary project in development is the China Eurasia Land Bridge (Weitz, 2012; Wu, 2011, p. 324). Only one percent of Chinese trade with Europe occurs overland through Eurasia, but this figure is expected to increase to over \$1 trillion in the coming years as high value-added goods begin to travel from China’s east all the way to Rotterdam (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 96). The Eurasia Land Bridge will facilitate this by constructing necessary rail and highway lines that transit through Kazakhstan via the China-Kazakhstan International Cooperation Center at Khorgos. Previously, only the crossing at Alashankou served as China’s operational rail link with Central Asia, serving more to transport heavy infrastructure and liquefied natural gas than tradable goods (Weitz, 2012, p. 7).

Kazakhstani Prime Minister Karim Masimov and President Nursultan Nazarbayev met with Chinese Premier Wen Jiaobao in the past year to develop a joint Action Plan for Coordination. The goal of the agreement is to raise bilateral trade between the two countries by \$40 billion by 2015 (Weitz, 2012, p. 8). Furthermore, the two countries intend to co-develop public infrastructure for Kazakhstanis. Construction will begin this year on a high-speed rail

from Astana to Almaty under Chinese supervision; China is funding 30 percent of the project (Weitz, 2013, p. 7).

Such infrastructure developments are heavily reliant on Han Chinese laborers who come to Kazakhstan on work visas. Chinese government statistics from the early 2000s estimated the total Han Chinese in the country to number 3,500 (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 87). A more accurate figure now is debatable. The number of Han Chinese in Kazakhstan depends largely on the number and magnitude of Chinese infrastructure projects that need Chinese workers. Both are variables that are constantly growing. Nevertheless, Chinese workers in Kazakhstan have minimal daily contact with anyone outside the isolated company enclaves where they reside (Pantucci & Petersen, 2012).

Earlier movements of Chinese were even less transparent. Between 1989 and 1993, a visa-free agreement allowed hundreds of thousands of Chinese merchants to come to Kazakhstan and sell cheap goods. Kazakhstani border records reveal that 150 to 200 Chinese “tourists” entered the country daily from 1993 to 1995 (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 89). It is estimated that 30 to 50 would not return to the PRC, suggesting that they settled in Kazakhstan or left for other countries such as Russia. Based on these trends, Kazakhstan’s government believes that no less than 130,000 to 150,000 Chinese illegally came to Kazakhstan during those years (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 89). Most of these illegal migrants were Uyghur shuttle traders who sold cheap Chinese wares at markets in Almaty and other cities in Kazakhstan. Between 1991 and 1996, the number of bazars in the country thus grew from around 400 to nearly 1,000 (Spector, 2008, p. 43). In total, there are approximately 300,000 Uyghurs living in Kazakhstan, with 90 percent residing in the Almaty area (Kazakhstani Uighur Groups, 2009).

Ethnic Kazakhs from China, or “Oralman,” represent a considerable presence as well. After independence, Kazakhstan’s government created a repatriation policy for Kazakhs living abroad. Over 65,000 ethnic Kazakhs officially migrated from China to Kazakhstan between 1991 and 2009 (Tyan, 2013). Fluent in Chinese and protected by dual citizenship, these migrants are playing an increasingly vital role as facilitators for Chinese and Kazakhstani trade contacts.

Environment and Responses to Chinese Presence

Kazakhstan is the “only Central Asian state to have performed genuine analysis of its relationship to China” (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2009, p. 134). While a substantial Chinese migrant population continues to grow in Kazakhstan, its presence is not overt. Authorities watch Chinese activities in Kazakhstan very closely. In turn, Chinese in Kazakhstan tend to accept the country’s laws and social norms. Also, because Kazakhstan has a centralized society and the highest per capita GDP in the region, public contention there over issues concerning China rarely leads to violent dispute.

Kazakhstan’s government is especially wary of any Chinese-related rancor and strives to avoid public unrest on such matters. When Kazakhstan proposed to lease one million hectares of land to China in 2010, a rare protest of nearly 2,500 people took to the streets, but only after receiving state sanction (Anti-Chinese demonstration, 2010). Since December 2011, Kazakhstan’s government has been pressuring Chinese companies to adhere more closely with ethical labor standards (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 106). Riots that month in Zhanaozen (Mangystau region) led to a state of emergency after 10 Kazakhstani workers died during wage strikes (Jarosiewics, Matusiak, & Strachota, 2011). Authorities quickly suppressed a solidarity

protest in Aktau that followed several days later, although national media eagerly exploited anti-Chinese sentiments nonetheless.

These examples are the exception. By and large, contact between Han Chinese and Kazakhstan citizens is very limited outside of business travel and academic institutions. There are no consolidated Chinese ethnic enclaves, or “Chinatowns,” in Kazakhstan’s major cities (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 109). Where notable Han Chinese populations exist as company-sponsored enclaves in central and western Kazakhstan, facilities are inconspicuously marked. Even in Aktobe, a major site of operations for China National Petroleum Corporation, the only Chinese eating establishment is a cantina unknown to any but company employees themselves (Pantucci & Petersen, 2012).

Overall, China’s presence in Kazakhstan has long been highly regulated. Once filled with Uyghur traders selling uncontrolled numbers of low-end Chinese goods, Kazakhstan’s bazars (or “barakholkas”) now face tight scrutiny and control by local authorities (Spector 2008, p. 45). The visa-free border traffic of the early 1990s first encountered restriction in 1993 with an agreement “On Citizens Business Travel,” which limited visa-free travel to holders of diplomatic and service passports (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 89). A “one-day” visa policy now keeps shuttle trade movements to a minimum for PRC citizens not arriving on prearranged work visas (Kazakhstan, China, 2006; Cooley, 2012, p. 157). Tourist visas for PRC citizens are closely guarded. PRC migrants coming to work in Kazakhstan in recent years tend to be employed at specific project sites on work visas. Kazakhstan intends to increase the share of local labor at these sites. A recently signed memorandum of cooperation with Sinopec Engineering seeks to employ 1,040 locals at Atyrau Refinery, though it is not clear how and if this will be enforced (Tasboulatova, 2013).

A major barrier to unchecked migration is the degree of regulation that Kazakhstan exercises over its goods trade from China. Consumer products face substantial tariffs. One reason why Kazakhstan refuses to join the WTO is to protect itself from being flooded with Chinese exports like Kyrgyzstan (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 112). Despite certain objections to it, Kazakhstan participates in Russia's Customs Union to reinforce border controls to keep out unwanted Chinese inflows (Block, 2013). Also, growing general goods trade from China is strictly channeled by Kazakhstan through the China-Kazakhstan International Cooperation Center at Khorgos (Block, 2013).

Such government policies effectively restrain Chinese migrant activities from interfering with Kazakhstanis' daily lives. Instead of competing directly with local labor in existing industries, Chinese laborers work in new growth areas that help unlock Kazakhstan's natural resource wealth and transit potential. Public opinion is cohesive against unchecked Chinese influence nonetheless. Media stories concerning sales of defective Chinese trucks or a China scholar's written debauchery of Kazakh women feed into a popular narrative that China is not to be trusted (Ministry of, 2012; Kazakhstan Foreign, 2012). One Kazakh newspaper in 2001 suggested that Chinese migration will turn Central Asian nations into additional Chinese provinces (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 183).

Yet open, physical conflict over China-related concerns is highly unusual. According to Sadovskaya's surveys, public awareness about Chinese interests in Kazakhstan is distinctly weighted toward demographic issues such as migration. At the same time, respondents from regions in Kazakhstan most exposed to Chinese migration, such as Karagandinskaya, predict that migration will soon decrease as projects finish or go elsewhere (Sadovskaya, 2011, pp. 124-25).

Glaring gaps in awareness about Chinese people and customs remain in most parts of Kazakhstan, which creates alarmist misconceptions about China's presence.

What interactions Kazakhstanis have with Chinese migrants is often not with Han workers, but with Uyghurs and repatriated ethnic Kazakhs from China. Kazakhstan's government long allowed Uyghurs to receive education in their own language (undisclosed source, personal communication, November 2012). Even Kazakhstan's Prime Minister, Karim Masimov, is purportedly of Uyghur heritage (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 100). Uyghurs during the 1990s who were not part of the Chinese shuttle trade industry often established their own businesses and civic organizations, such as the National Association of Uyghurs (Kazakhstani Uighur, 2009). However, many of the 300,000 Uyghurs who live in Almaty are political refugees, complicating the group's status (Kazakhstani Uighur, 2009). The rise of SCO pressure and extraditions during the 2000s has pushed Uyghur communities in Kazakhstan to adopt a quieter profile. Impacts of these security efforts have impacts that go beyond the Uyghur community. On one hand, Kazakh authorities are keen to oblige Chinese prerogatives against transnational Uyghur terrorism and separatism; on the other hand, the widespread belief amongst the Kazakhstani public that Chinese security services operate in Kazakhstan reinforces police monitoring (and detainment in some cases) of Uyghurs, Han Chinese, and even repatriated Kazakhs who are suspected of Chinese collusion (undisclosed source, personal communication, November 2012).

Ethnic Kazakhs who are repatriated from China are in a unique situation. Kazakhstan's government champions their return as a victory for national solidarity. Population share of ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan at independence was less than 50 percent (Dubuisson & Genina, 2011, p. 477). The public offers these "Oralman" a mixed reception though. Kazakhs from China face

implicit questioning of their citizenship on a day-to-day basis in a way that makes some feel like second-class citizens (Dubuisson & Genina, 2011, pp. 477-78). In some cases, Oralman who maintain their Chinese citizenship travel back and forth between the countries, taking advantage of social benefits from both sides (Tyan, 2013). Oralmans' lack of Russian language proficiency also tends to set them apart within officialdom and the business community. Despite the genuine hardship that many Oralman faced during the tumultuous Great Leap Forward and Chinese Cultural Revolution, some Kazakhstanis regard them as the descendants of "traitors" who fled Soviet oppression and left their compatriots behind (Dubuisson & Genina, 2011, p. 476). Questioning of Oralman allegiance is therefore an issue that has not yet found resolution.

Although Kazakhstan's government is wary of unmonitored Chinese activity in the country, governing elites espouse close ties with China and support the furtherance of development aims. Reaffirming Kazakhstan's "genuine analysis" of its relationship with China is engagement by government-backed think tanks. For example, the Institute for World Economics and Politics, as of 2009, was the only institution in Central Asia yet to open a Center for Chinese studies (Lareuelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 151). Among its ambitions was to "construct more adequate and profitable relations with China for Kazakhstani society" (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 152). Elite support for the Chinese relationship serves to justify the high-level deals between the two countries discussed earlier. As China's enormous stake in Kazakhstan's oil prepares to extend its reach to ConocoPhillips's 8.4 percent share of the giant Kashagan field, Kazakhstani elites are pushing a landmark 2020 commercial and economic cooperation agreement with China (Helman, 2012; Kazakhstan to, 2013). More and more children of Kazakhstani elites are attending Confucius Institutes or studying abroad in China (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 119).

In some ways the periodic anti-China rhetoric in Kazakhstan's media and political circles masks prolific corruption associated with Chinese deals. Data from Kazakhstan's National Bank places the 2010 total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from the British Virgin Islands (BVI) at \$712.5 million, a figure that surpassed China's official FDI to Kazakhstan in 2009 (\$708.7 million) (Cooley, 2012, p. 138). Cooley believes that a significant proportion of these offshore flows originate from China. In 2010, a scandal involving hundreds of millions of dollars in Chinese oil money and Timur Kulibayev, Nazarbayev's second son-in-law, became public in Kazakh opposition media (Cooley, 2012, p. 141). A Kazakh court quickly ordered the media to halt stories concerning the scandal. Public opposition in Kazakhstan may begin to galvanize against the government if its relationship with China produces more such cases. Until then, Nazarbayev's government is doing its utmost to portray the Chinese as amenable partners in Kazakhstan's development.

IV. Kyrgyzstan and PRC Migration: The Power of Wholesale

Among the nations of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan is the largest Chinese export market (Mudie, 2010). The country's numerous bazars serve as re-export bases for massive quantities of Chinese wares. Rather than creating greater prosperity for Kyrgyz society as a whole, however, the Sino-Kyrgyz partnership has actually fostered greater instability in Kyrgyzstan. In a decentralized state with weak economic development, uncertainty surrounding China's growing influence continues to channel resentment against Chinese interests. The presence of Chinese migrants, goods, and investments in Kyrgyzstan interacts with society on a much more noticeable level than they do in Kazakhstan. Violent disputes occasionally arise between Chinese

migrants and Kyrgyzstanis (Trilling, 2013). Elite social entrepreneurs have political incentives independent of the state to mobilize popular opposition against Chinese entities, which encourages destabilization (Kanazarov, 2008). These are dilemmas that impact the wider well-being of both Kyrgyz and Chinese interests.

Chinese Sectors and Migrant Presence

Kyrgyzstan has now become the largest recipient of cheap Chinese goods in Central Asia, which make up over three quarters of sales in the country's two largest bazaars, Dordoi and Karasu (Rickleton, 2011). In 2008, two-way trade made up of mostly Chinese exports reached \$9.3 billion, nearly double the value of Kyrgyzstan's gross domestic product that year (Higgins, 2010). World Trade Organization membership for both China and Kyrgyzstan contributes to these trade developments by removing protective barriers to trading activities.

The greater half of Chinese imports to Kyrgyzstan is re-exported. During a time of increased Kazakh and Uzbek border restrictions in 2010 however, turnover at Karasu bazar fell by 75 percent (Higgins, 2010). Almost all supply stayed in Kyrgyzstan. Local residents were even less inclined to purchase Chinese-made items regarded to be of low quality and undercutting domestic products. Some Kyrgyz vendors already reverted back to local suppliers for items over which the Chinese do not have a monopoly on, such as prized red-brown rice from Uzgen, a favorite staple for making *plov*¹⁵ (Rickleton, 2011).

In the long run, such trends may pressure Chinese businessmen and their intermediaries to quit the Kyrgyz market (they have, after all, been subject to increasing bribes and taxes from local Kyrgyz officials). Han shuttle traders, along with Uyghur and Dungan diaspora who serve as intermediaries, continue to enjoy disproportionate advantages in the informal economy

¹⁵ *Plov* is a popular Central Asian dish typically made from rice, carrots, and mutton.

(Zhaparov, 2008, p. 88; 83). Not only do Chinese traders enjoy free access to soft loans and low taxes on cheap purchases from China, but they also have near complete control over the distribution network on the Kyrgyz side, which keeps overhead costs low (Zhaparov, 2008, p. 84). Many Kyrgyz who work outside of Chinese business networks have thus been forced to take their activities elsewhere, a large number reestablishing activities to Russia and South Korea (Zhaparov, 2008, p. 83; undisclosed source, personal communication, March 2013). Chinese border procedures strongly favor Chinese traders such that few overland transits actually originate from Kyrgyzstan. Entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan are also more likely to hire Chinese drivers, whose trucks are larger and more reliable (Zhaparov, 2008, p. 85).

Most Chinese migrants to Kyrgyzstan are involved in the shuttle trade industry. There are approximately 46,000 Uyghurs and 70,000 Dungans in the country (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 21). Data from 2004 places the number of Han Chinese in Kyrgyzstan at close to 900, but this is likely much lower than the real figure due to similar statistical issues encountered in Kazakhstan (Sadovskaya, 2011, p. 87). Local media sources estimate that as many as 100,000 Han Chinese now reside in Kyrgyzstan (Goble, 2011). Uyghurs and Dungans throughout the 1990s dominated Kyrgyzstan's urban markets around Bishkek and Osh, often selling wares out of converted shipping containers (Zhaparov, 2008, p. 83). Heightened security pressures in recent years and rising Han in-migration both serve to change market demographics however. Recent visits to Bishkek's Dordoi Bazar alone reveal that hundreds of Han Chinese are now managing stalls previously run by Uyghurs and Dungans (undisclosed source, personal communication, February 2013). Over 2,000 Uyghur traders still conduct business at Bishkek's Madina bazar (Mudie, 2010). Even so, their function is increasingly that of intermediaries who sell on behalf of Han distributors.

The presence of Han Chinese in Kyrgyzstan is spreading to other sectors. Heavy industrial jobs in foundry work and infrastructure are seeing more and more Chinese laborers who are willing to work longer hours for less pay than their local counterparts. Originally, Chinese workers entered small and medium-sized enterprise jobs offered by Kyrgyzstani owners (Zhaparov, 2008, p. 87). As Chinese investment into Kyrgyzstan rises, more jobs are created under Chinese joint partnerships. Most of these new employers fill their staffing needs by insourcing even more laborers from China. Such is the case with Kyrgyzstan's new interstate highway projects, mineral mines, and the planned Kara-Balta oil refinery (Petersen, 2013; Dzyubenko, 2012; Smith, 2012).

Environment and Responses to Chinese Presence

Official discourse surrounding the Sino-Kyrgyz relationship emphasizes the allure and magnitude of Eurasian cooperation without considering important social and demographic aspects of the partnership (Kyrgyz PM, 2013). While Kyrgyz and Chinese leaders meet regularly to discuss joint security and trade, which has increased five-fold between 2004 and 2011, concerns of Kyrgyz citizens and Chinese migrants over dispute arbitration and unfair Chinese market dominance received little if any attention (Miller, 2011). Rather than engaging instability in Kyrgyzstan at a level proportionate to its formal and informal involvement there, China continues to pursue symbolic security with Kyrgyzstan while furthering large-scale development and trade projects. Meanwhile, the Chinese and Kyrgyz governments have not taken serious respite to consider the miscalculated social impacts of the relationship.

Some Kyrgyz are increasingly apprehensive about China's growing influence on the economy. One Bishkek teacher shares his concern: "The number of Chinese students grows

yearly... We have flights to Urumqi every day. We have Chinese restaurants on every street and the number of Chinese medical centers is huge. (Dalbaeva, 2010). While Kyrgyz acknowledge that Chinese funding brings positive infrastructure projects, many are indignant at the growing numbers of Chinese who invade industrial jobs and dominate small and medium-sized enterprises (Zhaparov, 2008, p. 87). With a large section of China's proposed European rail route going through Kyrgyzstan, many Kyrgyz are apprehensive about receiving even more Chinese exports and migrants (Rickleton, 2010). What are fair import and immigration quotas? Beyond increasing Chinese economic influence, they wonder, are there intentions for cultural or political control?

In 2010 China submitted a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) application to protect the Kyrgyz epic poem *Manas* as a Chinese contribution to world cultural heritage (Higgins, 2010). This effort intended to preserve the oral traditions of China's Kyrgyz minority in Xinjiang, but observers in Kyrgyzstan saw China's action as an effort to take ownership over their nation's cultural icons (Shishkin, 2010). Local media likened the sponsorship to China's adoption of Genghis Khan as a great Chinese emperor (Bekesheva, 2010).

Kyrgyzstanis increasingly believe that their government is unwilling to defend the country from perceived Chinese threats on their sovereignty. This perception is also created by the forced extraditions of over 50 people, mostly Kyrgyz citizens, by the Chinese security apparatus during the early 2000s (Counter-Terrorism, 2010, pp. 281-326). To support the SCO's fight against terrorism, Kyrgyzstan's government allowed China to extradite more people from Kyrgyzstan than it did from all of the other SCO members combined. These individuals are often charged with loosely-formed accusations and do not have access to legal due process.

Land concessions to China garner particular provocation in Kyrgyzstan's public sphere. Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous country where functional land is limited. Yet in 2002 the government of Askar Akayev conceded nearly 100,000 hectares to China to resolve a longstanding territorial dispute (Khamidov, 2002). Partly to bolster his own support, opposition legislator Azimbek Beknazarov launched a virulent campaign against the Akayev government for betraying national interests (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, pp. 109-110). Beknazarov was arrested, but his political leverage in his home district of Aksy sparked widespread mobilization to his cause. Three years later, residual dissatisfaction with the Akayev regime for the land concession and various cases of alleged corruption led to nationwide mobilization (i.e. Tulip Revolution of 2005¹⁶) that deposed Akayev from the presidency (Gullette, 2005). China's activities in Kyrgyzstan have clearly created more social disruption than official discourse from either side would like to reveal.

Throughout Kyrgyzstan's political turmoil in the summer of 2010,¹⁷ numerous attacks against (mostly Han) Chinese nationals and commercial centers in Bishkek took place, particularly in the core Chinese areas surrounding Guoying and Tataan plazas (Higgins, 2010). Included among the targets was at least one Uyghur restaurant, as well as one Uyghur resident, who was killed (Mudie, 2010). Violence against Chinese entities during this time was a mere offshoot from the larger degree of instability throughout Kyrgyzstan. Nevertheless, these actions were not without precedent; they underscored an ongoing record of open conflict commensurate

¹⁶ The Tulip Revolution was a popular uprising in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 that overthrew the government of former President Askar Akayev. Protests numbering in the tens of thousands broke out over the perception of fraudulent elections and long-running corruption associated with the Akayev regime.

¹⁷ The summer of 2010 witnessed Kyrgyzstan's second revolution in five years. Widespread popular unrest throughout the country was directed at the ruling government of Kurmanbek Bakiyev for perceived corruption, including a profiteering scandal tied to fuel contracts that the Bakiyev government provided to US forces at Manas Transit Center. Associated ethnic unrest in the country's south pitted Kyrgyz and Uzbeks against each other in violent confrontation. Localized unrest also broke out in the major cities of Osh and Bishkek. Chinese migrant entities faced random targeted attacks as underlying resentments ignited under wider instability.

with China's growing presence in the country. Prior incidents included the summer 2002 assassination of the Chinese Embassy's First Secretary in Bishkek and a fatal attack on a Chinese bus in March 2003 that left 17 dead (Dillon 2003). The Chinese government blamed both of these earlier incidents on the alleged Uyghur terrorist organization, East Turkestan Liberation Front (ETLF), but evidence remains lacking.

Although Uyghurs and Dungans share close religious and cultural affinity with their Central Asian neighbors, these peoples have certainly not been exempt from becoming targets of popular resentment either. Uyghurs tend to stand out from indigenous Turkic groups because they migrated from Xinjiang in the early 1960s, and therefore have had 30 years less experience living under a secular communist regime (Roberts, 2007, pp. 342-343). A certain degree of exclusiveness tends to prevail among the Uyghur diaspora. Uyghurs keep to their own mosques (Corley & Bayram, 2011). Both Uyghurs and Dungans are usually wealthier than other groups in Kyrgyzstan as a result of their business credentials and community networks. This disparity during periods of instability has incited violent attacks against Uyghur and Dungan neighborhoods (e.g. Iskra in 2006 (OCHA 2006), and Tokmok in 2010 (Kyrgyzstan: Minorities Targeted, 2010)).

The primary reasons for open conflict over China's presence in Kyrgyzstan are two-fold. First, Chinese migrant entities have an overt presence in Kyrgyzstani society that openly competes with local labor and business. Kyrgyzstanis are reminded of China's dominance each time they go to the market, where over 80 percent of items are Chinese (Cooley, 2012, p. 86). The January 2013 hostage-taking in Osh Province of locals by drunken Chinese laborers underscores the close and uncomfortable interactions that take place (Trilling, 2013). In August 2012, the killing of five Kyrgyz border guards by a colleague led to initial media suspicions of a

direct Chinese attack (Kyrgyz forces, 2012). Open incidents like these which involve Chinese migrants do not occur in Kazakhstan.

Second, the Kyrgyz government does very little to stem the flow, or at least compartmentalize, the Chinese presence in the country. An unregulated visa process and weak border controls are overwhelmed by the magnitude and growth of China's inflows. An estimated 40,000 unofficial crossings take place each day at the Uzbek border near Osh (Cooley, 2012, pp. 157-158). Most who cross the border are Kyrgyz and Uzbek shuttle traders who re-export cheap Chinese wares from the Karasu Bazar. Kyrgyzstan simply does not have sufficient political or economic leverage to effectively restrict these illicit business networks. Further complication arises when elite political maneuvers use the Chinese question to instigate unrest. Becnazarov's Aksy campaign indicates that popular concerns about China can become coopted into wider political agendas. Given Kyrgyzstan's frequency of open protest, it is unlikely that this will be the last.

V. Making Sense of China's Uncertain Expansion

As Chinese investment makes an impact across developing market landscapes worldwide, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are no longer isolated cases. A \$1 billion joint venture between Chinese firm Wanbao and Myanmar Economic Holdings at the Monywa copper mine in Myanmar reveals similarities to the Kazakhstan model (SPECIAL REPORT, 2013). Local protests over land evictions are brutally suppressed by authorities (Tha, 2012). While Chinese interests are more or less protected and kept out of sight, the government has established a

commission to make appropriate reparations. In Georgia, similarities to the Kyrgyzstan model exist. Chinese inward migration is rapidly growing and unregulated. Georgians, who are plagued by a 16 percent unemployment rate, worry about the continued availability of remaining jobs (Georgians Protest, 2013). Although a Chinese Embassy official in Tbilisi claims that only 2,000 PRC citizens are in the entire country, former President Shevardnadze estimated that nearly 40,000 Chinese exist in Tbilisi alone (Georgians Protest, 2013). Other parallels also arise when looking at Africa (Ori, 2009). How exactly will China, with trillions of dollars in foreign reserves, pursue a growing global strategy? What do migration trends in Central Asia say about the capabilities and limitation of China's growth? The benefit of examining the cases of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is that they offer predictable answers to these questions.

Inadvertent Empire?

China's ascension to dominant influence in Central Asia is largely inadvertent (Pantucci & Petersen 2013, p. 9). Instead of using a concerted grand strategy, China's actions in the region are based off of economic momentum. Interactions are initiated under the auspices of SCO projects and campaigns like "Open Up the West." Once these begin, trade and investment tend to be self-sustained. The overall pace of growth for China's various inflows rides on a steep and rising curve (Cooley, 2012, pp. 86-87). There may be numerous SCO "projects" at any given time, but most have a limited scope of implementation (Peyrouse, 2012).

Until the past three years, most trade activity outside of the energy sector has been based on unofficial border trade. In 2010, Kyrgyzstan still held 55 percent of total Central Asia trade with China, while Kazakhstan's share represented 26 percent (Cooley, 2012, pp. 48-50). These figures are now reversing as China and its Central Asian partners begin to optimize their

investment returns, focusing on Kazakhstan as a senior partner (Weitz, 2013, p. 7). Xinjiang remains the primary object of China's Central Asia focus. For the Chinese government, a stable and prosperous Central Asia guarantees a stable and prosperous Xinjiang; in turn, stability in Xinjiang guarantees China's national integrity. Investment to Central Asia is less a goal than a secondary tool to China's purposes.

Limits to Diffusion

Central Asians are still fearful about prospects for continued Chinese migration. The demographic changes in Xinjiang after 60 years of Han inflows weigh heavily on public discourse in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. One Kazakhstani newspaper in 2001 wrote, "The more that the question of migration is passed in silence, the less chance we will have to prevent the appearance of Chinese provinces [in Central Asia]" (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2012, p. 183). Some local politicians even go so far as to quote 1,300 year-old Turkic imperial steles, such as the Kül-Tegin: "Deceiving by means of sweet words and soft materials, the Chinese draw distant peoples close" (Grousset, 1970, p. 112). The reality is that the outward diffusion of Chinese faces four major limitations.

First, current PRC migration to developing countries is short-term. Migrants work abroad due to abrupt changes to their market environment at home. They harbor little desire to permanently relocate. Even though China is experiencing a severe demographic imbalance between cities and the countryside, its government is slowly adjusting residential policies to better immigrate the internal migrant population.

Second, host country responses can shape or reduce PRC migrant inflows. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan provide contrasting examples of state and society approaches to migrant

management. Their environments are still evolving as they continue to negotiate their awkward partnerships with China. How PRC migration affects developing countries elsewhere in the world will greatly depend on how host nations or Chinese decision makers interpret subnational attitudes and act on them.

Third, since migration and investment are interdependent units, continued migration requires continued opportunities. China's energy investments in Kazakhstan are substantial, but derived from older fields. What might happen if China exhausts its resources? A useful case study parallel can be seen with Russia's Far North. Soviet migration there revolved around security and national northern interests. Similar considerations about border delineations and energy requirements tend to parallel China in Central Asia today. Yet between the fall of the Soviet Union and 2006, 17 percent of the region's population emigrated away from the Russian Far North due to operations there being economically unsustainable (Wilson Rowe, 2009, p. 7). China's investment drives abroad are still young. It would not be unprecedented if some ultimately encounter boom and bust cycle similar to Russia and the Far North.

Fourth and most of all, continued Chinese ventures abroad, and especially into the developing world, depend on how much instability China can stomach. China's foreign policy is based on hypersovereignty, the rigid and inflexible defense of a nation's internationally recognized status (Feigenbaum, 2001, p. 32). The Chinese government, in theory, only endorses activities abroad that are central to its direct territorial interests. Maritime disputes in the South China Sea and border issues in Central Asia and Kashmir exist because China sees historical precedents to its claims. Unlike Russia, the United States, and various European powers, China does not engage in nation-building. Investments abroad that are peripheral to its sovereignty matters are left to the realm of business.

However, even if Afghanistan crumbles in 2015, it is doubtful that China would deploy its military to perform active intervention. Part of China's hypersovereign worldview is its refusal to intervene directly in other nations' domestic affairs. When Russia called on China in 2008 to support its Georgian war effort under the SCO umbrella, China refused (Swanstrom, 2008). The issue lay with Russia's intention to support two new breakaway states in Georgia. To China, such action endorses separatism, which is unacceptable.

This same behavior was seen in the summer of 2010. China used its sovereignty-focused worldview to stay out of Kyrgyzstan, despite expectations under the SCO that it might help restore stability in its Central Asian partner. China's response to the violence perpetrated against Chinese citizens in 2010 was largely symbolic. Chartered China Southern Airlines flights rescued a small, token percentage of Chinese who were caught in the turmoil (Cui & Qin, 2010). Chinese State News (Xinhua) announced that China distributed at least \$730,000 in humanitarian aid to Kyrgyzstan's beleaguered south (where few Chinese actually reside) (Cui & Qin, 2010). China also deferred mainly to the Russian-led Collective Treaty Security Organization (CSTO) to pursue security efforts in the country (Blagov, 2010). If such passiveness continues under future unrest scenarios, Chinese companies may not want to risk bringing labor and billions of dollars in capital to certain regions if their government cannot ensure business security.

VI. Conclusion

PRC migration to Central Asia will continue evolving in step with China's growing interactions in the region. At the same time, the long-term outlook of these activities is uncertain. Change is rapid. The Chinese presence in Central Asia will keep growing exponentially as long

as conditions remain supportive. Furthermore, as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan show, Central Asian nations play by their own unique set of rules. Variance in state-level and subnational responses will ultimately impact the environment in which Chinese assets and migrants must function in.

It remains to be seen how competitive geopolitics will affect China's presence in the long-term, but Russia's Customs Union has already posed indirect, short-term complications on the proliferation of illicit Chinese goods and workers in the region. At the very least, China seems to be adapting. Advances in general goods trade over border goods trade seem to work towards the advantage of Chinese profits and credibility, a dual win.

Similar migration impacts will occur elsewhere. Important lessons can be drawn from the cases examined in this paper, and their applications are useful for understanding China's growing presence elsewhere in Central Asia, in Georgia, Burma and even Africa. Most uncertain is how willing China is in providing security for its growing presence abroad. Major setbacks may occur if significant geopolitical destabilization occurs in Afghanistan after 2014 or elsewhere. These are likely to downscale China's overseas presence, but the alternative can never be ruled out.

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