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## THE YELLOW MAN'S BURDEN: CHINESE MIGRANTS ON A CIVILIZING MISSION

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In the aftermath of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, both the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and "ordinary people" pledged donations to the afflicted regions.<sup>1</sup> Triumphant headlines in the *People's Daily* likewise made a statement about China's rise from aid recipient to aid donor. Not coincidentally, the expanding scope of projects financed by China abroad, mainly in Africa and South America but also closer to home in Burma, Cambodia and Laos, attracted considerable attention from Western media in 2005.<sup>2</sup> From Guyana to Nigeria, China has emerged as a key source of state-led investment in infrastructure projects without the good-governance and human-rights strings that are attached to financing through international development structures, and Chinese companies have become a visible presence as major builders of roads, pipelines, bridges, hospitals, harbors, stadiums, water-supply facilities and so on.<sup>3</sup> In the Sudan, Chinese state-owned enterprises have invested US\$3 billion in the oil

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<sup>1</sup> The first week after the tsunami struck, the government pledged "humanitarian aid" worth US\$60 million—the largest aid package since the Communists took power—while the Chinese Red Cross had collected 20 million yuan in donations (*Xinhua*, 2 January 2005, *News Guangdong*, [www.china.org.cn/english/China/116552.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/english/China/116552.htm); *News Guangdong*, 5 January 2005, accessed 20 July 2005). This made China the seventh largest aid donor in the relief effort.

<sup>2</sup> In Cambodia, China is, officially, the fourth-largest investor. See Lute, "Zhongguoren taojin Jianbuzhai" (Chinese Gold Diggers in Cambodia), *Ouzhou shibao* (Europe Times) (Paris), 24 March 2003.

<sup>3</sup> "A New Scramble", *The Economist*, 27 November 2004, pp. 74-75; Human Rights in China, "China's Strategic Global Influence", *China Rights Forum*, No. 3 (2005), pp. 21-27.

industry and helped to build a 1,540-kilometre pipeline and a refinery.<sup>4</sup> In July 2005, censured by the UN for evicting 700,000 people from their houses, Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe traveled to China for a US\$300 million loan (he was denied it). In Northern Laos, Golden Boten City, a new Chinese real estate development, with international airport included, is being advertised to investors as a "developing space beyond belief". The brochure of the Golden Boten City Group assures potential investors that

Although now there are just 1500 people living in 3 villages in Golden Boten City, you should believe that thousands of people will gather here in a beautiful morning or an autumn evening. They [will] live and develop here with various occupations and identities, to form a huge community, and a modern society.<sup>5</sup>

Similar signs of Chinese architectural modernity are fast squeezing out British colonial memories from Pakistan's hill stations and Sierra Leone's coast.

In the institutionalized world of international development, in which states earmark aid budgets to be channeled through institutions such as the World Bank, such projects would be classed as private investment or, at best, as private aid. Yet in China—where aid and debt relief, though increasing, are far less significant than state subsidies for overseas construction projects<sup>6</sup>—both officials and managers discuss them in the language of development. While the roots of development discourse in China and in international organizations are shared, as are their proclaimed goals of aiding the economic and human progress of recipient societies, their emphases are rather different. The discourse of international development has, in the past decade, veered away from the previous, strongly criticized, unilateral emphasis on economic indicators and structural models originating in the West, and towards a socially and culturally "sensitive" framework—though just how much difference that shift has made on the ground is a matter of debate.<sup>7</sup> Chinese accounts of "contributing to development" abroad do not share these recent scruples: they typically remain purely economic and are set in contexts that, from the perspective of the now-professionalized "international development community", appear highly unusual.

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<sup>4</sup> Carol K. Wang, "Fueling Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur", *China Rights Forum*, No. 2 (2005), pp. 85-90.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Paul Cohen for making the brochure available to me.

<sup>6</sup> In recent years, Cambodia, Burma, Laos, Mongolia and the Sudan have received Chinese aid packages, but these were on the scale of hundreds of thousands of dollars. See Human Rights in China, "China's Strategic Global Influence"; David Shambaugh, "Return to the Middle Kingdom? China and Asia in the Early Twenty-First Century", in *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 23-47. In addition, China has delivered emergency relief in highly symbolic situations, such as to Russia after the Beslan school massacre in 2004 and to Afghanistan after the end of the war.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton (eds), *Culture and Public Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

The idea of exporting development centering on investment, trade and migration (for Chinese road projects are built by Chinese workers, and Chinese-sponsored farming projects typically bring both Chinese workers and technical advisors) is quite different from that practiced by today's international organizations, though perhaps not that different from earlier, colonial projects, in which the ground-level agents of modernization tended to be indentured laborers and traders imported from India and, again, China. Central to Western-originated international discourse is the separation of aid from investment: the idea that development aid is a not-for-profit affair, and accusations of profit-making can discredit donors. One reason for this is structural: large corporations that benefit from infrastructure projects are private in the West, but state-controlled in China. There is little doubt, however, that the two discourses also reveal differing understandings of what counts as *development*—whether in the sense of development as an end to be achieved or as a series of interventions towards that end.

Many Chinese narratives under that heading combine trade, investment, labor export, migration and development aid with distinctly civilizational overtones. For example, a recent article by two Chinese public security officials characterizes Laos as a “rather ... backward country” that “has begun to wake from its thousand-year slumber, particularly with China’s increasing strength and prosperity next door”. According to the authors, the Burmese border town of Mōng Yawng, “just a few years back hardly more than a small village with a few straw huts”, has become the “model zone for northern Burma’s economic prosperity”. This, they write, is thanks to tourism from Sipsongpanna across the Chinese border and to a road built with Chinese funding that will eventually link Sipsongpanna with Thailand via Burma, and to the planting, with Chinese and United Nations funding, of fruit orchards and other cash crops to replace opium along the Mōng Yawng–Kengtung road.<sup>8</sup>

The authors’ optimistic evaluation contrasts starkly with the view taken by international organizations and their advisors, who are wary of the risks posed by the sudden introduction of a cash economy, the displacement of slash-and-burn agriculturalists, and the commodification of sexual exchanges that accompany such projects, not to mention the smuggling of drugs and gems that finance the Burmese junta and the borderland ethnic armies allied to it.<sup>9</sup> The situation in Sudan (to which, as to Burma, China provides military aid) is similar: while Western-based NGOs blame the Chinese government for fuelling Khartoum’s “ethnic cleansing”,<sup>10</sup> Chinese diplomats and managers portray their investment in the oil industry as a selfless contribution to development: “When we started, they

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<sup>8</sup> Zhang Ansheng and Zhang Xiaoming, “Yimin xin sikao” (New Ideas on Immigration), *Yunnan gongan xueyuan xuebao* (Journal of Yunnan Public Security College), No. 3 (2002), pp. 89-92.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Chris Lyttleton, “Market Bound: Relocation and Disjunction in Northwest Laos”, in Santosh Jatrana, Mika Toyota and Brenda S. A. Yeoh (eds), *Migration and Health in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 41-60, on Laos.

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights in China, “China’s Strategic Global Influence”.

were an oil importer, and now they are an oil exporter”.<sup>11</sup> “A Western company couldn’t have done what we did ... Sudan wanted it done in 18 months and we did it, even though we knew we wouldn’t make money”.<sup>12</sup> One reason they could do this, a top official of the Chinese oil company said, was that the ten thousand Chinese workers brought in for the construction “are used to eating bitterness ... they can work 13–14 hours a day for very little”.<sup>13</sup> While the use of Chinese migrant labor is a competitive asset, for the official it also stands for selflessness, rather than for exploitation and lack of local job creation. One of the key differences between Western and Chinese discourses of development is that Western discourses express concern about “cultural preservation”, community participation, ethnic balance and promotion of democracy, and the Chinese discourse does not.

Focusing on the development emphasis in discussions of Chinese migration abroad, this article interrogates the connection between the Chinese discourse of overseas development and the domestic stress on “constructing civilization” and improving the “quality” of the population. Like some Western states in earlier times, China is becoming a source of foreign investment and a participant in international development discourse (though not in its current institutions) while intensely engaged in a modernizing process at home which it feels is still far from complete. How, then, does the new role in overseas development fit into Chinese discourses of domestic modernization? More particularly, how are the supposed harbingers of development—Chinese migrants—affected by their encounters with the foreign recipients of such development?

In the following section of the article, I revisit the arguments—already made by other authors<sup>14</sup>—about the “civilizatory” nature of China’s internal development discourse, particularly as regards ethnic minorities, and point to the role of internal migration in that discourse. I then move on to discuss recent entrepreneurial migration from China to other countries and the image of “new migrants” as pioneering modernizers, initiated as part of a sunshine campaign by a Chinese government but enthusiastically picked up by transnational Chinese media.<sup>15</sup> Next, I investigate whether and to what extent this image of

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<sup>11</sup> Carol K. Wang, “Fueling Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur”.

<sup>12</sup> Carol K. Wang, “Fueling Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur”.

<sup>13</sup> Carol K. Wang, “Fueling Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur”.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Stevan Harrell, *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); Sara L. Friedman, “Embodying Civility: Civilizing Processes and Symbolic Citizenship in Southeastern China”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (2004), pp. 687–718; Rachel Murphy, “Turning Peasants into Modern Chinese Citizens: ‘Population Quality’ Discourse, Demographic Transition and Primary Education”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 177 (2004), pp. 1–20.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Wanning Sun, *Leaving China: Media, Migration, and Transnational Imagination* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Pál Nyíri, “The ‘New Migrant’: State and Market Constructions of Modernity and Patriotism”, in Pál Nyíri and Joana Breidenbach (eds), *China Inside Out* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), pp. 141–76.

entrepreneurial Chinese migrants abroad places them in the same civilizational position *vis-à-vis* the “natives” that entrepreneurs occupy in domestic development projects. I conclude by arguing that the view of China as having taken up the torch of the global modernizing mission unites otherwise disparate groups (government officials, migrant entrepreneurs and Christians) and is central to understanding the Chinese view of their country's position in the world.

The discussion in this paper is part of a larger attempt to understand the view of international migration and mobility in contemporary China and the role of international mobility in Chinese understandings of modernization. The basis of my research is long-term fieldwork carried out among Chinese migrants to Europe—mainly in Hungary, but also in Italy, Britain, Russia and other countries—since 1993.<sup>16</sup> This has been supplemented by four field trips to China over 2004–05 and a systematic analysis of press articles and books published since 1978 on migration, tourism and spiritual civilization.<sup>17</sup> While in earlier articles I explored Chinese views of modernization as projected onto migration destinations,<sup>18</sup> I began seeing these views within the context of global development as a result of discussions with Chris Lyttleton, who has observed the effects of Chinese immigration as part of his research on development in northern Laos.<sup>19</sup>

### Civilizing China Through Mobility

In February 2005, enormous posters put up by the Peking City Civilization Commission at Dongzhimen in the center of the city display a series of keywords

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Pál Nyíri, *New Chinese Migrants in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Frank N. Pieke, Pál Nyíri, Mette Thunø and Antonella Ceccagno, *Transnational Chinese: Fujianese Migrants in Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> The analysis covered articles whose titles contained the terms “immigration” (*churujing*), “travel” (*lüyou*) and “spiritual civilization” (*jingshen wenming*). The articles were obtained in two ways: (1) by electronically searching China's national social science journals database and the national periodicals database since 1978 for these keywords, and (2) by manually searching a one-month sample of four representative mass periodicals each five years between February 1978 and February 2003, to find every article dealing with migration, travel abroad or spiritual civilization. The periodicals searched were the *People's Daily*, the *People's Pictorial* and *Beijing Youth Daily* (popular mass-market papers in the 1980s and 1990s–2000s, respectively) and *Southern Weekend*, the preferred daily of young, educated urban professionals in the 2000s. This has been supplemented by a review of books for which these keywords had been entered in the National Library's catalogue in 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Pál Nyíri, “Expatriating is Patriotic? The Discourse on ‘New Migrants’ in the People's Republic of China and Identity Construction Among Recent Migrants from the PRC”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (October 2001), pp. 635–53; Pál Nyíri, “The ‘New Migrant’”; Pál Nyíri, “Global Modernisers or Local Subalterns? Parallel Perceptions of Chinese Transnationals in Hungary”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (2005), pp. 659–74.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Chris Lyttleton, “Market Bound”.

such as “Wenming” (Civilization) and “Meihua” (Beautification). “Civilization” is illustrated by three photos: one of a sports event, one of a lion dance festival, and one of a scenic landscape. Meanwhile in Yuliang Village, She County, Anhui Province, the neighborhood committee has put up a large board displaying the six commandments of civilized citizens. These range from being good members of the family to getting temporary *hukou*, observing family planning and the—unidentified—Three Virtues.

These posters are examples of the omnipresent exhortations to build “socialist spiritual and material civilization” and, even more commonly, to improve the “quality” (*suzhi*) of the population, the low level of which myriad government resolutions and newspaper articles, as well as private conversations, blame for impeding the modernization of China’s society. As one academic puts it in a common turn of phrase, “The modernization of the person is the core of social modernization”.<sup>20</sup> The official discourse of “constructing socialist spiritual civilization” goes back to the early 1980s, but it has come to the fore since the 16th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2002, which declared the construction of a socialist spiritual civilization to be a precondition for achieving the goal of a “well-off society” (*xiaokang shehui*). Under the guidance of the Central Guiding Commission for the Construction of Spiritual Civilization (*Zhongyang Jingshen Wenming Jianshe Zhidao Weiyuanhui*), local governments have been distributing honor plaques to “civilized households” and “civilized work units” for years.

John Flower characterizes China’s campaign to “construct material and spiritual civilizations” (*wuzhi wenming, jingshen wenming jianshe*) as “a Chinese inflection of the global development discourse”.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, as Anagnost shows, official media portray the civilized citizen as a productive citizen who then in turn shares the fruit of his economic accumulation, so furthering the goals of spiritual civilization.<sup>22</sup> Here again, as Harrell points out, there is a striking similarity between the earlier Christian and the contemporary state civilizing project in China.<sup>23</sup>

The two posters discussed here suggest, however, that “civilization” cannot be entirely subsumed under productivity, even if the former serves the latter. The late socialist Chinese state’s civilizing discourse formulates a very distinct idea of the “good life”. This vision is one in which development is achieved through both eugenics and productivity, and in which the *petit-bourgeois* forms of consumption that stimulate the formation of a productive and modern subject—one endowed with “qualities compatible with the principles of market economy,

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<sup>20</sup> Fu Tengxiao, “Yimin wenhua yu wenhua xiandaihua” (Migrant Culture and Cultural Modernization), *Journal of Shenzhen University (Humanities & Social Sciences)*, No. 5 (2003), pp. 64-65; cf. Rachel Murphy, “Turning Peasants into Modern Chinese Citizens”.

<sup>21</sup> John M. Flower, “A Road is Made: Roads, Temples, and Historical Memory in Ya’an County, Sichuan”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (2004), pp. 649-85.

<sup>22</sup> Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 75-116.

<sup>23</sup> Stevan Harrell, *Cultural Encounters*.

**Figure 1. “Talk Civilized, Act Civilized, Be Civilized, Drive Civilized, Build a Civilized City”. Slogan of the County Civilization Commission in Yuliang Village, She County, Anhui Province, as part of the “Civilized Anhui” campaign. 6 February 2005. Photo by author**



such as competitiveness, and adaptability to the requirements” of a neoliberal economy rather than a willful and wasteful one—prevail.<sup>24</sup> The fostering of certain forms of consumption requires the encouragement of particular forms of popular culture. Hence, the idea of “population quality” covers a complex range of attributes, typically including manners, hygiene, discipline, education and competitive and open-minded thinking, but which—depending on the context—can also include upright morality, a correct political stand and correct lifestyle and consumption choices.<sup>25</sup> To quote Fu Tengxiao again, “The modernization of the person requires the modernization of lifestyle, of behavior and habits, as well as of thought and ideas”.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Elena Barabantseva, Chapter 4, “The Chinese Official Discourse on Modernisation”, and Chapter 6, “Exclusion through *Localisation*: Ethnic Minorities in the PRC’s Modernisation Project”, in *Shifting Boundaries of the Chinese Nation: Overseas Chinese and Ethnic Minorities in the People’s Republic of China’s Modernisation Project* (DPhil dissertation, School of Social Sciences, Manchester University, 2005), p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times*, p. 120, and Rachel Murphy, “Turning Peasants into Modern Chinese Citizens”, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Fu Tengxiao, “Yimin wenhua yu wenhua xiandaihua”. See also Tamara Jacka, *Rural Women in Urban China* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2005).

Thus, population quality does not refer only to productivity but also encompasses a range of characteristics, with the emphasis dependant on who uses the word. For, as both Anagnost and Murphy note, the notion of *suzhi* percolates far beyond official texts. In its more particularly government usage, “quality” is perhaps akin to “goodthinkfulness” in Orwell’s *1984*: it refers to a full identification with (or, in Newspeak’s perhaps more precise term, a “bellyfeel” for) the Party’s dual goals of modernization and socialist spiritual civilization.<sup>27</sup> For others, “quality” means mainly the possession of an entrepreneurial spirit or of Christian morality. And in Peking, in the run-up to the 2008 Olympics, it is increasingly associated with anti-spitting campaigns and manners classes. These emphases can be inherently contradictory and some are often stressed to the exclusion of others.<sup>28</sup> Yet superficial unity of terms, reluctance to make contradictions explicit (or even to recognize them) and sometimes even an insistence on the shared goals of these different (governmental, entrepreneurial and Christian) projects results in the discourse having wide currency.

“Population quality” comes to the fore in the discussions about civilizing the rural population which account for the bulk of contributions to the topic.<sup>29</sup> For instance, China’s White Paper on National Minorities Policy states that ethnic minorities—a key target of rural civilizing policies—are encouraged to adopt “new, scientific, civilized and healthy customs in daily life”.<sup>30</sup> Consumption and leisure are more prominent in the civilization narratives of large cities, which these days go hand in hand with the current Chinese leadership’s promotion of a “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui*) and “community-building” (*shequ jianshe*). In 1996, the Central Committee of the CCP resolved that all provincial-level administrative units must identify “civilized residential areas” (*wenming xiaoqu*).<sup>31</sup> These days, apartment blocks in Peking display slogans such as “Be the owner of your community, build a beautiful home”, “Everyone for the community, the community for everyone”, and even, in the embassy district, “Chinese and foreign citizens join hands in creating an international community”. In the run-up to the 2008 Olympics, civilizing fervor is reaching new heights: Peking’s East City district, for example, distributed towels and fans among

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<sup>27</sup> Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times*, compares “quality” to Bourdieu’s “habitus”. See also Yan Hairong, “Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing *Suzhi*/Value Flow through Labor Recruitment Networks”, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2003), pp. 493-523.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Kipnis, “*Suzhi*: A Keyword Approach”, *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 185 (June 2006).

<sup>29</sup> See Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times*; Yan Hairong, “Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism”; Sara L. Friedman, “Embodying Civility”; Rachel Murphy, “Turning Peasants into Modern Chinese Citizens”.

<sup>30</sup> [www.china.org.cn/e-white/4/index.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/4/index.htm), quoted in Elena Barabantseva, “Exclusion through Localisation: Ethnic Minorities in the PRC’s Modernisation Project”.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel C. Lynch, “Dilemmas of ‘Thought Work’ in Fin-de-Siècle China”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 157 (1999), pp. 173-201.



residents—no doubt hinting at proper personal hygiene—bearing inscriptions such as “Build a civilized East City, bring about a humane Olympics”.<sup>32</sup>

**Figure 2. “Build a civilized East City, bring about a humane Olympics”. Towel distributed to residents of an apartment block in East City, Peking. Photo by Xiao Putao**



The desire to civilize its subjects has, of course, characterized the modern nation-state in general, and it has characterized China since even before it became one.<sup>33</sup> That ethnic minorities—formerly known as “barbarians”—have

<sup>32</sup> On how the state “sells spiritual civilization” on billboard advertising, see also Steven Wayne Lewis, “What Can I Do for Shanghai? Selling Spiritual Civilization in China’s Cities”, in Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, Michael Keane and Yin Hong (eds), *Made in China: Consumption, Content and Crisis* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), pp. 139-51. On the relationship between “spiritual civilization” and “community building” and for a summary of “civilizing projects” in urban neighborhoods, such as “civilized residents’ covenants” which include censure for such behavior as the “disorderly hanging out of clothes”, see Xu Zhongzhen and Sun Weimin, *Shequ wenhua yu jingshen wenming* (Community Culture and Spiritual Civilization) (Shanghai: Shanghai Daxue Chubanshe, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Particularly during the late empire, when the Sacred Edicts of the Kangxi Emperor were read out and the cults of gods were standardized across villages. See James L. Watson, “Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T’ien Hou (‘Empress of Heaven’) Along the South China Coast, 960-1960”, in David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn S. Rawski (eds), *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 292-324.

been the primary objects of this civilizing mission has also been noted by a series of authors including Gladney, Harrell, Schein and Oakes.<sup>34</sup> But while, in Euro-American modernization, nation-building at home and the civilizing mission in the colonies were separated in time and space (though dialectically linked), in China these two projects are taking place simultaneously and targeting overlapping constituencies. Discussions of developing ethnic minority regions, which have come to the fore with the implementation of the government's Great Western Development (GWD) program in the 2000s, invariably include references to the improvement of population quality by introducing advanced "material and spiritual civilizations". While infrastructural modernization and integration into the circuits of the national and global economies are seen as key in this process,<sup>35</sup> "advanced" urbanites, encouraged to move to "backward" areas as skilled workers as well as to just visit them as tourists, are considered agents of this civilizing project. In a typical turn of the phrase, Ma Ping, writing on the GWD, argued that "local minority groups, after learning Eastern regions' advanced modes of life, can increase their own quality of life".<sup>36</sup> Or, as Schein writes, "minorities will learn from the Han to be economically energetic, proactive and innovative, *and* to be duly consuming".<sup>37</sup> The same seems to be true of peasants migrating to the cities, who are exposed to the civilized effects of "higher-quality" urbanites and their lifestyle.<sup>38</sup> Development in both its economic and civilizational sense is often cited as the main justification for the ongoing relaxation of domestic migration controls as well as for the state-supported growth of tourism.<sup>39</sup>

### Exporting Development Through Migration

On 29 April 2005, I caught a ride on a motorcycle taxi in Tonghai County in the south of Yunnan Province. My driver told me that he had served in the Sino-Vietnamese war in the late seventies, but recently, like many others in this area,

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<sup>34</sup> Dru C. Gladney, "Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (1994), pp. 92-123; Stevan Harrell, *Cultural Encounters*; Louisa Schein, "Gender and Internal Orientalism in China", *Modern China*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1997), pp. 69-98, and "Market Mentalities, Iron Satellite Dishes, and Contested Cultural Developmentalism", *Provincial China*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2002), pp. 57-72; Tim Oakes, *Tourism and Modernity in China* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> John M. Flower, "A Road Is Made".

<sup>36</sup> Ma Ping, "Xibu da kaifa dui dangdi minzu guanxi de yingxiang ji duice" (The Impact of Great Western Development on Local Ethnic Relations and Policy Responses), *Minzu wenti yanjiu / Minority Issues Research*, No. 5 (2001), pp. 37-42, quoted in Elena Barabantseva, "Exclusion through Localisation".

<sup>37</sup> Louisa Schein, "Market Mentalities, Iron Satellite Dishes".

<sup>38</sup> Rachel Murphy, "Turning Peasants into Modern Chinese Citizens", Yan Hairong, "Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism", and Tamara Jacka, *Rural Women in Urban China*.

<sup>39</sup> Tim Oakes, *Tourism and Modernity in China*.

he had made a number of trips to Vietnam for business. I asked him about the attitude he encountered in Vietnam. He said that Vietnam was very poor, but added that the Vietnamese were “hospitable. After all, they are a minority”.

The driver's comment, like the Public Security officials' views on Burma quoted in the beginning of this article, suggests a continued view of the Chinese borderlands as home to a semi-savage population which, whether inside or outside the border, is dependent on China's civilizing project but now also benefits from China's recent (post-Mao) erotic enchantment with its “internal orientals” as tourism to minority areas booms.<sup>40</sup> But can the civilizational discourse of development be linked to China's engagement abroad, beyond its immediate neighborhood?

**Figure 3. Chinese tourists at the statue of a Hani peasant, Terraced Fields Culture Square, Yuanyang, Yunnan. Photo by author**



As manifested in the government's yearly *Report on Modernization* which publishes a modernization index not only for China's provinces but also for foreign countries,<sup>41</sup> the Chinese discourse of modernization is an intensely comparative and competitive one, reflecting the continued influence of Morganian ideas of a quasi-biological competition for survival between races and

<sup>40</sup> Tim Oakes, *Tourism and Modernity in China*, and Louisa Schein, “Gender and Internal Orientalism in China”.

<sup>41</sup> Elena Barabantseva, “The Chinese Official Discourse on Modernisation”.

nations. While Anglo-American and Western European countries provide the upper benchmark in this contest, no less attention is paid to the lower benchmarks: China's southern neighbors (except Thailand), African and some Latin American countries, as well as to those ambiguous competitors on the West's periphery who used to lead China in the race but may now be losing to it: Russia and Eastern Europe.<sup>42</sup> (India, because of its size and conflicting indicators of development, occupies a special and complex place in the comparisons, as in some ways China's alter ego.) Just as, to use an often-repeated phrase, China must learn from the "advanced technology and management methods of developed Western countries", it can, in turn, transmit its own "advanced experience" to those less fortunate.

At the beginning of this article, I suggested that migration plays a greater role in exporting economic models from China than from the West. On the one hand, this has to do with the organization of Chinese corporations, whose overseas expansion has been led by entities that are wholly or partially state-owned. Their first moves overseas, in the early 1990s, served in part to spin off capital from the state-owned entity and into numerous small overseas affiliates that, though nominally independent, in fact maintained clientilistic relationships with the parent corporation. These arrangements served to enrich senior and mid-level managers, who pocketed the profits, and depended on the migration of the latter to oversee the setup and operation of the affiliates. These companies (usually in trade, construction or real estate) operated in transitional or "developing" economies in Eastern Europe, Africa, South or Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, and relied on the migration both of Chinese managers and of less-qualified migrants who became retail merchants or workers.<sup>43</sup> The expansion of Chinese consumer goods exports to these regions in the 1990s and 2000s has been accompanied by the migration of an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 Chinese to Russia, another 50,000 or so to Eastern Europe, and tens if not hundreds of thousands to Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, Burma, Central and South America (especially Argentina) and Africa.<sup>44</sup> South Africa and Argentina have attracted an estimated 30,000 migrants each from the

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<sup>42</sup> On Morganism in China, see, for example, Stevan Harrell, *Cultural Encounters*; Frank Dikötter, "Race in China", in Pál Nyíri and Joana Breidenbach (eds), *China Inside Out* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), pp. 177-204.

<sup>43</sup> See Pál Nyíri, "Transnationalism and the Middleman Minority Model: Chinese Entrepreneurs in Hungary", in Leo Paul Dana (ed.) *Ethnic Minorities & Indigenous Peoples: Subsistence & Self-employment Issues* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, forthcoming); Heidi Østbø Haugen and Jørgen Carling, "On the Edge of the Chinese Diaspora: The Surge of *Baihuo* Business in an African City", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (2005), pp. 639-62.

<sup>44</sup> See Pál Nyíri and Igor R. Saveliev (eds), *Globalising Chinese Migration: Perspectives from Europe and Asia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); James K. Chin, "Reducing Irregular Migration from China", *International Migration*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (2003), pp. 49-72.

province of Fujian alone.<sup>45</sup> In many of these countries, Chinese merchants have established nationwide networks of wholesale and retail shops catering to urban and rural populations, reminiscent of colonial trade networks in Africa and Southeast Asia.<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, the role of migration in exporting development has to do with the particular status of Chinese overseas in PRC foreign policy. Since 1978, Chinese leaders have repeatedly affirmed that they see overseas Chinese as an important force of China's "socialist modernization" and in "developing international friendship"; in other words, as sources or conduits of investment, technological innovation and behind-the-scenes diplomacy.<sup>47</sup> In return, they have made strenuous efforts to gain the trust of previously alienated overseas Chinese, including a sharp discursive shift from treating them as traitors to emphasizing their achievements and contributions to both China and their countries of residence.<sup>48</sup> After a period when overseas Chinese were considered marginal to China's self-definition, migration is now portrayed as an essential part of Chinese culture.<sup>49</sup>

In the late 1990s, the priority of "overseas Chinese work" shifted to recent migrants, who were seen as more educated and more committed to ties with China, as the government constructed a discourse on "new migrants" as pioneers of modernization both at home (that is, in China) and abroad.<sup>50</sup> In a 1999 speech, Chairman Jiang Zemin noted not only that "the Central Pacific Railroad in America would not have been built without the arduous labor of masses of Chinese workers" but also that on a recent visit to IBM and AT&T he had seen "research groups which were 99 per cent Chinese".<sup>51</sup> The commercial counselor

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<sup>45</sup> "Xin Nanfei zhu huihuang" (New South Africa Moulds Glory), 27 September 2004, and "Bang zai, lü A minren gan pin hui ying" (Great! Fujianese in Argentina: Willing to Toil, Able to Win), 11 October 2004, *Fujian qiaobao* (Fujian Overseas Chinese) (Fuzhou).

<sup>46</sup> Pál Nyíri, "Transnationalism and the Middleman Minority Model", and Heidi Østbø Haugen and Jørgen Carling, "On the Edge of the Chinese Diaspora".

<sup>47</sup> "Bixu zhongshi qiaowu gongzuo" (Overseas Chinese Work Must Be Taken Seriously), *Renmin ribao*, 4 January 1978; Deng Xiaoping, speech at meeting with Thai businessman Charoen Phokpand, Peking, 7 April 1990; Jiang Zemin, speech at the State Council's Overseas Chinese Work Conference, Peking, 18 January 1999; Hu Jintao, speech at the second meeting of the Tenth People's Political Consultative Conference, Peking, 7 March 2004, quoted in Cheng Xi, *Qiaowu yu waijiao guanxi yanjiu: Zhongguo fangqi "shuangzhong guoji" de huigu yu fansi* (Overseas Chinese Work and Diplomacy: Rethinking China's Abolition of Dual Citizenship) (Peking: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe, 2005), p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> Pál Nyíri, "Expatriating is Patriotic?"

<sup>49</sup> While overseas Chinese loomed large in China's modernization project at several earlier points in the twentieth century, migration itself was never before seen as an essential part of modernity.

<sup>50</sup> Pál Nyíri, "The 'New Migrant'".

<sup>51</sup> Jiang Zemin, speech at the State Council's Overseas Chinese Work Conference.

of the PRC embassy in Budapest has stated that “Chinese entrepreneurs played an inerascable historical role” in the revival of Hungarian–Chinese trade.<sup>52</sup>

As with the example of the railway workers in America, the view of Chinese as modernizers was extended into the past. While Chinese and Western narratives on the “coolie trade” have become rather similar (emphasizing the cruelty and to some extent the involuntary nature of indenture), Chinese narratives on more voluntary forms of late 19th – early 20th century migration portray migrants as active contributors to modernization. Thus, the official *Encyclopedia of Chinese Overseas* (published under the auspices of the All-China Federation of Overseas Chinese) writes that, in the early 20th century, people in the Russian Far East

lived in Chinese-built houses, used simple implements made in Chinese workshops, drank Chinese tea, ate flour and vegetables produced by Chinese, purchased all of their daily necessities in Chinese-run shops ... In the eyes of the Russians, the Chinese were geniuses of commerce: industrious, honest, clever, capable, and endowed with an indomitable competitive spirit.<sup>53</sup>

Western colonial narratives of migration likewise stress the diligence and usefulness of “middleman minorities” such as Chinese, Indians and Syrians, but interpret them as self-serving and opportunistic, and thus as sly and disloyal. Though they help colonial modernization, they are by no means its conscious agents. By contrast, the Chinese narratives make them into the humane pioneers that, in the Western versions, only Westerners themselves can be. Furthermore, with the promotion of the early 15th-century admiral Zheng He (whose fleet supposedly reached not only Africa and Southeast Asia but Australia and America as well) to national hero in the 2000s, the Chinese state threw its weight behind the view that, had it chosen to, China could have become the world’s colonizer and bringer of civilization much earlier than Europe did. Thus, China today is simply reclaiming a status that was long its due.

### Migrant Pioneers and Grateful Natives

In African countries—where China has been involved in construction projects since the 1960s—the view of Chinese migrants as contributors to development seems to be shared by many locals.<sup>54</sup> Østbø Haugen and Carling report that “Chinese and Cape Verdeans alike commonly assert that the living standard of

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<sup>52</sup> Lai Chunsheng, “Zhong–Xiong maoyi qian tan” (Shallow Talk on Chinese–Hungarian Trade), *Budapei shoubaobao* (Budapest Weekly), 6–12 June 2003, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Li Yongchang and Lin Zaisen, “Eluosi Huaqiao Huaren Gaishu” (The Situation of Chinese in Russia), in Zhou Nanjing (ed.), *Huaqiao huaren baike quanshu: lishi juan* (Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas: History Volume) (Peking: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe), pp. 92–98.

<sup>54</sup> On China’s involvement in aid projects in Africa during the Maoist years, see, for example Philip Snow, *The Star Raft* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). In Africa, China has continuously engaged in infrastructure projects since the 1960s, and transformed them into profit-oriented ventures without changing the rhetoric of fraternal assistance to the Third World.

poor Cape Verdeans has improved with the entry of the Chinese" (one Chinese shop owner asserts that "before the Chinese came, very few people wore shoes").<sup>55</sup> Chinese merchants elsewhere, whether in Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe or Latin America, make much the same argument about their contribution, and not without reason. In 2001, a poll in Hungary found that open-air retail clothing markets, which are dominated by Chinese importers, account for 39 per cent of retail clothing sales.<sup>56</sup> According to Chinese sources, in 2004, 90 per cent of the 1,300 groceries in Buenos Aires were owned by Chinese, operating at lower costs than local entrepreneurs, who went bankrupt during the collapse of the Argentine economy.<sup>57</sup> But it is less clear whether residents in those countries see Chinese as "developers", as investors or as unfair competitors. Certainly, in Eastern Europe and Russia, the "contribution" narrative conflicts strikingly with the opinion prevailing in the local media, which perhaps, grudgingly, recognizes the usefulness of Chinese imports for the low-income part of the population, but accuses the Chinese importers of illegal immigration, unfair business methods and involvement in organized crime.<sup>58</sup>

Nonetheless, that part of the rapidly globalizing Chinese-language media that caters primarily to audiences in mainland China and those who have left the PRC since 1978 but maintain transnational connections has largely been promoting the officially supported view of the "new migrant" from China as a global harbinger of modernization, an object of pride both for China itself and for the overseas Chinese.<sup>59</sup> This is not just the result of overseas Chinese audiences' appetite for such success stories, but also of conscious state policy. In its "Opinion on Implementing New Migrant Work",<sup>60</sup> the Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau (known as the Qiaoban) formulates the task to "raise a core cadre" of new

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<sup>55</sup> Heidi Østbø Haugen and Jørgen Carling, "On the Edge of the Chinese Diaspora".

<sup>56</sup> *Heti Világgazdaság* (Weekly World Economics) (Budapest), 31 March 2001.

<sup>57</sup> "Bang zai, lü A minren gan pin hui ying".

<sup>58</sup> Pál Nyíri, "Global Modernisers or Local Subalterns?"

<sup>59</sup> Pál Nyíri, "The 'New Migrant'"; cf. Cristina Szanton Blanc, "The Thoroughly Modern 'Asian': Capital, Culture, and Nation in Thailand and the Philippines", in Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (eds), *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 261-86. On the development of Chinese media in Europe, see Li Minghuan, "Ouzhou zhongwen chuanmei de xingqi, fazhan yu xianzhuang" (The Emergence, Development and Current State of Chinese Media in Europe), *Ouzhou* (Europe), No. 6 (2002), pp. 85-92. Li paints the picture of a strongly politicized media landscape in which media loyal to the PRC have gradually gained the upper hand over rivals with connections to Taiwan. This is related to the major demographic changes among Chinese in Europe since the 1990s, resulting in an increasing numerical dominance by recent migrants from the PRC (see Pál Nyíri and Igor Saveliev, *Globalising Chinese Migration*). On transnationalism among post-1978 migrants from China, see, for example, Pál Nyíri, "Expatriating is Patriotic?"; Frank N. Pieke, Pál Nyíri, Mette Thunø and Antonella Ceccagno, *Transnational Chinese*.

<sup>60</sup> Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau, "Opinion on Implementing New Migrant Work" (Guanyu kaizhan xin yimin gongzuo de yijian), document [1996]03.

migrants who are “able actively to contribute to accomplishing the country’s three great tasks”. To this end, it recommends to “promote them in our domestic and foreign media, [and] help them increase their fame overseas”. The same document calls on Chinese officials to “increase friendship” with and “strengthen guidance” of publishers of overseas Chinese newspapers. As early as the mid-nineties, the Qiaoban invested in overseas Chinese television stations through two Hong Kong-based companies it owns. More commonly, however, its involvement with overseas media is indirect and takes the form of providing articles or television programs, often specially produced for broadcast overseas, as well as extending invitations to and generally cultivating relationships with media producers.<sup>61</sup> It is likely that this relationship contributes to the steady presence of a staple of triumphalist “new migrant” stories.

The Paris-based *Ouzhou shibao*, for instance, uses the same language of “contribution” to describe the achievements of Chinese migrants both in the Netherlands and in Cambodia.<sup>62</sup> According to the paper, the 30,000 mainland Chinese migrant entrepreneurs who own businesses ranging from laundries and Internet cafés to water-bottling plants, power stations, farms and logging companies have made an “enormous contribution” to Cambodia’s “recovery and reconstruction”.<sup>63</sup> In the Netherlands, the paper wrote, the migrants have made “a major contribution to Dutch society, economy, science and technology, and trade”.<sup>64</sup> In an interview in *Shijie rongyin* (a Hong Kong-based magazine catering to migrants from Fuqing, a region of Fujian Province), the president of the Melbourne Fuqing Association said:

In Australia, Chinese immigrants are divided into new and old immigrants ... It is impossible to discuss old immigrants together with new immigrants ... Twenty years ago, Chinese were considered the most backward ethnic group in Australia. [By contrast,] new migrants have all received higher education; they have a strong ability to live here and develop quickly.<sup>65</sup>

In Australia and North America, it is high-tech entrepreneurs who are singled out for portrayal as successful “new migrants”. For example, a Chinese-

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<sup>61</sup> This is reported in the summary of the Qiaoban’s Overseas Propaganda Work Conference (Qiaoban document [1996]058).

<sup>62</sup> *Ouzhou shibao*, like all of the overseas Chinese publications quoted below, is officially independent of any state support, but is run by entrepreneurs and organizational leaders who enjoy good relations with the PRC. According to Li Minghuan in “Ouzhou zhongwen chuanmei de xingqi”, *Ouzhou shibao* does in fact rely on financial support from the PRC. This would differentiate it from the other papers.

<sup>63</sup> Lute, “Zhongguoren taojin Jianbuzhai”.

<sup>64</sup> “Helan huaren canyi jigou zhengshi chengli” (Consultative Body of Chinese in the Netherlands Officially Established), *Ouzhou shibao*, 23 September 2004.

<sup>65</sup> “Zheng Changhou tan Aozhou Rong-qing” (Zheng Changhou about Fuqing Fellowship in Australia), *Shijie rongyin*, June 2001, p. 17.



language magazine published in Budapest describes Howard Li, a New York-based businessman, in this way:

The new century is the century of the knowledge economy. Howard Li has included the Web in his vision ... The backbone of a worldwide Web-based goods exchange with hubs in New York and Hong Kong has already been formed ... By now, his joint and exclusive ventures in China extend over more than 30 provinces, cities and regions. He has helped Chinese goods conquer (*jinjūn*) the American market ... He has injected funds from abroad into China in order to promote the economic construction of the motherland ... He is also Chairman of the Asian–American Entrepreneurs Association, Honorary General Advisor of the New York Federation of Chinese Associations, and holder of forty or fifty other honors ...<sup>66</sup>

Howard Li is depicted as a contributor primarily to the modernization of China, but one whose contributions are recognized also in the United States. Similarly, stories about “new migrants” in Latin America and Europe emphasize the rapid rise of their social status—often in stark contrast with stories in European media, in which Chinese migrants most commonly appear as criminals or victims. They talk about “brilliant success ... starting from such a low point”<sup>67</sup> and “outstanding accomplishments ... after six–seven years of struggle”.<sup>68</sup> One article characterizes Fujianese migrants in Argentina in three phrases: “entrepreneurial pioneers who accumulated capital to raise up their families from labor to supermarket ownership”; “path breakers of international business”; “harbingers of the Chinese race’s culture”.<sup>69</sup>

The “new migrant” topic has been popular with Chinese audiences since the broadcast of the highly successful soap opera *A Peking Man in New York* (*Beijingren zai Niu Yue*, based on Glen Cao’s novel) on national television in the early nineties. Television serials and books written about “new migrants”—while discussing crime, sex and the suffering of clandestine migrants in lurid detail—also paint the picture of success in vivid colors. Thus, in *Zouru Ouzhou* (*Into Europe*), a soap opera directed by Chen Kemin for Southeast Fujian Television in 1999, the male protagonist arrives in Paris in a torn T-shirt without a penny. After a few months of rapid entrepreneurial success aided by prominent local Chinese, he develops an ambitious construction project. “Ladies and gentlemen!” he announces to his French audience, pointing to the drawing of a building complex with pagoda-style roofs, “What will be different on the new map of Paris two

<sup>66</sup> *Who’s Who of Chinese Origin Worldwide* (Shijie huaren mingrenlu) (Budapest), No. 4 (2000), pp. 31–32.

<sup>67</sup> Yu Jun, “Bai nian da ji zaiyu tigao ren de suyang” (The Great Project of a Hundred Years Lies in Improving the Quality of the People), *Huikan* (Bulletin of the Hungarian Chinese Association, Budapest), No. 25 (30 April 2004), p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> Zhang Zhongbin, “Mingxi lü Ou xin yimin chengwei jiaxiang jianshe di xin sheng lilian” (New Mingxi Migrants in Europe Become a Newborn Force in the Home County’s Construction), *Fujian qiaobao*, 21 December 1997.

<sup>69</sup> “Cong dagong jilei dao chaoshi qi jia de chuangyezhe; jinchukou maoyi de kaituozhe; Zhonghua minzu wenhua de fuchengzhe” (“Bang zai, lü A minren gan pin hui ying”).

years from now? The beautiful banks of the Seine will be full of Oriental splendor: the Chinatown Investment and Trade Centre!” The audience breaks into applause.

The significance of the “new Chinese” showing Paris—the symbolic heart of Europe—the road to the next level of modernity is obvious to any Chinese viewer brought up on narratives of how imperialist Europe both humiliated China and forced it to modernize. The Chinese state looms large in the narrative of the film, produced and aired by state broadcasters: the Chinese embassy provides support for the protagonist’s project, while funding for it is secured from China.

A random perusal of more recent arrivals in the National Library in Peking in early 2005 attests to the continued popularity of the genre, yielding titles such as *Love at Harvard*, whose subtitle reads “Two Generations of Chinese Men Go to Harvard from Peking: There, They Demonstrate to You the Wisdom and Strength of the Chinese Male”.<sup>70</sup> From *Peking Man in New York* on, the male Chinese protagonist outwitting the foreign employer or business partner, or else conquering (through love or money) the heart and body of the foreign lover, have been common tropes in “new migrant” stories.<sup>71</sup> But in stories from the developmental periphery, locals morph from equal adversaries to a hapless supporting cast dependent on crafty Chinese entrepreneurs: female assistants having affairs with their Chinese bosses, interpreters falling in love with Chinese female traders, loyal waiters or wicked middlemen. In Chen Dian and Chen Mei’s *Sheng he* (Sacred River), the apology of three Hungarian waiters for a colleague who had stolen a bottle of Chinese liquor from their Chinese employer recalls colonial novels of British India or the Dutch East Indies:

“Tibi has realized that he had done wrong,” Attila said earnestly. “ ... If Miss Shanshan does not object, he begs to be let in, to pay Boss Lin tribute with a Hungarian folk song and an excellent bottle of Hungarian wine ... ”

(Tibi) wore an attractive folk costume, his face was shaved clean, his hair carefully combed and oiled; in his hand was a bottle of first-rate Bull’s Blood of Eger. Astute Tibi first made a bow toward Shanshan, as if indicating that his punishment was over, and then stepped forward, bowed to (Boss) Lin Tianhao and handed the bottle to the star of the evening. Lin Tianhao stood up, as if savoring the wine, and merrily took the birthday present. He took out a few bills worth thirty thousand forints and handed them to Tibi ...<sup>72</sup>

The Orientalistic scene of the dancing natives accompanying the dinner of the Chinese businessman could very well be from a popular package tour of China’s southwestern “ethnic” regions.

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<sup>70</sup> Wang Zhengjun, *Hafo zhi lian* (Love at Harvard) (Peking: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> See Geremie Barmé, *In the Red* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 255-80.

<sup>72</sup> Chen Dian and Chen Mei, *Sheng he* (Sacred River) (Peking: Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 1997), p. 86, my translation.

Although Chinese migrants whom I interviewed in Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s did not share the social status of Boss Lin or Howard Li—and indeed were acutely conscious of the discrimination and bullying they suffered—they did share a strong sense of their “contribution” to local society. When describing their impressions of Eastern Europe, Africa or Indochina, they often used the term “backward” (*luohou*).<sup>73</sup> “What’s good about Europe is that it’s quiet and there are few people. For the rest of it, Shanghai is better. It’s more developed”, said Sun, a 28-year-old from Shanghai who worked as a waitress in Budapest. A 29-year-old business traveler from near Shanghai put it more politely: “In the last two decades, there doesn’t seem to have been much development”. In a Chinese-language program on a local radio station, the owner of a shipping and customs clearance company recalled her arrival in Hungary in 1990:

I found out that Hungary was actually an agricultural country with very backward industry; having only just embarked on reform and opening, goods were very scarce ... there were no industrial goods at all, all of them had to be “imported”; so I went home, organized suppliers, and started importing.<sup>74</sup>

As in this narrative, Chinese often appear in the roles of bold developers. For example, a 1995 interview in the Shanghai daily *Wenhuibao* credited Zhang Xianzhang, a former pig farmer who migrated to Czechoslovakia in 1992, with introducing the idea of pig farming there—although he eventually gave up because of the cold climate, so that “the Czechs still have to eat imported pork” while Zhang’s pig business prospers in the United States.<sup>75</sup> Michael Song, the mastermind behind the Asia Center in Budapest—heralded at its 2002 opening as the largest shopping centre in Europe—claimed that it would not only “raise Hungary’s international profile” but actually “contribute to Hungary’s Olympic bid”—a hyperbole that echoed the language used by the Chinese official quoted in the beginning of this paper, in reference to the state’s engagement in infrastructure projects overseas. A marble stele in front of the Asia Center bears the following English inscription:

Great Asiacyenter fuse fengshui theory from the East with material culture from the West, extending traditional Chinese culture, as well as enriching modern western material technology. The palatial Asiacyenter is a rare creature in the world, its name will spread to each corner of the world.

Similarly, Li Xinzhu, a Chinese entrepreneur and association leader in South Africa, described in an interview how, when he first arrived in the 1990s, there was a “scarcity of goods”, so, through “arduous toil” (*gan pin jia qinfen*), he

<sup>73</sup> See Pál Nyíri, *New Chinese Migrants in Europe*, and Frank N. Pieke, Pál Nyíri, Mette Thunø and Antonella Ceccagno, *Transnational Chinese*, for details of my fieldwork.

<sup>74</sup> “Huaren nüqiyejia Lai Hua” (Lai Hua, Chinese Businesswoman), *Shichang* (Market) (Budapest), 12 August 2003, p. 11. Originally broadcast on Tilos Rádió (Budapest), 6 August 2003, 9-10 p.m.

<sup>75</sup> Fu Xiaobo, “Kuachu guomen de siying laoban” (Private Bosses Transcend National Boundaries), *Wenhuibao* (Shanghai), 2 June 1995, p. 7.

proceeded to open a chain of twenty shops, then a shoe factory and, “employing 150 local blacks, has made a contribution to solving the employment problem and developing the economy”.<sup>76</sup> (This kind of claim would perhaps sound unsurprising from a major employer in a less developed African country, but is hardly consistent with local views in South Africa.) Yuan Jianping, head of four Chinese organizations in Argentina and “actively involved in high-level social activities”, recalls Argentinians’ surprise at the opening of his showroom of Chinese imports in 1995: “We didn’t know that Chinese products were so varied and so good!” The article about Yuan notes that his “high-level social activities” have enjoyed the “attention and appreciation” of the Chinese and Argentine governments in view of his “outstanding contribution” to bilateral trade.<sup>77</sup> In these narratives, Chinese migrants appear in a West that was once the beacon of modernity but that has run out of steam and now needs to be infused with the flexibility, industry and vision of the global Chinese in order to take the next step. The way migrants talk about their experiences re-embodies the Chinese state’s development project and the idea of a linear evolution of nations towards higher stages of modernization.

Reports from Russia—China’s erstwhile “big brother”—are even more extravagant. A recent article in *Ouzhou Shibao*, entitled “Chinese migrants in Russia: Billionaires through hard toil, they hire majors as bodyguards”, claims that “girls compete to marry Chinese migrants; authorities welcome Chinese investment”.<sup>78</sup> In this case, the hero, in Russia since the early 1990s, owns sixteen lumber yards and thirteen trading companies, which employ five hundred people. Zhao, whose assets are worth “nearly 100 million yuan”, is a capitalist with a caring heart: his farm has “solved the local people’s difficulties with vegetables, so they no longer completely rely on importing vegetables from China”. His Russian wife, Nadia, has a high opinion of the Chinese: not only are they hardworking and sober, but also “courteous: every time they meet someone they say hello”.<sup>79</sup>

This last statement suggests that, as one proceeds east and south, not only do judgements about “backwardness” become increasingly harsh but the “quality” of Chinese migrants is also cast in a more favorable light compared to that of locals. Chinese interviewees and media in Hungary broadly agreed that while Hungarians might be lazy, unambitious and willing to live in “backward” circumstances, their “quality” was high—higher than that of people in China. This manifested itself in such things as education levels, politeness, well-behaved children and what was perceived to be harmonious family life—attributes linked

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<sup>76</sup> “Xin Nanfei zhu huihuang”.

<sup>77</sup> “Bang zai, lü A minren gan pin hui ying”.

<sup>78</sup> “Zhongguo yimin zai Eluosi: ku gan cheng yi wan fuweng gu shangxiao zuo baobiao”, *Ouzhou shibao*, 11-13 September 2004.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

to low population density and ones that people in China are supposed to lack.<sup>80</sup> As an article in a Chinese-language Budapest newspaper put it, characteristically:

at the bottom of their hearts, Hungarians are pure, kind and peaceful, like the benign old man who greets you good morning at daybreak, the innocent youth who patiently explains how to find your way, or the burly fellow who feeds pigeons at the roadside ... When will the homeland [China] have such carefree pigeons? When will China have such peaceful evenings? ... When will our elders have such graceful smiles?<sup>81</sup>

Thus, while the degree of economic modernity in Hungary or Argentina may be disappointing, their peoples, being white and having low reproduction rates, at least share the “Western” attributes of high quality. But that view does not hold for others, such as Gypsies in Eastern Europe and, especially, Africans. The public perception of blacks in China is still strongly tinged with a Spencerian idea of racial inferiority;<sup>82</sup> African countries are often described as *both* backward and uncivilized. For example, an article entitled “South Africa As I Know It” in the magazine of the World Futsing Association consists of four paragraphs which begin with the subheadings “AIDS Widespread”, “Prisons Burst”, “Security Bad” and “Child Prostitution”.<sup>83</sup> One episode of *Into Europe* demonstrates the tension between racial attributes and modernity: the protagonist and a Chinese friend are sitting in a plush Paris nightclub when they notice a Chinese woman and a black man at another table. Unable to contain his outrage at this—presumably the violation by a racially inferior foreigner of a Chinese woman’s body—the friend goes over and picks a fight. He is then pacified by the protagonist, who chides him for his uncivilized behavior.

### **It’s the Turn of the Chinese**

In this article, I have juxtaposed four elements of China’s approach to development. I started by pointing out China’s use of international development rhetoric to describe infrastructure investment and development projects in the Southern Hemisphere outside both the institutional structure of international development organizations and the structure of meaning that “international development” carries in the West. I argued that there was a close relationship between Chinese capital flows abroad and migration, both domestically and internationally. I described the “civilizational” nature of China’s internal development discourse and suggested that the idea of a civilizing mission is being exported across the borders simultaneously and contiguously with the domestic project—rather than, as in the Western colonial case, separated from it in time and space. Finally, I suggested that the cultural production that emerges around

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<sup>80</sup> See Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times*, pp. 117-37.

<sup>81</sup> Xiangnan, “Duonao xiasi” (Summer Thoughts on the Danube), *Ouzhou daobao* (Europe Guide) (Budapest), 13 July 1994, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Frank Dikötter, “Race in China”.

<sup>83</sup> Yan Taorui, “Wo renshi de Nanfei”, *Shijie rongyin*, No. 19 (2005), p. 56.

“new migrants” depicts them as globally mobile harbingers of modernity,<sup>84</sup> but also puts them into an ambivalent relationship with “foreigners” which is framed by the imperatives of the civilizatory discourse of development.<sup>85</sup> In this competitive relationship, where it is assumed that both parties pursue the goals of entrepreneurial modernity, the migrants are both alerted to the “quality” of their hosts and reminded of their own task to “improve their quality”. Just as in the 1983 newspaper story of a “model household” in Hebei Province which turned from gambling to entrepreneurship and became a contributor to local civilizing projects,<sup>86</sup> there is a dialectic between “contributing” to the modernization of foreign countries and overcoming “China’s internalised sense of lack”<sup>87</sup> which manifests itself in the “population quality” discourse, for the individual as well as for the state. Like the converted gambler, successful migrants, often of lowly origin, become model individuals who persuade others (Chinese and foreigners) of the wisdom of the state’s modernizing policies. Unlike Western colon(ial)ists, they do not go about educating or “reforming” natives, but show them an example of success. This difference underlies the claims of altruism that Chinese officials use to indicate subtly the *moral* superiority of China’s economic “contributions”—despite their profit-oriented nature—over the more socially interventionist aid schemes of the West.

The positive developmentalist view of Chinese migration to the cross-border periphery contrasts with the dominant Western view, which is shaped by wider fears of Chinese “expansion” as well as by the kind of economic, political and cultural concerns that have by now been ingrained in the discourse of “sustainable development” used by international development agencies (and increasingly in China as well). Chinese narratives see Chinese migration to Indochina and Burma as inherently positive, bringing development to the locals. By contrast, Western narratives presents it as inherently detrimental and as causing economic and cultural damage, and simply do not see it in the development frame of reference at all.<sup>88</sup> The same logic explains, incidentally, the profound disconnect in the matter of Han Chinese migration to Tibet and Xinjiang (East Turkestan).

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<sup>84</sup> I have discussed this media imagery more fully in earlier articles (Pál Nyíri, “The ‘New Migrant’”, and “Global Modernisers or Local Subalterns?”); see also Wanning Sun, *Leaving China*.

<sup>85</sup> Recent mainland Chinese migrants who live in Europe and other white-majority societies usually call locals “foreigner” (*laowai*), a term perhaps better translated as “whitey” and normally applied only to whites. Chinese in Africa tend to refer to locals as “blacks” (*heiren*) or “niggers” (*heigui*), whereas those in Indochina use the local ethnonym (for example, “Lao”) to refer to their neighbors.

<sup>86</sup> Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times*, pp. 88-93.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>88</sup> Bertil Lintner, “Illegal Aliens Smuggling To and Through Southeast Asia’s Golden Triangle”, in Pál Nyíri and Igor Saveliev, *Globalising Chinese Migration*.

I have already mentioned the pervasive influence of both Morgan's and Spencer's social evolutionary theories in today's China, an influence described by Harrell and Dikötter<sup>89</sup> but still insufficiently analyzed in the ideology and practice of contemporary Chinese governing projects. That races and nations<sup>90</sup> are biological entities endowed with different capacities, that they compete for economic resources and hence for political dominance, is as evident to many Chinese citizens today as that they themselves as individuals are endowed with different faculties and also must compete. It is in these terms that the competition between China and the United States is explained and understood in Internet chatrooms, that the endless discussions of "overall national strength" (*zonghe guoli*) and the government pronouncements and media reports on the "arduous struggle" (*jianku fendou*) and eventual success of "yellow-skinned, black-haired descendants of the Yellow Emperor" abroad are read ("struggle" being, of course, a strongly oppositional term used to describe the victorious history of the Communist Party and the laboring people). A literally millenarian (cf. "Pacific century") sense emerges from this discourse: that *it is the turn of the Chinese*, with their unique endowments of flexibility and efficiency and now backed by a strong modernizing state, to lead the world to a new, improved version of modernity and capitalism.<sup>91</sup> This fantasy is, of course, shared by many Western commentators: Aihwa Ong argues that the "globally modern Asian" is the new ideal American subject in the era of flexible capitalism.<sup>92</sup>

This view reverberates in official speeches, but its circulation goes far beyond state-endorsed narratives. In the rapidly growing global Chinese evangelical movement, there is, in the words of Rev. Edward Wei of the British-based Chinese Overseas Christian Mission (COCM), a "worldwide sentiment that the responsibility for or instrument of mission has moved over to the Chinese".<sup>93</sup> COCM's 2000 International Mission Conference had the title "The Light of Ten Thousand Countries: God's Grace Chose Overseas Chinese Compatriots to Spread the Gospel All Over Europe". As Mr. Qiu, a Chinese Christian convert in Hungary, told me,

Since I believe in God, I think the reason so many Chinese leave China is that they too are the seed of Abraham, as it is said in the Bible, and it is now their turn to spread the gospel on Earth, as the British and Americans formerly did, because

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<sup>89</sup> See, for example, Stevan Harrell, *Cultural Encounters*, and Frank Dikötter, "Race in China".

<sup>90</sup> As has been pointed out by many authors (including Harrell and Dikötter), the current Chinese phrase for "Chinese nation", *Zhonghua minzu*, often carries an overtone of biological heredity, such as did—in Dikötter's comparison—the term "Anglo-Saxon" in the Victorian era or the phrase "das Deutsche Volk" in the first half of the twentieth century.

<sup>91</sup> See Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>92</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Buddha Is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>93</sup> Pál Nyíri, "Moving Targets: Chinese Christian Proselytism among Transnational Migrants from the PRC", *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2002), pp. 263-302.

there are many Chinese and they are everywhere. We did not leave China by chance; God summoned us out of China so we get to know Him. We will not be here long, because God will need us in other countries, especially China. Christian countries are generally more civilized, more democratic and more developed. Therefore China, too, needs Christianity. Many people used to think that science or democracy could save China, but actually only God can save it.<sup>94</sup>

Mr. Qiu's reasoning makes explicit the links between ethnic belonging, modernity, migration and Christian mission. Those who, like him, have taken upon themselves the full weight of the "yellow man's burden" are, of course, a minority.<sup>95</sup> But the sentiment that the Chinese people must tomorrow take over the mission that has been carried by Americans since World War II and before them by the British, the mission of modernizing and civilizing the world, is a widespread element of Chinese nationalism. In official ideology, it is disguised by the "united-front" rhetoric of "opposing hegemony" and "solidarity with developing countries".

Yet, ultimately, it is not nationalism but the obsession with a culture-nonspecific yardstick of modernization that make Chinese anti-colonialism and anti-Americanism so different from other varieties of these sentiments. In this view, global intervention and hegemony in the name of development and civilization is *not* in itself illegitimate; indeed, it is understandable and even necessary. Read carefully, the emphasis on cultural difference in the orientalist tales about Lao or Hungarian "natives" is really a foil for competing claims of superiority in hierarchies of modernity and capitalism—just as it is in many Western development projects. The difference is that Chinese subjects themselves feel handicapped and continuously pressured to strive upwards in those hierarchies. If their surprise at the lack of correspondence between "modernity" and "quality" in the ambiguous countries of the Western periphery does translate into questioning the Chinese model of development, those doubts are, for now, drowned out by the gung-ho chorus of global Chinese boosterism.

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<sup>94</sup> Pál Nyíri, "Moving Targets".

<sup>95</sup> However, it is important to note that they do not generally perceive their civilizing project as one opposed to that of the Chinese state, but rather as one perfecting it. It is interesting to compare this current Chinese Christian civilizing project and its co-optation of the state's civilizing project to the earlier, Western Christian experience in China; see Stevan Harrell, *Cultural Encounters*.



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