

The Fourth Indo-China War

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Abstract Against the background of twentieth-century military conflict in Asia, the article concentrates on China's contemporary relationships with outlying states, regions and provinces. Employing a version of Thomas Malthus's political economy, we argue that population wars are an important, if often disguised, future of modern foreign relations. Through an examination of a various examples but specifically Tibet, Vietnam and Uyghurs in Xinjiang province, the article considers the current prospects of sinicization by demographic means. We conclude by describing 'red capitalism' in Asia as a combination of authoritarian states plus economic success within the framework of a tributary Han civilization.

Keywords Population wars · Tributary state · Malthus · Demographic aggression · Red capitalism

In the second half of the twentieth century, Vietnam was transformed by three major wars lasting from 1945 to 1979. We can regard the First Indo-China War (1945–1954) as bringing an end to France's imperial ambitions in the region and especially an end of the absorption of Vietnam into French Indo-China that had occurred between 1858 and 1887. The Second Indo-China War or the Vietnam War occupied the period from 1950 to 1975, drawing the United States into a costly and problematic military engagement

with Asia. The Third Indo-China War (or the Sino-Vietnamese War) between the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was short and bloody lasting some two months at the beginning of 1979. These wars brought massive destruction to Indochina, setting off several violent and destructive civil wars as well as widespread insurgencies. These Wars have been the subject of numerous and continuous historical analyses, but in this essay we are less concerned with history, offering instead a brief sociological interpretation of these Wars in order to sketch out the emerging reorganization of Asia which we will describe as the Fourth Indo-China War. Having described the roots of this conflict, our aim is to offer an account of Chinese colonial expansion as a 'population war'. More precisely, we may regard this process as the 'Hanization' of Asia. Although the Fourth Indo-China War has radically different sociological and military characteristics from previous conflicts, it clearly builds on the three previous Wars. Its current geographical focus is the border area between Laos and Vietnam but this population war has major consequences for Asia as a whole. Given the scope of this emerging conflict, these social changes will also have major implications for the future of American foreign policy.

Vo Nguyen Giap and Social Transformation in Asia 1945–1979

General Vo Nguyen Giap played a major role in the previous Indo-China Wars and was responsible in particular for the stunning defeat of the French military forces at Dien Bien Phu. Born in Quang-binh Province on 25 August 1910, Giap will celebrate his centenary this year. Having survived all the key players in the history of Indo-China Wars—including Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, Kennedy,

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Johnson, and Nixon—Giap remains an influential although marginalized voice in contemporary Vietnamese politics. It remains to be seen what role he may play in the Fourth Indo-China War.

Giap's story is well known. Between 1942 and 1945 Giap helped to organize resistance to the Japanese army and after the surrender of the Japanese in August 1945, the Vietminh under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh took control of the North and set up a provisional government. In September 1945 Ho announced the creation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. However in an agreement between Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin at Potsdam in July 1945, Vietnam was to be divided into two sections with the Chinese in control of the North and Britain in control of the South. In January 1945 Britain agreed to remove its troops and China left Vietnam in return for a promise from France that she would give up any claim to Chinese territory. Because France refused to recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, sporadic fighting broke out between the Vietminh and French troops. In the early stages of this conflict the poorly equipped Vietminh had few successful engagements but their situation improved when Mao Zedong defeated Chiang Kai-Shek and the Vietminh found a safe basis in China from which to conduct operations against the French. In the resulting campaign between 1946 and 1952, the French lost 90,000 troops who were killed, wounded or captured. By 1953 the Vietminh had achieved control over large areas of North Vietnam.

The First and Second Indo-China Wars were classical colonial wars fought initially between western armies and insurgent forces whose ideology was primarily nationalistic but subsequently characterized as communist. The ideological framework of these Wars was, for China and Vietnam, framed within a Marxist-Leninist analysis and Giap's lectures on the conflict were couched in the rhetoric of a people's war against capitalist colonialism (Giap 1955, 1965). The substance of the conflict however had more to do with a struggle for national autonomy than with communist expansion. As the Vietminh were increasingly equipped with Soviet or Chinese armaments, the conflict took on the character of a more conventional war between well organized armies. For the Viet forces, it involved a strategy of attrition in which Giap's troops absorbed huge losses and both Wars were terminated by spectacular conflicts in which neither the French nor the American public was willing to accept the mounting casualties. In the First Indo-China War, with the support of Chinese military equipment after 1949, there was a gradual escalation of the scale of the conflict as a rural insurgency evolved into a national struggle for independence. The turning point in this conflict with France came in 1954 with the battle of Dien Bien Phu which General Navarre had planned as a trap to engage the Viet Minh in a large-scale conventional

battle. Out of this decisive battle, the humiliated French army eventually withdrew from the conflict and Giap emerged as a national hero (Curry 1997).

The Second Indo-China War had a similar pattern in which the South was supported by American forces and modern technology and the North was increasingly supplied by the Soviet Union. In the Vietnam War the conflict became a regional struggle, expanding into Cambodia when the US opposed the Chinese-backed *Khmer Rouge*. The Cambodian Civil War from 1967 to 1975 virtually destroyed Cambodia as a viable society. In Laos the US supported the NVA against the Communist Pathet Lao in the Laotian Civil War or Secret War of 1962–1975. Both Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon had come to the conclusion that the war in Vietnam could not be brought to a satisfactory conclusion in military terms alone and both had supported peace talks. The problem was that any withdrawal of American troops would leave the North Vietnamese army remaining in their positions in the South. In order to put pressure on the North Vietnamese, Nixon ordered a new series of bombing raids on Hanoi and Haiphong and in the space of eleven days 100,000 bombs were dropped on the two cities. There was an enormous public outcry about the scale of attack, involving the slaughter of thousands of civilians. However, the crucial turning point in the War was the Tet offensive in 1968. Paradoxically these attacks were not successful from a military point of view and the Viet Minh suffered huge losses, but it convinced the American public that a military defeat of the Viet Minh was not possible and American troops finally left Vietnam in March 1973. Despite the peace, fighting between the NLF and the AVRN continued and after a series of victories by the NLF in the spring of 1975, Saigon fell eventually on April 30, 1975.

Ho died in 1969 in a context where there was a general suspicion in Vietnam that the Chinese had in fact supported the American forces during the Tet Offensive. China's foreign policy objective was to prevent Vietnam from becoming a significant force in the region and hence China's aim was to prevent Vietnam gaining any lasting control over either Laos or Cambodia. The Third Indo-China War occurred when China invaded Vietnam as 'punishment' for the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. With the expiration of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance on February 15, 1979, the PRC felt free to strike at a Soviet ally. The overt reason was Vietnamese mistreatment of ethnic Chinese minorities in Vietnam and Vietnamese occupation of the Spratly Islands. On February 17, a PRC force of some 200,000 entered northern Vietnam. Both sides dispute the scale of their casualties. Because the Chinese army had been severely disrupted by the Cultural Revolution, the engagement was short and the Chinese military suffered a large number of casualties. The Chinese army adopted a scorched earth policy as they

retreated out of Vietnam, causing extensive damage to the countryside (Dunnigan and Nofi 1999). Border conflicts continued through the 1980s. The border demarcation was officially completed in January 2009. However, the notion that Vietnam should be punished as younger ‘brother’ perhaps well illustrates the ideology of a Confucian tributary state exercising authority over its provinces. China’s punitive intervention was consistent with Chinese imperial history in which the state periodically intervened to control provincial and local unrest, and to eliminate any popular politicization against the central authorities (Kuhn 2002). Although one can interpret this conflict within this historical framework of China’s tributary state, the War also had more specific causes such as Deng Xiaoping’s desire to keep the military preoccupied while he consolidated his power against the remnants of his left revivals from the Mao era.

China as a Tributary State

Vietnam has been for many hundreds of years significantly influenced by Chinese culture. In addition the success of Vietnam against both the French and the Americans was dependent on Chinese support. Ho Chi Minh had changed his name to the Chinese ‘Ho’ out of respect for the Chinese family that had given him support during his exile. Similarly in April 1940 Giap had been sent by the Central Committee to China to plan for the launch of a future guerrilla struggle. The cultural and political influence of China over Vietnam has without question been considerable. For a thousand years to 938 CE China ruled An Nam, the pacified southern province. The French also referred to their new colonial subjects as Annamites. Vietnamese opposition to foreign domination was a national struggle fuelled in modern times by the western ideologies of nationalism and communism and there are currently signs of continuing nationalist opposition to Chinese influence in Vietnam. Many Vietnamese intellectuals have recently criticized their government for allowing China to surround Vietnam by its take-over of the South China Sea and by its economic activities along the Laotian border. On 16 March 2009 China established its control over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea which are thought to be rich in resources, including oil. Ownership of these islands has been a topic of dispute between China, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, Philippines and Vietnam. China’s unilateral take-over will be an ongoing source of tension in the region, but, given the size of the Chinese navy, it will find control of this region relatively easy. The Chinese occupation of the Spratly Islands is seen by many Vietnamese as an illegal occupation and Chinese arrests of Vietnamese fishermen working off traditional coastal areas

have complicated the issue. There have also been conflicts over the development of a bauxite mine by the Chinese in Truong Son (‘Long Mountain’) between Laos and Vietnam, because there is the suspicion that the Chinese ‘workers’ are in fact military personnel. There have been violent conflicts between local Vietnamese and the Chinese workers. The world’s largest producer of bauxite is Australia providing around a third of the world’s supply. Both China and Vietnam have deposits but it is likely that the real significance of the Chinese bauxite mine is military rather than economic.

The problem for China is basically Malthusian—there is a severe mismatch between the size of its population and its natural resources. We describe this situation as a classic example of Malthusian scarcity because the driving force behind these developments is population growth alongside limited resources. The uncontrolled transfer of rural population into urban areas has in addition created severe political problems and the threat of unrest among its massive student population has been further exposed by the current global economic downturn. It is clear that China has not enjoyed a successful population policy. While the one-child family planning policy cut the growth of the Chinese population significantly, it has left China with a significant gender imbalance. In particular it has a surplus male population, whose expectations of family life inside China cannot be easily accommodated. One consequence is a significant increase in prostitution, but another solution not contemplated by Malthus in his calculation of the positive and negative constraints on population growth is for China to export its population of young men to neighbouring societies. While in the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution famine was the obvious Malthusian control on population growth, the export of surplus men is a major component of the Fourth Indo-China War.

For Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo, the critical demographic problem for Britain was the scarcity of available arable land in relation to population. In modern times, we might say that the problem of scarcity is the ratio of oil to people. Globally it can be argued that an oil-production zenith emerged in 2005 after which world oil production will not exceed 74 million barrels of oil per day (Phillips 2008). This energy crisis is combined with efforts by various oil-exporting countries to exit from the US dollar and a return to economic nationalism. Because China is now a net importer of oil, the supply of oil represents a severe political and economic problem. Conflicts over energy resources have increased tensions between Japan and China, for example when China commenced explorations in the Chunxiao gas fields in 2004 only four kilometres from the median line (Calder 2006). China’s dependency on external sources of energy is creating a

global network of alliances that is slowly changing the diplomatic map of the world. In August 2009 China signed an agreement with Australia for the supply of liquid gas over the next 20 years at the cost of 50 billion Australian dollars from West Australia. One consequence is that Australia will be forced to take a much more conciliatory attitude towards Chinese expansion into the South China Sea and to adopt a less critical attitude towards human rights issues with respect to ethnic minorities inside China.

China is also determined to sustain pressure over societies and regions that are historically regarded as components of the Chinese state. The problematic legal and political status of Taiwan is a long-standing example. The island was settled thousands of years ago by people who now unsurprisingly claim to be the original inhabitants. Reintegrated into China as a province in 1945, Taiwan's status was changed radically after 1949 with the flight of the Guomindang (GMD) including its leader Chiang Kai-shek to the island. Although some GMD units kept up the struggle against communism and were labelled as 'bandits', the civil war was over. Between two and three million people crossed the Taiwan Straits (Lary 2007). These 'Mainlanders' or *waisheng* ('from outside the province') added some 15% to the island's population of *ben tu* ('of this land') and the problem of Taiwan identity has never been successfully resolved. Today government statistics claim that 98% of the population are Han, but within this 'Chinese' category there are Hoklo (70%), Hakka (15%), Mainlanders (13%) and Aborigines (2%). Over the centuries the original inhabitants, who now number around 458,000 people, have been swamped by the migration of Chinese (Copper 2003). These figures remain controversial because whether Taiwan is a nation or a province is bitterly disputed (Copper 2003). The history of Taiwan does however perfectly illustrate the social and political consequences of the endless pressure of Han migration and the incorporation of such lands as provinces into a tributary Chinese state.

China has been expanding its population into the surrounding region through much of the nineteenth century. Indeed we might say that Chinese (specifically Han people) have been leaking into the surrounding world all the way from Hong Kong to Indonesia. Migration history is important because it gives us a perspective on globalization and modernization, but we need to study this history from an Asian perspective. In short, we need a better and broader historical grasp of migration, both European and Asian. When historians concentrate on European migration to America, it is as if Asia, and specifically China, had not been part of the modern process of globalization. During the early stage of modern migration from the 1830s to the 1930s, more than 160 million migrants moved from major

centres of population in China, South Asia and Europe to sparsely populated and largely undeveloped areas of the Americas, Southeast Asia and northern Asia. Some 50 million people migrated from South Asia and South China to Southeast Asia, Australia and various parts of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, together with another five million people from the Middle East and Europe. Some 48 million migrants left China, Russia, Korea and Japan travelling to Central Asia, Siberia and Manchuria. Within China, there was significant migration to the developing coastal cities, but also to the under-populated areas of the Yangtze basin and to the northwest and southwest border regions. There was considerable overland migration to Southeast Asia. In *Melancholy order: Asian migration and the globalization of borders*, Adam McKeown (2008) demonstrates how Chinese migration is the key historical fact of Asian migration.

When one talks about migration and diversity in Asia, one is therefore talking essentially about the migration of Chinese workers and entrepreneurs into Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Pacific. However, this pattern of Chinese migration must also to be understood in terms of the colonial development of Asia. For example, the existence of minorities and majorities can be regarded in part as a consequence of British colonial administration in the region. The census of populations in the colonies forced amorphous and heterogeneous social groups to start thinking of themselves in ethnic terms and it was this registration of people that created minority–majority relationships. Ethnicity became the principal basis of social classification. Because the principle of twentieth-century nationalism has been that majorities should form legitimate governments, the British as a white minority were in the long-term in an untenable position. When the British found themselves confronted by a significant majority, they adhered to a political strategy of forming coalitions with minorities. Such ethnic partners in coalition often found it strategically important to convert to Christianity but ethnic differences remained the critical issue. These colonial policies of the British and Dutch created "Chinese minorities" of people who often did not speak Chinese or read Chinese characters. The country in which the Chinese were assimilated completely into the royal family and the political establishment was Siam—a country which had escaped colonial control and ethnic classification.

The recent history of Han migration to achieve military-political control over its neighbours has been brought to world attention by Tibet where the new railway system allows China to transport goods and military personnel speedily into the region. In 1950 the Chinese army invaded Tibet and in 1951 forced the Tibetan authorities to sign a seventeen-point agreement recognizing Chinese sovereignty

over the country. The Tibetan Government in Exile, headed by the Dalai Lama, regards the Chinese military occupation as illegal (Smith, 2008). In 2000 the population was primarily composed of Tibetans representing 92.8% with a small Muslim minority. The Han Chinese are 6.1% of the population but the construction of a railway in 2006 has seen a rapid rise in Chinese migration. These population figures are disputed by the Tibetan Government in Exile which claims that the official statistics include neither the People's Liberation Army which is garrisoned in Tibet nor the large number of illegal migrations, leading the Dalai Lama to talk about his people becoming a minority in their own land and describing the Chinese policy as one of 'demographic aggression'. The view of modern Tibet from the perspective of Tibetans in exile has been disputed by academics who argue that China's positive attempts to develop Tibet economically have been neglected. However, the Tibetans have the impression of being swamped by the Han because these migrants have a competitive edge in the urban context. Tibetans have unusually high urban illiteracy rates and it is the Han migrants who benefit most from Chinese economic investment. Tibetans have become an urban underclass, while those remaining in rural areas have suffered from limited off-farm opportunities and rural poverty (Fischer 2005). These economic data need to be set alongside the question of the survival of Tibetan Buddhist culture. While there has been a significant decline in the number of Buddhist monks, some 1,550 out of 1,886 monasteries have been rebuilt in eastern Tibetan areas (Kolas and Thowsen 2005). However, Chinese promotion of Buddhist sites in China generally may also be connected with the expansion of what we might legitimately call 'religious tourism'. This commercial development of religious sites is common in China and indeed more generally in Asia (Kitiarsa 2008). This commodification of religion is also consistent with greater state intervention in the management of religion in China since the 1990s and those groups that cannot achieve recognition from the state as a religion may attempt to flourish as cultural or tourist sites under the regulation of local state agencies (Ashiwa and Wank 2006).

The case of the Uighars and Chinese Muslims (Hui) has also recently become a matter of international concern. The Uighars have a complicated history. With the collapse of the Second Eastern Turk Qughanate in 742 CE, the Uighars created a steppe empire in 744. In 755, they helped the Tang to suppress the An Lushan uprising and extracted important resources from the Tang, including silk and royal brides. However, with internal political struggles and inclement weather which destroyed their herds, famine contributed to the collapse of this empire in 840. Some Uighars then sought sanctuary with the Tang and over time some sections of the Uighar community became sedenta-

rized merchants, even joining the cosmopolitan aristocracy of the Tang administration. Other Uighar groups were dispersed and those that resisted Tang dominance were killed. In his *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighar Empire*, Michael Drompp (2005;156) concludes that the majority of Uighars who sought support from the Chinese perished, while the Uighars who lived in China were finally acculturated and dispersed. The pacification of the Uighars along the northern frontier zone was brought about in large measure by the administrative skills of Li Deyu whom Emperor Wuzong had put in charge of the political and military crisis. The seeds of Uighar nationalism were sown in the late nineteenth century and cultivated through the modernization of the Uighar education system. Through the 1930s there were nationalist rebellions on the part of both Uighars and Chinese Muslims (Hui). The creation of the East Turkistan Republic in 1933–4 was a turning point in Uighar political consciousness. The contemporary political history of the Uighars starts in 1949 when the Chinese Communist military leader General Wan Jen occupied Xinjiang and despite sporadic resistance the PRC was successful in bringing the Muslim establishment under control. The traditional social structure of Uighar society was undermined by land reform which dispossessed the Uighar landholding class and redistributed land under the control of mosques. With the demobilization of one million soldiers in 1952, there was increasing population pressure on the province. As a result, the proportion of Han people has steadily increased. In 1949 the Uighars represented 76% of the population, in 1967 it was 50% and in 1984 the Uighars were down to 40%. The Chinese government also started nuclear tests in Lob in East Turkistan which it is claimed has caused significant damage to the fertility of the local Uighar population. In summary it has been argued that the modernization of the Uighars is taking place through the filter of sinicization, but the main question is whether the Chinese version of modernity will spell the end of Uighar culture (Berlie 2004).

Hong Kong has an entirely different history, but there are certain similarities in terms of population pressures. Hong Kong flourished as a port and capitalist hub after the 1949 communist take-over of China. In response to the Cultural Revolution and the 1967 pro-communist riots in Hong Kong, the British colonial administration started a process of 'localization' of the civil service and other public services. The aim was to create a new 'Hong Kong Belonger' identity that would be eventually separate from both British and mainland influences. Ironically the Sino-British talks about the future of Hong Kong that took place in the 1980s only served to strengthen this emerging identity. The 'one country two systems' policy recognized the fact that Hong Kong was institutionally more developed

than China and could offer a model of economic success. The Basic Law in recognizing ‘Hong Kong Permanent Resident’ status also created some form of ‘sub-national’ identity. The Tiananmen Square crisis resulting in a crack down on pro-democracy movements produce significant opposition in Hong Kong including street marches in May and June 1989. In the following years, Hong Kong has sought to protect itself from a deluge of mainland migration and in 1999 reinterpreted the Basic Law to deny children born on the mainland of Hong Kong parents a right of abode (Abbas 1997). On the one hand, Hong Kongers have been anxious to preserve their economic and political advantages and on the other Beijing has been concerned to contain political agitation and criticism from Hong Kong. One dimension of the tension has involved the demand by Hong Kongers to protect their city icons—the Star Ferry and Queen’s Pier—from urban development and modernization. One strategy has been what Anthony Cheung (2009) has called ‘the economic absorption of politics’, namely a strategy of keeping the middle class comfortably incorporated into the existing arrangements by sustaining economic growth and employment opportunities. There is however a slow transformation of Hong Kong in which the Cantonese-speaking Chinese are slowly being ‘diluted’ by Mandarin-speaking Han from the mainland. The successful inclusion of Hong Kong into the mainland system may depend on population pressures rather than administrative and political arrangements.

A similar strategy has guided the development of Singapore. The ‘Singapore model’ is a combination of authoritarianism and economic growth (Nasir et al. 2009). Although Singapore is a small island city-state in Southeast Asia where it is surrounded by societies that have much larger populations and resources, it is a society that is instructive from a sociological point of view. Singapore illustrates in stark and clear terms the paradoxes of liberal capitalism. While the dominant form of global capitalism has been neo-liberal, few Asian societies have fully embraced deregulation in economics and liberalism in social life. The idea of a harmonious society based on a strong state and Confucian values has been more attractive. Asian states have sought to regulate family and religion in the interest of social stability. The Singaporean experience shows that any society that wants to separate religion and politics (in order to guarantee freedom of religious belief and practice) must interfere systematically in society to manage religions. Singapore’s political elite is Chinese and the ethnic composition of the island guarantees the cultural and economic dominance of Chinese with the Chinese community representing 70% of the total population. With the Malays around 14%, there has always been an uneasy relationship between the state and Islam, but the current migration and family policies are designed to sustain

Chinese dominance. The island’s future economic success lies with China, not with the West.

Red Capitalism

Giap’s early understanding of the conflict in Indo-China was seen through the lens of Marxist-Leninism in which the Chinese and the Vietnamese were joined in a common struggle against colonial enemies, namely the French and the Americans. The Third Indo-China War had a different character, being the attempt by China to punish a younger disobedient brother for independent action in Cambodia. In the contemporary political struggles in Vietnam, Giap has emerged as a critic of China’s ambitions to control the Spratly Islands and to inject large numbers of surplus Chinese men into Vietnam through the pretext of developing Vietnam’s bauxite mines (1). As an ex-soldier, Giap realizes that whoever controls Truong Son, the mountainous back-bone of Vietnam—the site of bauxite mining activities—controls Indo-China. The strategic importance of the mountainous border region of Vietnam and its ethnic minorities was also well understood by the French and American military leadership (McAlister 1967). In the contemporary period, China is gaining control over a region, not by military interventions, but by economic and population strategies that are more difficult to resist and even more difficult to reverse.

The new form of warfare via demographic means involves the settlement of adjacent societies by a mixture of migration, both legal and illegal, and by economic contracts and alliances. The export of surplus males to northern Vietnam—in the Ho Long region—and to the bauxite mines on the Ammanite mountain range are examples of what we might call ‘population wars’. The first three Indo-China Wars were openly aggressive and conducted by conventional military means. Population wars are peaceful strategies of territorial conquest in which there are no armies, equipment, declarations of war or peace treaties. They are Malthusian wars of demographic annexation. This strategy of dumping surplus populations on neighbouring regions is reinforced by the strategy of taking out long leases on adjacent land for example in Laos. This is conquest by demographic means. The new type of warfare is therefore reinforced by economic investments that are often achieved by corrupting local officials and buying off opposition. This population strategy also involves the case nexus, namely acquisition through the peaceful mechanisms of the market. These mechanisms of territorial control are also lubricated by the oil of corruption. Local politicians as well as senior officials are bought out and in many cases in Vietnam Chinese penetration is often undertaken by Vietnamese of Chinese

ethnicity. When the local Chinese workers claim to be intimidated by local Vietnamese, the Chinese authorities can put further pressure on the central Vietnamese government to camp down on local instability. The Vietnamese border areas begin as a consequence to resemble another version of Tibet, Taiwan and Uighar province. These quasi-official strategies are further reinforced by the intimidation of local populations. In the case of the bauxite mines, the Chinese can exploit Vietnamese distrust of ethnic minorities in the area. It may be the case that pro-Chinese elements in the Vietnam government are supporting bauxite exploitation as a means of subordinating ethnic minorities in the region who in recent years have been converting to Protestant fundamentalist missions, thereby further promoting the historical distrust of Vietnamese towards what the French called the *montagnards*.

The long-term consequence is the emergence of the Chinese tributary state with *de facto* control over its ‘provinces’ by demographic expansion and occupation by stealth. These developments are based on imperial claims that these out-lying provinces—Tibet, Vietnam, Taiwan and Xinjiang—have been under Chinese control for millennia. These claims are historically exaggerated since for many prolonged epochs there was no central government to claim authority over Xinjiang. These traditional conflicts between the Han and their neighbours have in recent years acquired a new vocabulary, namely the war on terrorism. Some authors claim that Uighar are actively involved in terrorist organizations such as IMU the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Rashid 2002). But this is disputed (Millward 2004). There is little evidence that Uighar opposition to Chinese control has the active support of al Qaeda, but the East Turkistan Islamic Movement has been labelled by the Chinese as a terrorist organization. Over these modern conflicts, the traditional rhetoric of Confucianism remains. Political domination is described in terms of Confucian ideology in which authority over subordinate regions and the loyalty of local states to the Chinese imperial system is legitimized in the name of a greater social harmony.

While these developments are most obvious in Tibet, Xinjiang and Vietnam, the power of the Chinese business elites in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore also provide a sympathetic audience with respect to Chinese economic influence in the region. The outcome is a new type of capitalism or ‘red capitalism’ which involves an authoritarian state plus a Confucian ideology, a capitalist mode of production and foreign policy conducted by demographic means. Asian will consequently be subject to a predatory politics of demographic annexation or to simple possession in the case of the Spratly Islands. It is fortunate that President Obama appears to be taking Asian more seriously recognizing for example the importance of asserting American influence over the possible future of North Korea

and Burma. We can only hope that American foreign policy can in addition respond more robustly to Chinese ambitions in the South China Sea, on its border regions in Tibet, Laos and Vietnam, its steady incorporation of Hong Kong, and its long-term ambition to re-posses Taiwan. Indirect Chinese influence through Chinese business elites in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines will also create a sympathetic audience to Chinese interests in Asia. The foreign policy challenge is urgent, but the current economic crisis and the problems facing America with respect to Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran may prevent any serious and systematic focus on Asia in general and on China in particular.

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