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## Felix B. Chang and Sunnie T. Rucker-Chang (Eds.) Chinese Migrants in Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. London and New York: Routledge. 2012.

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**Felix B. Chang and Sunnie T. Rucker-Chang (Eds.) *Chinese Migrants in Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe*. London and New York: Routledge. 2012.**

Globalization is a term loaded with political, economic, and cultural implications. The benefits of globalization are typically said to include the increased availability of affordable products, the possibility of instantaneous communication, and the development of infrastructure in previously isolated regions. The drawbacks of globalization typically include the negative impact associated with it on a society's traditional way of life and the damage done to the physical environment as a result of rapidly developed infrastructures. How globalization appears to the people living in transitional economies and to transnational migrants is little understood in a world in which the process of globalization is often seen through a Western lens and is presupposed to be a homogenizing (i.e. "westernizing") force. Nevertheless, globalization has concurrent narratives, one of which, explored in this book, is the growing role of China in the process of globalization and, indeed, the influence of China on the world.

In *Chinese Migrants in Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe*, U.S.-based scholars Felix B. Chang and Sunnie T. Rucker-Chang present nine papers by scholars from the three geographic areas under review. The authors ask some ambitious questions in their work in an effort to characterize the globalization narrative that is "the rise of China." In particular, the volume attempts to understand whether increased Chinese migration since the inception of the reform era is an indicator of China's emergence as a global power. Additionally, the volume offers insights into the relationship between Chinese migrants and host societies, especially in regard to the calibration needed among the latter due to changing economic realities.

The distinctiveness of Chinese migration to Russia, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe is revealed throughout the book. In Eastern Europe, Chinese migrants tend to be small traders in cheap manufactured goods; in Central Asia, many Chinese are workers or managers on state projects, while in Russia, the tendency appears to be a combination of the previous two. (The writers do not include the Turkic Uyghur from the northwest of China in their analysis of "Chinese" migrants to Central Asia.) Despite this omission, the contributors agree that the outward movement of Chinese to Russia, Central Asia, and Europe is underpinned by China's economic success. As a result of China's economic strength, its influence with respect to globalization is distinct. As Rucker-Chang explains, "Globalization with Chinese characteristics . . . occurs through the penetration of Chinese products, investments and most prevalently, people throughout the world."

The authors explain both (1) the responses of host societies towards Chinese migrants, from the Russian Far East to the Balkans and (2) the migrants' variable rates of progress in assimilating to their new communities. These are complex issues that are justly explored in some depth; for example, the authors assert that negative perceptions of Chinese migrants in part stem from the veneer of illegality surrounding Chinese migration to these regions, mainly vis-à-vis the migrants' circumvention of immigration requirements or commercial tariffs. Yelena Y. Sadovskaya uses disparate sources to demonstrate how some Chinese traders living in Kazakhstan have failed to legally register their enterprises with the state, consequently avoiding customs duties and causing resentment among Kazakhs. Compounding this, many Chinese traders have simply undercut local manufacturers with the import of cheaper goods and in the process have exacerbated unemployment in their host nations.

Conversely, the authors discuss how the volatile economies and corruption in many of the host nations under review in essence present opportunities for Chinese migrant traders, forming a significant migratory pull factor—a force that induces individuals to select a particular migratory destination. In some countries, such as Serbia, rather than competing with local businesses, Chinese migrants have been instrumental in supplying consumers with everyday items when the domestic economy could not otherwise provide them due to political instability. Writing about Russia, Alexander Larin explains that corrupt societies require a sort of “criminal adaptation” on the part of the migrants, which they justify as a “[response] to a broken system within which *their* rights are violated” (45). While lack of transparency in host nations necessitates Chinese traders operate in the shadow economy, the authors argue that the more rooted Chinese migrants become in their new surroundings, the more migrants view corruption as a problem. Larin writes that corruption is the greatest source of unhappiness among Chinese in the Russian Far East, even more upsetting than xenophobia. Felix B. Chang’s research into Chinese merchants in Serbia arrives at a similar conclusion about corruption among government officials.

One of the effects of rising Chinese migration and the negative perceptions of Chinese migrants has been periodic outbreaks of “Chinese takeover” scares, usually drummed up by opportunistic politicians mining historical fears. Sadovskaya describes how Chinese traders’ “semiformal business activities would cause resentment among various groups of Kazakhstanis, generating fears of a sinicization of the republic” (89). Larin records “Yellow Peril” alarm in Russia dating back a century and suggests the media as a partner to politicians for fanning new flames of xenophobia. Interestingly, the domestic political environment in Russia is most likely responsible for anti-Chinese sentiments, according to Larin. Politicians aspiring to western ideals of democracy, as well as nationalists, are culpable due to their fears over China’s rise “as a counterweight to the West” (75). Larin also proposes it is the small numbers of Chinese that add to anti-Chinese feeling. In surveys conducted in the Russian Far East, he found “the smaller [the] number of Chinese, the more intense the fears and phobias” (75). Perhaps the most intriguing quirk of history concerning Chinese migration and subsequent xenophobia is the case of Serbia. A rumor has persisted in the country that Chinese were brought in by Slobodan Milošević to influence elections in his favor in exchange for citizenship. Despite the small number of Chinese in Serbia—small enough that they would not have been able to influence any election—the migrants’ presence has been tarnished with the discredited Milošević.

*Chinese Migrants in Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe* explores the challenges Chinese migrants experience with respect to integration into host societies. The authors describe an absence of attachment to their destinations, with many migrants often speaking very little of the local language. In addition, a common theme in all the papers is the Chinese migrants’ fungible view of their host nations. Russia, Serbia, and Kazakhstan are not considered destinations in themselves but merely represent opportunities to engage in trade. In other locations, such as in the Russian Far East or Eastern Europe, migrants reported being simply *en route* to more “desirable” destinations. Larin states, “For all the products and labor they provide, if Chinese skirt local laws and continue to remain isolated from the larger community, then they will continue to be received with unease. The prospect of improved relations therefore depends on Chinese desires to assimilate and stay” (80). However, while conceding, “much of the new Chinese diaspora in Eastern Europe does not desire to integrate,” Rucker-Chang details how an increasing desire among Chinese migrants to bring their children from their hometowns and send them to local schools is an indicator of longer-term settlement (200). Rucker-Chang concludes her absorbing assessment of Chinese representations in Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and

Slovenian film saying, “The fact that these migrants are given treatment in cultural products presents an interesting case study of development of acceptance and identity in the Yugoslav successor states” (200).

The correlation between Chinese migration and Chinese government influence in Russia, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe is explored in the book, but some areas of research remain unexplored. Importantly, the authors describe how in the view of the Chinese state, “Chinese migration has even evolved from „treacherous to tolerated but ideologically suspect to patriotic,” as can be seen through the pro-PRC bent of voluntary overseas Chinese associations” (7). In the introduction, Chang explains, “Notwithstanding their informality, the Han Chinese often seek or receive protection from local Chinese embassies” (7). This is where an examination of ethnic minority migration from China would have provided a richer analysis. In general, foreign connections among the Uyghur, for example, are still viewed suspiciously, especially in Central Asia, as China often cites security concerns posed by the Uyghur.

Chinese migration often precedes or is concurrent to greater Chinese state approaches to other nations. The Chinese government’s involvement in large-scale natural resource projects in Central Asia is one such case. Originating from the necessity to secure oil and gas to fuel economic growth in eastern China, as well as being a strategic gambit, the Chinese government’s increased engagement with Central Asia has been significant. Despite unease among the local population about China’s intentions and disputes over commercial information sharing between joint ventures, China has managed to impose its agenda among Central Asian governments on rooting out Uyghur activism in Central Asia. Given this influence, the analyses on Central Asia would have benefitted from more discussion on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which is an emerging model for an association of nations independent of “western” power. The development of the SCO from a security to an economic arrangement is also noteworthy, and it represents a potential forum for China to challenge the supremacy of Russian dominance in Central Asia. To this effect, China has also employed soft diplomacy to win hearts and minds among the general populace, chiefly through Confucius Institutes and cultural events.

Although there is a tendency to dichotomize “China’s rise” into threat or opportunity, *Chinese Migrants in Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe* does an excellent job of avoiding such simplicities and going into great depth through the case studies presented by the authors. The arrival of Chinese migrants in the areas under review are representative of the changes host societies have undergone since the post-Cold War era and of new models of economic and political governance embodied in China’s expansion of influence. This change in realities and the strength of local response can be applied to any continent on the globe. However, it is the people in host societies and the ways in which the Chinese government decides to wield global prowess that will determine how the world reacts to Chinese globalization. *Chinese Migrants in Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe* makes a significant contribution to understanding these issues.

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