Typifying Chineseness along the Sino-Myanmar frontier

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Introduction

This paper is motivated by the need to better understand the diffusion of Chineseness in contemporary Myanmar. This is a topic of profound importance in circumstances where, by some estimates, there are 2.5 million "ethnic" Chinese in the country. Many of these migrants have arrived recently, since the 1980s, yet they are part of a much longer series of migrations, starting millennia ago, that have seen waves of people moving from central Asia, Tibet and China into the region now known as Myanmar. Their efforts to develop different cultural and political systems have fundamentally blurred the boundaries between those Myanmar residents with Chinese origins, and those without. While the Chinese, as "*Tayoke*," are officially classified as one of Myanmar's populations, albeit not as a "national race", there are all manner of ways that the boundaries between ethnic affiliations are distorted. Through centuries of contact, collaboration and conflict, a jumble of influences from Yunnan and beyond marks the Sino-Myanmar borderlands. The position of the "non-Han Chinese" in this contested cultural landscape is especially intriguing. To help explain how different forms of Chineseness jostle for precedence this paper explores an emerging typology of belonging and exclusion. The categories that we emphasise in this typology are Myanmar's "national races", the Chinese who assimilate with the national races, and the Kokang. These three groups help to illuminate different engagements between Chinese diasporic and migrant groups, and the societies in which they settle. We propose to explore these peculiar ethnographic situations to present an analytic typology of Chineseness along the Sino-Myanmar frontier.

First, there are the many non-Han Chinese who are considered members of Myanmar's "national races". Groups such as the Kachin/Jingpo, Shan/Dai and Wa occupy the borderlands where the two countries meet. We explain the character of their "Chineseness", especially in contexts where they are considered distinctively "Myanmar". For such non-Han minorities—almost never considered "Chinese" in Myanmar eyes— there are certain advantages: their abilities to speak Chinese languages and navigate Chinese cultures offer economic opportunity. Yet their official status in Myanmar often trumps the stigmatised Han Chinese. For this reason they are the exemplary cases for explaining the mechanisms that determine inclusion along the international border. The status of different "Chinese" cohorts in these contested circumstances has a further layer of complexity especially in those places where they seek to define themselves as *neither* Chinese nor Myanmar.

Second, at the other extreme of the typology of Chineseness, there are those Han Chinese who, to support their efforts to integrate into Myanmar society, present themselves as members of one of Myanmar's "national races", most often as "Shan". Such efforts to gain legal and social acceptance in Myanmar's domestic political economy complicates the picture of inter-ethnic and trans-national relations. The challenge is to understand precisely what makes somebody a member of a non-Han Chinese group, rather than a Han group, or simply a Myanmar one? This "transitional" type helps illustrate the prevailing complications at the heart of the analysis in this paper. The boundaries between Han and Myanmar categorisation are not as neat as the two relevant nation-states would often pretend. What

then of the ways that certain people can mobilise new social affiliations for political and economic purposes?

Third, and to provide an even more interesting picture of the Sino-Myanmar frontier, we explain the typology of Kokang, who further challenge our understanding of the designations of the "Chinese" in Myanmar. The Kokang "race" comprises approximately 80 per cent Han Chinese who speak a Yunnanese Mandarin dialect (Wang 2005: 72), with the remainder drawing in other borderlands peoples.[1] The Kokang, as a category, appear to be considered "brothers" by other Han Chinese, but their status and identity make them officially separate from all other "Chinese" in Myanmar.[2] They are a distinct "national race" in Myanmar's official classification scheme, even meriting their own borderland "Kokang Self-Administered Zone" under the 2008 Constitution. Such a special designation further complicates the interaction between the Chinese and Myanmar systems of official categorisation and ethnic affinity. How does their status fit the typology of Chineseness along the frontier?

To answer these and other questions, this paper offers an account of the different flavours of Chinese identity that are emerging along Myanmar's frontiers with China. Our typology seeks to muddle the prevailing ethnic identities and distinctions of the borderlands. Still, this typology exists within a broader understanding of Chinese identity that must first be clarified. The key terms can be considered to be *Huaren* (華人), *Huaqiao* (華僑) and *Zhongguoren* (中國人). All are based on concepts of loyalty, home and identity. In this paper, ethnic Chinese or *Huaren* refers to Chinese persons who have settled abroad, acquired citizenship status in their new country, and who do not intend to return to China.[3] For them, their new country is their "home" (Suryadinata 2007: 1). Overseas Chinese or *Huaqiao* refers to Chinese who are living outside China but intend to return to China, even if they never do. Chinese or *Zhongguuoren* is used for Chinese citizens who temporarily live and work abroad but have no strong connection to their new location.[4] The terms *Huaqiao* and *Zhongguoren* imply loyalty to China, while the term *Huaren* implies loyalty to the host country. The term *Huaqiaohuaren* (華僑華人) is often used to encompass all Chinese who have settled abroad. When speaking to Chinese in Myanmar, our informants are almost always quick to assert whether they identify as *Huaqiao*, *Huaren* or *Zhongguoren*.

Such specificity can be disrupted, however, in the Sino-Myanmar frontier's zone of interchange. We are therefore cautious about the definitiveness claimed by any of this paper's "Han" and "non-Han" Chinese responses. As we undertook the field research related to this study it became clear that there are very significant, and un-studied, populations of Chinese peoples, in surprising configurations of cultural, economic and political orientation, across Myanmar's borderlands. To adequately account for all of their variations will require further investigation and a more thorough effort to explain the ways that China and Myanmar have interacted, not only over the past quarter century, but in the millennia before. To begin explaining these circumstances we offer an overview of the Chinese nestled among the

[1] There are claims that up to 95 percent of the population of Kokang are Han Chinese but such claims are difficult to confirm from available data.
[2] Confusingly, the other ethnic groups that make up the "Kokang race" include Shan, Palung, Wa, Miao and Lisu. Exactly how this category has been constructed is not entirely clear, although its omnibus character points to the variety of ways that ethnic affiliations can be constructed in the Sino-Myanmar borderlands. The grouping of "Kachin" could be conceived as similarly wide-ranging, bringing together a wide range of social and linguistic attributes. For more details on the Kachin case of ethnic group formation see Mandy Sadan (2013).
[3] Many Chinese in Myanmar consider themselves *Huaren* even if they have not obtained Myanmar citizenship. As this paper discusses, it is difficult for Chinese to legally obtain Myanmar citizenship, even when their families have lived in the country for generations.
[4] With Chinese investment and trade booming in Myanmar, there are many *zhongguoren* visiting, temporarily living and working in Myanmar, most notably in resource extraction, transportation and trade.

fixed ethnic categories of contemporary Myanmar. There are few more politically or socially sensitive topics in the country today.

I. Chinese among Myanmar's "national races"

The Myanmar Government recognises 135 official "national races" (*Taiyintha*) in the Myanmar population.[5] Members of these "races" can obtain full citizenship, providing the predictable rights such a status entails.[6] Some national races are also entitled to special representation in the upper house of parliament, the *Amyotha Hluttaw*. Many of Myanmar's state governments, such as Kachin State and Rakhine State, have special ministerial positions for "national race" representatives. Other "races" such as the Chinese, Indians and Rohingya are excluded from the formal status of the "national races" although these groups can sometimes fit into miscellaneous categorisations. It is possible, for instance, to have national identity documentation that references a "Chinese" race, often in combination with a "race" such as Bamar or Shan. On its side of the border, the People's Republic of China (PRC) also classifies the population according to 56 official "ethnic groups" (*minzu* 民族).[7] Eight groups can be found on both lists, although the ethnography determining the shape of these groups is not entirely consistent. This overlap and incommensurability is determined by the jumbled borderlands that China and Myanmar share, and by the different paths that local ethnography has taken.[8] Both lists are designed to include and exclude, and to elevate the status of certain ethnic identities above others.

It is useful to examine five groups that are represented, officially, in both of the national classification systems to explain the mechanisms of ethnic classification. The Shan are the largest minority in Myanmar, a "national race" and the custodians of the Shan State, and are known as the *Dai* (傣族) in China.[9] On Myanmar's list, the Kachin ethnic group is broken into sub-groups, one of which is the Jinghpaw who are known in China as *Jingpo*(景頗族). Myanmar lists the Maingtha as a sub-group of the Shan, while they are named as *Achang* (阿昌族) on the Chinese list. The Akha are recorded as Kaw (Akha-E-Kaw) on the Myanmar list and as *Hani* (哈尼族) on the Chinese. The *Lisu* (傈僳族), *Lahu* (拉祜族), *Yao* (瑶族) and *Wa* (佤族) are known by the same names in China and Myanmar.[10] A small number of *Hui* (回族) have also migrated to Myanmar from Yunnan. This Muslim minority have ethnic minority status in China but do not have minority status in Myanmar.[11] In this paper we focus on the two largest of these groups, the Shan/Dai and the Kachin/Jingpo.

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[5] For a full list of Myanmar's 135 "national races" see Tun Tun Aung (2007: 267).
[6] The British introduced the term "race" to the Myanmar vernacular and the concept was reinforced through colonial policies (South 2008: 8). The term is consistently used in official language and common speech today.
[7] For a full list of China's 56 ethnic groups see "Fifty-six ethnic groups", China's Official Web Portal available at http://english.gov.cn/2006-02/08/content_182626.htm.
[8] Unfortunately there is insufficient space in this paper to fully explore the different ways that ethnic groups have been officially identified in the two countries. For an adjacent history, based on the colonial experience in the Vietnam-Yunnan borderlands, see Michaud (2007).
[9] Shan groups in Myanmar often refer to themselves as "Tai", in a linguistic element relatively common across the region's Tai speaking peoples. To further confuse matters, the Shan of Myanmar are also sometimes referred to as *Shan* (掸) in Chinese, rather than as Tai/Dai.
[10] The *Wa* are sometimes referred to as Va in English transliterations, including on the PRC's official English language list of ethnic groups.
[11] In Myanmar, the Hui are also grouped by their religion with Myanmar's Indian Muslim population, with whom they share mosques and religious ceremonies and some degree of social discrimination. More understanding of the relationship between the Hui and the broader Myanmar Muslim population is needed. For now it is worth pointing to recent media coverage of the "Panthay" Chinese-Muslim community in Mandalay who are campaigning for greater recognition in Myanmar's ethnic politics. See Mullins and Mon Mon Aye (2014).

Throughout the last two millennia, the boundaries of Chinese, Myanmar and later British colonial power and influence have been redrawn in the borderlands. The demarcation of the present day Sino-Myanmar border in 1960 cemented the extents of Chinese and Myanmar power and divided the various ethnic groups in the area. Those on the Chinese side officially became "Chinese" and those on the Myanmar side officially became "Myanmar". Despite this division, economic, cultural and family links continue to transcend the border.

It is the character of that transcendence that is most relevant to this discussion. For the Kachin and Shan their "national race" identity in Myanmar aligns with a Chinese identity on the other side of the border. When are they Chinese and when are they Myanmar? Or to re-frame the problem: are Dai and Shan mutually exclusive categories or is there something specific about their application that helps explain aspects of China's non-Han diaspora? Within China, it is clear that the Dai and Jingpo have their own distinctive identities and cultures. However, their Chineseness is also expressed through their PRC citizenship, whether current or expired, their ability to speak Mandarin Chinese (*putonghua* 普通話) and/or Yunnanese dialects (雲南話), and their knowledge of Han Chinese culture. The use of the Myanmar or Chinese languages as a lingua franca helps to distinguish some of the peoples who are more consistently Chinese or Myanmar. Yet in a region where multilingualism is very common there is a clear need for greater analytical precision.[12] People have a range of stories of recent migration that help to shape their sense of connection to different landscapes and societies.

Like other groups who came from China, some Dai fled to Myanmar during the Japanese occupation of Yunnan, or the Chinese civil war or, later, the famine resulting from the Great Leap Forward. In Lashio, the capital of northern Shan State, approximately 30-35% of residents are ethnic Chinese. They live side-by-side with the town's "national races". One suburb is filled with Dai from China, many of whom left during the 1940s and 1950s. These Dai are incorporated into the local Shan population with "Shan" identity cards but they can also speak Chinese and relate to the Han Chinese living around them. Their shops and restaurants are patronised by Han Chinese residents, while their Shan Theravada Buddhist temples incorporate Chinese characters. Their abilities to speak Chinese languages and conduct business with other Chinese have helped maintain their livelihoods. Despite losing their Chinese citizenship, like all who fled China during this time, and now having full citizenship of Myanmar, they are locally considered "Chinese Shan" (*Shan Tayoke*). This conflated designation helps to explain one mechanism of absorption into Myanmar society.

For those who were part of more recent waves of Chinese migration there are noticeably different dynamics. For instance, the Dai migrants who left China after 1985 have been able to retain their Chinese citizenship and *hukou* (household registration), and also gain Myanmar registration and identity cards despite both countries prohibiting dual citizenship. With citizenship and identities recognised on both sides of the border, these Shan/Dai are able to move back-and-forth across the border to conduct business, attend cultural and religious events, and visit family. For a group that straddles the border this may prove to be an optimal calibration of belonging. While both countries are prepared to accept such borderland compromises, the advantages for the Shan (who are also Dai) and the Dai (who are also Shan) are clear. The challenge may emerge when different political and economic

[12] In addition to speaking Mandarin Chinese and Yunnanese dialects, most Han Chinese living in northern Myanmar also speak Myanmar and/or a minority language such as Shan or Kachin. Tong Chee Kiong, in his study of Chineseness in Myanmar found Chinese identity to have been "racialised" and be heavily based on primordial markers because many Chinese, particularly in southern Myanmar, had lost their Chinese language abilities and cultural traditions during Ne Win's period of "Burmanisation" (Tong 2010: 156).

conditions begin to change the overall landscape of exclusion and inclusion. There are conceivable future scenarios where the dual identities of such people make them vulnerable in *either* country. In circumstances where loyalty is defined narrowly, and requires the elimination of any perceived foreign connection, such "dual" citizens might be targeted for official sanctions.

For the Kachin/Jingpo in Myanmar and China, a shared origin, somewhere in the wilds of central Asia, has been mobilised to build coherence under difficult political conditions. In 1961 the Kachin Independence Army commenced a rebellion against central government control in northern Myanmar. Key bases were eventually built along the Chinese border. For a period the Kachin rebels received significant Chinese support. At all times, however, the relationship between Kachin sub-national politics and the Chinese authorities has been fraught. The population of Jingpo in China's Yunnan province has been encouraged to show loyalty to Beijing, rather than to the rebel commanders who have fortified their headquarters right against the Sino-Myanmar frontier. The most recent outbreak of violence in northern Myanmar, which commenced in June 2011, saw new waves of displaced people moving back towards the border from inside Kachin State and Shan State. There are now approximately 110,000 internally displaced people as a consequence of the fighting.[13] Some have ended up huddled against the Chinese border: their only place of refuge. While it is impossible to generalise, we have found that many Kachin feel at home in neither country,and instead still hope for a political resolution to their predicament that supports greater autonomy for the Kachin, perhaps with a newly-imagined "Kachinland". While such an outcome is partly conceivable on the Myanmar side of the border, and may be the final product of ongoing peace negotiations, it appears profoundly unlikely that the Chinese authorities would make any such concessions to the Jingpo. In that sense, and others, Jingpo and Kachin are categories that imply very different histories of interaction with the central governments that claim control in their respective borderlands.

It is the heavily contested character of today's politics in Myanmar, and the different economic opportunities available in China and Myanmar, that are encouraging the Jingpo to stay in China while many Kachin look across the border to China for opportunities. What does this mean? Are there Kachin who become members of China's Jingpo group? Does a Chinese Jingpo have any claim to "national race" status in Myanmar? Technically, they would need to prove residence and family connections, but there are stories where the interlocking family and clan ties that all Kachin and Jingpo are able to claim are massaged for this purpose. In their case, the presence of related peoples in northeast India has further complicated the trans-border nature of their migrations and settlement. Stories of Kachin becoming part of India's swirl of tribal designations are part of the reality of fluid borderland identities.[14] To trace the "Chinese" origins of such people would likely make Indian bureaucrats nervous. Nonetheless it is clear that across a wide area of Asia, especially at the intersection where China, India and Myanmar meet, there is a long-term story that is not

[13] This estimate for the Internally Displaced Population comes from well-placed sources in northern Myanmar. They claim that 40,000 of these people are in Myanmar government-controlled areas, while the majority, around 70,000, are in areas controlled by the Kachin Independence Army. In March 2014 we had an opportunity to visit a number of the largest IDP camps to determine how they fit into the region's geo-political and social frameworks.
[14] Some of the most traumatic such stories relate to the family members of Kachin Independence Army soldiers who were adopted by families in northeast India. In some cases those families were not "Kachin" (a group known in India as "Singpho"). Instead they may have been Naga or even "Shan". Such movements have often left the Kachin migrants estranged from their original families, unable to speak fluent Kachin. Even more problematically, their adoptive families may have raised them as Buddhists. For the militantly Christian Kachin who make up the majority of Kachin Independence Army fighters this has been a difficult outcome to accept. For a discussion of these issues see Sadan (2013), and also Farrelly (2014).

readily captured in the rigid categories of “national races”. Nation-states have sought to claim diverse peoples as their own, while seeking to limit the possibility of national fragmentation.

The muddled nature of social interaction along the border ensures that there are migrants with Chinese characteristics, but whose Chinese origins are often de-emphasised. Such migrants are part of a very long-term flow of peoples across the contemporary borders of the nation-states. “Non-Han” Chinese is not, as a result, a category that is especially meaningful at any of the vernacular levels. Instead, the sub-categories of belonging, such as Kachin and Jingpo, or Shan and Dai, help to structure the relationship between local populations and the central governments. Where both the Chinese and Myanmar governments recognise adjacent populations in their own official ethnic schemes, the possibilities for smooth migration are enhanced. The countless different configurations of current and former identity that may emerge further undermine the certainty of lineage that some claim is integral to ethnic identity. Instead, the typology that emerges must leave significant room for ambiguity, flexibility and change.

II. Han Chinese becoming Myanmar’s “national races”

In an attempt to establish their lives in Myanmar, some Han Chinese migrants have, at times, adopted the identities of Myanmar’s minority “national races”. In general, they have not attempted to adopt the cultural identities of these groups and may not speak the appropriate language. These identities are for official purposes only and serve as an escape from the official and unofficial racial discrimination they face. It provides a simple route into a respectable category of Myanmar identity. Partly because of the fluidity of these categorisations, Han Chinese who “become” Shan or Kachin will not encounter much resistance. They will, instead, bolster a minority population and also fit themselves neatly into Myanmar’s dominant format for social inclusion.

In Myanmar, government issued identity cards are essential for navigating the bureaucracy and security apparatus. While there are three types of cards, in three different colours, they all list a “race” or “races”, and a religion. Pink cards are for full and associate citizens, green for Foreign Registered Citizens (FRCs) and blue for naturalised citizens.[15] Many FRCs, their children and grandchildren still do not hold an identity card but instead hold a paper document dating from their 18th birthday that must be renewed and paid for every three years.[16] In Lashio there are estimated to be approximately 2000 Chinese still carrying paper-based FRCs with the current processing time for a green card reported to be 7 to 8 years from application. FRCs without a green card may face heavy restrictions. For example, they have to apply for permission to travel to another town, which can take two weeks to process. Strictly, such people are “stateless” as they left China prior to 1985 and therefore lost their Chinese citizenship on their departure. In order to obtain a Myanmar passport an applicant

[15] Under the 1982 Citizenship Law, people of non-national races, including Han Chinese migrants, are only eligible for “Associate” citizenship if they or their parents had acquired citizenship under the 1948 law before the 1982 law came into effect. Associate citizens have fewer rights than full citizens. For example they cannot stand for election, and their citizenship can be revoked if they trade or communicate with enemy states or organisations hostile to the state, show disaffection or disloyalty to the state by any act, speech or by otherwise committing an offence showing moral depravity (Article 35).
[16] The types of identity cards held within one family may also vary. One Han Chinese informant in Lashio reported that his sister was able to obtain a “Shan” pink card but the rest of the family hold FRC green cards.

must have an identity card (of any colour).[17] Without any identity card, it is therefore difficult to navigate daily life in Myanmar or travel abroad.

To avoid this situation, Han Chinese migrants and their descendants have bought fraudulent identity cards and replaced the photo with their own, or bribed officials to falsely list their race as Shan, Kachin or Kokang.[18] When fraudulently obtaining an identity card, it is preferable to obtain a pink card that lists a "national race" because this allows full citizenship and gives the bearer more freedom, options and security. For example pink cardholders have the option to study any course at any university while FRCs cannot study "professional" courses such as medicine and engineering. They also have more political rights and can stand for election. Han Chinese businessmen in Muse also reported dealing with the official bureaucracy and security apparatus is "less hassle" if you have a pink card with a "national race" listed. In the hierarchy of Myanmar racial identity, holding a pink card with a national race listed is ideal, something which many Chinese are keen to obtain.

In addition to state-sanctioned racial divisions and discrimination, the Han Chinese also face unofficial racial discrimination. Han Chinese in northern Myanmar often complain they do not receive any assistance from the Myanmar government or local population, and they feel they can only rely on themselves and the Chinese community. The racism reported by Han Chinese informants impacts their daily lives and the options made available to them. For instance, a Han Chinese teacher in Lashio reported how after graduating with high marks from a Myanmar high school, she was interviewed for a scholarship to study in Japan. Upon seeing her, the interviewer asked was "What race are you?", to which she replied Chinese. The interviewer then told her to leave because they would notgive the scholarship to a Chinese student. Even if Chinese have another race listed on their card, they may still face discrimination. This was encapsulated in the experiences of a *Huaren* Chinese businessman in Muse who explained that despite his identity card listing Shan his face "betrays" him.

In Kachin State, some Chinese citizens have also sought to present themselves as Myanmar converts. In many cases they will quickly seize economic opportunities and it can prove useful to support such claims with a local identity. During the period of ceasefire between the Kachin Independence Army and the Myanmar Government (1994 – 2011) an economic boom in Kachin-dominated areas saw large numbers of Chinese cross the border into Myanmar. Their involvement in the construction, mining and logging industries helped to integrate them into the local economy. Some Chinese, including Han, sought to present themselves as Myanmar locals. They acquired citizenship documents much like those Chinese who ended up in Shan State. In the Kachin State, some Chinese settled in areas not controlled by the central government. While never accepted into Kachin society as equals, there has been recognition of their economic and political value. This has drawn Chinese into the complicated politics of northern Myanmar. Their efforts to integrate are partial and predicated on the shifting terrain of peace and conflict.

More generally, the position of these Han Chinese in Myanmar has the potential to unleash destructive forces. In many places, their relative economic success has made some Han Chinese a target for discrimination and resentment. Wherever possible, Han Chinese have

[17] International mobility is high among Myanmar's Chinese population who now live all over the world. A passport is therefore viewed as essential for visiting family and friends, and pursuing economic opportunities.
[18] Although the "race" listed on the cards may vary, the religion is usually listed as "Buddhist" and occasionally as "Christian" if the bearer is living in a predominantly Kachin Christian area, thus conforming to local religious norms. Identity cards do not distinguish between the Theravada and Mahayana forms of Buddhism.

made accommodations with the local political, cultural and legal environment to support their long-term residency. As discussed, this has required some to take on new identities that specify "non-Han" origins. It is a peculiar outcome of the different ways that national regulations interact with the much more complicated realities of the Sino-Myanmar borderlands. To take these transformations at face value is, however, likely to be a mistake. There are good reasons, at this stage, to presume that a strong hierarchy of different identities exists and will continue to shape future ideas about belonging. We have not, to help reinforce this subtle point, met Chinese who are claiming Akha origins, or identities such as Chin or Naga. This is partly a matter of convenience but also of status. For those holding Myanmar identity documents there is further and subtle discrimination. Taking what might be considered a high status alternative identity, such as Shan or Kachin, has obvious currency in a society where different levels of belonging are constantly adjudicated.

By such processes of blurring cultural identities, Han Chinese migrants have been able to avoid discriminatory policies and adapt to best suit their long-term needs. Part of their adaptation has been to assume the status of a minority in Myanmar, officially recognised in the national race matrix. We do not anticipate that in China they would be so willing to embrace a non-Han status. Yet the challenge of Myanmar politics, where Han Chinese identity is a potential hindrance to social progress, shows that a more strategic manoeuvre is attractive. To be re-designated as Shan or Kachin is to have taken advantage of the typification of belonging most readily available to those who do not belong to Myanmar's Bamar mainstream. To have morphed from Chinese, of any variety, into Myanmar is to have made a leap of imagination that blurs some boundaries while reinforcing others.

III. Kokang as a "national race" and Chinese

Arguably the most challenging category of "non-Han" Chinese in the Sino-Myanmar borderlands is the Kokang. With great finesse they have managed to support their claims to Myanmar residency to the extent that they are considered a "national race", and therefore indigenous, to Myanmar. Yet they have maintained a distinctly Han Chinese cultural identity.

The Kokang,[19] known as *Guogan* (果敢族) in Chinese, migrated from Yunnan in the 18th century to the area now known as "the Kokang".[20] According to colonial records, Kokang leaders paid tribute to the Shan Sawbwa of Hsenwi equivalent to 10 percent of revenue. After British colonisation, the British briefly ceded the Kokang to the Chinese in 1894 before they altered the agreement and returned the Kokang to British Burma in 1897 (Zhang 2008: 50). During the following five decades before Myanmar's independence from Britain in 1948, the Kokang were able to establish themselves as part of "British Burma". In 1951 they were rewarded when the ruler of Kokang was elevated to the status of 'Sawbwa',[21] the term used for Shan rulers (Sao Hpa Hman and Yang 1951). The status did not last long as, along with the other Sawbwas, he gave up the title in 1959. However, the Kokang had still achieved recognition on par with Myanmar's largest minority. The Kokang are sometimes referred to as the "Chinese-Shan", considered to be of Han Chinese ethnicity but part of the broader "Shan" ethnic group (Smith 1991: 95). When the Myanmar Government created their list of 135 "national races", the Kokang were recognised under the Shan group of "races".

[19] The name "Kokang" is believed to have Shan origins, a distortion of the Shan words *kau kang* meaning "nine villages".
[20] The area comprising the Kokang totals approximately 2,000 square kilometres and directly borders the Chinese province of Yunnan (Lintner 1990: 83).
[21] The term *Sawbwa* is the Burmese transliteration of the Shan word *Saopha* (sometimes spelt *Saohpa*).

The Kokang have been able to establish a Shan ethnic identity while maintaining their Chinese cultural identity. The Kokang today continue to speak a Yunnanese dialect of Chinese with a distinct accent, and are known among Chinese for speaking very quickly. They have maintained Yunnanese Han Chinese traditions and religions (Wang 2005: 72). This means that while they attained official identity in Myanmar, they can communicate and interact with the Chinese people and Chinese government officials with ease. The Kokang are notorious for drug production and smuggling. The area is also connected to human trafficking with illegal Chinese migrants transiting through Kokang where they can "blend in" and where Mandarin-speaking Kokang businessmen are available to facilitate their journey. The area serves as an important link with China, aided by the relative autonomy the Kokang maintain from Myanmar authorities and their abilities to work with other Chinese.

In August 2009 identities and loyalties were tested when the Myanmar army attacked the Kokang Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA). Within a few days government forces occupied the Kokang Self Administered Zone (Kramer 2009: 1). A mutiny occurred within the MNDAA led by Bai Xuoqian who agreed for the Kokang army to become a Border Guard Force, which was the aim of the Myanmar army (Smith 2010: 219). Meanwhile the former MNDAA leader Pheung Kya-shin (also known as Peng Jiasheng) fled to China (Kramer 2009: 2). During the fighting approximately 37,000 refugees fled to China with several thousand of these refugees staying with family and friends in China (Bodeen, 2009). Such a large number of refugees staying with family and friends highlights the depth of transborder cultural and family connections. The "Kokang Incident" also raised difficult questions for the Chinese Government. Many within China consider the Kokang to be "*Huaren*" and called for China to intervene in their defence (Thompson 2009: 12).[22]

The Kokang illustrate what we have judged to be an ambiguous, intermediate category of Chinese for the purposes of understanding "non-Han" diasporic communities. We are not aware of any other examples outside China's borders that so clearly demonstrate the malleability of Han identity in contexts where other affiliations are more desirable. Over the course of only three centuries, the Kokang were able to solidify their place in Myanmar's multiethnic landscape as "indigenous". That their designation has survived is probably a result of the relative ignorance of many senior Myanmar decision-makers about the exact character of ethnic identities. It may also be the case that there is a deliberate, and strategic, ignorance of their fundamental "Chineseness". For Myanmar it is not entirely unhelpful to have a Chinese group included among the other "national races". So many different groups have Chinese origins that the more specifically "Han" culture of the Kokang is simply another manifestation of diversity.

Analysing the typology

This paper has sought to disentangle a typology of non-Han Chinese social categories along the Sino-Myanmar frontier. To further explain the dynamics of belonging and exclusion, we offer four analytical interventions that we anticipate will support the overall argument about ethnicity in the Sino-Myanmar borderlands. We propose to explore *blurred boundaries*, *lost origins*, *complex affiliations* and *unequal identities*.

[22] The People's Republic of China has a troubled history of intervention in Myanmar, in particular through the provision of material and financial support to the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in the 1960s and 1970s (see Maung Aung Myoe 2009: 105).

First, the character of *blurred boundaries* is shaping the portfolio of identities available along the border. While we have separated the ethnic groups in this paper, blurring between identities is common. This is most evident between the Han Chinese "*Huaren*" and the Kokang. The Chinese Government recognises the Kokang as "*Huaren*", while the Chinese we spoke to in Myanmar view the Kokang as *Huaren*, but of a primordial variety. Yet the Kokang have crossed the threshold from foreign to indigenous in the Myanmar system and have attained "national race" status, affording them special rights not afforded to more recent Chinese migrants. Where does Han Chinese identity end and Myanmar's "national race" status begin? The answer is partly shaped by history, but also by the variety of ways that contemporary status relies on blurred boundaries.

This blurring of cultural boundaries is clearly present in the Kokang schools we visited. As a "national race", the Kokang have been permitted to operate their own schools since the 1990s, which are permitted to teach Kokang language and culture in the morning and the Myanmar language in the afternoon. In these schools, the teachers of the Kokang program are mostly Han Chinese *Huaren* or Dai. The teachers were educated in China, Taiwan and Myanmar. According to the Vice Principal of one such school in Lashio, Kokang culture and language and Chinese culture and language are "the same". The curriculum is essentially Chinese, taught with textbooks from China and Taiwan.[23] However, the school maintains a veneer of "Kokangness" with maps and photos of key Kokang leaders. This is apparently sufficient for the Myanmar government's school inspectors. Like the identity cards, the use of "Kokang" schools serves as an official cover for Chinese to make life a little easier.

Second, there is the issue of *lost origins*. Many different groups in Myanmar present themselves with mythical or invented versions of their historical genesis. In many cases such mythology will support claims in the present day. The Kokang demonstrate the line between indigenous and foreign, and the extent to which actual origins are less important than the perceptions cultivated in the present day. They arrived late to Myanmar in the 18th century but were able to establish themselves before colonisation in the 19th century. Cementing their position during colonisation they are now considered "indigenous" despite their relatively brief stay in the area and distinctly Chinese culture. Meanwhile other Chinese who arrived during colonisation and since are still firmly considered "foreign". For the Kachin and Jingpo a common origin is often asserted, even though today their different citizenships have severe political ramifications. There is no simple or single way of tracing the beginning of these borderlands peoples.

Third, there is the related issue of *complex affiliations*. In the diverse borderlands, most people hold multiple identities and multiple loyalties. Han Chinese who have been born, raised and educated in Myanmar often exemplify the ability to develop and maintain multiple identities. Their education is often undertaken at Myanmar schools during the day and Chinese schools in the evening and on weekends. As such they become fluent in both languages and customs, able to navigate life in a multiethnic, multilingual society. Another means of attaining multiple identities has been through intermarriage. Intermarriage between Han Chinese, non-Han Chinese and Myanmar minorities in the borderlands is

[23] The Chinese population in Myanmar were once divided between those who supported Beijing and those who supported Taiwan. "Red Chinese", or *Tayoke ne* in Burmese, were pro-communist and pro-PRC, while the "white Chinese" or *Tayoke phyu* were pro-nationalist and loyal to the Republic of China (Mya Than, 1997: 130). The use of PRC or Taiwanese textbooks was one way such loyalties were expressed. However, in Myanmar, textbook choice now seems to be a matter of convenience: whichever text is easiest to find in sufficient quantities. Most textbooks come across the border from China but many teachers were educated in Taiwan and write in traditional Chinese characters. Thus a mix of PRC and Taiwanese writing, textbooks, fiction, non-fiction and news are currently available in Myanmar.

common. The children of such marriages are therefore born with multiple identities. They use their non-Han identity for official purposes but may display one or both identities for cultural purposes.

Such multiple identities was clearly observed one evening on a beach in far western Rakhine State, where a group of young students had travelled from their hometown of Taunggyi in Shan State to celebrate their graduation from the Taunggyi Chinese School. The graduates included Han Chinese, *Dai* and students of mixed Shan, Bamar and Chinese ancestry. Throughout the course of the evening the attendees switched between speaking *Putonghua*, *Yunnanhua*, Shan, Myanmar and broken English depending on their audience. As the music switched from Chinese and Myanmar pop songs to Shan folk music, they were able to adjust their dancing and singing accordingly. These students were able to comfortably navigate their multiple identities in the multiethnic environment around them.

Fourth, there is a hierarchy of belonging, what might be termed *unequal identities*. In Myanmar, ethnic stratification is enshrined in the constitution and several laws, most notably the citizenship law. Some identities are worth more than others. In response to this inequality, the Han Chinese have adopted non-Han identities and found coping mechanisms to improve their lives in spite of the ethnic identities they were born with. Non-Han identities, meanwhile, which in some contexts are viewed as lesser in China, are elevated above the level of the Han Chinese in Myanmar. If this institutionalised inequality did not exist in Myanmar, perhaps the relative positions of the Han Chinese, non-Han Chinese and Kokang outlined in this typology would be different.

Yet such multiple cultural, religious and linguistic identities often cross borders and neat government definitions. At times, cultural identities take precedence over national identities and, at other times, vice versa. Non-Han Chinese are able to live in Myanmar because of their cultural identity, and in spite of their national identity. At other times their kinship with Han Chinese as expressed through their national identity and citizenship is what assists their livelihood. It is difficult to therefore distinguish if the non-Han Chinese are *Huaqiaohuaren* or not. From our conversations with Chinese Shan and Chinese Kachin in northern Myanmar it appears they assert their cultural identity first and their national identity second. When talking about the Chinese Shan and Chinese Kachin, Han Chinese *Huaqiaohuaren* also assert the importance of cultural identity over their national identity. In Myanmar, they are considered to be Shan or Kachin first, and Chinese second.

Conclusions

The complicated ethnography and geography of the Sino-Myanmar frontier makes it an important area for seeking to better understand the variety of relationships that exist between China and its multifarious diasporas. In Myanmar the classification of peoples tends to fundamentally dilute Chinese origins, and this is part of a very long-term effort to integrate diversity while insisting on a fiction of local origins. “National race” politics in Myanmar are built, historically and genetically, on legacies from beyond the national borders. Yet the evidence for such links is largely de-emphasised in the local political discourses that have made membership of the 135 categories such a potent political issue. To be excluded from the “national races” is to risk future calamity. The current difficulties faced by the Rohingya in western-most Myanmar are an example of the dire ramifications that could follow. For Han Chinese in Myanmar there are reasons to worry about long-term security. At some stage their position may become tenuous. Those “non-Han” Chinese, including the ambiguous Kokang, who live in Myanmar are in a somewhat more secure

position. It is an irony that their minority status in China, or their capacity to generate such a status in Myanmar, may support long-term residence and integration. Whether Shan/Dai, Kachin/Jingpo, or Kokang, or some other identity, including Han Chinese, the processes of assimilating and formalising identities are too powerful to ignore.

Through our understanding of these three distinctive elements of a typology of “non-Han Chinese” in Myanmar, it is clear that Han and non-Han identities are merely one level of social demarcation. Where these categories merge with competing ideas about citizenship, class and economic opportunity it can prove impossible to make neat distinctions. For the peoples of the Sino-Myanmar frontier, different affiliations test their cultural and citizenship bonds in ways that typify the fluidity of Chineseness and challenge preconceptions about modalities of belonging and exclusion. In the future, researchers will need to be even more consistently aware of the ways that politics have shaped such non-Han diasporic communities. As part of the region’s long-term geopolitics, the movement of such people across the Sino-Myanmar frontier could typify the challenges to government and society in the 21st century.

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