

Spring 2015

# Asian Refugees: The Case of China, Vietnam, North Korea, and the International Community

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**Asian Refugees: The Case of China, Vietnam, North  
Korea, and the International Community**

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**Defended April 6, 2015**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Leslie Dong: Asian Refugees

Under the Direction of William Wei

*The world is plagued by the largest refugee crisis since World War II. At this given time, there are more than 51 million displaced people around the world and nearly 35% of them originate from and remain in Asia. Due to the absence of developed regional institutions, refugee crises remain largely a state-to-state issue in Asia, making China (P.R.C.) a key player in addressing these crises. China's geographic location and its robust economic growth has not only made it an ideal haven for refugees, China's growing influence in Asia has also given it an unprecedented opportunity to establish itself as a leader in humanitarian crises. Because of the immense impact that China's refugee policies have on the surrounding region, this study seeks to examine how China formulates its refugee policies and why it adopts certain policies over others in different situations. By examining the driving factors for China's starkly different response to the Vietnamese refugee crisis (1978-1979) and the North Korean refugee crisis (since the 1990s), this study sheds light on China's policy considerations and its implications for the rest of Asia.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>Chapter One: Methodology</b> .....	10
1.1 Ethnic Ties Argument.....	12
1.2 Economic Argument.....	14
1.3 International Status Argument.....	15
1.4 Regional Security/Geopolitics Argument.....	17
1.5 Social Security Argument.....	19
<b>Chapter Two: Refugee Cases</b> .....	21
2.1 Vietnamese Refugee Crisis.....	22
2.11 Ethnic Ties Argument.....	25
2.12 Economic Argument.....	28
2.13 International Status Argument.....	31
2.14 Regional Security/Geopolitics Argument.....	35
2.15 Social Security.....	37
2.2 North Korean Refugee Crisis.....	40
2.21 Ethnic Ties Argument.....	42
2.22 Economic Argument.....	45
2.23 International Status Argument.....	48
2.24 Regional Security/Geopolitics Argument.....	51
2.25 Social Security.....	56
<b>Chapter Three: Analysis</b> .....	58
<b>Chapter Four: Conclusion</b> .....	62
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	65

Jan Egeland, the former Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary General for Conflict Prevention and Resolution, recently brought attention to the global plight of refugees in an article titled “This is the Worst Refugee Crisis Since WWII. It's Time For Us to Rethink Our Response.” There were up to 28.8 million recorded refugees in 2012 and as many as 33.3 million in 2013. Now at this given time, there are more than 51 million human beings around the globe that are forcibly displaced from their homes due to political conflicts, human rights abuses, starvation, and poverty. These numbers are the highest that has ever been recorded since World War II.

While Egeland and the international community have acknowledged that we have entered into a new era of refugee crises, Asian refugee crises are often overlooked even though they present some of the most dire humanitarian issues of this age. Angus Francis and Rowena Maguire in *Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Asia Pacific Region* write, “The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2011 statistics on refugee populations residing by region are a stark reminder of the challenge facing states and civil society in the Asia Pacific. In 2011, Africa hosted 2,149,000 refugees; the Americas, Europe, and Middle East and North Africa hosted 513,500, 1,605,500 and 1,889,900 respectively, while the Asia Pacific hosted a staggering 3,793,900” (1). Nearly 35% of the world's refugees originate from Asia Pacific and 84% of these displaced refugees remain in Asia.

Presented with these startling realities, the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) becomes a key actor in addressing these humanitarian crises in Asia. As this study shows, China still views refugee crises as largely a state-to-state affair and continues to adopt refugee policies that are predominantly driven by its own interests and motivations. The most important factor in determining China's refugee policies is the ethnicity of the refugees, followed by concerns about security and stability of the Chinese state. If the crisis involves refugees that are ethnically Chinese, China will adopt an approach centered around ethnic ties. But if the refugees are not ethnically Han, China will prioritize security and stability when formulating its refugee policies.

Even though these refugee policies are adequate and justifiable domestically, China has yet to realize its immense potential in humanitarian affairs. China is perhaps the only country in the Asia Pacific region whose domestic refugee policies can have a wide-spread impact on the surrounding region. Its response to Asian refugee crises will not only set a precedent for how other Asian countries should respond, it also has the potential to transform how the international community handles global refugee crises. This is an invaluable, springboard opportunity for China to establish itself as a reputable and influential leader in both Asia and in the world.

What China needs to understand is that Asian refugee crises are not isolated, individual occurrences. They are part of a much bigger systematic issue in the region that 1) creates refugees and 2) lacks the institutional capacity to effectively absorb and handle them. Asian refugee crises will not be resolved by adopting the "right" domestic policies, Asia desperately needs China to step up and pave the way in creating effective regional frameworks and institutions to handle these humanitarian crises.

As the United Nations Human Right's Council (UNHRC)'s Regional Representative for China and Hong Kong remarked, China's "opportune position" is partly due to the current structure of the international refugee regime. China is one of the only Asian states that has ratified both international and regional refugee treaties, including the "magna carta" of international refugee law which was established by the United Nations in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. These two treaties set out to accomplish two goals. First of all, they strove to establish a universal definition of a refugee and what criteria must be met in order for a person to be legally recognized as a refugee. According to the 1951 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee Resolution, a refugee is defined as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" and the Principle of "Non-Refoulement" is defined as "No contracting States shall expel or return ("refouler") a refugee in

any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened” (“Part II Strategic Review Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 58/153.”).

These two legal documents also attempted to set and promote a uniform standard in how states should respond to refugee crises. The 1951 Convention was able to achieve most of these goals while the 1967 Protocol helped remove geographic and temporal restrictions from the 1951 Convention.

While these two treaties were able to effectively lay out a comprehensive foundation for the treatment of refugees and continues to play a significant role in dealing with refugee crises today, they were largely rejected by Asian states. China is one of the only Asian state that has become a signatory of these two treaties in 1982 (Ho Security 56). The majority of Asian states reasoned that since these treaties were crafted in response to the European refugee crises following World War II, they were overly Eurocentric and unsuitable for handling Asian refugee crises. Governments in Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Laos, and the Philippines also criticized the treaties for setting unrealistic financial expectations on how much developing states should contribute to incoming refugees.

In addition to becoming one of the only Asian signatory states of the UN treaties, China is also a signatory of several regional agreements. The most prominent of which is the AALCC, a regional organization that allows Asian and African states to consult with each other about regional and international issues. It also established the Bangkok Principles of 1966, which acknowledge the existence of refugees and urge all member states to uphold the principle of non-refoulement and provide asylum for refugees. The Bangkok Principles are neither enforced or monitored, they only provide states with a legal guide on how to appropriately respond to refugee crises (Davis 563). The Bangkok Principles also has an important clause in its provision that states that the effect of these principles is limited if the security of the state is threatened. It is up to the each individual state to decide whether or not they will apply these principles in different situations. As a result, treatment of refugees remains largely a state-to-state issue and China is one of the most influential states in the

region as well as the largest stakeholder in these refugee crises.

To start, China has consistently received large inflows of refugees from other Asian countries. According to the UNHRC's 2014 statistics on Asian Pacific refugees, Australia, the second largest host country for Asian refugees has over 34,000 refugees currently residing in Australia. China has a staggering 301,033, nearly ten times the number in Australia. The UNHRC's 2015 Subregional Operations Profile on East Asia and the Pacific claims that this is because "China is becoming a transit and destination country for mixed migration as a result of its geographical and economic importance."

By virtue of its geographic location, China has one of the largest land masses in the world as well as the largest number of bordering states. The 14 different sovereign states that border China show a great diversity in language, culture, history, and politics. With states ranging from Mongolia to Pakistan to Vietnam, many of these states share a checkered history with China and "mutual trust is not high in [this] region" (Lampton 246). Many of these neighboring states also present some of the most pressing refugee crises in the region. North Korea's authoritarian and oppressive regime caused a continuous flood of refugees into China's northeast borders since the late 1990s and civil wars in northeast Myanmar forced tens of thousands of Burmese refugees to seek asylum in China.

The difficulty of guarding China's borders is also a contributing factor to the large presence of refugees. China has over 13,500 miles of international borders with more borderlands than any other country in the world. While countries like the United States only needs to monitor two borders between Canada and Mexico, China has to secure borders between 14 different countries. Because of the inherent challenges of securing its borders, China has become a popular destination for refugees. McLaughlin in GlobalPost's *Borderland: China's 14,000 mile struggle* describes China's challenges in maintaining border security in the following quote:

There is the tightly controlled North Korean border, where armed soldiers on both sides of the line patrol with marked tension, looking for unwelcome refugees. The fluid border with



Myanmar, where Chinese and Burmese cross back and forth with ease and open smuggling is a 24-hour reality. The old Silk Road oasis of Kashgar, set within a stone's throw of multiple heated global conflict areas, including Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan. And Guangzhou, where many of the plants and animals smuggled across China's borders end up for sale.

Coupled with its geographic location, China's rapid economic development also presents a luring opportunity for people from bordering states. China's relative economic prosperity in comparison to its neighboring states creates a US-Mexico border scenario where people are incentivized to leave their native countries and enter into China to escape poverty. The economic lure of China is further accentuated by the growing labor shortage in China. Ronald Skeldon, in *China: An Emerging Destination for Economic Migration*, explains that because China is experiencing changes in its demographics because of low fertility rates, skewed gender ratio, and a rapidly aging population, this resulted in “[t]wo million job vacancies [...] in the southeast coastal region of China in 2004, and labor shortages spread north into the Yangtze River and the north coastal region in 2005.” The growing economic opportunities in China become highly attractive to economic migrants and refugees from bordering countries.

Despite being a country that is familiar with the concept of displaced people, China lacks a clearly defined definition of a refugee. Even though China has an extensive history of dealing with various Asian refugee crises including the Indonesian refugee crisis (1959-1969), the Malaysian refugee crisis (1949-1953), the Vietnamese refugee crisis (1978-1979), and the North Korean refugee crisis (1997-present), Chinese discourse has rarely referred to these people as “refugees.” Instead, China has often referred to these displaced people with other classifications such as “returnees,” “economic migrants,” and “escapees” throughout history. While China does have the term “refugee,” it usually refers to refugees seeking asylum in countries outside of China instead of refugees entering into

the Chinese mainland.

China's definition and understanding of refugees is further complicated when placed in contrast to the UN's definition of a refugee. According to the 1951 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee Resolution, a refugee is defined as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin” because of well-founded threats to their human security if they were to return (“Part II Strategic Review Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 58/153.”). As one of the only signatory states of this resolution in Asia, China's definition of a refugee should be aligned with the UN and should also carry out refugee relief efforts based off of this agreement. China's recent treatment of the North Korean refugees however, clearly violates this resolution.

In an attempt to escape poverty, starvation, and political oppression from the North Korean regime, a large numbers of North Koreans have smuggled their way into China. While most of them were drawn to China because of economic factors, the United Nations still regard them as refugees because they will face political persecution if deported back to North Korea. This is clearly articulated in the refoulement clause in Article 33 of the Refugee Convention, which entitles the refugees to protection and prevents them from being sent back to their home country (“Part II Strategic Review Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 58/153”).

Despite these claims, China has refused to acknowledge the North Koreans as refugees. A Chinese representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared publicly at a press conference that North Korean refugees are “illegal economic migrants” and are not refugees. Thus, they are not eligible for any form of protection from the Chinese government. The Chinese government has also actively rounded up and deported all such “escapees” back to North Korea.

This case of North Korean refugees demonstrates that China has a very different definition for refugee than that of the United Nations. The numerous classifications that China has given to refugees (e.g. economic migrant, defectors, returnees, etc.) also complicates this definition, making it incredibly

difficult to establish a basis for comparison between different refugee cases. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, refugees will be defined by the UN definition, and all Chinese classifications that satisfy this definition will be referred to as refugees. Please refer to the chart below for all the refugee terms that will be used in this paper.

Chinese Refugee Term	Romanization	English Translations
脱北者 / 逃北者	Tuobeizhe/Taobeizhe	Escapee
朝鲜叛逃者	Pantaozhe	Defector
归侨	Quiqiao	Returnee
经济难民	Jingji nanmin	Economic Migrant
N/A	Kkotjebi	Fluttering Swallows
环境难民	Huanjing nanmin	Environmental Refugees
难侨	Nanqiao	Ethnic-Chinese Refugee
归国 难侨	Guiguo Nanqiao	Returnee-Refugee

Because of China's central role in the international refugee regime as well as its involvement in Asian refugee crises, it is crucial to understand China's policy response and how it formulates these official refugee policies. This study will first examine the arguments that have been commonly used to explain China's refugee policies and then test the validity of these arguments by applying them to two refugee cases (the Vietnamese and North Korean Refugee Crises), where China adopted drastically different policies. Finally, through a cross-comparison of these two cases, this study will illustrate how China formulates its refugee policies and examine the significance of these policies in shaping the regional and international response to Asian refugee crises.

### Chapter 1: Research Methodology

Even though China is such an important player in Asian refugee crises, very little material has been published on its refugee policies as a whole. Multiple studies cover individual refugee cases with

the most prominent ones focusing on the ongoing North Korean and Burmese refugee crises, but few scholars have conducted comprehensive studies to examine how China formulates its refugee policies. As such, this study will be dedicated to examining how different factors drive China to adopt certain refugee policies over others.

The independent variables in this study are the factors that potentially influence how China formulates its refugee policies, which include both domestic and international factors. The dependent variable then is the type of refugee policy that China adopts. This is the policy outcome that results from all the influencing factors (the independent variables). Since refugee policies show a wide range of variation, this study will only focus on two types of refugee policies: acceptance and non-acceptance policies. Acceptance policies are when China willingly accepts incoming refugees and provides asylum and assistance to help these refugees settle in China. Non-acceptance policies are when China refuses to provide asylum to the incoming refugees. The relationship between the independent and dependent variables in this study can be summarized by the following equation.

*Significant Factors (Independent Variables) → Type of Refugee Policy (Dependent Variable)*

The following section will explain the methodology used to examine the relationship between these variables. First, a list was compiled of all significant factors that can influence the formation of Chinese refugee policy. This was accomplished by combing through previously published material on Chinese refugee crises and identifying the major arguments that were most commonly used to explain China's policy decisions. These arguments were also drawn from a variety of sources such as newspapers, government press releases, and academic publications that documented notable cases where refugees flooded into China including the Indonesian Refugee Crisis in 1959, the Malayan Refugee Crisis in 1972, the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis in 1978, and the North Korean Refugee Crisis

in 1997. After filtering through these case studies, five major arguments were identified, centering around ethnic ties, economic development, international status, regional security/geopolitics, and social security. These arguments help establish a basis for comparison between different refugee case studies.

Secondly, these five arguments will then be applied to two different refugee cases where China adopted starkly different policies. The first one will be focused on the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis (1978-1979) where China adopted an acceptance policy and the second one will be centered around the North Korean Refugee Crisis where China adopted a strict, non-acceptance policy. By applying these five arguments to these two refugee cases, it will help shed light on the validity of each argument in explaining China's response to the different crises.

Thirdly, both refugee crises will be examined side by side. By placing the findings of the five arguments in both the Vietnamese and North Korean Refugee Crises together, it will help determine the validity and effectiveness of these arguments in explaining China's response to both crises. It will also shed light on other underlying political rationales and motives that may influence China's policy-making process.

Finally, all significant findings and trends will be compiled and analyzed closely. This section will examine the significance of these findings and what it means for China's policy decisions and for future refugee crises in the Asia Pacific region. Policy recommendations will also be provided for how China should manage refugee crises in the future to best enhance its position as a rising leader in both Asia and in the world. This following section will define these five arguments and provide background information about their origin.

### **1.1 Ethnic Ties Argument**

The ethnic ties argument contends that close ethnic ties between incoming refugees and the Chinese populace play a significant role in shaping Chinese refugee policies. According to the

argument, refugees that share close ethnic ties to China significantly increase the likelihood that China will adopt an acceptance refugee policy. The opposite will also be true. If the refugees do not share close ethnic ties to China then China will likely adopt a non-acceptance policy. While this concept of ethnic ties will be applied primarily on refugees for the course of this study, this concept was originally derived from the Theory of Counter-Disasporic Migration and Ethnically-Privileged Migration.

Counter-Disasporic Migration refers to the “return of later-generation diasporic descendants to an ancestral homeland” (Ho Returnee 601). It suggests that because of a commonality in “roots, identity, and belonging,” diasporic descendants that grew up abroad are prompted to return to their native home” (601). At the same time when diasporic descendants are motivated to return, ancestral homelands also provide them with priority admission and special rights based solely off of their perceived ethnic affinities. An example of this is Israel's Law of Return, which provides Jews that reside abroad a right to return to Israel and attain citizenship. The Japanese government also adopted similar preferential immigration policies for the *nikkeijin* who are people of Japanese descent but hold foreign citizenship. While the *nikkeijin* are not entitled to Japanese citizenship, the Japanese government does give them preferential immigration visas (Ho Returnee 601).

A variety of rationales have been adopted that attempt to explain why states are likely to grant preferential immigration rights to “co-ethnics.” The most common rationale focuses on a state's identity. If a state regards itself as an ancestral homeland, it feels compelled to not only provide for the current citizens that reside within its borders, but to also act as a protector of co-ethnics in times of distress. Co-ethnics that return to the ancestral homeland as refugees is an appropriate example of this. In addition to feeling responsible toward co-ethnics abroad, a state may adopt preferential immigration policies as a way to protect its own reputation as an ancestral homeland. By preserving this image, a state can gain support from the greater pan-ethnic community and can entitle a state to a variety of benefits. It can help legitimize a state's political power, channel in outside investments or can even

translate into “political mileage for ruling elites acting in the name of national interest and wider state security” (Ho Security 58). Because of these reasons, China may be prompted to intervene if the incoming refugees are of Chinese descent.

## 1.2 Economic Argument

The economic argument suggests that refugee policies are primarily driven by economic factors. China's decision to adopt an acceptance or non-acceptance policy depends on the overall, *perceived* economic impact of receiving the refugees. If the perceived economic costs of receiving the refugees are greater than the perceived economic benefits, then China will likely adopt a non-acceptance policy. But if the economic benefits of receiving the refugees outweigh the economic costs, China will likely implement an acceptance policy.

A report from the UN titled *Social and Economic Impact of Large Refugee Populations on Host Developing Countries* explains that large refugee populations can either put a huge strain on a receiving country's economy or positively spur economic growth. It could also have both of these effects at different times in the resettlement process. When there are large influxes of refugees into a country, it can strain all economic resources and pit refugee populations against local communities in competition for water, food, land, housing, and medical services. Over time, these refugee populations can also lead to greater demands on education and health facilities, energy, transportation, social services and employment as well as other natural resources. At the same time however, refugee influxes can bring about a variety of economic benefits.

A large presence of refugees can help stimulate the host country's economy in a variety of ways. For example, refugee influxes can bring in a valuable new source of labor, both skilled and unskilled, to the host country. Refugees that are highly educated, skilled, or possess a business background can help generate new jobs in the host country or fill in for more specialized jobs such as in the medical or

teaching fields. Unskilled refugees on the other hand, can become a valuable labor force that helps open up and develop the entire country. Refugees in general, also constitute a new consumer market for domestic goods like food, shelter, daily necessities, and services.

In addition to this, large refugee populations also help host countries attract a outside investment. For example, if the incoming refugees are ethnically-Chinese, they are likely to have extensive connections to overseas Chinese communities and help channel in remittances and investment from extended family members and relatives from all over the world. As Ho wrote in *Irregular Migration and Human Security in East Asia*, “China continued to keep a watchful eye on its co-ethnics, regarding them as sources of remittances, philanthropic contributions and potential political allies” (Ho Security 60). Accepting large influxes of refugees can also attract a variety of development agencies into the host country and entitle the host country to development support from the international community including the United Nations, refugee relief NGOs, and other international organizations.

Because refugees can have a positive or negative impact on domestic economies, the economic argument contends that China will formulate refugee policies based on the overall, perceived economic impact of the refugees. China will weigh the benefits versus the costs associated with accepting the refugees. If China perceives the economic benefits to be greater than the economic strains, it will likely adopt a refugee acceptance policy. If China perceives the costs to be greater than the benefits then China will likely adopt a non-acceptance refugee policy.

### **1.3 International Status Argument**

China's international status is defined by its international image, prestige, and influence vis a vis another country, regime, or its own position in the international community. This argument contends that China will only adopt refugee policies, either acceptance and non-acceptance, that can effectively



bolster China's international status. This argument is grounded on the assumption that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the founding and ruling party of the P.R.C has a desire to secure its political legitimacy and increase its soft power and global influence.

China's desire to elevate its international status can be traced back to the Chinese Communist Party and their rival, the Kuomintang (KMT)'s struggle for power over the mainland in 1927. According to David Wu in *The Living Tree*, “After the Nationalist government was established in Nanjing in 1928 following the Northern Expedition, China entered a period of 'political tutelage' under the authoritarian rule of the Kuomintang party” targeting the Chinese education system (Wu 153).

Even though the KMT's establishment was almost a century ago and fled to modern-day Taiwan, the KMT's influence has effectively spread to various overseas Chinese communities all over the world. Wu writes, “This kind of national indoctrination was also brought to overseas Chinese schools via branch organizations of the Kuomintang party and other overseas Chinese organizations, including the Overseas Chinese Commission of the Nationalist government [...] Even today the commission regularly sponsors cultural and educational activities in North America and Europe, under the guise of promoting Chinese cultural tradition, in order to induce loyalty to the Nationalist government in Taiwan” (Wu 153). These movements have helped the KMT establish a strong presence in overseas Chinese communities.

In order to combat the KMT's overseas influence, the CCP is prompted to reach out to and win support from overseas Chinese communities. Adopting refugee policies that appeal to overseas Chinese communities is an effective way to do this. Even though refugee policies tend to receive less press and attention, they can be incredibly effective in projecting an altruistic, humanitarian image of the CCP in times of crisis. If the refugees in question are of Chinese descent, China can strategically adopt certain policies to project an image of “caring concern” (Gilks 197) to overseas Chinese communities. This can help legitimize China as an ancestral homeland to all Chinese descendants and as the rightful

“protector” and “caretaker” of all overseas Chinese communities.

China can also effectively bolster its own influence and status in the international community by adopting refugee policies that are aligned with western values. This can help present China as a team player in global politics and as a country that is willing to comply with international norms. China's actions during the Vietnamese refugee crisis are a good example of this. By unconditionally accepting the Vietnamese refugees and implementing a large-scale relocation policy, China was able to win support and recognition from influential international organizations. Liang Shuying in “Refugee Protection in China: The Issue of Citizenship and Potential Solutions” wrote, “When China's State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan met with Antonio Gutettes, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on 22 March 2006, he stated that China places great emphasis on the importance of refugee protection, has fulfilled its obligations by implementing practical measures, and actively and constructively cooperated with the international community” (67). This in turn, effectively bolsters China's international status and influence.

#### **1.4 Regional Security/Geopolitics**

The regional security/geopolitics argument contends that China's refugee policies are largely shaped by China's concerns about border and regional security. As a country that is surrounded by 14 different sovereign states ranging from Vietnam to India to Kyrgyzstan and is also surrounded by a great diversity of cultures, languages, history, and politics that are distinctly different, China views this proximity and diversity with caution. Each border region has different security challenges that must be handled differently in each location. Because of this, China views its border security with utmost importance.

Li Guogang, the deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Center for China's Borderland History and Geographic Studies explains, “China has a single border policy and it's quite

simple: stability. If the borders in China are not stable, all of China will be unstable. If the border areas are not developed, all of China will be undeveloped. We can say the border areas are extremely important, throughout history” (qtd. in McLaughlin Struggle).

Given this emphasis on maintaining border security, China tends to view refugees and large influxes of people moving in between Chinese borders as a great threat to national security. China is extremely cautious of all refugee crises that occur close to or around its borders. As a result, China will strategically select and allow refugees to enter into its borders based on the geographic region that the refugees originate from. Fearing that accepting refugees can destabilize border regions and destabilize the Chinese mainland, China will be more likely to accept refugees from borderlands that are more stable than refugees from borderlands that are more prone to instability.

This was one of the most common rationales for China's response to the North Korean refugee crisis. Song explained that because “a mass exodus from North Korea may destabilize the [Chinese] north-eastern border region” (162), China had no choice but to adopt a strict, non-acceptance policy and actively secure the Sino-North Korean border. China's evaluation of a borderland's stability can also be due to a variety of factors including the susceptibility of these regions to political uprisings, ethnic tensions, and humanitarian crises.

This same logic about refugees can also be extended to larger geographic regions such as Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. While China has historically viewed both of these regions to be of great strategic value, especially during the Cold War, there is a discrepancy in how much China values each region. While China has had ongoing historic ties with Southeast Asia that traces back to the time of Chinese tributary states like Annam (modern-day Vietnam), Northeast Asia has consistently been regarded as a region of upmost strategic value. Not only does northeast China possess some of the most valuable economic resources in the entire country, North Korea in many ways can be understood as a gateway right into the heart of China. Choi in *China's Strategic View of the Korean Peninsula*,

explained that “Traditionally, China has regarded the Korean peninsula as a key factor that affects the security of the mainland. The peninsula has often been described as a “dagger” aimed at China that shares a geopolitical “curse” with China” (75). Any insecurity in Northeast Asia can have dire consequences for China. Because of this discrepancy in the strategic value of different regions, China will be more likely to accept refugees from regions that are of less strategic value such as Southeast Asia versus regions that are of great strategic value like Northeast Asia in fear that accepting any refugees will have severe ramifications in the stability of the region and in mainland China.

This stress on regional security can also prompt China to view refugees as a part of a larger picture of geopolitics. While China may adopt refugee policies in an attempt to bolster regional stability, these policies can also have implications in the balance of power in that specific region. For example, China may have adopted a strict no-acceptance policy in the case of the North Korean refugees in an attempt to maintain stability in both the China-North Korean border region as well as the Northeast Asian region. But by enacting this refugee policy and strengthening current Sino-North Korean relations, it can impact the balance of power between several major players in that region including Japan, the United States, Russia, and South Korea. These geopolitical concerns can be just as significant as considerations about border and regional security.

### **1.5 Social Security**

A press release published from the World Economic Forum titled *China as a Global Player* explains that China's greatest political priority is to maintain stability at home. As David Lampton writes:

Throughout Chinese history there has been a belief that as internal conditions deteriorate, external forces seek to take advantage of that weakness to pursue their own goals and exploit a supine China. The Chinese formulation is *nei luan, wai huan*, a relaxed translation of which is,

'When there is turmoil within, the barbarians from without inflict disasters.' Or, as the scholar-general Zeng Guofan put it positively in the mid-nineteenth century, 'If you can rule your own country, who dares to insult you? (208)

This stress on maintaining social security within the Chinese state is a consistent and reoccurring theme throughout Chinese history and is embodied in the term a “peaceful rise” that was coined in 2003. President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao used this phrase to “reassure the outside world (particularly the PRC's neighbors and Washington) that China's ascendance would not follow the destructive paths of Germany and Japan in the first half of the twentieth century” and pose a threat to the rest of the world (Lampton 33). By taking this stance, China hoped that it would prevent other states from taking actions to thwart its development and jeopardize its social security.

China's consistent emphasis on maintaining social security is due to the unique challenges of governing the state. China has one of the largest land masses in the world with diverse terrain ranging from the humid, coastal areas in the east, the mountainous regions scattered throughout the country, and the arid, desert-like landscapes in the west. The sheer mass of China plus the geographic diversity of its territory makes governing China an impressive feat, but in addition to this, China also has the largest population of people in the world and a rich diversity of ethnic groups, languages, and customs. The sheer amount of people that China needs to govern can easily exacerbate any domestic issues within the country, making social security not only an ideal condition but a necessity in order to govern China.

Building on this assumption that social security is the priority of the Chinese state, this argument contends that China will only adopt refugee policies that help maintain or bolster social security. Before adopting a refugee policy, China will likely examine and evaluate the projected social costs of accepting large influxes of refugees. These social costs will account for all the domestic resources that will need to be allocated to the refugees when they arrive such as land, housing, jobs,

and food as well as concerns about the impact the refugees will have on local communities. China may also have fears that incoming refugees will cause social unrest, increase the rate of crime, and exacerbate ethnic tensions.

It is also important to note that these evaluations are based on China's *perception* of the social costs associated with accepting the refugees. Because of this, the ethnic identity of the refugees can play a significant role in influencing China's evaluation of these social costs. For instance, Elaine Ho in *'Refugee' or 'returnee'? The Ethnic Geopolitics of Diasporic Resettlement in China and Intergenerational Change* argues that China was willing to accept large numbers of Vietnamese refugees because the majority of them were ethnically Han and would thus, “cohere easily with the indigenous population [in China], which is bound by kinship obligations” (601).

Nevertheless, the social security argument contends that China's refugee policies are adopted based off of an overall assessment of the social costs associated with accepting refugees. China will likely adopt a refugee acceptance policy if the perceived social cost of accepting the refugees are low, but will adopt a non-acceptance policy if the perceived social costs are high.

## Chapter Two: Refugee Cases

The Vietnamese and North Korean refugee crises were specifically selected for this study because they are comparable in size and reveal an inconsistency in China's refugee policies, providing the perfect space to examine how China develops its policies.

Even though there is a large range in the estimations, the number of Vietnamese and North Korean refugees are comparable. Lee explains that “The exact figure of North Koreans in China is unknown. The PRC government estimates 10,000-50,000; the ROK claims 30,000-50,000; the US State Department says 75,000-125,000; the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) opts for 50,000-100,000; and the NGOs say 100,000-300,000. In its 2009 report, the US

Committee for Refugees and Immigrants estimates that around 11,000 North Koreans remained in hiding in or near the border” (Song 162). At the same time, estimates for the Vietnamese refugees also show a large range because the numbers often overlap with other Southeast Asian refugees that flooded into China around the same time. These include refugees from Malaya, Indonesia, Laos, and Cambodia that are often grouped under the umbrella term “Indochinese Refugees.” While Han estimates that from “Vietnam alone, more than 200,000 co-ethnics arrived in China under forced migration circumstances,” (Han qtd. Ho 56) Chinese reports claim that the UNHCR's Beijing office helped settle up to 300,000 Vietnamese refugees following the Sino-Vietnamese War (Zhao). Nevertheless, the upper range in the estimates of both North Korean and Vietnamese refugees is between 100,000-300,000.

These two crises also reveal an inconsistency in China's refugee policies. While China had shared a similar relationship with both Vietnam and North Korea against the backdrop of the Cold War, China responded to each crisis very differently. Not only did China form a political and strategic alliance with both of these countries, all three states were active members of the communist bloc during the Cold War. All three countries were dedicated to fighting a war against the Western democracy and supported a global communist revolution.

Both Vietnam and North Korea also presented a similar strategic significance to China. Since Vietnam and North Korea both share a border with Chinese mainland, China viewed both of these countries as ideal buffer zones (Niu 366) that would shield China from American presence in Asia. This is one of the many reasons why China felt compelled to enter both the Korean and Vietnam War after American military forces threatened to overtake both of these countries. If Vietnam and North Korea fell to American forces, there would no longer be a buffer zone that could shield China from the United States.

Apart from the similar strategic relationship that China shared with both of these countries, Vietnam and North Korea also shared distinct similarities. Both countries suffered through a civil war

that centered around ideological differences and ultimately resulted in the split of both countries. North Korea and North Vietnam (at the time) supported a communist regime while South Korea and South Vietnam advocated for democracy. The civil wars that broke out in these countries eventually turned into proxy wars within the larger Cold War landscape.

Despite these similarities, China's response to both crises was drastically different. The Chinese government was incredibly accommodating to the Vietnamese refugees that flooded into Chinese borders in the late 1970s and implemented a full-scale relocation and settlement program to help Vietnamese refugees settle into China. On the other hand, China maintained a strict policy against North Korean refugees. Not only did China refuse to acknowledge North Korean “escapees” as refugees, Chinese law enforcement actively sought out North Korean citizens in China and repatriated all refugees back to North Korea (The Invisible Exodus: North Korean in the PRC).

Because of China's starkly different approaches to handling both crises, examination of both cases will provide insight in the reasons and the motivations that drove China to adopt the refugee policies that it did in both cases.

## **2.1 Vietnamese Refugee Crisis**

While the majority of the literature on Vietnamese refugees documents the mass exodus that followed the fall of Saigon, this paper centers on the Hoa Crisis that occurred a few years after the reunification of Vietnam. The Hoa Crisis refers to the two waves of Vietnamese refugees that flooded into China starting in the late 1970s due to the regime's increasingly oppressive economic policies and the collapse of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance. The first wave occurred in the late 1970s to early 1980s and the second wave occurred in the late 1980s to early 1990s.

While the initial reunification of Vietnam has been described as one of the smoothest transitions of power, the communist regime became increasingly repressive over time. Shortly after 1975, various



programs were implemented to solidify the communist rule and transform the capitalist Vietnamese economy to a socialist economy. These policies uprooted hundreds of thousands of “capitalists” and forcibly sent them to “re-education” camps, New Economic Zones, or state farms to work as agricultural workers.

The most prominent group of people that were targeted by these reforms was the Hoa, who were ethnically Chinese. At the time of reunification, there were an estimated one to two million Hoa living in Vietnam with the highest concentrations located in southern Vietnam. The Hoa were highly represented in private business and trade, making up a high percentage of Vietnam's educated and upper class. The Hoa's association with capitalist activity was not the only reason why they were targeted by the regime. Because they were ethnically Chinese, the Vietnamese government also feared that they were fifth columns or spies for the China. Gilks in *Breakdown of Sino-vietnamese Alliance 1970-1979* argued that “Hanoi was particularly eager to wrest control from the ethnic Chinese, whose loyalty was suspect and who might be open to manipulation by Beijing” (193).

During one violent operation in April 1978, the Vietnamese regime confiscated over 30,000 private businesses that belonged to the Hoa people. The regime actively forced the Hoa into New Economic Zones, conscripted them into the military, and enforced “restrictions over the use of Chinese names and language learning. [The Hoa] were also subjected to claims of divided loyalties, [and] random or organized acts of violence” (Ho Security 59). The regime's persecution of the Hoa continued until the regime started a full-scale purge of the Hoa. While the Hoa were not the only people to be persecuted in Vietnam, they constituted approximately 80 percent of the Vietnamese refugees. Estimates for the number of Vietnamese refugees range from 100,000-300,000 (Zhao).

In the wake of the Hoa Crisis, the Chinese government responded by implementing an unprecedented refugee policy and provided “unconditional acceptance” to all Vietnamese refugees. In addition to opening its borders to these refugees, China sent the ships, *Changli* and *Minghua* (Gilks

203) to actively bring the “persecuted Chinese” back to China and at first, allowed refugees free entry with or without proper travel documents into China. Yet, when the swelling number of refugees seeking asylum into China continued to increase, the Chinese government eventually reversed this policy and only accepted refugees that received proper exit visas from the Vietnamese government.

When the refugees arrived, the Chinese government initiated a full-scale relocation program and helped them settle in China. According to Fan Shouyi in *Now That They Have Come, We Must Help Them Settle Down: An Investigation of the Living Conditions of 200,000 Vietnamese Refugees in China*, “[L]ocal governments accept[ed] all refugees with no strings attached; and [...] provided these penniless refugees with food, clothing and shelter for free” (14). A grand total of 263 state-owned farms or resettlement camps were also set up throughout the Yunnan, Guangxi, Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Fujian provinces to accommodate the refugees. The Chinese government then joined efforts with local authorities to provide the refugees with job opportunities in agriculture, fishing, and mining. Vietnamese refugees that were unfamiliar with these fields were offered job training and given the necessary tools to enter these occupations (Refugees in China). For skilled refugees like teachers and doctors, the Chinese government tried to match their skill sets to respective jobs.

China's official resettlement programs ended in 1988 but the Chinese government has never stopped providing financial and material support and aid to these Vietnamese refugees (Zeng). Even when the UN ended various supportive programs for Vietnamese refugees in 1991, China continued to subsidize the refugees' living expenses and provided them with free work training and education programs.

More than thirty years later, these refugees have fully integrated into the Chinese society and considered themselves to be Chinese people. The Chinese government also allows the refugees' children to attend local schools and take the entrance exams to attend Chinese universities.

China's response to this refugee crisis has gained international recognition. Fan wrote, “29

years later, on May 10, 2007, the Office of UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) highly acclaimed the Chinese government's efforts to make arrangements for settling the refugees in China, saying that over the past 30 years or so, China's placement of Vietnamese refugees within its borders is one of the most successful models for settlement of refugees” (14). China's response to this crisis played an unprecedented role in shaping the responsibility of states in handling refugee crises. The following section will examine how effective the five arguments are at explaining China's response to the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis.

### *2.11 Ethnic Ties Argument*

The ethnic ties argument is one of the most effective arguments in explaining China's refugee policy during the Vietnamese refugee crisis. As Ho explains, “expulsion from Southeast Asia was authorized by the sending states and their resettlement in China endorsed by the receiving state on account of their co-ethnicity” (Ho security 56). The significance of the refugees' ethnic ties to China was evident in how China justified its legal jurisdiction over the refugees as well as its treatment of the refugees after they arrived in China.

China had tactfully employed the ethnicity of the refugees as a way to justify its extraterritorial reach over the refugees. Even though reports showed that 80% of the Vietnamese refugees that flooded into China's borders from 1978-1979 were ethnically Chinese, they did not fall immediately under China's jurisdiction. While the majority of the refugees were ethnically Chinese, a great portion of them were naturalized and became Vietnamese citizens, especially refugees that had resided in South Vietnam. Because of this, the Vietnamese government claimed jurisdiction over the refugees based off of their nationality and China claimed jurisdiction based off of the refugees' ethnicity. Even though China “questioned whether those who naturalised abroad did so willingly or under compulsion by the governments in their countries of residence” (Suryadinata qtd. in Ho 603), China was cautious not to

overstep these legal boundaries. Doing so will appear as an interference in another state's domestic affairs and a violation of China's promises in the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, a set of principles developed to govern the relations between Asian states in 1954. Because of this, it was difficult for China to assume responsibility for the refugees.

In order to justify its claim over the refugees, Chinese political discourse eventually labeled the refugees as “returnees” instead of refugees. By packaging the refugees as “returnees,” China suggested an element of choice rather a forced migration. The Qiaoban, a government agency that managed the resettlement of the refugees required all refugees to “renounce their foreign nationalities to signal their return 'voluntarily' [to China]” (Ho Returnee 603). As long as the refugees were willing to renounce their foreign nationalities, China would accept them as rightful citizens of China. Employing this categorization of the refugees helped legitimize China's extraterritorial reach over the refugees.

China also actively employed the ethnicity of the refugees to justify their preferential treatment when they arrived in China. While the Vietnamese refugees “enjoy[ed] basic rights to life, production, employment, education, and medical care [...] for non-Indochinese refugees [...] there is no right to employment and the UNHCR provides assistance in terms of food, basic accommodation, health care and primary education” (UNHCR 2011 Statistics). China's preferential treatment of the Vietnamese refugees was not only restricted to refugee populations. The Chinese government also gave preferential treatment over the local Chinese citizenry. Ho documents how a Vietnamese refugee recalled that “food vouchers distributed to returnees under the commune system provided them with 29 jin of rice compared to non-returnees, who could only have 25 jin” (Ho Security 62). According to Godley, many of the Vietnamese refugees also continued to “receive government sponsored food packages despite a widespread shortage” (qtd in Ho 604). As a result, this triggered resentment from local populations who viewed the refugees as scroungers that had a dependency mentality and relied on government assistance.

In order to justify these preferential policies, national Chinese news reports evoked the refugees' ethnicity and portrayed them as patriotic, loyal descendants that voluntarily returned back to their homeland. China's use of the word “return” is especially noteworthy. In common forced migration literature, “return” is defined as the “repatriation to the country refugees left but consider home” (Black qtd. in Ho 601) so in this case, “return” should refer to the Vietnamese refugees' return back to Vietnam. But 'return' in this Chinese context suggests that the refugees were returning back to their ancestral homeland – a place of belonging and ethnic attachment. By appealing to these ethnic ties, the Chinese government effectively portrayed the refugees as “us” rather than the “other” and justified the need to protect and provide for other, fellow Chinese.

At the same time that China drew on the ethnic identities of the refugees, it also alluded to its own responsibilities as an ancestral homeland. National news reports portrayed the refugees as “vulnerable [Chinese] populations without protection in their adopted homelands” (Ho Security 59). Because the refugees lacked this protection and China was their ancestral home, China had the “right to take action, assert extraterritorial protection for the co-ethnics in distress, and mobilize domestic support for the resettlement policies” (Waver qtd. in Ho Security 59). Waver has identified this as a type of “speech act” (Ho Security 59) that targeted the local Chinese citizenry and legitimized China's treatment of the refugees.

While Chinese discourse repeatedly appealed to the refugees' ethnicity to justify its treatment of them, it also displayed China's underlying attitudes towards themselves. China did in fact, view itself as an ancestral homeland for the Hoa people and strongly believed that it had an obligation to protect and provide for them. The Hoa's ethnic ties to China were not just a justification for why China adopted the policies that it did, but a driving reason why they adopted these preferential policies to begin with. This concept of ethnic ties is a reoccurring theme throughout all five arguments and in almost all discussions about the Vietnamese refugees.

### 2.12 Economic Argument

The economic argument, which contends that the formation of China's refugee policies is largely driven by economic factors is consistent with China's response to the Vietnamese refugee crisis. The economic benefits of accepting the Vietnamese refugees greatly outweighed the economic costs.

At the onset of the Vietnamese refugee crisis, the Chinese economy was in dire condition. After suffering through the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese economy was left in shambles after years of neglect, ineffective economic policies, and a lack of investment in human capital. In an attempt to rejuvenate the Chinese economy, Deng Xiaoping enacted the “Four Modernizations” in 1978 to bolster up the fields of industry, agriculture, national defense, and science and technology. When the Vietnamese refugees crisis broke out, the refugees presented themselves as a great economic opportunity and potential asset to China.

To start, the Vietnamese refugees provided a new source of human capital and labor for China. Unlike the North Korean refugees who suffered from poverty, starvation, and had very few job skills, the Hoa dominated the business and commercial sectors of the Vietnamese economy and were also highly represented in private business, trade, and also made up a high percentage of Vietnam's upper class. As a group of highly educated and skilled laborers, the Hoa were viewed as a valuable source of human capital that could spur China's economic growth and reform. After recognizing the refugees' skills and talents, local Chinese governments deliberately matched the skill sets of the refugees to corresponding occupations in China. In the Chinese news investigation titled, *Vietnamese refugees in China*, Tu explains that after 1980, all refugees that were cultured, skilled, or highly educated were directed to specialized jobs in schools, hospitals, factories, and government departments.

Unskilled refugees on the other hand, provided a new source of labor to help open up and develop rural areas in China. “According to the settlement policy of the local government, refugees

with skills were settled in the city and mostly worked in plastic or food factories and schools. The ones without skills worked on farms” (Wain). The majority of the unskilled Vietnamese refugees were settled in rural and largely uninhabited areas throughout Guangxi, Guangdong, and Fujian provinces, following in the footsteps of the Indonesian-Chinese and Malaya-Chinese refugees that came before them from 1949-1969.

Similar to the Vietnamese refugees, these Indonesian and Malaysian refugees fled into China to escape oppressive governments and ethnic persecution. Once they arrived in China, they were resettled in rural, impoverished, and undeveloped farms and were expected to help open up and develop the land. Ho explains that:

The refugee-returnees from Malaya and Indonesia [...] became pioneers in preparing the land for agriculture and building housing, factories, roads or other facilities for the farms [...] During interviews, some recounted that the soil on the undeveloped land was hard and of such poor quality that tilling the land proved to be back-breaking labour for them. But they had little choice because the party officials that managed the farms would not give them food provisions under the commune system otherwise (63).

Even though the “Vietnamese-Chinese are reportedly 'of a lower quality than the [earlier returnees from Indonesia]” (Ho Security 64), the Chinese government reasoned that as Chinese descendants, the refugees had an ancestral duty to their homeland and should contribute to the development of China in the same way that other ethnically-Chinese refugees did in the past. Because of these reasons, many of the Vietnamese refugees were sent to the same farms that the earlier Malaya and Indonesian refugees settled or relocated to farms that had equally challenging living conditions.

Secondly, a large presence of Vietnamese refugees can attract a variety of outside investments into China. The Hoa were part of a closely-knit community of overseas Chinese. These ties prompted

close family members, relatives, and friends to send economic remittances back to China to support the refugees. The Chinese government was aware of this economic value of the refugees even before the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis broke out. Ho explained that “China continued to keep a watchful eye on its co-ethnics, regarding them as sources of remittances, philanthropic contributions, and potential political allies” (Ho Security 60).

Accepting the refugees will also entitle China to developmental support from the international community. A UNHRC report titled *Social and economic impact of large refugee populations on host developing countries* explained that “The presence of refugees [...] can attract development agencies to the host areas. While infrastructure is developed in the initial stage primarily to facilitate the work of host governments, UNHCR and its implementing partners in the refugee affected regions, it can also serve as a catalyst to 'open up' the host region to development efforts that would otherwise never reach these 'marginal' areas.” The Chinese news investigation titled, *Vietnamese Refugees in China* explains that the Guangxi province alone was able to secure 4,851,000 USD from the United Nations World Food Programme, 15,000 GBP from the British Overseas Aid Group (BOAG), 1,356,300 FRF from the French Medical Association, and 32,853,200 USD from the United Nations Human Rights Council in developmental support. These funds helped establish 187 different developmental programs and provided the refugees with additional resources in healthcare, education, job training, and employment. Not only did these funds dramatically improve the living conditions of the refugees, it also played a significant role in developing the rural areas and farmlands where the refugees relocated.

Thirdly, the Vietnamese refugees' multiculturalism was able to help boost local economies in south China. “[T]he re-territorialised cultural identities of the refugee–returnees intersect with the re-scaling of state power in the post-1980s, resulting in the distinctive reinvention of the overseas Chinese farms as economic zones and tourism sites featuring ‘Southeast Asia’ in China” (Ho Returnee 605). Many of these refugee camps that housed the Vietnamese refugees were transformed into tourist sites



that provided an insight to the diverse and exotic cultures of Southeast Asia as well as the humanitarian efforts that China had offered at the time of the crisis. Even though this restructuring of the refugee camps occurred after the refugees were permanently settled into China, these sites became key tourist attractions that generated a significant amount of revenue for local economies.

Even though the Chinese government bore substantial costs in the initial resettlement of the refugees in providing them with housing, food, and other basic necessities, the economic value and contributions of the refugees far outweighed these costs. Apart from the direct contributions of the refugees and the international community, the investment that China was able to attract from overseas Chinese communities alone, played a significant role in rebuilding the Chinese economy. Lampton contends that a good proportion of China's current economic success can be traced back to the “financial, managerial, intellectual, and marketing resources that ethnic Chinese living outside China have brought to the PRC's modernization since the late 1970s” (85). Because of these reasons, the economic benefits of accepting the refugees greatly outweighed the costs and can effectively explain why China adopted its acceptance policy.

### *2.13. International Status Argument*

The international status argument was effective in explaining China's response to the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis. By adopting this large-scale acceptance policy, China was able to enhance its own international status, specifically by contributing to nation-building efforts, challenging the legitimacy of the Kuomintang, and elevating China's position in the international community.

Before analyzing how accepting the Vietnamese refugees enhanced China's international status, it is important to establish China's international status prior to the refugee crisis. At the onset of the crisis, China was undergoing several major transitions. To start, China had just survived the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, which resulted in millions of casualties and widespread domestic

instability. Following this turbulent time period, China also fell into a power vacuum. After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, Mao and his “gang of four” effectively lost control over China, but Deng Xiaoping, the next up and coming leader, had not yet consolidated his power. The Chinese economy was left in shambles after years of neglect and the social harmony within China was torn apart. The accumulation of these events greatly undermined the leadership and legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), especially in overseas Chinese communities. China was in dire need of nation-building and to reestablish its legitimacy and status in the international community. It was under these circumstances that China accepted the Vietnamese refugees.

### **Contributions to Nation-Building Efforts**

The CCP viewed the Vietnamese refugees as a valuable asset that could contribute to nation-building efforts. As previously established in both the sections focusing on the ethnic ties and social security arguments, China viewed the Vietnamese refugees as part of a larger, overseas Chinese community. Even though a good portion of them were Vietnamese nationals, China regarded them as Chinese descendants. Because of this, China effectively linked and “contextualized [them] in a broader history of Chinese return migration, particularly after the communist victory in 1949 that welcomed educated and skilled diasporic Chinese and their progeny to return and contribute to nation-building” (Huang X qtd. in Ho 603).

China, had in other words, effectively linked these Vietnamese refugees to a group of voluntary Chinese returnees that had moved back to China around the same time period to help build a new communist China. This is evident in how China labelled the refugees as “returnees” instead of refugees, which effectively signified choice rather than forced migration. China discourse also went on to described the refugees to be a community of “loyal diasporic descendants” (Zhang qtd. in Ho 603) and placed heavy emphasis on their patriotism. By merging these two groups together, China was able

to effectively portray and understand both of them as a valuable asset to their nation-building efforts.

Hence, prompting China's acceptance of these refugees.

### **Establish the CCP's legitimacy**

In addition to contributing to nation-building efforts, accepting the Vietnamese refugees would also assist the CCP in challenging the KMT's legitimacy and win support from overseas Chinese communities. Since the Nationalist government was established in 1928, the CCP and KMT have engaged in a continuous struggle to secure legitimacy and control over China. As the KMT spread its ideology and increased its influence around the world, the CCP had to find ways to reestablish itself as the legitimate regime. Accepting the Vietnamese refugees was an effective way to achieve this.

The CCP and KMT's "political tutelage" (Wu 153) over the Chinese education system started after the establishment of the Nationalist government in 1928. Prior to moving its power base to Taiwan, the KMT actively targeted Chinese schools, which became one of the key platforms for nationalist indoctrination. As stated in in the *Living Tree*, "Nationwide inculcation of Kuomintang ideology in school classes included the teaching of Sun Yet-sen's Three People's Principles and speeches of KMT leaders along with lessons on citizenship and patriotism" (153). This active promotion of KMT ideology did not only occur inside the classroom, the KMT also introduced a daily tradition of a flag salute and national anthem as well as organizing weekly meetings to disseminate lectures on Dr. Sun Yatsen's vision and promote national allegiance to the party and to the KMT leaders.

The KMT's efforts were not limited domestically either. After moving its power base to Taiwan, branch organizations of the KMT party and other Chinese organizations such as the Overseas Chinese Commission of the Nationalist government continued to promote KMT teachings and brought this kind

of indoctrination to overseas Chinese schools. The KMT's efforts also transcended generations. Till this day, the KMT still hosts a variety of cultural and educational activities in North America and Europe. While these activities are disguised as a way to preserve and promote the Chinese culture, these activities have been effective ways in disseminating KMT teachings and inducing loyalty and support for the Nationalist government in Taiwan.

In order to counterattack the KMT's far-reaching influence, the CCP had to win support from overseas Chinese communities and reestablish its own legitimacy. Accepting the large influx of Vietnamese refugees was an effective to achieve this. Not only would it reinforce CCP's claim that it is the “ancestral homeland” for overseas Chinese communities, it would also allow the CCP to project “caring concern” (Gilks 197) for these communities. Launching the full-scale relocation and resettlement policy would also send a powerful message to overseas Chinese communities that the CCP was willing to reach out extraterritorially to provide, protect, and support all people of Chinese descent throughout the world. This would effectively challenge the KMT's legitimacy while elevating China's status and support throughout overseas Chinese communities.

### **Elevate China's International Standing**

Adopting this large-scale acceptance policy also effectively elevated China's status in the international community. Fan explains that “As compared with other countries' way of handling refugee problems on short-term and temporary basis, the Chinese government's commitment to provide permanent protection to every refugee from Vietnam fleeing to China is unparalleled in UN history” (Fan 13). By adopting this policy, China was able to display its commitment to international laws and its willingness to work as a team player in the international community. It also provided China with opportunities to work closely with other international actors and help China build stronger, working relations with a variety of international organizations, refugee relief NGOs, humanitarian groups, and

other states.

Because China's refugee policies played such a dramatic role in alleviating the refugee crisis, it also set a precedent for how the international community should respond to future crises. On May 10, 2007, “the Office of UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) highly acclaimed the Chinese government's efforts to make arrangements for settling the refugees in China, saying that over the past 30 years or so, China’s placement of Vietnamese refugees within its borders is one of the most successful models for settlement of refugees and for allowing them to mingle with local communities” (Han).

By adopting these policies, China received recognition and support from the international community and effectively elevated its own international status. More importantly, China's far-reaching attempts to provide for these Chinese-Vietnamese refugees sent a powerful message throughout the overseas Chinese community, highlighting China's commitment to Chinese descendants. It also helped the CCP legitimize itself and bolster its image as the rightful homeland for all overseas Chinese.

#### *2.14 Regional Security/Geopolitics Argument*

China's response to the Vietnamese refugee crisis is consistent with the regional security/geopolitics argument, especially if China's refugee policies were intended to alleviate the explosive, ethnic tensions in Southeast Asia. Since before the outbreak of the Vietnamese refugee crisis, Southeast Asia has had a long history of ethnic discrimination and violence against the ethnic Chinese. While the Chinese made up of a small percentage of the population in these countries, they control a large percentage of the wealth. As Amy Chua in *World on Fire* pointed out, the Chinese is a “market-dominant minority.” The Chinese's “market dominance and intense resentment amongst the indigenous majority is characteristic of virtually every country in Southeast Asia except Thailand and Singapore” (61). This resentment has resulted in widespread persecution, discrimination, and violence against the

Chinese.

These tensions were further aggravated when the Vietnamese refugee crisis broke out and thousands of ethnic Chinese refugees flooded into neighboring countries in Southeast Asia. Not only did this upset the already sensitive ethnic balance in many of these countries, it also triggered widespread anti-Chinese sentiment. The Malaysian government for example, made it clear that the Vietnamese-Chinese refugees, especially those that were ethnically Chinese were not welcome in Malaysia. Other member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also expressed a deep unwillingness to take on the heavy burdens of caring for the Chinese refugees. The compounding effects of the anti-Chinese sentiments that had already existed in Southeast Asia and the influx of ethnic-Chinese refugees created an explosive situation that undermined the security of the region.

As these tensions worsened, frustrations became increasingly directed at China and “triggered sensitive relationships with Southeast Asian countries” (Godley qtd. in Ho 603). Because China regarded the refugees as “ethnic kin,” many of the countries felt that China was evading its responsibilities to provide for them and allowed these issues to spill over into their territories. Neighboring states viewed the overseas Chinese communities with suspicion and feared that China's “territorial expansion ambitions [...] could be realized through the Chinese populations within their countries” (Ho Security 60). Because of this, the rising anti-Chinese sentiments quickly transformed into anti-China sentiments. As Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, who is also of Chinese descent explained, “The more pressures [that] are placed on these countries, the more the balance is upset and the more anti-Chinese and anti-China they become” (Wain).

These anti-China sentiments also increasingly jeopardized China's regional interests in Southeast Asia. Melvin Gurtov in *China and Southeast Asia—the Politics of Survival: a Study of Foreign Policy Interaction* explained that “China's objective in Southeast Asia is the promotion of a

militarily quiescent, politically accessible region occupied by weaker (noncompetitive) states that are 'friendly' and 'non-hostile' (167). These anti-China sentiments increasingly antagonized these Southeast Asian countries and undermined China's attempt to “publicize its revolutionary ideology” (169) in the region.

In order to alleviate this increasingly dire situation and restore China's image in Southeast Asia, it was a wise move for the Chinese government to accept the Vietnamese-Chinese refugees. Removing the refugee presence in Southeast Asia would not only effectively soothe the building anti-Chinese and anti-China sentiments, it would also help China reestablish friendly relations with all these countries and restore stability in the region.

### *2.15 Social Security Argument*

The social security argument is equally effective in explaining China's response to the Vietnamese refugee crisis. In accordance to the argument, China did not perceive the Vietnamese refugees to be a great threat to the social security of China and was thus, more willing to accept them.

China viewed the refugees as Chinese descendants that were returning back to China. Even though the refugees originated from Vietnam, 80% of them were ethnically Chinese and China recognized them as part of the greater overseas Chinese community. The refugees' ethnic ties to China prompted China to view them as close kin rather than foreigners, even though these sentiments may not have been reciprocated. They possessed greater affinity to their adopted homeland than to China. “Many of the overseas-born Chinese may not have recognised China as 'home' until the events that compelled them to seek refuge there” (Ho Returnee 601). Despite this, many of the refugees were familiar with the Chinese culture and spoke regional Chinese dialects such as Cantonese, Hokkien, and Fujianese. In light of these qualities, China believed that the refugees would be able to cohere peacefully with local communities.

Secondly, the majority of the refugees were relocated to areas that were largely isolated from local Chinese communities. While highly skilled and educated refugees were often relocated to cities, the rest of the refugees were often settled in areas that were largely rural, undeveloped, and uninhabited. In *China As the 'Protector' of Co-Ethnics in Distress: Changing Episodes of Human Security Vulnerabilities over Space and Time*, the refugee-returnees that were interviewed recollected that “they and the voluntary returnees had a rude shock as the trucks transporting them approached the remote and underdeveloped villages in which they would be relocated. Some wanted the trucks to bring them back to the cities, but the party officials shepherding them to their new homes flatly refused” (Ho Security 61). Because most of these areas were remote and far away from other established towns, these refugees did not pose a major threat to the local communities or to the social security of the region.

Thirdly, the refugees' contributions to developing China's rural farmlands outweighed the social costs of resettling them. The Chinese government endured heavy social costs in the initial resettling of the refugees. A United Nations' report explain that, “the presence of a large refugee population in rural areas inevitably also means a strain on the local administration. Host country's national and regional authorities divert considerable resources and manpower from the pressing demands of their own development to the urgent task of keeping refugees alive, alleviating their sufferings and ensuring the security of the whole community” (*Social and Economic Impact of Large Refugee Populations on Host Developing Countries*). Since China's resettlement policy was comprehensive and provided the refugees with food, water, housing, etc., it inevitably diverted a significant amount resources away from the local communities.

Accepting these refugees however, did not necessarily hinder local governments from developing rural areas. In fact, refugees were expected to help develop the land and was assigned to do farm work upon their arrival. It was not until later on in the resettlement process that the refugees were



allocated salaries for their labor. Initially, the refugees' allocation of food was contingent on the work they did on the rural farms. Their contributions to developing China greatly diminished the initial social costs of resettling them.

Finally, China expected a good portion of the refugees to resettle again to third countries. Even though China received a large influx of refugees and bore heavy costs in helping them resettle into local communities, China also anticipated that many of them will reunite with their extended families in other countries. The *Foreign Affairs Journal* published an article titled, "The Indochina Refugee Crisis" that explained that out of the 250,000 Vietnamese refugees that China had accepted, Peking estimated that "30,000 ethnic Vietnamese among the refugees wanted to settle in third countries." This did in fact happen. After arriving to China, a large wave of refugees flooded into Hong Kong, which was still a British colony at the time. According to Chen Xiaoying's *Study on Hong Kong's Vietnamese Immigrants from China*, this led the British administration to adopt the *dilei* immigration policy, which states that as long as the refugees can prove that they are reuniting with relatives or can find housing, the Hong Kong government would be willing to accept them.

As the evidence shows, China did not perceive the Vietnamese refugees to be a great threat to the social security of China. The fact that the majority of the refugees were ethnically Chinese is a driving reason why China did not view them as a threat and is also reminiscent to the ethnic ties argument. Because of these reasons, China was more willing to accept the refugees.

## **2.2 North Korean Refugee Crisis**

The first cross-border refugees that entered into China from North Korea occurred in the 1960s. They crossed the Sino-Korean border in small numbers and did not become a significant issue until the 1980s when China formally recognized these border-crossers as refugees (Lam). Despite this, the Chinese government continued to turn a blind eye to these refugees for a considerable amount of

time after the 1980s. Kathleen E. McLaughlin, in *For Refugees in China it pays to be from Burma not North Korea*, explains that interviews with local Han Chinese citizens residing along the border reveal how it was not unusual to see North Koreans crossing the Yalu river in broad daylight to escape starvation and political prosecution. Many North Korean teenagers, often called *kkotjebi* or “fluttering swallows,” (Song 162) would temporarily cross the North Korean border into China in search of food, and when they were fed, they would return back to North Korea.

It was not until the North Korean famine in 1997, which caused an estimated 20,000-30,000 refugees to flood into China, did China initiate major crack downs. Unlike how China chose to handle the Vietnamese refugees, China maintained a strict “no acceptance” policy and has been determined to repatriate all North Korean “escapees” back to their own country. The Chinese government dramatically increased its security measures alongside the Sino-Korean border, authorizing the People's Liberation Army to conduct regular patrols along the border. The 2010 *Chinese Defence Report Q1* also claims that “North Korean police have been seen working with the Chinese to round up refugees.” Because many local Chinese families harbor North Korean refugees in their homes, local Chinese police forces later “created a net of systemic search and house-to-house arrests” to round up all these North Korean refugees (S. Lee 88). Additionally, the Chinese government also restricted the activities of international non-profits, relief organizations, and missionary groups, often refusing to allow them to set up camp on the Chinese side of the Sino-Korean border to provide aid for North Korean refugees.

Despite these efforts, North Korean refugees have continued to enter China through the northeastern provinces of Liaoning, Heilongjiang, and Jilin. Fleeing from starvation, poverty, and an oppressive political regime, many of the refugees move into China through a variety of underground networks. Song explains that “Chinese-organized smuggling networks, South Korean missionaries and foreign NGO activists have been actively involved in the internal movements of North Korean[s] and transporting them across the Chinese borders to neighboring South-East Asian countries” (Song 164).

The International Crisis Group also released a report in 2006 explaining how Chinese gangs that used to smuggle illegal migrants to Southeast Asia have also jumped on the North Korean smuggling business, contributing significantly to the efforts of the 'Seoul Train' underground railroad. Many of these refugees flee to third countries, usually in Southeast Asia before finding ways to enter South Korea. However, thousands of North Korean refugees continue to live under the radar in China and face great risks of being discovered by the Chinese government and repatriated back to North Korea.

The consequences of being discovered are extremely severe for the North Korean refugees. By escaping into China, the refugees will be considered political defectors or traitors to the state when they are deported back to North Korea. Because of this, they will likely be sent to concentration camps, political prisons, or face public execution upon return. Their family members and relatives would also be charged with guilt by association and face similar punishments. Despite this risk of being persecuted, North Korean refugees are not guaranteed protection by the international community.

While the UNHRC recognizes the North Korean escapees as refugees under the *refoulement* clause in Article 33 of the Refugee Convention because the refugees have a well founded fear of returning back to their home country, there are major flaws in the UNHRC refugee treaties. First of all, refugees must be propelled to leave their home state due to *political reasons* in order to be granted refugee status. Because of this, North Koreans that have escaped because of economic reasons such as starvation or poverty do not qualify as a refugee under this clause. For these reasons, North Korean defectors are often described as “international orphans” (S. Lee 83). Secondly, the fate of the refugees are determined by the accepting state. Because China viewed the North Koreans as “economic migrants” instead of refugees, it has refused to accept the North Koreans even if it is a blatant violation of the *refoulement* clause in the Refugee Convention.

As a signatory state of the UNHRC refugee treaties, China's strict “no-acceptance” policy of the North Korean refugees has ignited international criticism. China has been accused of violating

international law in addition to human rights. Nevertheless, China has continued to uphold its strict refugee policies. China has only soften its stance when refugees make the world headlines. For example, on August 26, 2002, seven North Korean refugees attempted to enter into China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters and demanded to be recognized as refugees. The refugees were subsequently arrested, but their plight caught the attention of the international media and subjected China to intense international pressures. In the end, China released the seven refugees. Even though this incident forced China to temporarily accede to international and humanitarian norms, Lee warns that “if the wave of embassy invasions continues, China most likely would stop the foreign NGO's operations altogether and close off its border with North Korea” (S. Lee 88). This in turn, will subject the North Korean refugees to even greater risks and dangers in China. The following section will now analyze how effective the five arguments are in explaining China's response to the North Korean Refugee Crisis.

### *2.21 Ethnic Ties Argument*

Even though the ethnic ties argument is derived from the long-standing Theory of Privileged Migration Theory, it is difficult to assess its effectiveness in explaining China's response to the North Korean refugee crisis because it is unclear what the argument defines as “ethnic ties,” especially in the case of China.

China is an incredibly diverse country and is populated with fifty-six officially recognized ethnic groups. The largest of which is the Han ethnicity, which constitutes over 90% of the total population in China (Schubert 49). The remaining fifty-five ethnic groups make up the remaining 2% of the population with an estimated 105 million people. Many of these ethnic minority groups are concentrated in the geographic periphery of China in the north, northwest, northeast, south, and southwest.

While the majority of the Vietnamese refugees were ethnically Han, all of the North Korean refugees are ethnically Korean with no ties to the Han ethnicity. The North Korean refugees however, do share close kinship ties to the Korean-Chinese or *Chaioxianzu* ethnicity. The Korean-Chinese are a minority ethnic group that resides on the Chinese side of the Sino-Korean border. “There are approximately 800,000 ethnic Koreans living in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, the north-eastern border city in China adjunct to North Korea, and they amount to 36.7 per cent of the Yanbian population in 2009” (China Navor qtd. in Song 163). Both the Korean-Chinese and the North Koreans speak similar Korean dialects and share a similar cultural heritage.

In addition to the close kinship ties between the North Koreans and the Korean-Chinese, they also share close historic ties. During the turmoil in the 1950-1960s, which resulted in wide-spread famine, political purges, and prosecution in China, thousands of Korean-Chinese flooded into North Korea to seek help from their relatives. Thus, when a series of natural disasters swept through North Korea in the mid-1990s, causing large-scale famine and disease, the Korean-Chinese were prompted to help the North Koreans in return.

The Korean-Chinese have also played an instrumental role in helping other North Korean refugees escape into China. In addition to setting up and operating the “Seoul Train,” an underground passageway constructed to smuggle North Korean refugees into China, once they arrive, many Korean-Chinese households also provide for and illegally house them. Because of this, many Korean-Chinese have been arrested and detained by Chinese law enforcement.

While the Korean-Chinese share very close ties to the North Koreans, they are recognized by the Chinese government as a legitimate Chinese ethnic group. Amelia Schubert, in *Contesting Koreanness: Migration as a Challenge to the Ethnic Identity of the Korean Chinese*, explains that the “Korean Chinese were granted their own *minzu* [or Chinese ethnic identification], along with their own administrative region, as early as 1952” (53). Thus, by extension, the North Korean refugees also share

ethnic ties to the indigenous Chinese. According to the ethnic ties argument, China should be more willing to accept these refugees and provide them with preferential-immigration rights because of their ethnicity. Despite this, the Chinese government has continued to enforce its strict policy of non-acceptance and even taken direct action to round up and deport all North Korean refugees back to North Korea.

Because it is unclear whether the “ethnic ties” in the ethnic ties argument applies strictly to the Han ethnicity or can also refer to the Korean-Chinese (*Chaioxianzu*) ethnicity, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of this argument. But this case study suggests that unless the refugees are ethnically Han, the Chinese government will not recognize their ethnic ties to China. Furthermore, unless the refugees are Han, the Chinese government will not grant them preferential immigration rights like in the case of the Vietnamese refugees. This role that ethnicity plays in formulating China's refugee policies is consistent with Stevan Harrell's argument that the Chinese have “an innate, almost visceral Han sense of superiority” (Harrell qtd. in Jacques 316). While Chinese minority policies assert that all ethnic groups are treated equally and are bestowed the same rights, in reality, minority cultures are only “recognized at a superficial level [and are] not treated as equal of the Han in more substantive matters” (Jacques 317). The Vietnamese and North Korean case studies demonstrate the significance of ethnic ties in determining China's refugee policies.

## 2.22 *Economic Argument*

China's response to the North Korean refugee crises is aligned with the economic argument. Accepting the North Korean refugees would accrue extremely high economic costs for China because it can potentially disrupt all cross-border trade between China and North Korea. Since the economic reforms in the early 1990s, the Chinese Communist Party's overriding priority has been economic development. As Kahrs argues in *Regional Security Complex Theory and Chinese Policy towards*

*North Korea-China*, the “Chinese Communist Party has effectively tied its legitimacy to economic growth” (70). The Party's legitimacy no longer depends on its revolutionary credentials, but on its ability to carry out its promises, especially in improving the living standards of the Chinese people and maintaining stability. Failure to deliver will almost indefinitely result in widespread social unrest and instability in China. Not only will this directly challenge the Chinese government's capacity to deal with this social instability, it will also severely undermine the authority and control of the Chinese government.

When the North Korean refugees first started flooding into China in large numbers, the North Korean regime appeared to be ready to fully open up its market to China and there was great optimism that North Korea was finally ready to embrace international trade and invest in its own development (McLaughlin Struggle). Even though this prophecy did not materialize, China has continue to be North Korea's most important ally and possesses a near trade monopoly with North Korea. According to McLaughlin, cross-border trade between China and North Korea has increased by 20% per year since the 1990s. Liu Hongcai, the Chinese ambassador to Pyongyang also explains that “As Pyongyang attaches more importance to developing its economy and improving the livelihood of its people, it is reaching out for more foreign economic cooperation. Such a need provides business opportunities for many Chinese enterprises” (Gill 5). China recognizes that there is immense economic potential in North Korea and growing bilateral trade will continue to spur economic growth through Northeast Asia.

Because of these growing economic ties, it is too costly for China to accept the North Korean refugees. First of all, acceptance of the refugees can disrupt all cross-border trade between China and North Korea and jeopardize China's return on its investment in North Korea. China went to great lengths to set up a joint steering committee with North Korea to determine the future direction of economic cooperation between the two countries. Following the diplomatic meeting between Chen

Bingde, China's Minister of Commerce and Jang Sung Thaek, the Director of North Korea's Central Administration Department, China and North Korea was finally able to reach a consensus to develop several economic trade zones between the two countries. These include the Rason Economic and Trade Zone and the Hwanggumpyong and Wiwha Islands, which are located strategically between Rajin and Sonbong on the northeast coast of North Korea and along the Yalu River. China anticipates these economic zones to greatly facilitate trade between China and North Korea and reap great economic benefits for China.

In addition to developing these trade zones, China has also invested heavily in building the economic infrastructure in North Korea to pave the way for facilitate bilateral trade in the future. In 2011, China started construction on a new four-lane bridge across the Yalu River, costing China 1.8 billion yuan. China also initiated the construction of a 53.5 km road reconstruction project that would stretch between Wonjeong-ri and Rason, costing China an additional 150 million yuan. Apart from these two projects, China and North Korea have also established “green channels” (Gill 5) between the two countries that ease customs procedures at certain border crossings, making it easier for Chinese investors to invest in North Korea. Because of these prior investments, China is extremely unwilling to accept any North Korean refugees. Large, uncontrollable flows of refugees across the border have the potential to disrupt all cross-border trade and jeopardize future trade relations between China and North Korea.

Secondly, accepting the refugees will disrupt the existing bilateral trade between these two countries. As the Chinese ambassador to North Korea revealed, “trade volume between China and North Korea has grown six-fold between 2000 and 2009. China’s exports to North Korea nearly doubled from 2007 to 2008 alone. Trade between the two countries experienced a slight downturn in 2009 when the UN imposed sanctions in the wake of North Korea’s nuclear test in 2008. However, by 2010, trade rebounded and reached its previous levels and will likely continue to expand” (Gills 2).



Trade between China and North Korea have already expanded to a variety of sectors and products. According to Choi in *China's Strategic Goals in the Kim Jong-Un Era*, “the North has expanded its commission-based processing trade for China's clothing and sewing products” (112) and there has also been a significant upsurge in China's import of iron ore and briquettes from North Korea. Interviews with Louxian International Logistics Co., a Chinese-based company also revealed how profitable it is to trade North Korean fish to South Korea and Japan and how Chinese enterprises have managed to start businesses by building cement factories inside North Korea (McLaughlin Struggle). Because of these current economic ties, China is unwilling to accept North Korean refugees and thereby risk disrupting bilateral trade with North Korea.

Thirdly, China is counting on bilateral trade with North Korea to revitalize the economies of its northeast region. If it accepted the North Korean refugees, this could jeopardize the economies in China's northeast provinces. In an article about China's New Exit-Entry Law, Chodorow explains that “Since 1986, China began to experience a new trend of economic immigration. As China modernizes and urbanizes, smaller families are preferred, labor growth is slowing, and elderly population is increasing wage pressure and economic immigration.” Because of these trends, China's northeast provinces including Liaoning and Jilin have been sites of some of the greatest labor unrest in China.

To alleviate this situation and spur economic development in the region, China has invested heavily in bilateral trade with North Korea. Increasing trade with North Korea has not only helped bolster the economies of China's “northeast rust belt,” it also helped distribute wealth throughout other parts of northeast China. Bates Gill argues that with “improved economic prospects for northeast China, [...] local governments and domestic security authorities will be vested in economic development and the accompanying reduced likelihood of unrest in this part of the country” (Gill 6). Accepting the North Korean refugees could jeopardizes the opportunity to rejuvenate local economies and also aggravate labor unrest and instability in northeast China.

After a thorough examination of the economic costs associated with receiving the North Korean refugees, it is understandable why China refuse to accept them. Unlike the Vietnamese refugees, accepting the North Korean refugees could accrue substantially higher economic costs. Not only would it severely disrupt the increasing trade relations between China and North Korea, it will also jeopardize the Chinese investment in North Korea and confiscate an opportunity to rejuvenate the local economies in northeast China. Because of these economic factors, the economic argument is consistent and aligned with China's response to both the Vietnamese and North Korean refugee crisis.

### *2.23 International Status Argument*

The international status argument, which suggests that China's refugee policies are fueled by its desire to enhance its international status is ineffective in explaining China's response to the North Korean refugee crisis. In fact, China's North Korean refugee policy has resulted in the opposite effect. China was chastised by the international community for actively persecuting the North Korean refugees and violating their human rights.

Because China is a signatory state of the UN refugee treaties, China's refusal to accept the North Korean refugees has been viewed as a blatant disregard for international law as well as an evasion of China's international responsibilities. Even though China has defended itself by reasoning that the North Koreans are “economic migrants” instead of refugees and should not be entitled to any form of protection from the Chinese government, the UN has not acknowledged this rationale. While most of the North Korean refugees are drawn to China because of economic factors, the United Nations still regard them as refugees because they will likely face political persecution if deported back to North Korea. This is clearly articulated in the Refoulement Clause in Article 33 of the Refugee Convention, which entitles the refugees to protection and prevents them from being sent back to their home country ("Part II Strategic Review Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 58/153").

Despite this, China has continued to carry out its strict policy of “non-acceptance” and has even increased its efforts to patrol the Sino-Korean border to round up refugees and actively deport them back to North Korea. Because of these actions, China has received great international criticism and pressure to reverse its refugee policies. As Sokeel Park also points out in *China's North Korean Refugee Problem*, “China is hemorrhaging soft-power on this issue, alienating the South Korean people and government and damaging their reputation before the international community. In the long-run this is a strategic mistake” (Park).

Apart from being criticized for disregarding international law, China has also been under attack for violating the human rights of the North Korean refugees. In addition to actively persecuting the North Korean refugees, China has also refused to allow the UNHRC, Christian missionary associations, refugee-relief NGOs, or even UN investigators access to northeast China where the North Korean refugees are concentrated. As a result, organizations like Amnesty International, Anti-Slavery, Good Friends, the International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch and the US Committee on Human Rights in North Korea are unable to provide direct assistance to the refugees. Song explains how this forces “NGOs, missionaries and brokers [...] to assist the refugees by illegally breaking the PRC's domestic jurisdiction and fill in the gaps by transnationally smuggling North Koreans throughout East Asia.” Additionally, many “devoted NGO activists [that] have helped North Koreans [...] have been arrested and detained by the Chinese authorities” (164) .

China has also been attacked for turning a blind eye on the transnational trafficking of North Korean women. Because of China's One-Child Policy, there is a great imbalance in the national gender ratio. According to Lampton, “The skewed sex ratio (the number of males born divided by the number of females born) in China has become dramatically more unbalanced since the late 1970s, reaching 119.2:100 in 2000 and 118:100 in 2005” (218). This has led to an increase in the trafficking of women throughout China for prostitution and to be sold as “wives.” North Korean women are particularly

vulnerable and have been trafficked throughout China. Despite this, China has failed to protect these refugees and trafficked victims, even if many of the North Korean women bear the children of their own citizens. An article published through Dajiyuan, a Chinese online newspaper, explained how North Korean women that have been impregnated by Chinese men are still forcibly deported back to North Korea. They are strung together by piercing barb-wire through their shoulder blades and transported back to North Korea. Their babies are forcibly aborted or slaughtered in front of their mothers (Hong). China's failure to address the trafficking of these North Korean female refugees not only violate International Refugee Law, but also violate multiple clauses in the UN Convention including Transnational Organized Crime, the Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, the Palermo Protocol, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air.

China's refugee policies in the North Korean refugee crisis did not enhance China's international status in any obvious way like it did during the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis. In fact, China was attacked for its outright disregard for human rights and its violation of international law. Thus, the international status argument is only consistent in the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis but is ineffective in explaining China's response to the North Korean refugee crisis.

#### *2.24 Regional Security/Geopolitics*

The regional security/geopolitics argument is one of the most compelling and most commonly cited explanations for China's response to the North Korean refugee crisis. It contends that by adopting a strict, no-acceptance refugee policy, China will not only be able to maintain border and regional security, it will also help China gain an upper hand in the geopolitics in the region. The following paragraphs will explore the validity of this argument in explaining China's response to this crisis.

### **Border/Regional Security**

Securing the Sino-Korean border and stabilizing the North Korean regime continues to be one of China's greatest priorities. Li Guogang, the Deputy Director of the Chinese Academy explains that “China has a single border policy and it's quite simple: stability [...] If the borders in China are not stable, all of China will be unstable. If the border areas are not developed, all of China will be undeveloped” (McLaughlin Struggle). This is particularly true in the case of North Korea. Instability in the China-North Korea border can result in instability in China.

Song argues that “A mass exodus from North Korea may destabilize the [Chinese] north-eastern border region, where some 800,000 ethnic Koreans have been residing since the late nineteenth century” (162). Not only would large inflows of refugees overwhelm domestic policing efforts, the refugees would also compete with local populations for vital resources such as food, water, and land. As Bates Gill laid out in *China's North Korea Policy: Assessing Interests and Influences*, “[China's] Liaoning and Jilin provinces – that border on North Korea have [already] been the scene of some of the greatest labor unrest in China” (6). If refugees flood into Northeast China and compete with the local communities for the same jobs, it can bring about a potentially explosive situation in northeast China. The presence of a large refugee population can also aggravate ethnic tensions, exhaust environmental resources, and raise the crime rate.

Maintaining security alongside the Sino-Korean border is equally critical for the survival of the North Korean regime and the stability of Northeast Asia. A large exodus of North Korean refugees into Chinese borderlands could destabilize the North Korean regime and threaten to bring about a collapse of the entire state. Such a collapse would result in a sudden power vacuum in the region. Since “China, Japan, Russia and the US all consider Korea to fall, to some extent, within their own geo-strategic sphere,” any changes in North Korea can significantly affect the balance of power in Northeast Asia (Kahrs 64). Because of this, many of the surrounding states will be prompted to contend for control over the region once North Korea collapses. This struggle for power will result in an “onslaught of

regional insecurity” and even potentially lead to war (H. Lee).

Driven by this fear of destabilizing North Korea, China has already implemented a variety of policies to prevent the collapse of North Korea. For instance, in defiance against international sanctions, China has more than doubled its humanitarian aid to North Korea. According to Bill Gertz in “China Doubles Aid to North Korea Under Kim Jong-Un,” Beijing's aid to North Korea “doubled from \$2.68 billion in 2009 to nearly \$6.96 billion in 2014.” China has also invested heavily in building trade relations with North Korea in an attempt to induce gradual political and economic reform in North Korea. Thus, China's refusal to accept the North Korean refugees may be another preventative measure that China adopted to ensure the survival of North Korea as well as the stability of northeast China and Northeast Asia.

### **Geopolitics**

By restricting the flow of North Korean refugees from coming in from the border, China can also strengthen its ties with North Korea and increase its influence in the strategic region of Northeast Asia. “Northeast Asia is not a straightforward area to look at, because of the difficulty in distinguishing between regional and global levels. There is a heavy American military presence, and three of the main actors with security interests in the region – the United States, China and the Russian Federation – are nuclear weapons states with permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council” (Kahrs 64). Northeast Asia also possesses a “heavy concentration of military capabilities, high levels of tension, the economic and technological capacity to support a hi-tech arms race,” that can easily jeopardize China's interests in the region (64). Because of this, it is in China's best interest to strengthen its ties with North Korea and use North Korea to leverage itself in the region.

Adopting a non-acceptance policy of the North Korean refugees will be an effective way for China to strengthen its ties with North Korea. As the previous sections explained, by securing its

border, China can help stabilize North Korea and prevent a possible collapse of the regime. It would also demonstrate China's commitment to the 1962 Sino-North Korean Border Treaty, which requires China to repatriate all illegal, North Korean migrants back to North Korea. By strengthening ties with North Korea, China can effectively increase its influence in Northeast Asia.

First of all, China's exclusive access to North Korea will help leverage itself over other major powers in the Northeast Asian region. As the only state that shares a close communist "brotherhood" with North Korea, the repressive 'Hermit Kingdom,' China yields significant influence over the state. Because of this, China has taken advantage of its exclusive access to North Korea and served as the outside world's link to the regime. For example, China was one of the only states that was able to convince North Korea to participate in the Six-Party Talks, which was focused on urging North Korea to demilitarize and eliminate its nuclear program. According to Lampton, China supplies North Korea with the majority of their energy resources. By cleverly employing a "technical problem" on one of the oil pipelines, China "use[d] this supply interruption to create pressure to Pyongyang to join multilateral talks about its nuclear efforts" (110). Even though the Six-Party Talks ultimately failed, China's close ties to North Korea significantly increased China's influence in the region.

While recent reports claim that China's leverage over North Korea is rapidly diminishing and the old revolutionary ties and ideologies between the two states are no longer influential, China still yields significantly more leverage over North Korea than other states. For instance, an NBC coverage of Secretary of State, John Kerry's recent visit to South Korea explains that "The key to everything is China [...] China is the only one with leverage [over North Korea]" (China: the 'only ones with leverage' on North Korea). China also continues to exert a certain level of influence over North Korea because of North Korea's economic dependence on China. Not only has China more than doubled its humanitarian aid to North Korea in the last few years, it is also responsible for nearly 90% of the North Korean economy (McLaughlin Trade). With North Korea facing sanctions from the UN and multiple

other bilateral sanctions from South Korea, Japan, and the United States, North Korea has increased its reliance on China. Because of this, China adopted its strict repatriation policy of North Korean refugees as a way to preserve the remaining leverage that it has over the North Korean state and to maintain its position of influence in Northeast Asia.

Secondly, developing closer ties with North Korea can give China a greater say in the terms of reunification if North Korea were to collapse. As Kahrs explains, “In the longer term, the surrounding countries wish to prevent a reunified Korean from tilting towards one of the other powers in the region. The degree of external support for reunification would largely depend on the circumstances leading to unification and the nature of the process itself” (68). Driven by the fear that after the collapse of North Korea, the Korean peninsula will be dominated by external powers that pose a threat to China's national security and territorial integrity, China is determined to prevent other states from increasing their presence in the region. This is especially the case with the United States, which still maintains close relations with South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan and effectively surrounds the Chinese state. China fears that following a collapse of North Korea, the United States will build an anti-China coalition in the western Pacific. In order to prevent this scenario from manifesting and to maintain its influence in the region, China was prompted to secure its close ties with North Korea and reject the North Korean refugees.

Thirdly, repatriating the North Korean refugees back to North Korea can also help China restrict the United States' current presence in Northeast Asia. As Professor Niu in *Introduction to History of Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China (1949-2000)* explained, history has demonstrated that China has rarely been able to tolerate global powers like the United States and the Soviet Union in close proximity to Chinese borders. Even though the Cold War has ended, the Korean War is one of the only conflicts that is still 'hot,' prompting China to continue viewing American presence near its borders as a great threat. By maintaining close relations with North Korea, China hopes that “North



Korea [will] evolve into a new strategic buffer zone [...] protecting Chinese security and economic interests” (Choi 107) and keeping the United States at a distance from China.

Finally, by maintaining its strict deportation policy, China can also restrict both American and western influence in China. A large presence of North Korean refugees naturally attract a variety of international human rights, refugee relief, and religious organizations. If China accepted all the North Korean refugees, these organizations would flood into northeast China and set up camp alongside the Chinese side of the Sino-Korean border. Having such a strong western presence in China, especially along this strategic border between China and North Korea, would be extremely unsettling for China. Seymour explains that “Those who help illegal immigrants are prosecuted under the Chinese jurisdiction and, furthermore, from the Chinese and North Korean perspectives, NGOs are seen as political or sectarian, anti-communist, anti-DPRK and “Christian fundamentalist[s]” (Seymour qtd in Lee 163). To prevent this scenario from occurring, China adopted a non-acceptance refugee policy.

China's refusal to accept the North Korean refugees is very much aligned with the regional security/geopolitics argument. Adopting this refugee policy will not only help maintain stability within China, it will also prevent instability alongside the Sino-Korean border and in North Korea. It can also strengthen China's ties with North Korea and allow China to gain political leverage over North Korea and enhance its own position in the geopolitics and balance of power in Northeast Asia.

### *2.25 Social Security Argument*

China's response to the North Korean Refugee Crisis is aligned with the social security argument, which suggests that China's a strict, no-acceptance policy of the North Korean refugees is fueled by concerns about social security within the Chinese state. Hypothetically, the social costs of accepting the North Korean refugees should be much greater than the social cost of accepting the Vietnamese refugees. This appears to be the case, especially because the North Korean refugees are not

ethnically Chinese.

The North Korean refugees' cultural background would pose a great challenge for them to integrate into Chinese society. Unlike the Hoa, the North Koreans were unable to speak local and regional Chinese languages and were unfamiliar with Chinese culture. This makes it very difficult for the North Koreans to become positive contributors to China – both economically and socially. For instance, the Vietnamese refugees could fill in jobs in the medical and teaching fields almost immediately after relocating because of their language abilities and skill sets. The North Korean refugees on the other hand, would need a significant amount of language and job training in order to be employed in China. Their presence would also become a great burden to local communities.

China also feared that the refugees would disrupt the social security in the region by aggravating ethnic tensions between the Korean-Chinese residing on the border and the Han Chinese. The ethnic tensions between the Korean-Chinese and the Han trace back to the years following the Cultural Revolution. Schubert explains that before the Cultural Revolution, the Yanbian area, an autonomous Korean region in northeast China, had a relatively high standard of living. But the economic growth in the region stagnated by the end of the 1970s while the rest of China's urban economy exploded. Thus, “a sense of relative poverty, combined with resentment over Cultural Revolution grievances, resulted in previously rare conflicts between Korean Chinese and Han” (Schubert 43).

Beijing has an ingrained fear that accepting the North Korean refugees will escalate these existing tensions. Many Korean-Chinese have already shown defiance against the Chinese government by actively helping North Korean refugees escape from North Korea and illegally housing them in their own homes. The Chinese government is also wary that the growing number of ethnic Koreans in Yanbian “may link to other minorities such as Uyghurs or Tibetans” and threaten China's minority policies (163). Kahrs in *Regional Security Complex Theory and Chinese Policy towards North Korea-*

*China* also argued that as these ethnic tensions grow, there is “potential for economic problems to intersect with ethnic tensions and [cause a] knock-out effect in other parts of China” (73).

Due to the fact that the North Korean refugees were not ethnically-Han, China viewed the social costs of accepting the North Korean refugees to be extremely high. Consequently, China was unwilling to accept the refugees, fearing that it would cause instability.

### Chapter Three: Analysis

Out of these five arguments, four of them were consistent with China's response to the two refugee crises. The international status argument is the only one that is clearly ineffective in explaining China's refugee policies. By accepting the Vietnamese refugees, China greatly elevated its international status. This helped the CCP challenge the legitimacy of the KMT and establish itself as the rightful homeland for the Chinese. China also received recognition and support from the international community, most notably with the UNHRC. China's response to the North Korean Refugee Crisis on the other hand, brought about the opposite effect. China's active persecution and repatriation of the North Korean refugees did not enhance its international status in any obvious way. In fact, China was attacked by the international community for its violation of international law and disregard for human rights. This discrepancy invalids the international status argument.

The remaining four arguments, ethnic ties, economic development, social security, and regional security/geopolitics, are valid explanations but range in their effectiveness to explain China's policy decisions. The regional security/geopolitics is the weakest of the four. While it was incredibly compelling in the North Korean case, it was much less convincing in the Vietnam crisis. China's response to the North Korean Refugee Crisis drew on several layers of analysis. Not only was China concerned about its own border security, it also feared that the North Korean refugees would threaten

regional and global security. Application of the regional security/geopolitics argument on the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis on the other hand centered around a single rationale, which was to subdue ethnic tensions in Southeast Asia. The regional security/geopolitics argument provides a much more convincing explanation for China's response to the North Korean Refugee Crisis than it did for the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis.

The remaining three arguments are the most compelling of the five. The ethnic ties, economic, and social security arguments clearly show how the corresponding absence and presence of the same factors account for the discrepancy in China's policy response. For example, the ethnic ties argument contends that China adopted the policies it did because the Vietnamese refugees were Han-Chinese but the North Korean refugees were not. China viewed itself as an ancestral homeland to the Hoa and felt compelled to protect them. But it did not share this same sense of responsibility for the North Korean refugees.

Furthermore, the social security argument shows how the social costs of accepting the North Korean refugees were substantially higher than the costs of accepting the Vietnamese refugees. Unlike the Hoa who were ethnically Chinese and could speak various dialects like Mandarin, Cantonese, and Hakka, the North Korean refugees were unfamiliar with Chinese culture and unable to speak Chinese languages. This made it significantly more difficult for North Korean refugees to integrate into Chinese society than Vietnamese refugees. Additionally, because the North Korean refugees were not Han, China feared that their presence would upset the ethnic balance in the northeastern provinces and aggravate ethnic tensions between the Korean-Chinese and the Han. Due to the difference in social costs of accepting each refugee group, it is rational for China to adopt the policies that it did.

This same logic appears in the economic argument. The economic costs of accepting the North Korean refugees were notably higher than the economic costs of accepting the Vietnamese refugees. In fact, the Hoa brought a variety of economic benefits to China. They filled specialized jobs, attracted

investments into China, and also played an invaluable role in opening up and developing China throughout the 1980s. Accepting the North Korean refugees on the other hand, would jeopardize all cross-border trade between China and North Korea. The refugees would also compete with local Chinese citizens for jobs in regions that already experience high levels of labor unrest and instability. This stark difference in the economic cost of accepting North Korean refugees versus the Vietnamese refugees helps explain why China responded the way it did.

While the ethnic ties, social security, and economic arguments provide convincing explanations for China's policies, it is important to note that there are some obvious overlaps between these three arguments. Because the Chinese government had effectively tied its own legitimacy to economic development and recognized economic growth as the key to maintaining social security, the economic argument can be merged into the social security argument. Ethnic ties and social security then are the main driving factors of China's refugee policies.

This, however, does not imply that ethnic ties and social security are the *only* factors that are essential to understanding how China responds to refugee crises. China is unlikely to accept, resettle, and provide for tens of thousands of Vietnamese refugees solely because they can potentially contribute to the development of China. The Chinese government is equally unlikely to repatriate all North Korean refugees and jeopardize its international status simply because they are not Han. Isolating these two key factors is only the beginning of the story. These two factors are as much the key drivers of Chinese refugee policy as they are the starting point for how China evaluates refugee crises. If the crisis involves refugees that are ethnically Chinese, China will adopt an approach centered around ethnic ties. But if the refugees are not ethnically Han, China will prioritize security and stability when formulating its refugee policies. Ethnic ties and security then, form the foundation for how China evaluates and makes sense of other significant factors such as regional security, geopolitics, and international status.

For example, China's response to the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis is much more compelling

when ethnic ties become the core of the explanation. Concerns about China's international status suddenly become a much greater consideration once the refugees involved are of Chinese descent because China's treatment of the refugees will directly affect its status and legitimacy in overseas Chinese communities. Similarly, because the refugees are ethnically Chinese, it alleviated much of China's fears about social security. The Chinese government was confident that because of the refugees' ethnic and cultural ties to China, they were unlikely to cause unrest in the Chinese society and would be able to integrate easily with local Chinese communities. The refugees also provided China with a gateway to tap into the economic and intellectual wealth of overseas Chinese communities. Finally, China felt compelled to intervene in the refugee crisis because the Vietnamese-Chinese refugees aroused anti-Chinese and anti-China sentiments that threatened to destabilize Southeast Asia. Reexamining the five arguments through ethnic ties paints a much more complete picture of why China adopted its acceptance policy during the Vietnamese Refugee Crisis.

This same pattern appears in the North Korean Refugee Crisis. China's response is much more compelling when security/stability becomes the core of the explanation. Because the North Korean refugees are not ethnically Han, the Chinese government feared that they would severely undermine the social security of the region. Not only would the North Korean refugees face challenges in integrating into Chinese society, they would also aggravate existing ethnic tensions between the Korean-Chinese and the Han-Chinese. Accepting the North Korean refugees will also severely disrupt all cross-border trade between China and North Korea and destabilizing the border. This in turn, can undermine the stability of the North Korean regime and jeopardize the security of Northeast Asian. Placing stability/security as the core of the explanation helps map out the interplay between these five factors and reveals a much more complete and credible explanation for China's response to the North Korean Refugee Crisis.

#### Chapter Four: Conclusion

Identifying ethnic ties and security/stability to be the major factors that shape China's refugee policy reveals key information about how China views itself and its relationship with the rest of the world. By prioritizing ethnic ties and security/stability it is evident that China's refugee policies are still largely China-centric and driven by self-interest. It also shows that China continues to view refugee crises as a predominantly state-to-state affair rather than a regional or even global issue. China is yet to recognize the amount of power and influence it holds in refugee crises. It is perhaps the only state in the entire region whose domestic policies can have implications on a regional or even global scale. Because of this, Asian refugee crises present an invaluable, springboard opportunity for China to establish itself as a reputable and influential leader in both Asia and the world.

What China needs to recognize is that the handling of refugee crises is an adaptive challenge (Heifetz) rather than a policy issue. Asian refugee crises are not isolated, individual occurrences. They are part of a much bigger systematic issue in the region that 1) creates refugees and 2) lacks the institutional capacity to effectively absorb and handle them. While it is relatively easy to solve each refugee crisis in a state-to-state manner and on a case-by-case basis, refugee crises can not be resolved by adopting the "right" refugee policy. No matter how many North Korean refugees China arrests and repatriates back to North Korea, it still can not resolve this crisis and the impending threat to its own security. Devoting all these resources in securing its border with North Korea also can not prevent other refugee groups from flooding into its porous borders. Even though it is difficult to accept, the handling of Asian refugee crises will not be solved by quick and easy solutions. They will need a significant amount of time to implement and will require changes in approaches, beliefs, values, and even relations between China and the rest of Asia. But it is precisely a challenge that is as formidable as this one that calls upon China. Few other states in the region can lead in the face of a challenge that is as complex,

diverse, and widespread as this one.

China already shows great ambition in becoming a key leader in Asia. This is evident in Chinese slogans like the "peaceful rise" and the "China Dream," which convey images of a new and powerful China that is ready to emerge onto the world stage as a leader. It is also highlighted in China's role as a global, economic powerhouse or even in bestsellers like Martin Jacques' provocative *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*. What stands between the current China and a global leader however, are three obstacles. First, as Lampton in *Three Faces of Chinese Power* explained, China faces distinct challenges to developing internally while maintaining domestic security. Second, while China is confronting a variety of internal challenges, "the outside world is making demands on it to conform to a variety of international 'norms' [and responsibilities] that did not exist when Europe and the United States developed" (Lampton 209). Third, China has yet to find a balance between exhibiting its growing strengths without alienating or threatening surrounding countries. The recent growth in China's military capabilities, its territorial claims in the South China Sea, and even its proposed plans to build a "New Silk Road" have aroused suspicion and fear from other Asian states. China needs to find a way to increase its influence in the region in a more effective and less threatening way. Stepping up and leading efforts to redefine how Asia should handle refugee crises is an effective way to overcome these obstacles.

As Lampton laid out earlier, the international community imposes a variety of expectations and standards on China, often claiming that China has yet to fulfill its role as a "responsible stakeholder" in the world (Lampton 274). While China has remained passive in response to these claims, it is partly responsible for how it is portrayed on the world stage. But instead of just complying to these established norms, China can take ownership of the pressing, refugee issues and use them to redefine its own role and responsibilities in the region. This is not to say that China should evade the responsibilities that it already committed to in the UNHRC and regional Asian refugee agreements, but



it should embrace its own alternative approach to dealing with refugees.

The main reason why most Asian states are not signatories of the UNHRC treaties is because the agreements were overly Eurocentric and unsuitable to handle Asian refugee crises. Regional refugee agreements provide an alternative to these treaties, but only serves as a loose guideline for how states should respond. As a result, refugee crises are still handled on a voluntary basis with most of the responsibility falling on the hands of individual states. Asia desperately needs its own unique, institutional approach to handling refugee crises and China can be the leader in making this a reality.

Taking on this challenge can help China win support from not only the Asian states but also the international community. Because humanitarian affairs are less sensitive than issues in economics or security, it will be easier for China to rally support and cooperation in tackling refugee crises. This will help China portray a more humanitarian image of itself and wash away its past record of human rights violations. It will also be extremely conducive to helping China win support and build trust with the West.

By taking this initiative, China can also show that it is compassionate for the suffering in Asia. As evident in its past refugee policies, China's main considerations have been largely driven by self-interest. Its emphasis on ethnic ties in particular, projects an "us" versus "them" mentality, favoring ethnic Chinese refugees over all other Asian refugees. If China can convince other states that it is capable of placing the regional interests of Asia above its own self-interests, at least in the issue of refugees, China will be able to gain a lot respect in the region. Similarly, if China can show the Asian states that it cares about their well-being as much as its own development, it will greatly alleviate the sense of threat and danger that other states feel towards China.

By establishing this mutual trust between itself and other Asian states, China will be able to more effectively develop its own soft power and influence as a leader. It can become the state that other Asian countries seek guidance from in humanitarian affairs and be the state that helps redefine the

responsibilities and norms of how to tackle Asian refugee crises. These efforts in turn, will directly benefit China by ensuring greater human security around its borders and throughout Asia.

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