

# Melting Pots - Not Quite Everywhere

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In China, there are only fifty-six legally defined minzu [hard to translate but basically nationality/race] one indicated on every citizen's identity card...

- Peter C. Perdue - Demystifying China, New Understandings of Chinese History

This term I'm taking a class on Chinese History since the Qing Dynasty. Our first reading was from Naomi Standen's book "[Demystifying China](#)"<sup>[a]</sup> and I think the first chapter is one of the best introductions I've seen to Chinese History and the mindset of its current leaders.



I think a lot of people have the tendency to project their model of the world on other societies and people (creating a poor base of understanding from which mistakes are made). This bit seems particularly important to helping specifically Americans in this quest because of how comparatively loose we usually are with this type of thing.

## Related reading:

I had a similar experience to this in a course I took on Imperial Russia my senior year in high school with a chapter from Richard Pipes' [Russia Under the Old Regime](#)<sup>[b]</sup> (specifically the chapter titled "Consequences of the Environment").

Pipes' thesis is that as relatively poor fighters, the Russian people (worth noting the Russian language makes a distinction between ethnic Russians - русский - and citizens - россияне) were pushed into the Eurasian Steep where there was little rain and bad dirt. This in turn led to a more decentralized society that limited the development of cities and markets. As such, the rare surplus was turned to alcohol, and capital accumulation did not occur as it did in the rest of the world. According to the author, these factors set the stage for a Russia whose Eastern Orthodox beliefs find piety in suffering/struggle, and a unique identity distinct from the rest of the world. It was a really wonderful introduction to Russian History/thinking and definitely helps you avoid projecting your own cultural background/experiences on a country that is distinct from its neighbors in Europe and Asia.

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## Links

- a. [amazon.com/Demystifying-China-Understandings-Chinese-History-ebook/dp/B00B60DREO](https://www.amazon.com/Demystifying-China-Understandings-Chinese-History-ebook/dp/B00B60DREO)
- b. [amazon.com/Russia-under-Old-Regime-Penguin/dp/0140247688](https://www.amazon.com/Russia-under-Old-Regime-Penguin/dp/0140247688)