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The Identity of the Chinese in Belgrade: A National Question

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The Identity of the Chinese in Belgrade: A National Question

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Abstract

The Chinese community is an unknown population to the general Serbian society. Since most of the Chinese function within their own established spaces, it is difficult for outsiders to fully understand the dynamics of Chinese identity. This study aims to explore the layers of identity formation in the Chinese transmigrant community in Belgrade, Serbia. By taken into account different daily-life factors that impact identity formation, this study examines the extent to which Chinese identities are influenced by living and working in Serbia.

The methods used in this study are four semi-structured interviews and thirty-two informal conversations with the Chinese in Belgrade. These verbal interactions were aimed at Chinese individuals with contrasting backgrounds such as those who work in Chinese-dominated areas and those who work in Serbian-dominated areas. Observations and conversations were held in varying Chinese venues such as the Confucius Institute, Blok 70, China Trade Center, Chinese restaurants, and other locations.

The conclusion of this study magnifies the multi-dimensional nature of Chinese transmigrant identities in Belgrade. With the changing of transnational networks, the national identity of each individual changes as he/she operates differently in new social ties that transcend traditional ethnic ties. The expansion of networks in the Chinese community successfully shifts the national identity of individuals as their social networks continue to be enlarged. The Chinese in Belgrade cannot be lumped into one large group, as they each have changing national identities.

Introduction

Blok 70 in New Belgrade is known in town as the Chinese block. A large concrete building stuffed with endless shops and items, this is where you can find cheap socks, cheap hardware, cheap school supplies, cheap *everything*. But other than that, there is very little known information and understanding about the Chinese community in Serbia. The *Kinesi* have generally kept to themselves without coming into contact with the local Serbian population. It is even rare to see them anywhere outside of Blok 70. The aim of this paper is to explore the national identity of Chinese migrants living and working in Belgrade, Serbia.

Serbiens generally believe that the Chinese have been in Serbia since late 1990's as the result of Milosevic's relationship with the Chinese government. As China supported Serbia politically, the Milosevic regime opened the borders to Chinese immigrants who came to Serbia primarily as merchants.¹ Since then, the Chinese community in Serbia has steadily grown and expanded from the capital of Belgrade to other smaller cities. Although the Chinese community has been present in Serbia for more than a decade, this sizeable Diaspora has yet to become a part of the Serbian state narrative on the political or social level. In order to understand the lack of Chinese participation in Serbian society, I seek to examine the foundations of Chinese migrant identity.

The national identity of the Chinese is traditionally interpreted as an ethnic category, with the emphasis on the historical genealogy of each particular Chinese clan.² The assurance of their ethnic lineage enables the Chinese to remain fully Chinese wherever they emigrate. However, in

¹ Mangat, Mona. "East Meets West in Blok 70." *Balkan Insight*. Accessed online on 15 April 2011, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/east-meets-west-in-blok-70>

² Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity* (1991). Reno: University of Nevada Press, p. 11.

the context of migration, the national identity of the Chinese Diaspora is fluid and subject to the influences of their host society. By living and working in a new state, the Chinese migrant is confronted with local linguistics, media, politics, climate, economy, and other components of daily-life.

In this study, I will examine the elements that have impacted the national identity of the Chinese Diaspora in Belgrade by using qualitative study methods. Through conducting interviews and having informal conversations with more than thirty-five Chinese people living in Belgrade, I was able to investigate the Chinese view of their national identity and explore different socio-cultural factors in Belgrade that influence Chinese lifestyles and perceptions. Using the information I have gathered from the field, I attempt to provide a synthesis of the Chinese transmigrant identity. The questions I seek to answer in this project are: How does the Chinese Diaspora in Belgrade perceive their national belonging and civic identity? How does their sense of belonging affect their identities, perceptions, and actions? How do daily-life experiences through socialization, occupation, and physical environment influence their national identities?

Methodology

The time span of this field study is one full month in the spring of 2011. In order to attain a vast variety of Chinese perceptions, I conducted four semi-structured interviews and thirty-two informal conversations with people of varying backgrounds. In addition, I recorded important observations at Chinese venues including stores, homes, restaurants, and other places. In order to gain a holistic understanding of the Chinese in Belgrade, I chose to utilize all three of these methods to gather a range of information for this project. At the start of my project, I originally

planned to have more interviews than informal conversations; however, during the first week of my field work, I quickly realized that formal interviews were very inconvenient for the average Chinese working in Belgrade.

Since most of the Chinese merchants work at least eight hours a day everyday of the week (with the exception of Tuesdays in some cases), it was difficult to schedule interviews with individuals. Even when the Chinese were not working, they were often doing work at home to prepare for the next work day, such as sewing accessories, getting products ready for stocking, etc. The storefronts where the Chinese worked at were the easiest locations for me to access them. They were there regularly, usually with large chunks of spare time available to speak with me. Most of the informal conversations I had with the Chinese lasted more than an hour each, which allowed me enough time to ask the questions I had prepared in advance for the formal interviews. Furthermore, having informal conversations with individuals gave me the opportunity to establish trust in my relationships. The level of openness the Chinese were with me often depended on the level of trust they had in our relationship. As a result, it was crucial that I spent time introducing myself to them to establish a degree of transparency before proceeding to my research questions. After they became comfortable with me, they were much more willing to open up and speak honestly about their personal experiences in Serbia. Informal conversations with groups of more than one Chinese also helped me understand the social dynamics among the Chinese and the nature of their interactions with each other. In addition, conducting informal conversations in their shops enabled the Chinese to function within their own “dominions,” where they were more relaxed while interacting with me.

In addition to the informal conversations, I conducted four semi-structured interviews with people who had very different backgrounds from each other. The four interviewees were 1)

the chief-editor of the Chinese newspaper in Belgrade, 2) the head-cook at a local Chinese restaurant, 3) a Chinese merchant from Hong Kong, and 4) a Chinese student who goes to the British International School in Belgrade. Since these interviewees each had very different backgrounds, each semi-structured interview took on very different directions as I asked them questions relative to their individual trade. These interviewees each brought very different perspectives on the Chinese experience in Belgrade (to be discussed in later sections of this paper).

I conducted my semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and observations in different parts of Belgrade, including Blok 70, China Trade Center in Zemun, Chinese restaurants, Chinese homes, the Chinese church in Ledine, the Chinese Embassy, and the Chinese shops in Batajnica, central Zemun, Old Belgrade, and New Belgrade. In addition, I conducted two interviews at East Asian academic venues in Belgrade--- including the Confucius Institute and the Faculty of Political Science--- with non-Chinese, local Serbian professionals in order to get a general overview of the Chinese community. Keeping in mind the diversity of experiences each individual had, I directed my interactions at contrasting groups--- high level of education/low level of education, married/single, Blok 70/outside of Blok 70, multi-ethnic (Chinese-Serbian) couples/Chinese couples. I did this in order to demonstrate the different perceptions of national identity among the Chinese who have different backgrounds.

Since I am a Mandarin Chinese speaker, I used the Chinese language to communicate with all the Chinese I came in contact with during my field research. Although most of the Chinese have regional Chinese dialects, most of them knew how to speak the official Chinese dialect known as Mandarin, or *pu-tong hua* (which literally means, “standard language”). Some

Chinese were better at Mandarin than others, but all of them were good enough at it to communicate fluently.

My Positionality

When I first arrived in Belgrade for my semester abroad, I was immediately confronted with the reality of my ethnic appearance in contrast to the rest of the inhabitants as the result of people's reactions to me. As a Taiwanese American student from an environment of racial diversity back in Texas, I was rarely reminded of my own race on a daily basis. In Belgrade, however, it was a different story. As a clearly distinguishable East Asian, I received curious stares and comments everywhere I went regarding my ethnicity. Locals were constantly asking me in fascination, "Are you Chinese or Japanese?" Serbians, more often than not, interacted with me based on my ethnicity before they tried to connect with me as an individual. Although initially uncomfortable for being singled out because of my race, these experiences eventually led me to question the visibility and impact of the Chinese community in Belgrade. East Asia remained a land of the Far East, unknown to the average Serbian, although right within a bus ride's reach, an entire community of Chinese exists, lives, and in a way, flourishes amongst themselves.

As a student who came to the Balkans in hopes of understanding the reality of life for post-conflict societies, I discovered that the way people reacted to my ethnicity was also a legacy of recent conflicts. Before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, international students were relatively more common in Serbian universities. However, as a local Serbian student I spoke with told me, during the insecurities of the 1990's, very few international visitors and students came to Serbia. On top of that, the NATO campaign against the Milosevic regime in 1999 successfully projected

Serbia to the international community as the primary perpetrator of the wars. The attractions of Serbia were suddenly forgotten as the nation was stamped with the status of a war-villain.³ The domestic affairs of Serbia proceeded to crumble into political unrest during the popular overthrow of Milosevic and the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Dindic. All of these political events resulted in an isolated Serbia with little visitors other than Europeans. As a local Belgrade worker I spoke with expressed, the influx of Chinese merchants who started coming to Serbia at the end of Milosevic's years was at first a shocking sight for the local Serbians. But overtime, they became an integral part of the Serbian economy as they provided affordable, cheap products to the average Serbian. The Chinese market became a "shopping hot-spot" for impoverished middle class citizens.⁴

As a Chinese speaker with East Asian features, I was perceived by the Chinese in Belgrade as a partial insider. Since I am originally from Taiwan, my Chinese accent is noticeably different from my mainland Chinese counterpart. Also, since most Chinese people have their distinct regional dialects, Mandarin Chinese is their secondary dialect that is used when they are not talking to people from their hometown. Furthermore, since I have lived in Texas for the last ten years, my Chinese has also acquired an English flavor, with sentence structures mirroring English grammar. My Chinese language clearly distinguished me from the rest of the Chinese during my frequent visits to Chinese venues in Belgrade.

In addition to my language, my Taiwanese and American nationalities were sources of interpersonal barriers in a few instances. Since the independence of Taiwan is highly contested between the two shores of the Taiwan Strait, a few Chinese people I encountered, upon hearing

³ Hume, Mick. "Nazifying the Serbs, from Bosnia to Kosovo" in Hammond, Phil, and Edward S. Herman. *Degraded Capability: the Media and the Kosovo Crisis*. London: Pluto, (2000), pp. 70-79.

⁴ Stupar, Aleksandra. "(Re)Symbolizing the Modern Heritage: A New Identity for a Prosperous Future?" (2006). 42nd ISoCaRP Congress, p. 4.

that I was born in Taiwan, were determined to assert their views on the status of Taiwan during our conversations. In these situations, I tried to avoid discussing the topic as much as possible since it did not have any direct connections to this particular study. I presented myself in a way that recognized the cultural and historical ties of the Taiwanese and Chinese people by referring to the two national groups as “us” in the sense of being “East Asians in Serbia.” People usually reacted to my American nationality with a positive attitude, often referring to the popular images of the U.S. as portrayed by the American media. The Chinese enjoyed asking me countless questions about life in the U.S., often under the assumption that everyone lives extremely wealthy lifestyles as demonstrated by popular TV series. Although some images the Chinese had about the U.S. were unrealistic, I understood that the opportunity to study abroad in another country is not as commonly available to students around the world. My role as a study abroad student from the U.S. defined the temporary nature of my stay in Serbia, whereas the Chinese who live in Belgrade will most likely be here for many more years. This definitive fact limited my ability to fully relate with the Chinese narrative as an “insider,” especially when they had grievances about being in Serbia.

Despite all of the aforementioned factors that put me at an outsider position to the Chinese community, many Chinese people received me warmly as one of their own after enough trust is established with them.

Overall, this study is not only about the identity and experiences of Chinese migrants in Belgrade, it is also about how a Taiwanese American student put her own words and interpretations to what she saw and understood in the Chinese community.

Literature Review

Since not a lot of academic work has been done on the Chinese community in the Balkans, I have only six secondary sources that directly address the Chinese immigrant experience in Serbia, five of which are newspaper articles. In addition, I draw on different works that indirectly relate to the Chinese migrant experience in Belgrade, including the theoretical framework on national identity, identity formation in New Belgrade, and transnational migration theory.

The works directly dealing with the Chinese community include five online news-articles and one academic article. An article on Balkan Insight called “East Meets West in Blok 70” by Mona Mangat covers the experiences and attitudes of Chinese living in Belgrade through short interviews. Another article on Politika called “Only Four Chinese People Have Permanent Residence in Serbia” by Daniel Vukosavljevic argues that there are not a lot of illegal Chinese immigration and fraudulent marriages (for permanent residency) in Serbia. An additional article on Radio Television Serbia called “Serbia as the Second Home for the Chinese” by Bilijana Jovicic describes a few aspects of Chinese life in Serbia, including language, profession, and information technology. Another article on BBC called “Little China in Belgrade” covers the influx of Chinese migrants to Belgrade. The last news-article is on The Independent, called “Chinese Discover that Utopia is Not a Place in Belgrade.” This article describes the disillusionment of the Chinese about their new lifestyle after they came to Belgrade. In addition, Svetlana Milutinovic from the Forum for Ethnic Relations in Belgrade did a piece titled “Chinese transnational entrepreneurs in Budapest and Belgrade: Globalizing the cities of Central and Southeast Europe?” This piece focuses on the role of the Chinese in two South-eastern Europe cities, and their effect on the local societies. A small amount of information about the wave of

Deleted: called

Chinese immigration to Serbia is presented, though Milutinovic herself states, “The data on Chinese migration to Serbia is scarce or non-existent.” In this article, Chinese migrants are introduced as members of the transnational social space, which stems from the transnational migration theory.

In *National Identity*, Anthony D. Smith illustrates the theory and components of national identity. I will mainly focus on the theory of non-Western ethnic national identity as highlighted by this book in order to understand how the Chinese in Belgrade fits into the ethnic national framework.

In “Diversification of Urban Neighborhoods: The Case Study in New Belgrade,” Mina Petrovic from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade discusses local Serbian professional perceptions of New Belgrade during the periods of post-socialist transition. I will focus on the few local perceptions of the Chinese market at Blok 70 as presented in her study.

In “(Re)Symbolizing the Modern Heritage: A New Identity for a Prosperous Future?” Aleksandra Stupar briefly discusses the process of creating a new identity during the economic and political crises of Serbia in New Belgrade. I will be using her work to synthesize the role of the Chinese market during transition.

In “Un-Packing Packaged Culture: Chinese-ness in International Business,” Can-Seng Ooi discusses the nature of cultural representation of Chinese in international businesses. This source is valuable in its discussion of the cultural foundations for business practices.

In “Introduction: The Business of Identity,” Can-Seng Ooi and Juliette Koning demonstrate the challenges the over-simplification of Chinese culture by discussing the effects of generational shifts in international business.

In “Family Firms, Transnationalism and Generational Change: Chinese Enterprise in Britain and Malaysia,” Edmund Gomez presents both the ethnic view and practical (non-ethnicity based) view of Chinese businesses. I use his theoretical arguments in the context of Chinese business practices in Belgrade.

In “(Re)Creating the Comfort Zone: From Common Ethnicity towards Commonwealth: The Transnationalisation Process of Malaysian Chinese Small and Medium Enterprises,” Esther Zwart discusses the process of transnationalization and its effect on Chinese identity. I utilize her theoretical arguments about the integration of Chinese into host nations and apply it to the case in Belgrade

1. Background of the Chinese in Belgrade

It is commonly believed that after Milosevic’s official visit to China in 1997, large numbers of Chinese migrants poured into Serbian cities. Many speculated that Milosevic’s wife, Mira Markovic, who had a “known obsession with China,” was the primary promoter of a Chinatown in Belgrade.⁵ At a time when European and American sanctions were still in full force in Serbia, the relationship between Serbia and China were promoted by both sides to showcase their partnership and support for one another. Although most of the Chinese I spoke with did not directly mention the friendly ties between the leaders of the two nations as an underlying factor that encouraged their migration, some older Chinese merchants mentioned that it was really easy during that time to get visas for Serbia.⁶ From this, we can infer that the Chinese took advantage of the loosely controlled borders and migrated in hopes of making profit in the Serbian economy.

⁵ Zimonjic, Vesna. “Chinese discovers utopia is not a place in Serbia.” The Independent. Accessed online on 8 May 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/1166678.stm

⁶ Informal conversation with Mr. Huang, Zemun, Belgrade, 6 May 2011.

The official numbers of Chinese migration to Serbia vary from source to source. BBC estimated the number of Chinese in Belgrade to be between 75,000 and 100,000 in 2001⁷; Balkan Insight reported the estimated number of 40,000 in 2010;⁸ Radio Television Serbia estimated the number to be at 7,000 in 2009, of which 3,000 live in Belgrade.⁹ A Chinese guy who works at the Chinese Embassy Consulate in Belgrade also said that the number is at around 7,000, although he didn't have any official records available. According to an article published by Politika in 2006, only 4 Chinese individuals had permanent residence in Serbia.¹⁰

The enticement of living in a European country attracted many poor farmers and peasants from the provinces of Southeast China. The most notable province is Zhejiang by the East China Sea. A majority of the Chinese I spoke with in Belgrade were from four different towns in this province: Wenzhou, Qingtian, Lishui, and Jincun. Other Chinese came from similar peasant towns from other provinces such as Fujian and Liaoning. Many of the merchants who are from peasant towns called themselves “uneducated and unrefined” (“*mai su-zi*,” which literally means “without number”). From my observations in Blok 70 of New Belgrade, the Chinese that have migrated to Serbia are generally in their working age, with an overwhelming majority in the age range of twenty to forty. One Chinese lady told me that about half of the population in Qingtian has migrated to other countries, and most of the people left in the town are children and the

⁷ “Little China in Belgrade.” BBC. Accessed online 6 May 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/1166678.stm

⁸ Mangat, from Balkan Insight

⁹ Jovicic, Biljana. “Kinezima Srbija kao drugi dom.” Radio Television Serbia. Accessed online on 6 May 2011, <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/Dru%C5%A1tvo/166861/Kinezima+Srbija+kao+drugi+dom.html>

¹⁰ Vukosavljevic, Daniel. “Samo cetiri Kineza imaju stalni boravak u Srbiji.” Politika Online. Accessed online on 6 May 2011, http://www.politika.rs/index.php?lid=lt&show=rubrike&part=details&int_itemID=11253&cat=Hronika&page_name=samo-etiri-kineza-ijaju-stalni-boravak-u-srbiji

elderly.¹¹ Many of the young teenagers who decided to come to Serbia (where their families have already established small businesses) did not finish their high school education.¹²

2. National Identity

In order to properly discuss national identity, I will lay down some theoretical groundwork as it relates to the Chinese community in Belgrade. I will discuss the theory behind “non-western national identity” as illustrated by Anthony D. Smith, and the extent to which the Chinese in Belgrade fit into this framework.

The non-Western conception of national identity, according to Smith, is characterized by ethnic belonging. Regarding the ethnic conception of national identity, Smith writes:

“Its distinguishing feature is its emphasis on a community of birth and native culture... Whether you stayed in your community or emigrated to another, you remained ineluctably, organically, a member of the community of your birth and were forever stamped by it. A nation, in other words, was first and foremost a community of common descent.”¹³

The Chinese community in Belgrade fits in Smith’s description of ethnic nationality almost perfectly. When asking the Chinese where they feel they belong, with very few exceptions I will elaborate on later, they unanimously replied, “China.” The basis for Chinese common ancestry is based on presumed family ties, ostensibly uniting the Chinese into a collective conception. Although some Chinese I spoke with have lived in Serbia for more than a decade, they still consider themselves a part of China, and as Mr. Ma told me with visible loyalty

¹¹ Informal conversation with Yun-xi, Blok 70, New Belgrade, 19 April 2011.

¹² Informal conversation with Fu-shi, New Belgrade, 17 April 2011.

¹³ Smith, p. 11.

and conviction in our interview, “He will always be Chinese, wherever he goes.”¹⁴ In order to understand the importance of ethnic national identity, we have to consider some historical attributes of the Chinese identity.

Smith asserts that the widespread awareness of national myths and history solidifies the idea of the ethnic nation.¹⁵ This is indeed the case for China. Political ideologies in Chinese contemporary history focused on the wellbeing of the Chinese ethnic nation, which strengthened the Chinese identity. The nationalist component of Mao Zedong’s communist movement was clearly a campaign targeted at the ethnic Chinese citizenry.¹⁶ On behalf of the Chinese ethnic nation, Mao led the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under a slogan of “serve the people,”¹⁷ referring specifically to the ethnic Chinese. Public school education under the CCP drove the patriotic understanding of Chinese national identity for many decades, inscribing in young minds the importance of belonging to the Chinese nation. As a collective identity was established by the Communist Party, many Chinese who immigrated to other countries reserved their national loyalty strictly to “their people,” the ethnic Chinese nation.¹⁸

Not only does ethnic nationalism encourage loyalty to a prescribed nascent identity, another important element is, according to Smith, its tendency to be more “inter-class” and “populist” in tone.¹⁹ Chinese migrants in Belgrade exist in communal connections at the work place and at home. Although they are not linked together in an active political entity in Serbia, they operate out of “populist” tendencies by establishing Chinese merchant and social unions.

¹⁴ Interview with Mr. Ma, Belgrade, 5 May 2011.

¹⁵ Smith, p. 12.

¹⁶ Smith, p. 144.

¹⁷ Wright, David. “Party Slogans” SACU’s China Now Magazine. Accessed online on 30 April 2011, <http://www.sacu.org/slogans.html>

¹⁸ Interview with Mr. Ma, Belgrade, 5 May 2011.

¹⁹ Smith, p. 12.

The merchant organizations serve their members by keeping order in the business operations of the community, while the social organizations simply gather people together for recreational events, usually to celebrate the Chinese New Year. Though not as strict as western business codes, the rules established by these business unions establish a sense of communal order, intended to ensure that business matters are carried out smoothly. A notable example of the utility of business organizations is the role of the union at Blok 70. The Chinese Business Association at Blok 70 determines when the merchants in the old market (green building) go on holiday and notifies each store on these occasions.²⁰ Since Chinese merchants do not always take the same holidays as local Serbians, the business association at Blok 70 serves the crucial role of determining which holidays this particular community will take.

The ethnic element of Chinese business unions encourages the cooperation of all ethnic Chinese into one functional group in the host country, reinforcing the importance of collective identity.²¹ In addition to ethnic collectivism, Chinese merchants in Belgrade also function in strong familial ties. According to Gomez, kinship ties are crucial in raising investment funds to start a business.²² Due to the weaknesses of social trust for people outside of the family unit, many Chinese in Belgrade started their trade businesses with the support of their own family. From business investments to day-to-day operations in the Chinese storefronts, Chinese merchants often utilize their familial networks to meet their business demands. Jin-li, a Chinese woman who is now married to a local Serbian, told me of her distrust for local Chinese traders as a result of her bad experiences of cheated by Chinese partners. Since she does not have many family members in Serbia, she was more vulnerable to fraud and has been taken advantage of by

²⁰ Informal conversation with Shi-xia, Belgrade, 2 May 2011.

²¹ Zwart, Esther. "(Re)creating the Comfort Zone: From Common Ethnicity Towards Commonwealth: The Transnationalisation Process of Malaysian Chinese Small and Medium Enterprises." *East Asia* 24: (2007), p. 201

²² Gomez, Edmund. "Family Firms, Transnationalism and Generational Change: Chinese Enterprise in Britain and Malaysia." *East Asia* 24: (2007), p. 155.

other Chinese merchants. The functional value of nepotism stemming from familial networks ensures that each Chinese is well-protected in their business ventures. Although the common ethnic identity of the Chinese in Belgrade projects the entire Diaspora as a large collective to the outsider, the reality, as I have discovered, is that there are many fragmentations within the group based on family ties and regional affiliations. I will discuss divisions among the Chinese based on where they come from in the next section.

2.1 Divisions in the Ethnic National Group

Although most of the Chinese in Belgrade are from the province of Zhejiang, they are from four different townships--- Lishui, Qingtian, Wenzhou, and Jincun. Each township has its own distinct dialects that the other towns do not understand. The divisions in spoken language are clear indications where a Chinese person is from. The Chinese population in Belgrade is visibly separated into functional groups according to these townships. From my observations at Blok 70, it was clear that members of the same township work in close proximity to each other, often as next door neighbors. They speak mainly in their local dialect with each other, switching to Mandarin Chinese as they come into contact with people from other regions of China. Since the Chinese often establish their networks of shops according to family ties from their native townships, speaking the same dialect with others is a visible sign of collective regional identity and trust. However, dialectical and regional barriers are not rigid structures that cannot be overcome, as demonstrated by inter-regional marriages of Chinese couples in Belgrade (which will be elaborated on in a later section).

2.2 *Ethnic Motivation?*

We cannot prescribe the collective characteristics of Blok 70 solely to the common ethnic background and the familial networks of the Chinese; we have to take into account the practical, non-ethnic driven benefits of establishing a business union. Scholars such as Can-Seng Ooi and Edmund Gomez oppose the idea that Chinese business models are established based on ethnic and traditional Confucian values. Ooi and Gomez argue that the Chinese are constantly responding to their business environment to protect their individual interests.²³ In other words, the Chinese are not simply reacting out of their ethnic cultural traits, which are fluid categories that change over time, space, and environment. Gomez asserts that as the Chinese respond to new environments in their host countries, new national identities are created.²⁴ Since large numbers of Chinese merchants work together in a small space, establishing a business association is the practical solution to ensure the basic cooperation between Chinese traders. Business operations, as the result, are the product of both ethnic collectivism and practical responses to the given environment.

3. **Transnational Migration Theory and the Chinese in Belgrade**

The transnational migration theory is built on the basis that the Chinese immigrant functions in a transnational space that crosses over state boundaries, maintaining and extending established networks in both the sending and receiving nations. The transmigrant sustains ties with the sending country, China, while s/he develops new ties in the receiving country. The cultural identity of such a migrant, as a result, does not remain as a static category. Instead, new national identities are created as the result of a dynamic mixture of influences from both sending

²³ Ooi, Canb-Seng. "Un-Packaging Packaged Cultures: Chinese-ness in International Business." *East Asia* 24: (2007), pp. 122-123.

²⁴ Gomez, p. 172.

and receiving countries.²⁵ In the following sections, I will discuss different factors of living in Serbia that have influenced Chinese national identity.

3.1 Citizenship and Civic Duty

All of the Chinese I spoke with, regardless of whether they have been living in Serbia for five years or fifteen years, do not have Serbian citizenship, and they do not want to get one. As Chinese citizens, they cannot hold dual citizenships. If they decided to get a Serbian citizenship, they have to give up their Chinese citizenship, which would require them to apply for visas to visit China. None of the Chinese I spoke with wanted to become permanent residents in Serbia. As *Politika* reported, only four Chinese had permanent residency in 2008.²⁶ Most of the Chinese hold on to their hopes of one day returning to China, having made enough money in Serbia. Many Chinese also commented that there are no benefits to becoming a Serbian citizen. The lack of incentives for Chinese migrants to become Serbian citizens, combined with a strong Chinese sense of belonging result in very few Chinese in Belgrade becoming fully integrated.

As I asked merchants about their sense of civic duty in China or Serbia, most of them laughed at my question. Many Chinese expressed that there are too many worries to think about already without getting involved in politics. Chinese traders feel that as long as they have their businesses and families taken care of, they are content with life, so they do not see a point to political participation. When I asked about their perceptions of Serbian politics and whether they think Serbian current events are important for their lives in Serbia, most of them gave me

²⁵ Milutinovic, Svetlana. "Chinese transnational entrepreneurs in Budapest and Belgrade: Globalizing the cities of Central and Southeast Europe?" *Forum for Ethnic Relations, Belgrade*. Pp. 3-4.

²⁶ Vukosavljevic, from *Politika*

negative replies. They do not perceive Serbian politics as relevant to themselves since “it does not affect their lives.”²⁷

In contrast, Mr. Ma, the chief-editor of the Chinese newspaper in Belgrade, explained his Chinese civic responsibility to me. He saw himself as strictly a Chinese citizen, loyal to the Chinese Communist Party. His sense of duty and allegiance were to his native nation, and it always will be. Mr. Ma was very aware of the local political situation in Serbia, yet he saw these issues as only factors that affect his business, not his personal identity. Mr. Ma is professionally trained both in business entrepreneurship and medicine. He said that if the economy does not get better in Serbia, he will go back home to practice medicine.

Mr. Ma is very different from his Chinese counterparts who do not care about politics in China or in Serbia. He started the newspaper in Belgrade in order to generate information for the Chinese community in Belgrade. Although Mr. Ma clearly defines his civic duty in line with the Chinese government, he still seeks to be knowledgeable of current events in Serbia. The lack of a sense of civic duty for the Chinese merchants has much to do with their level of education and understanding of their role in established nations. Since most of them have agricultural backgrounds, they did not care about politics and civic participation even when they lived in China, thus Serbian politics are even more irrelevant for their lifestyles. Although most Chinese merchants in Belgrade do have a strong sense of belonging for China, they do not have a strong sense of civic duty, nor do they participate in civic matters in China.

²⁷ Informal conversation with Yie-bi, Belgrade, 20 April 2011.

3.2 The Effect of Location

Although the majority of Chinese in Belgrade work at Blok 70, a considerable number of Chinese work outside of the block in Zemun, Old City, Batajnica, and other locations. Many of these Chinese merchants have shops that are in close proximity to other Chinese shops, concentrated on one or two streets in a specific area. These Chinese boutiques operate differently than those at Blok 70. The shops at Blok 70 do wholesale, whereas the stores located in other areas, aside from the China Trade Center, do retail. Although customers can purchase retail items at Blok 70, the primary function of Blok 70, as many Chinese merchants of Belgrade told me, is seen by Chinese and non-Chinese traders as a wholesale market, the place where merchants go to restock their retail shops or stands. The Chinese shops away from Blok 70 are usually larger in size and carry vast varieties of products for retail, whereas the shops at Blok 70 usually specialize in a specific line of products in large quantities.

The merchants who work in other areas of Belgrade usually have close business ties to wholesalers at Blok 70. However, because of the distance of these stores from Blok 70, the interpersonal relationships between the Chinese who work at Blok 70 and those who do not are sometimes only business based and have no significant personal connections. This social distance can be attributed to the working hours of the Chinese shops outside of Blok 70. Many of these stores do not have any days off during the week and have daily working-hours of 8am to 8pm, unlike the Blok 70 hours of 9am to 5pm with Tuesdays off. The rigorous work schedule allows the Chinese very little time to themselves, much less time to socialize with others. Also, the Chinese who work outside of Blok 70 usually live in apartments or houses that are closer to their shops, creating a greater distance from where the majority of the Chinese at Blok 70 live--- Ledine, the outskirts of New Belgrade.

Many Chinese merchants, however, have multiple stores in their family network. It is not uncommon for a Chinese family to have both a shop at Blok 70 and another store in a different part of town, or even another Serbian city or village. From my observations in different parts of Belgrade, I discovered that the merchants who only have stores outside of Blok 70 live separate social lives than the majority of the Chinese, unless they have family ties at Blok 70.

The social distance created by the Chinese working away from Blok 70 does not indicate a greater integration into the Serbian society, as one might imagine. Chinese families that do not live in Ledine go through day-to-day routines without much contact with their Serbian neighbors. Aside from a few words of greeting, most of the Chinese do not participate in significant interactions with their neighbors. The identity of the migrants who live and work away from the majority of the Chinese in Belgrade conduct their lives based on their business operations without social connection in the local Serbian society. The result for these identities is an isolation effect, where one retreats even further into their existing familial circle--- usually a handful of people in Belgrade. Some of the merchants who fit into this category are very reminiscent of their social lifestyles back in their hometowns in China, where their friends and family members are, and where they have much more social capital.²⁸

3.3 Students in Serbia: the Impact of Education

Most Chinese parents send their children back to their hometowns in China once they reach the pre-school age of four to be taken care of by family members. The Chinese want their children to receive Chinese education, mainly because they see Chinese language as a crucial skill for the future of the child. Since China is a growing nation, many Chinese merchants perceive Chinese education and upbringing as more beneficial than Serbian education. Many

²⁸ Informal conversation with Fu-Shi, Belgrade, 17 April 2011.

Chinese teenagers from the age of sixteen to eighteen moved to Serbia before they finished their high school education in China to start their careers in the foreign market. As many Chinese migrants told me, many of these young Chinese were performing poorly in school before they decided to give up on their education and quit school. Since the grades that students get in China theoretically determine the level of one's success in the future, when Chinese students get poor grades, they don't see any value in staying in school. For many Chinese students, migrating to Serbia to work was often the last resort as they failed to see any career opportunities in China. In Serbia, they had guaranteed positions in businesses that have already been established by close family members. These students retain strong ties with their networks in China, for most of them have hopes of returning to China one day.

On a different note, there are also cases of Chinese students going to local Serbian schools. I interviewed a young eighteen-year-old Chinese named Pan-rei who came to Serbia from Hong Kong when he was seven-years-old and immediately began attending a Serbian elementary. He is now graduating from the International British School in Belgrade and planning on going to art school in the United Kingdom. Pan-rei breaks the mold of the typical Chinese teenager in Belgrade. First, he only has Serbian friends. Second, he is a local graffiti artist who collaborates with other Serbians in his graffiti "crew." They go around the city together to create graffiti art on "legal" walls. Third, he speaks Serbian fluently. Fourth, he has a Serbian girlfriend from his high school. He has very close relationships with his girlfriend's family, and he often spends time over at her house. Fifth, he doesn't feel like he has any real connections with China, and he will "probably never go back there to live."²⁹ When asked whether he feels more Serbian

²⁹ Interview with Pan-rei, Belgrade, 4 May 2011.

or Chinese, he answered, “Serbian.” Because of his education and social interactions in Serbia for the last eleven years, he has become fully Serbian, although he looks fully Chinese.

Another Chinese girl I became friends with during my research is named Lin-lin. She is a nineteen-year-old student from Zhejiang. Four years ago, Lin-lin moved to Serbia, where her immediate family owns a few shops, to attend the International School of Belgrade, from which she is graduating this month (May 2011). She is now planning on going to a university in California. Lin-lin has friends from all over the world because the school she attends has mostly foreign students and children of wealthy Serbians. Her environment is largely characterized by American culture, as her school operates and teaches its students with American educational standards and methods. Lin-lin speaks fluent English but very little Serbian. When asked whether she will come back to Serbia, where a large majority of her family is, she said, “Probably not. I will develop my career somewhere else.” Lin-lin’s national identity is characterized by a mixture of cultural influences, shaping her into someone unclassifiable by any single national identity, but as a student who functions in a transnational space with multiple networks and affiliations, both of which will continue to expand as she continues her education in the U.S.

Education is an important factor for every Chinese migrant. Whether they receive Chinese or Serbian education, the content of what they have learned and their social environments have shaped them into individuals with identities that are completely different from their parents. In order to capture the identities of students who have many external influences through education, we have to consider not only their environments, but also their understanding of themselves. As students in a transnational space, both Pan-rei and Lin-lin have the opportunity to extend their learning networks to other countries. However, the opportunities

available to most of the young Chinese who have dropped out of school to come to Belgrade are more limited. In order to pursue further education or different careers, they have to break the pre-established norms in the Chinese community.

3.4 Marriages

Since many Chinese teenagers migrate to Serbia to work for family businesses, a large number of them get married to other Chinese in Serbia. Couples in their early twenties often marry each other to start their own family shop, extending the business network of their families. According to many Chinese residents in Belgrade, although marriages most often occur between individuals from the same Chinese town, there are also some cases of inter-regional marriages. The dynamics between marriage and business interests vary from marriage to marriage, but couples that get married in Serbia often continue their trades as merchants, working together in the same store. I will give a case study of an inter-regional marriage in the following section.

(1) Inter-regional Marriages

Yin-xien and Dan-bao are a young married couple that I befriended during my field work at Blok 70. Yin-xien is from Lishui, Zhejiang while Dan-bao is from Hong Kong. Yin-xien has many family members in Belgrade as a result of her large familial network. In contrast, Dan-bao and his sister are the only Chinese from Hong Kong working in Belgrade as traders. Dan-bao speaks Cantonese, the dialect of Hong Kong, while Yin-xien speaks her native dialect from Lishui and Mandarin fluently. Dan-bao had to learn to speak Mandarin Chinese after moving to Serbia in order to communicate with other Chinese in Belgrade. In addition to linguistic differences between Dan-bao and Yin-xien, their cultural backgrounds are also very different. Since Hong Kong is a very developed city, unlike the rural town of Lishui, Dan-bao is used to

spending more money for leisure activities than the people from his wife's hometown. Since the traditional Chinese values that the migrants from Lishui abide by heavily emphasize the discipline of saving money, Dan-bao clearly was not like the other Chinese migrants in Belgrade. Yin-xien's family was at first unsupportive of her marriage with Dan-bao because of the regional cultural and linguistic differences. However, after some time, her family agreed to the marriage, and the couple have been married for three years, now managing their own clothing business together. Regional identities are not rigid conceptions that cannot change over time, as evident in this example. Although "the Chinese in Belgrade usually marry people from their hometown because of regional business ties," as Xin-yi, a young Chinese student told me, there are also cases of inter-regional marriages, indicating the changing dynamics of regional belonging and cultural identities.

(2) Inter-ethnic Marriages

Inter-ethnic marriages between Serbian and Chinese individuals, though uncommon, have to be taken into account when discussing the evolution of Chinese national identity in Belgrade. Yi-jie and Vladimir are a Chinese woman and a Serbian man who got married five years ago in 2006. The couple met at the Chinese market at Blok 70, where they were both working, and they now own a Chinese shop together, specializing in women's attire. They have a young, four-year-old boy named Mihail who goes to a Serbian day-care. Yi-jie has both Serbian and Chinese friends and speaks Serbian almost fluently. She experienced opposition from some of her Chinese friends at Blok 70 when she decided to marry Vladimir. Her friends did not believe that a Serbian man would be compatible for her due to cultural barriers. However, after she gave birth to Mihail, her Chinese friends became more supportive of her marriage. On the other hand, she also had trouble being accepted in her husband's family because of her ethnic

background. However, with the birth of Mihail, opposition also disappeared, and her husband's family became a lot more accepting towards her. The phenomenon of an inter-ethnic marriage being accepted by both the Chinese and Serbian communities as a result of having children indicates that mixed children signify a definite merge of two drastically different cultures that cannot be undone. The child becomes the ultimate inter-cultural symbol, connecting two lines of history into one.

The mixture of cultures in Yi-jie's family created an interesting dynamic for her life. Although she works at Blok 70, her home-life is filled with activities with mostly local Serbians. Unlike many other Chinese, Yi-jie does not have a lot of family members in Serbia, so she spends most of her time with her husband's family. She does not know how to cook so her family eats mainly Serbian dishes prepared by her husband. However, despite of her integration in Serbian society, Yi-jie does not intend to get her Serbian citizenship for the sake of keeping her Chinese citizenship. When I asked her if she was planning on being in Serbia for the rest of her life because of her family, she replied, "No, I hope to go back to China one day, you know... I would like to bring my family to China with me." Yi-jie's reluctance to become a Serbian citizen or spend the rest of her life in Serbia indicates her unwillingness to fully assimilate in her husband's society. She participates in the Serbian social space with interpersonal connections, but she also takes part in the Chinese community by working and socializing with other Chinese at Blok 70. The mixture of networks established in her daily-life allows her to be a part of both communities.

3.5. Different Business Concepts

Although most Chinese merchants in Belgrade come from peasant backgrounds, there are a few Chinese entrepreneurs who are educated business professionals that invest in large-scale transnational corporations. The business concept behind the Chinese corporation is drastically different from the small Chinese shops that are commonly seen at Blok 70. The China Trade Center (CTC) is a large business project that began in 2008 between Highway 70 and Highway 75 in Zemun. It is currently at the end of its first of three phases of construction, with many wholesale stores already operating. The second and third phases include the construction of a beauty salon, gym, post office, and multipurpose hall for conferences.³⁰ Mr. Zhou, the head executive CTC, shared his business visions with me in an informal conversation, “CTC is not just a business corporation. It is a public space where cultural exchanges happen. It is about teamwork and giving back to the Serbian community.”³¹ The architectural model of CTC is drastically different from Blok 70. Whereas Blok 70 is made of two large concrete buildings with many tiny shops inside, CTC is a large center with individual storefronts and avid advertising. It can be best described as an outdoor mall with a spacious parking lot. Similar to the model of Chinatown in the United States and Western Europe, CTC is designed to be a place where business interactions and cultural exchanges take place at the same time. Mr. Zhou also commented on the quality of products at CTC, “Not every shop is accepted here; we select only those that reach a quality standard.” Whereas Blok 70 is known for its poor quality, low-end products, the CTC is envisioned by its leaders to be a place where customers have access to more reliable, higher-end merchandise. CTC also accepts non-Chinese companies, and it currently has companies from seven different nations represented at the center. With its multi-cultural

³⁰ Visit www.etc.rs for more information.

³¹ Informal conversation with Mr. Zhou, Zemun, Belgrade, 4 May 2011.

background, CTC is an open space for business-persons of any nationality, breaking away from the traditional familial networks that dominate Chinese migrant business practices, as commonly seen at Blok 70.

The physical environment at CTC is notably different than that of Blok 70. The noise level at CTC is much lower; the stores are much cleaner on the inside, with items displayed nicely on shelves instead of stacked in boxes; there is much more open space for customers to walk in to. In an informal conversation with a shop-owner at CTC, Xiao-fan, expressed her distaste for the behaviors of the Chinese at Blok 70. “The Chinese at Blok 70 act in crude ways without proper manners because they are surrounded by other Chinese. At CTC, not everyone is Chinese, so we have to act in a way that represents China. The Chinese at Blok 70 have completely forgotten that they are representing a culture to others because they are surrounded by other Chinese who act in the exact same way as themselves!”³² The actions of the Chinese depend largely on their environment. In a setting where everyone is working in very small spaces, smoking indoors, and talking very loudly, people tend to be more relaxed and negligent of any formal manners, thus impacting their public image to the local society. What people see when they go to Blok 70, as a result, becomes the represented “culture” of the Chinese, which oversimplifies the diversity of Chinese nationals.

The populations that shop at Blok 70 and CTC also have different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Xiao-fan said that the customers at CTC are usually Serbians, not Chinese. Most Chinese retailers go to Blok 70 to restock their stores, along with many other Serbians. The Serbian customers who go to CTC, according to Xiao-fan, are more refined and are more respectful towards the Chinese than the Serbians who go to Blok 70. Since she used to own a

³² Interview with Xiao-fan, Zemun, Belgrade, 4 May 2011.

store at Blok 70 before relocating to the CTC, she had several negative experiences with Serbians that were rudely addressing her as “*Kinezi*” (Chinese) and not by a proper title. At CTC, according to Xiao-fan, there has never been an instance of disrespectful comments from Serbians. The cultural environment at Blok 70 and CTC differ drastically as people with different levels of cultural understandings go to the different markets. However, we have to take into account the newness of the CTC compared to Blok 70. Blok 70 has been a known Chinese market in Belgrade since the late 1990’s, whereas CTC started operating in 2009. From my observations in Belgrade, many Serbians do not know that CTC exists, and if they do, they do not know what is inside the center. On top of that, CTC is significantly more difficult than Blok 70 to get to due to the lack of accessible public transportation. People who may like to shop at CTC, as a result, have many more barriers to overcome to get to the CTC.

The business model at Blok 70 is small-scaled trade with no long-term investments. They order products from manufacturers in China, import the items, and sell them to retailers. Many of the merchants have even switched to retail sales only as they lost too much money doing wholesale imports. They pick out merchandise for resale from other importers to make a marginal profit. In contrast, the business model at CTC, according to many Chinese merchants who work at CTC, is large-scaled investment with strategies for long term development and competitiveness. The executive of CTC, Mr. Zhou, said that in order to survive in the market, a transmigrant merchant has to start upgrading their business model to one that will be competitive in the future markets of Serbia. He believes that the market styled businesses will not last long if they do not change the quality of their products and the presentation of their shops to the consumer. In my conversations with the Chinese, many of them repeatedly mentioned the large numbers of Chinese merchants who have been going back to China due to business failures. In

order to survive in the markets, Chinese merchants increasingly have to out-compete each other, since many of them sell similar products.

3.6 Chefs: A Temporary Stay

There are numerous Chinese restaurants in Belgrade with authentic Chinese chefs that come from different parts of China. Many of these chefs are asked by local restaurant owners to come to Serbia. They are usually contracted under one or two year terms, and they usually do not stay in Serbia long.³³ Most of these chefs have families back in China, and after a few years, as their contracts end, they return back to China and continue their cooking profession. Since most of the Chinese restaurants in Belgrade have Serbian servers, many of the chefs develop close relationships with their Serbian co-workers. These relationships generally function in the workplace only; when the Chinese chefs go home, they are usually alone and out of contact with the Serbian society. They can be in Belgrade for a few years and still not have any friends, according to Ren-fu, the head chef at a local Chinese restaurant whom I interviewed. Also, from my conversations with several chefs, I discovered that most of the chefs come from different provinces than the merchants, thus they do not have large familial or regional networks in Serbia they can rely on. As a result, most of the chefs do not come into close contact with local Serbians, aside from the workplace, or other Chinese migrants,. Most of them speak very little Serbian, knowing just enough to get by at work. Chinese chefs are exposed to less Serbian cultural influences as they migrate to Serbia to work for a short and defined length of time.

³³ Interview with San-min, Belgrade, 7 May 2011.

3.7 Confucius Institute: Disconnected with the Chinese in Belgrade

The Confucius Institute in Belgrade is a non-profit organization supported by the Chinese Ministry of Education. It began in 2006 with the main purposes of educating Serbians in the Chinese language, history, and culture. This institute hosts cultural activities such as showcasing Chinese movies, teaching Serbians how to cook Chinese cuisines, hosting exhibitions of Chinese art, etc. I spoke with Filip, a worker at the Confucius Institute, to ask him about the local Chinese involvement in the cultural activities aimed at promoting cultural exchanges. He said, “The Chinese in Belgrade mainly come from rural, peasant towns in China. They are not interested in cultural events, as they are mostly absorbed in their own work.” Filip’s response indicates that the Chinese in Belgrade are usually pre-occupied in day-to-day business affairs, thus they pay very little attention to the cross-cultural events that the Confucius Institute hosts. In addition, since many of the Chinese in Belgrade have low levels completed education, cultural events centered around literacy and generating Chinese information in Serbia do not interest them.

With an objective of “promoting Chinese culture,” the Confucius Institute is completely disconnected from the actual Chinese who live in Belgrade, signifying the lack of cultural exchanges between Serbian and Chinese Institutions. The Chinese transmigrant identity in Serbia, as a result, is largely the product of interactions within the Chinese community without much contact with local Serbians. Although open to dialogue with Serbians, most Chinese say that the language barrier and the differences in cultural values make it difficult for them to connect with the locals. “We are just too different,” says Wu-min, a Chinese merchant who works in New Belgrade.

Conclusions

This research has most importantly shown the multi-dimensionality of the identity of Chinese transmigrants who live in Belgrade. Ethnic national identity has a strong root among most of the Chinese in Belgrade, however, their ethnicity does not make their national identities equivalent. Most of the Chinese function in a transnational space, where they utilize both their networks in China and Serbia to carry out day-to-day operations. With strong connections to their regional identity, the Chinese are divided among themselves along township lines and dialects. However, with the increase of young Chinese workers coming into the trading business, the regional lines of individual Chinese identities will be increasingly blurred through inter-regional and inter-ethnic marriages. The familial ties in the Chinese community will become broader as young Chinese marry each other, and more individuals with different networks will be linked into a larger overall network. Eventually business considerations based on practical calculations will overtake the family network (as the family ties get larger and more confusing).

Some students that study in Serbia are in a transitory stage, waiting to step into their next transnational space. Young, educated Chinese from Serbia will function in multiple networks across different regions of the world. With the increase of education, more and more Chinese will take on different professions other than the merchant trade, whether in Serbia, China, or other countries.

Business models that are based on long-term planning and investment will have more competitive weight as smaller trading businesses will die out. Since larger business models such as the CTC are more willing to integrate foreign companies, the transnational network of these businesses will increase beyond Serbia, while the smaller traders will not be able to expand as

easily. The national identity of individuals with long-term business plans will be embedded in multiple societies, while the national identity of the trader without long term plans will remain in old, familiar networks.

In conclusion, the environment and activities of the Chinese immigrant determines his/her national identity and the networks in which he/she will function. Not one immigrant will have the exact same identity as another, as each individual has a different set of circumstances as defined by their family ties, transnational networks, practical business models, social interactions, level of ethnic nationalism, education, marriage, etc.

Limitations of the study

Since I spent most of the time with people inside of their stores, the mentality of the Chinese were largely framed around their working space, not their recreational or resting space. This element caused some Chinese people to answer my questions based on the framework of business, economy, and work.

The lack of time was also another restriction I faced. Since we only had three weeks to conduct all the field work, I was not able to thoroughly interact and build trusting relationships with all of the Chinese people I encountered. Since research on the Chinese experience requires established trust between the Chinese people and I, sometimes the Chinese were not as open and honest with me.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Since this project only focused on the Chinese in Belgrade, future studies should explore the perceptions of identity among Chinese migrants who have settled in smaller Serbian

towns outside of the capital city. In addition, the Serbian and Roma perspectives of the Chinese should also be explored in order to understand the overall climate of the status of Chinese in Serbia from multiple viewpoints. Furthermore, since Chinese entertainment via television and internet play a significant role in the daily-life of Chinese migrants, future studies should examine the media the Chinese Diaspora expose themselves to, and the effect it has on the migrant experience. Lastly, the Chinese experience in the other cities of former-Yugoslavia should be explored in order to understand the similarities and differences in Chinese identities across the region.

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Appendix

Interview Questions:

Basic background

- Where are you from? (What city in China?)
- When did you come to Beograd?
- Why did you come?
- When did you first hear about Beograd?
- What is your legal status in China?
- Do you have citizenship here? Do you plan to get it in the future?

Family, education, language

- Do you have family in Serbia?
- Do you have children?
- If so, where do they go to school? And why?
- What language do they speak?
- How is your Serbian language?
- What your educational background?

Perception of self, cultural values

- What country do you think you belong to? Serbia or China? Both? Neither?
- How has being in Serbia affected your personal life?
- How long do you plan to stay in Serbia? How do you think that will affect your cultural values?
- How do you define your nationality? It doesn't have to be restricted to ethnic affiliation.
- What are the most important values you hold as an individual?
- Do you think the future generations of Chinese in Serbia will be very different from you?

Civic duty

- What do you think about the prospect of one day becoming a Serbian citizen?
- What are your current obligations of being a citizen of _____?

Social interactions

- Who are your closest friends? Where are they from?
- Do you have any non-Serbian friends? (including Roma and Serbians)
- How often do you go outside of New Belgrade into Old City?
- What is your perception of Serbians in general?