

The Strangers Next-door: A Case Study of a Chinese Family in Brno

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There have been abundant researches and studies on migrants in the Czech Republic. Brno, as the second largest city and the capital of Southern Moravia region, is known for its cultural and ethnic diversity. Migrants from many countries have been residing in this city since decades ago. Yet, among the researches, comparably very little is done about Chinese migrants. What the researchers have found out basically is that the Chinese community is rather not as intact as the others are. Therefore, in this case study, I would like to focus on one Chinese family that has been in Brno for almost 20 years, to see how they survive in the host society “alone” without the help from a close-knit community. Besides the main research question mentioned above, I would also address other issues, for instance, why they choose to stay a “stranger”; how they view the Czech society and themselves within, at present and in the future.

I have already conducted the first round of interview with one of the family members and have collected some basic first-hand empirical data. I am going to analyze the transcript of the interview in this paper. There may be follow-up interviews in the course of analysis if it is needed. For the conceptual construction of the paper, I start with George Simmel’s concept of “stranger” in order to describe the essentially transitive relation between Chinese migrants and the host society. Marketa Moore’s concept of “cloakroom community” is what I intend to explore and supplement by my study. My hypothesis is that the Chinese family is part of a transnational network spreading all over Europe, or central Europe to be more precise. The network is not largely integrated into any host society, but self-sufficient. It transcends the geographical boundary and is thus very liquid inside.

I am going to start my paper with a literature review for readers to grasp the over-all situation of the field. As literature on this specific topic is not well available, I would use also those that are closely-related to my topic, for example the works of Pal Nyiri and Frank Pieke on the Chinese communities in Hungary; and to put it into a larger context, the studies of Chinese communities in the whole Europe and US. After the literature review, there will be an overview of Brno the city. A general description of the history of immigration in Brno is important for a better understanding of the case. Second-hand data on the situation of the migrants, such as policies and regulations, and the changes that have been made to them over the years, would serve as a background for later analysis. The next part of my paper will be a detailed recollection of the case, including contents of the interview, introduction of the family, and the direct answers made by the respondent to the major research questions. The last part is the analysis of the case. I am going to connect the empirical evidence with the theories to answer to my research question and hypothesis.