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## **Integration of Chinese immigrant children in four countries: Germany, Hungary, Spain and the UK.**

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### **Abstract**

*The children of immigrants now constitute a significant percentage of the population of the European Union, and their integration is a basic requirement for these children to become citizens able to contribute to the advancement of their societies and to use the benefits of the host society. A key social arena for many migrants is the school. This paper explores national, group and individual variations in support availability to Chinese migrant parents and their children, and the consequences of such support for the well-being of individuals and their communities across Europe. Whilst contact between the Chinese and the majority communities varied significantly across cultures, the Chinese felt well integrated and respected within the school system across these nations.*

### **Introduction**

The children of immigrants now constitute a significant percentage of the population of the European Union. Integration of immigrant children into the receiving society is a basic requirement for these children to become citizens able to contribute to the advancement of their societies and to use fully the benefits of the host society. One major arena of integration is the school, where immigrant children might have several disadvantages and they themselves and also their families might need different kinds of social support in order to participate equally in the educational system. While support is most probably inevitable to establish fair treatment of children in school, Verma *et al.* (1994) have shown the dangers of this as well, namely how the dominance of the 'compensatory' perspective in education (Siraj-Blatchford, 1993) has resulted in ethnic minority groups being viewed in deficit terms, irrespective of their performance.

In our study we explored a particular group of immigrants, namely Chinese living in four different European countries: Germany, Hungary, Spain and the UK. Our main informants were mothers whose children are at school. In this chapter we concentrate on the nature of relationship Chinese families have with the home and the host culture and the kind of difficulties mothers perceive to encounter related to their children's schooling,

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Robin Goodwin from Brunel University, UK was the project and scientific leader of this British Academy funded project.

the amount of help they receive in relation to these difficulties, the main providers of this aid and the potential cross-country differences in these respects.

### **Chinese immigration to Europe**

Chinese emigration had reached unprecedented levels since the onset of reforms after the Cultural Revolution in 1978 and the liberalisation of migration with the emigration law of 1985. Students and professionals mainly headed towards the USA and Japan and by the end of the 1980s this trend was called the 'leave China fever' (Pieke, 1998). Chinese people nowadays have considerable freedom to move to destinations that offer a prospect of better life both inside and outside the country. Emigration to foreign countries in fact - as Pieke wrote in 1998 - was in a large part a foreign extension of the domestic phenomenon of *xia hai*: to move mainly to southern China and try one's luck in the rapidly growing market sector. The total number of Chinese population in Europe adds up to more than half a million people now (Pieke, 2006). However this data cannot be considered reliable due to the huge number of illegal immigrants. There are also a rapidly growing number of Chinese students participating in undergraduate and graduate programmes in Europe (Shen, 2007).

The composition of immigrants in Europe differs from the composition of those who leave China for the US or Australia. On one hand, European universities up until recently had been less eager to enrol and fund talented Chinese students than the US, and as a result of the strict limitations on employment and settlement after graduation, Europe largely excluded the benefits of brain-drain from China on which the US effectively capitalised (Pieke, 2006).

On the other hand, immigration is an emotive topic in Europe; there is a fear of competition for scarce jobs and an overstretching of the generosity of the welfare state. Immigrants in the USA are basically left on their own, there is no benefit allocated to them as immigrants. The welfare states of Europe however have different policies to help immigrants integrate into the society (subsidised housing, free language courses, free health care etc.) and these are very costly. Therefore it is logical to try to control and restrict the number of incoming immigrants to their countries more strictly. Occasional racist sentiments and fear of a flood of starving millions from the Third World are partly related to this allocation of public resources. The general attitude towards immigration is therefore more reserved than in the USA as it is seen to imply mainly costs and not benefits to the society. Immigration restrictions only manage to scare off wealthy and well-educated migrants though (Pieke, 1998) but less educated Chinese find their ways and means to enter Europe – illegally if necessary.

Research on Chinese immigrants in Europe has no long history and there are few studies on them. Scholars mostly dealt with Chinese in Southeast Asia, North America and Australia. Because research started late, the majority of results remained in unpublished reports or dissertations in local language. There has been somewhat more research in countries with large Chinese communities like France, Britain and the Netherlands. Recently, there has been some research on Chinese communities in Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Russia and Spain (Benton & Pieke, 1998).

Pieke (2006) argues that many aspects of the Chinese presence can be properly understood only when studied on a European rather than a national level and comparing the experiences of Chinese groups in different European countries throws greater light on their experiences than a country-by-country analysis. It may make it possible to identify what is a common Chinese cultural characteristic, which is present in all the different countries irrespective of the national context and also to understand how the policy of the different countries related to the particular cultural-historical-political past and present influence the integration of Chinese immigrants.

### **The study**

In our research we conducted a four-country study with the participation of Germany, Hungary, Spain and the UK. The project leader was Robin Goodwin (Brunel University, UK) and the project was funded by the British Academy (2003-2006). We chose countries with different histories related to immigration and also related to Chinese immigration.

#### ***Chinese in Germany***

The very first Chinese arrived in Germany in 1821 (Gütiger, 1998). Since then Chinese immigration was continuous, but Chinese immigrants never constituted a high proportion of Germany's total immigration. Chinese communities live mainly in the big cities. At present the second largest People's Republic of China national community in Europe is in Germany and there are 16 Chinese student and academic associations in the country. Chinese immigrants, in contrast to e.g. Turkish are not seen as a 'problematic' immigrant group, as Gütiger (1998) writes they 'diligently serve the people of their host nation' (p.205). Chinese actors, musicians and painters etc. are frequently in the limelight.

#### ***Chinese in the UK***

Of all the European nations Britain has the largest Chinese population, mainly due to its colonisation of Hong Kong (Hong Kong Island and the New Territories) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was in Britain that the catering trade was established as the primary industry among the Chinese. The majority of Chinese and British-Chinese living in Britain today are from families which arrived in the late 1950s and 1960s and are dominated by the Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysian Chinese (Frances, 2004).

Chinese are seen as 'naturally' or 'culturally' industrious, entrepreneurial and they have the lowest recorded unemployment rate of any immigrant group. Verma et al (1999) report very positive statistics about the Chinese families living in England. Among the different immigrant groups they are the most upwardly mobile and their average total household income is also the highest. They speak English fluently or fairly well and they are doing exceptionally well in terms of educational achievements. Chinese males have the highest proportion of all ethnic minorities with a university degree and the lowest proportion with no GCSE. Chinese British women are more than twice as likely to have a university degree as even British European. Chinese living in England are relatively

unlikely to report racial discrimination or its likelihood compared to all other ethnic minorities. They have an acculturative strategy that is retaining a strong element of traditional identity whilst accommodating some major features of life in Britain. Verma et al (1999) compared Chinese adolescents in Britain and Hong Kong and European British adolescents. They found that educational attitudes are crucial aspects of the identity of Chinese children and they enjoy school more and think less that it is a waste of time than their European British counterparts. As a group, British-Chinese pupils are high achievers within the British education system. British-Chinese and Indian pupils outperform children from other ethnic groups in British compulsory education (DfEE, 2001). Further, over 90% of British-Chinese students continue into full-time post-compulsory education (Owen, 1994), and they are more likely than any other ethnic group in Britain to enter higher education (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996). Chan's (2000) work confirms that young British-Chinese have high self-esteem compared to their white-British and Hong Kong Chinese contemporaries and they have positive feelings about themselves and as members of society. Frances (2005) however warns that the notion of the Chinese as an economic 'success story' in Britain has meant that they are often seen as not needing help, and as not having difficulties, and consequently tend to be bypassed by social services.

### *Chinese in Spain*

In Spain immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon and immigrants are mainly perceived as a labour force rather than permanent citizens of Spain. In the last ten years Chinese immigrants have outnumbered the other traditional immigrant communities such as those coming from Venezuela, Portugal etc (Perez, 2006). In spite of the growing number of immigrants living in the big cities this has not yet resulted in the modification of social structures and traditional school practices. Perez (2006) conducted a research in the so-called Welcome School Programme that has been created in Spain in order to teach the Spanish language to those students who do not speak it. His results show that Spanish teachers have generally low educational expectations of immigrant children and they are not culturally 'literate' and have difficulties in understanding cultural differences related to the teaching-learning situation. Therefore they tend to interpret Chinese students' more reserved and respectful behaviour (i.e. not asking questions) as lack of interest and dumbness. This creates a very different educational result than in other countries. In Spain Chinese students do not excel in school and teachers have no 'stereotype' about the 'good and keen Chinese learner' as it is the case in the UK or in USA and Australia.

### *Chinese in Hungary*

Immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon in Hungary. It started in 1989-1990, after the fall of the socialist system and opening of the borders. The Hungarian society is not open towards the immigrants, according to several international sociological studies (e.g. the International Social Survey Program <http://webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/ICPSR/access/index.html>) in 1995 or the European Value Study in 1999 ([http://www.gesis.org/en/data\\_service/evs/](http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/evs/))). Hungarian respondents proved to be the most xenophobic and had the highest intolerance index in Europe.

The number of Chinese immigrants has grown fast. They are largely northern Chinese, who arrived by the Trans-Siberian trains from Beijing and from Zhejiang province. By 1991 there were about 30 000 to 40 000 of them in the country. In 2004 among all the immigrants 7 percent were Chinese (Feinschmidt & Nyíri, 2006). In 2003 as a result of a bilateral agreement between the Chinese and Hungarian government (that is unique in Europe!) a Chinese school opened in Budapest that accepts both Hungarian and Chinese children and emphasizes transnational 'double' identity and dialogue between cultures, cultural understanding, and cultural tolerance. Students follow the Chinese curriculum and teachers and textbooks are also from China. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education in 2002/2003 Asian students (Chinese and Vietnamese) got into secondary school (gymnasium) in greater proportion than Hungarian speaking migrant children in Hungary (Feinschmidt & Nyíri, 2006) demonstrating that they are successful in the Hungarian education system.

### **The study**

Confucianism advocates several interconnected values that give learning the highest priority and can contribute to positive attitude towards school. The well-known Confucian phrase states that '*those who labour with their brain should govern those who labour with their brawn...*' (Verma et al, 1999) Filial piety implies a strong sense of duty and obligation, and it is paramount to do one's best. Perseverance and obedience are essential qualities of a good son and daughter and teachers are highly respected (Verma et al, 1999).

Pieke (1991) however found a double phenomenon in relation to Chinese children's educational achievement in the Netherlands. While Chinese students' results were better than other immigrant children's, and in some respects better than those of the native Dutch, there was a group of students who dropped out and did not continue after compulsory education. These were students with a low-educational parental background who worked in the catering business. According to Pieke the cultural script of the parents and the child is not the individual's but the family's success, therefore the child's education is seen as an investment into the future that can bring a higher financial status later. This investment is worthwhile only in case the child shows the ability to achieve well. If the family needs the child as an additional worker and the child's school achievement is low then the time lost with schooling is not in proportion with the potential gains

In our study we compared two countries that have a long history of immigration (UK and Germany) and two others with a relatively recent history of immigration (Hungary and Spain). We studied characteristics that are able to reveal how well integrated Chinese families consider themselves in the host society, placing in focus perceived social support related to different aspects of schooling as a highly esteemed culturally and/or pragmatically endorsed value of Chinese families.

### **Respondents**

Data have been gathered from 218 Chinese mothers in four countries (Germany=58, Hungary=47, Spain=56, UK=57). On average, the respondents have spent about 12 years

in their host country ( $SD = 6.3$  years), the duration of their stay ranging from 2 to 30 years. About 30 percent of the respondents are originally from Zhejiang province in China; about 15 percent of the participants are originally from Hong Kong. Of the sample studied, the average number of children the participants have is 2 ( $SD = 0.86$ ), ranging from 1 to 4 children. The mean age of the first child is about 13.4 years ( $SD = 6.0$ ). Mothers' average educational level is secondary school.

### **Method**

A questionnaire with closed-ended questions was used in Mandarin language. The studied topics were the following: 1. Social networks; 2. Language use and competence; 3. Parental Values; 4. Schooling of the child; 5. Support received related to schooling: emotional support (in case of distress related to schooling), practical support (books, translations etc.), informational support (which school to choose, school events, homework) and education related support in general; 6. Child's social network and integration at school; 7. Satisfaction with child's schooling; 8. Mother's general well being.

In this chapter we will describe only a part of the results focusing on different dimensions of integration into the host society: social networks, language use and competence, support related to schooling of the child and the mother's general well being.

### **Results**

#### ***Social networks***

Four intercultural strategies have been identified by Berry (1980) related to basic issues faced with acculturating people. These four strategies are based on the distinction between two orientations: a relative preference for maintaining one's heritage culture and identity and a relative preference for maintaining contact with and participating in the larger society. The four different strategies combine these two dimensions to a different degree. *Marginalisation* means that the immigrant does not have contact with the host society, but has lost contact with the home culture too. *Isolation* emphasises the home culture, *assimilation* the host culture while *integration* encompasses both in the given person's cultural identity.

#### ***Contact with own culture***

In order to reveal how deep a contact Chinese immigrant families keep with their home culture we designed several questions related to their social networks. According to the results altogether 34 percent of the respondent mothers are member of a Chinese association in the host country (mainly funded by members) and 77 percent like to have contact with other Chinese living in the given country. We did not find any difference among Germany, Hungary and Spain, but in the UK significantly more respondents are members of a Chinese association ( $p < .05$ ) and they report significantly less frequently (4%) that they do not like to have contact with their own ethnic group compared to Chinese living in Hungary, Spain and in Germany (26%, 26%, and 17%, respectively,

Chi-Square Test:  $p < .02$ ).

Respondents living in Europe keep in frequent contact with China. One fourth of them more than once a week and altogether 50 percent at least once per week. We found significant cross-country differences (Kruskal-Wallis Test –  $p < .001$ ). Chinese in Hungary have contact with China most frequently (mean rank = 86.62), Chinese in Germany come next (mean rank = 87.82), then comes Spain (mean rank = 106.29) and the UK (mean rank = 124.18). 26 percent of them also support relatives living at home by regularly sending money to them. 40 percent travel at least once a year to China. 78 percent read Chinese newspapers at least weekly and 73 percent watch Chinese television daily. It seems that Chinese living in Hungary have the strongest contact with China because they not only visit China more frequently but also read Chinese newspapers and watch Chinese television significantly more often than Chinese living in the other three countries ( $p < .001$ ). Chinese living in the UK seem to have the weakest contact with China (Hong Kong) based upon the responses to the above questions.

One possible explanation is the command of the host language. We asked about both the mother's and the child's language competence in general and related to school (how well teachers understand them and how well they understand teachers). We applied a 4-point Likert-type scale (1. Very poor; 4. Very good) in each case, however, these 4-point scales correlated so well (at the 0.01 level) that they could be treated as three items of a single scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ). The scale mean was 2.66;  $SD = .81$ . We found that Chinese mothers living in Hungary rated their host language competency significantly lower (HUN: 2.15; UK: 2.69; GER: 2.84; ESP: 2.86)  $p < .001$  (one-way ANOVA). We got a similar significant difference in case of the parent's perception of oldest child's language competency. While in all countries the mothers estimated the child's language competence higher than theirs ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .86$ ) a similar significant difference was found among the different groups of children. As in the case of the previous variable the one-way ANOVA test showed that the language competence of children living in Hungary was estimated to be the lowest ( $p < .05$ ), while Chinese mothers living in Spain answered the most positively about their child's knowledge of the host language. (The country means were: HUN: 2.88; GER: 3.23; UK: 3.24; ESP: 3.41).

The language mainly used at home is also part of the acculturation strategy of the family. The large majority of the families use either Mandarin (almost 40 percent) or a regional Chinese language (42 percent) at home. Only 8 percent mix one version of Chinese and the host language and 12 percent speak only the host language at home. We found that more families use the host language at home in Germany versus in the other countries (31.6% versus 4.5%,  $p < .001$ ).

Half of the mothers use one form of Chinese (Mandarin or a regional language) in work, meaning that their contact with the host society is relatively limited. 70 percent of them use Mandarin and 24 percent a regional Chinese language communicating with other Chinese. Only 2.4 percent of the mothers use the host language in this case.

### ***Contact with the host culture***

We studied the contact with the host culture in relation to different kinds of supports



asked for and received in relation to school in detail, but we also wanted to gain a picture about the more general attitude towards it. The results show that while mothers report a very vivid contact with the Chinese language and culture, the majority of them (87 percent) like to have contact with the host culture too, indicating a striving for integration of the home and host culture. But Chinese mothers living in the UK (26%) and in Hungary (19%) significantly more frequently reported that they did not like to have contact with the host group (GER: 6%; ESP: 4%)  $p < .001$ .

Contact with the host culture is partly dependent on the mother's language competence. We found a weak but significant relationship between command of the host language and talking to others from the host group about the child's school. The higher the parent's language competence, the more she talks to people from the majority group about school ( $r = .153, p < .05$ ) and the higher the child's language competence, the more the mother talks to people from the majority group about school ( $r = .189, p < .05$ ).

### ***Social integration of the Chinese minority group in general***

We were interested in how mothers perceive their relationship with people from the host country therefore we asked how well Chinese people in the given country get on with the people of the host country in general. We used a 4-point scale: from very well (1) to not at all well (4). The average was  $M = 2.45$ ;  $SD = 0.78$  and there was no difference between countries. We also placed this question in the school context and asked how well Chinese people living in the given country understand how to deal with problems related to the child's schooling. We got a significantly more positive picture ( $M = 1.97$ ;  $SD = 0.7$ ) indicating that mothers feel more confident about school and education related issues than about their general relationship with people of the host society.

As a potential indicator of the success of the integration process we measured mothers' subjective well being with Diener's (1985) 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The scale includes statements like the following: '*The conditions of my life are excellent*'. In this 4-point scale (1. strongly disagree; 4. strongly agree) the mean was:  $M = 2.91$ ;  $SD = 0.54$ . The country means were the following: HUN 2.61; UK 2.80; ESP 3.03; GER 3.11. We found that Chinese mothers living in Hungary and the UK were significantly less satisfied with their life than their counterparts in Spain and Germany ( $p < .05$  level).

### ***Integration in school: perception of teachers' potential discriminatory behaviour***

We asked mothers if in their opinion teachers encourage the host students more than the Chinese students or whether they treat them in the same way or even encourage the Chinese students more. The majority of mothers (75%) reported about an equal treatment, while 17 percent thought that teachers encourage the host students more, however 8 percent stated that the Chinese students get more encouragement than the host students. We found a significant cross-country difference: Chinese mothers living in Germany felt more frequently (33.3% of them) that teachers encourage host nation students more:  $p < .05$  (Chi-Square Test). In case of boys and girls the overwhelming majority of mothers (92 percent) considered that teachers treat and encourage boys and girls equally.

### *Support related to education*

One factor underpinning the successful adaptation of migrants to their new societies is the nature of the integration process, and the support networks that are needed to ensure its success. Therefore we studied what kinds of support (emotional, informational, and practical) are most readily available to migrants and from where does support originate (e.g. friends from the host community, work colleagues from the same ethnic community etc.). We focused on support related to the educational arena as an important context of integration of children of immigrants and also a culturally valued field among Chinese.

We considered as one indicator of the importance of schooling the frequency of discussing matters related to the child's schooling with members of their own ethnic group and the host society. Almost half of the mothers said that she 'always' consults questions related to schooling with other Chinese, 13 percent does this 'often' and only 10 percent never talks about this with members of her own ethnic group. In addition to this one-fourth of the mothers also talks about school problems within a Chinese association. Half of the mothers receive help/advice even from relatives and friends back in China related to the child's schooling in the host country.

Compared to this there is a less vivid contact with members of the host society. 22 percent of the mothers indicated that they talk 'always' about school related matters with people of the host country and 17 percent does this 'often', meaning that almost 40 percent have a vivid exchange of thoughts in this respect. Only 13 percent of mothers indicated never to talk with members of the host country about this topic.

### *Emotional support*

We asked about specific, potentially emotionally upsetting situations related to the child's schooling and if the mother received help in connection with that upsetting event and who provided the help. The situations were the following: the child has been bullied, underachieved, misbehaved, was wasting time at school, child was discriminated against or was being rejected due to his/her ethnic background. The results can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. Problems reported regarding the child:**

	Yes	No
Bullying	56.8%	43.2%
Underachievement	62.7%	37.3%
Misbehaviour	28.3%	71.7%
Wasting time	14.4%	85.6%
Discrimination	35.9%	64.1%

The most frequently mentioned problem that Chinese mothers considered emotionally upsetting was underachievement, but a relatively big proportion of the mothers (57 percent) reported bullying and 36 percent discrimination. We found significant differences in all five questions (Chi-Square Tests). In each question Chinese mothers

living in the UK reported in the biggest number that an emotionally upsetting event occurred ( $p < .001$ ).

We also asked the mothers if they received help in case they encountered a problem related to their child in the school. The results show that the most probable problem in which to receive help is in the case of underachievement (52.5%), but in comparison discrimination is helped only in one-third of the cases (Table 2).

**Table 2. Help received for problems regarding the child:**

	Yes	No
Bullying	39.4%	60.6%
Underachievement	52.5%	47.5%
Misbehaviour	23.2%	76.8%
Wasting time	13.3%	86.7%
Discrimination	28.6%	71.4%

While the biggest proportion of Chinese mothers who reported problems were those living in the UK, they were also the ones who reported getting help related to these problems the most frequently ( $p < .001$ ). Almost all mothers (90 to 100 percent) living in the UK who indicated a problem managed to get help.

Around one third of the mothers got help from the school (27%). The family is also an important source of emotional support (23 percent); other Chinese who represent the 'home' social network were mentioned by 13 percent and host group members by 9 percent.

### **Practical and informational support**

In the case of practical support the most frequently mentioned was sharing school equipment (52%) and obtaining books (43%). More than half of those who needed support related to school equipment, and 43 percent of those who were in need of books actually got them. Being helped financially was less frequent, less than 20 percent of the mothers indicated that they got this kind of support. Needs were fulfilled by school (30%), family (18%), local government (8%), host group (7%), Chinese association (5%) and other Chinese (1.4%).

Informational support related to where to send the child to school was needed in 63 percent of the cases and 41 percent actually got support. The child's progress in school was mentioned by 53 percent of the mothers and 52 percent got support. Homework and school events were less frequently mentioned (23% each) but the amount of support was the highest related to these (around 70 percent in each case). Needs were fulfilled by school (43%), family (14%), host groups (10%) and other Chinese (5%).

### **Summary**

The Chinese mothers who were our respondents in four different countries of Europe reported a vivid and rich contact with their own ethnic group and culture and even with

their home country, at the same time they demonstrated a willingness to participate in and a practice of interpersonal exchange with members of the host society, referring mainly to *integration* as an acculturation strategy though with more emphasis placed on the Chinese 'connection'.

Our results did not confirm Perez's (2006) conclusions that Chinese children in Spain are not handled equally in school: at least the mothers did not perceive it like that. Similarly, Chinese mothers living in Hungary did not report more discrimination or bullying towards their children than mothers living in the other countries, however international polls indicated a high level of xenophobia and intolerance among members of the Hungarian society.

In spite of these positive results we found it alarming that according to mothers every second Chinese child experienced bullying and more than every third was discriminated to a degree that was emotionally upsetting for the mother and the child. Teachers were not seen as practicing discrimination by the majority of the mothers; therefore it must have been the peer group and the wider society where this experience could have happened. Even more disturbing was that in only about one-third of the cases mothers were supported in solving these problems. Help was however mainly provided by the school.

The integration of immigrant Chinese children into the school system of the host country is generally seen as a success story. Our results show that in spite of several positive aspects there is still some work to do both on behalf of the schools and the policy makers.

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