

THE CHINESE DIASPORA IN THE EU COUNTRIES

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This article is a further contribution to the discourse on the ethnic ‘diffusion’ in European countries — the debate started on the pages of the Baltic Region journal by the triumvirate of three authors — Yu. N. Gladky, I. Yu. Gladky, and K. Yu. Eidemiller [4]. We assume that Europe has been a major centre of attraction for immigrants in recent decades and a site for the rapid emergence of ethnic communities. Unlike Muslim immigration — a product of the Arab Spring and often a measure of the last resort, — the Chinese immigration is a result of a certain convergence between the ideologies of the host countries, committed to multiculturalism, and the country of origin, pursuing a ‘go global’ policy. We chose the EU countries as a ‘demonstration site’ and the Chinese diaspora as the object of research. Our aim is to describe the process of migration from China and the formation of a Chinese diaspora in European countries. We analyse the timeline and scope of Chinese immigration, the qualitative changes in the composition of the immigrants, factors affecting the choice of the country of entry, and the quantitative parameters and settlement patterns of today’s Chinese diaspora in the region. We suggest grouping the Baltic region states by the numbers and ‘age’ of their Chinese diasporas. We consider the ethnic ‘diffusion’ as part of the ‘European project’ within Beijing’s global strategy.

Keywords: ethnic ‘diffusion’, ‘new’ migrants, Chinese diaspora, EU countries

European countries in the global migration mosaic. An integral part of the globalisation process, the international migration became an easily observable phenomenon at the end of the 20th century. As of 2015, according to the UN data, there were over 245 million people

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living outside their country of origin,¹ which is approximately 3% of the population of the Earth [25]. Obviously, the influence of the ‘migrant nation’ on the political, social, demographic, and economic development of individual countries, as well as on the intergovernmental collaborations and integration processes, is growing. The increase in irregular migration and the formation of ethnic communities often aggravates a wide range of problems. These include the ‘erosion’ of the pillars of national cultures, the replacement of the native population by migrants, the growing xenophobia, the overloading of the labour market and the social security system, brain drain, security threats (including those of terrorist attacks), the increased crime and corruption rates, etc. Recently, this problem has merited the close attention of international organisations, the governmental circles from different countries, the academic communities, and the general public [2; 5; 11; 13; 24].

One of the largest migration systems in the world, Europe is being tested in the crucible of mass immigration [10]. In 2015, the number of new arrivals was estimated at 1.5 million in the EU alone. In 2016, the estimate was at 1.8 million people (fig. 1).

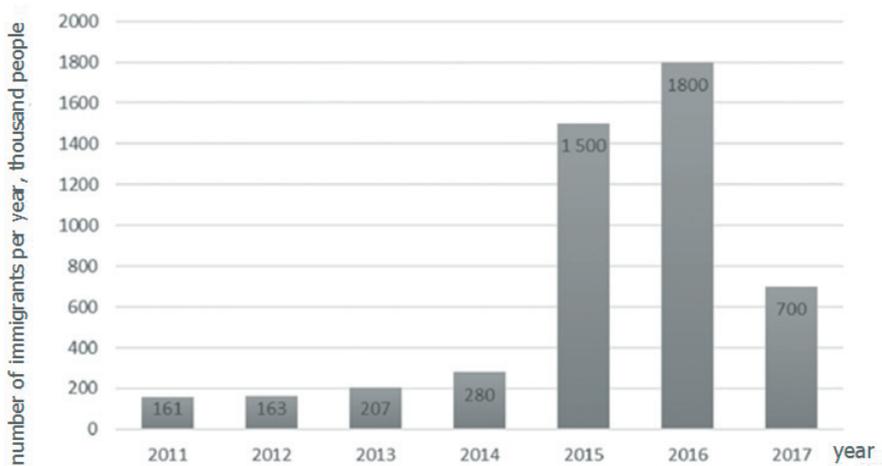


Fig. 1. Changes in the number of immigrants in the EU, 2011—2017

Prepared based on [20].

With the looming economic downturn and ethnic tensions, many countries of the region imposed strict control over immigration and retargeted their migration policies at receiving the qualified specialists at the expense of all the other categories of migrants, including refugees. During his time in office, Nicolas Sarkozy stressed the need to move from

¹ This estimate does not take into account undocumented or irregular migrants.

‘suffered’ to ‘chosen’ immigration [26, p. 17]. Although the political elite has gained a better understanding of the gravity of the problem, few practical measures have been taken. This results in ‘a rapidly growing criticism of the migration policy in Europe. The problem cannot be reduced to migration and minorities. They are not synonyms of poverty, unemployment, and aggression — which, for instance, Britons view as the cause of riots in their cities provoked by the so-called chavs. Crises also affect members of the middle class, thus widening the gap between them and the upper class. This does not eliminate the question about strategies for integration, adaptation, multiculturalism, focal or dispersed ethnic settlement pattern. Nor does it eliminate the question about social stratification or the absence thereof’ [18, p. 11]. The temptation of multiculturalism remains a ‘headache’ for both Western European governments and the advocates of multicultural and tolerance [4, p. 45]. Before the beginning of the emergency EU summit on migration scheduled for June 2018, the President of France Emmanuel Macron emphasised that migrant crisis in the EU had grown into a political crisis [14].

‘Two sides of the same coin’ or the timeline of the Chinese immigration in Europe. Against the background of an unprecedented increase in immigration in the region in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, few studies pay attention to migration from China. Works focusing on the geographical aspect are either absent or unknown to us. To a degree, this is explained by the history of the process, which can be perceived and evaluated from two perspectives — those of the country of origin and the country of destination. In terms of scale, direction, and structure, Chinese emigration is divided into two distinct eras. The first era comprises three periods. The first period — from antiquity to the 19th century — is characterised by relatively modest Chinese migration to the neighbouring countries, primarily those of South-East Asia. The period spanning through the 19th century, the fall of the Qin dynasty, the substantial weakening of China, and the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, was marked by a considerable expansion of the geography of migration, its main channel being the coolie trade. In the next three decades — from 1949 to 1978 — migration was almost non-existent, since the country’s borders were closed at the time. The second era began as China embarked on economic reforms in 1978. Few have paid attention to the fact that almost half of today’s Chinese diaspora emigrated from the country after this landmark event. The emergence of the so-called ‘new’ migrants dramatically affected the existing diasporas and the perception of the Chinese across the world. Such migrants have made a significant contribution to the development of China. They became a major force behind the Chinese modernisation and an important link between the People’s Republic of China and the rest of the world [17].



Despite its geographical remoteness, the European continent has attracted the Chinese population for a long time. Experts distinguish three stages of the Chinese immigration in the region. The first stage — from the late 19th to the mid-20th century — was characterised by sporadic arrivals of the Chinese and the emergence of small diasporas in Western European countries, mostly those with a colonial past. Having come by sea, most migrants settled in the port cities. Others were arriving by land via Russia. The only period of a massive influx of migrants from China spanned the first years of the First World War, as the European countries were faced with workforce shortage. The native population of Great Britain and France often viewed such migrants as a ‘national threat’. After the end of the war, most Chinese migrants were repatriated. During this period, Chinese migrants founded small Chinese quarters — ethnic enclaves, Chinatowns — in many large cities. The second stage (from the mid-20th century to the 1980s) witnessed an increase in the number of Chinese immigrants, accounted for by the undocumented emigration from the PRC during the Cultural Revolution and secondary migration influxes from Asia.² At the time, the Chinese appeared in the countries of Central Europe and occupied their own economic niche — the restaurant business [32]. The third, current, stage, is a product of the historical coincidence, when the second era of Chinese emigration met the liberalisation of migration laws in the European countries aimed at attracting international human resources. The distinctive features of the period are the massive Chinese immigration and the emergence of the Eastern European states as the likely destinations. The new wave is unique in terms of the sex ratio, the high proportion of young people and qualified specialists, and the large contribution of the educational migration. Note that over 2.6 million Chinese students obtained the higher education abroad. Only 1.1 million (41.9%) returned home. In 2011, 339 thousand Chinese students were studying at international universities [21; 30].

According to Ernst G. Ravenstein’s econometric model [34] and Everett S. Lee’s push-pull theory — if one refrains from analysing the pushing agents — the attractiveness of Europe for the Chinese immigration is sustained by several groups of historico-geographical, political, and socio-economic factors. Calculating the correlation between the proportion of Chinese migrants in the national population and a series of statistically available measures for the set of EU member states (table 1) makes it possible to take into account and ‘weigh’ the significance of individual factors. It turns out that, alongside the tenets of the immigration policy, the most important motivators in choosing the country of destination are the local population’s wellbeing and incomes, the labour market performance, and the economic cooperation between the possible destination and the PRC.

² The UK was the preferred destination for the ethnic Chinese from Malaysia and Hong Kong; the Netherlands, for those from Indonesia and Surinam; and France, for those from Indochina.

Table 1

**The significance of factors affecting the Chinese immigration
in European countries, 2013***

Measures	The proportion of the Chinese immigrants in the national population
HDI	0.7
Annual net	0.67
FDI stock from China	0.58
Unemployment rate	-0.26
Chinese diaspora as a proportion of the population	0.78

* Comment: the significance of factors is determined based on a calculation of rank correlation coefficients.

Compiled by the authors on the basis of [20; 23; 27; 29].

However, the decisive role is played by the ‘feedback’ — the presence of an established Chinese community (here, the correlation coefficient reaches 0.78), which once again testifies to the importance of immigrants’ social networks.

In 2015, the Chinese accounted for less than 3% of the 76 millions of international migrants in Europe [22; 23; 27]. Not all the first generation immigrants are the citizens of the PRC or the Republic of China.³ Their distribution is very irregular, which is explained by the differences in the personal priorities and in the attractiveness of individual countries. For example, 285,000 Chinese people live in the UK, from 80 to 160 thousand in France, Italy, Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands. Much fewer Chinese immigrants live in Italy and Hungary. Note that, recently, the latter has been playing the role of the ‘gate to Europe’.⁴ In view of the high mobility of population both within the EU and beyond the Schengen Area, to obtain an accurate estimate of the distribution of the first-generation Chinese immigrants, it is necessary to eliminate the intraregional migrations. The calculations of the proportion of the Chinese in the allochthonous population show that, while becoming more pronounced, the overall situation does not change dramatically. However, it is possible to distinguish three categories of countries. The first one brings together states that are extremely attractive to Chinese migrants

³ The European countries, all the countries of the EU, consider the Republic of China a part of the PRC and do not establish diplomatic ties with the former.

⁴ For example, from October 1988 to April 1992, 45,000 transit migrants from China crossed the territory of Hungary. Later, they have scattered across Europe and, partly, North America [33, p. 16].

(the Netherlands, Ireland, Norway and Finland). The countries of the second category are equally attractive to Chinese and European migrants (Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg). The third group comprises countries characterised by the greatest openness to the ‘outer world’. The UK and France are the major destinations for migrants both from Europe and from all the other regions (fig. 2).

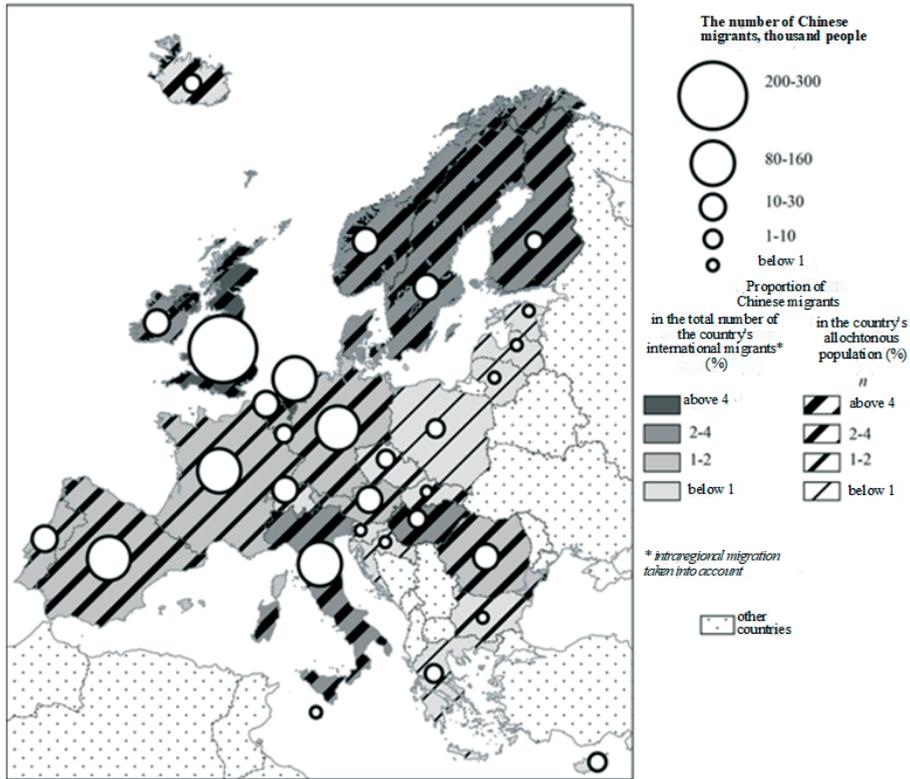


Fig. 2. Chinese migrants in the EU and EFTA countries, 2011

Prepared on the basis of [20; 23; 27].

The increase in the number and spatial concentration of immigrants launched the formation of a Chinese diaspora. Nevertheless, there is no established research methodology for studying this phenomenon. A clear definition, a set of generic characteristics, and a single classification are also lacking [5, p. 563, 569]. As T. S. Kondratyev stresses, despite the long history of the phenomenon, this diaspora drew the international researchers' attention only in the late 1970s. In Russia, they have been studied since the second half of the 1990s. Nevertheless, 'in the past decade, such eminent Russian researchers as M. A. Astvatsaturov, V. I. Dyatlov, T. S. Illarionov, Z. I. Levin, A. V. Militarev, T. V. Polodkov, V. D. Pop-

kov, V. A. Tishkov, Zh. T. Toshchenko, T. I. Chaptukova, and others have not only presented their viewpoints on a wide range of diaspora-related issues but also started an animated discussion' [9]. Chinese diaspora studies are complicated by a historically ramified conceptual framework. According to the law of the PRC on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Returned Overseas Chinese and their Relatives of September 7, 1990 [6], there are several terms and definitions for the Chinese living outside the country.

Tongbao — 'compatriots' (Chinese 同胞) — are the Chinese living in the Republic of China and the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau. Technically, they are not considered members of the Chinese diaspora.⁵

Huaqiao — 'Chinese migrants' (Chinese 华) — are the Chinese holding the citizenship of the PRC or the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau but permanently residing abroad. Historically, this term included the Chinese migrants rather than those living overseas on a permanent basis. This term is widely used in the Russian language literature.

Waiji huaren — 'foreigners of Chinese descent' (Chinese 外籍华人) — are the Chinese (huaqiao and their descendants), naturalised or holding a foreign citizenship by birth, and thus stripped off the citizenship of the PRC, the Republic of China, or the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau. This term refers to the foreigners of Chinese descent. It is often abbreviated to huaren — the Chinese (Chinese 华人).

Huayi — 'descendants of the Chinese' (Chinese 华裔) — are people of the Chinese origin, descendants of Chinese migrants. This term refers to people born and raised outside China, who studied and socialised abroad, i. e. the migrants of the second, third generations. The Huayi are part of huaren.

The term Haiwai huaren — the overseas Chinese (Chinese 海外华人 huaren) — refers to all the Chinese and people of Chinese origin living abroad, all the Chinese migrants, the overseas Chinese community, virtually, the Chinese diaspora. All the official documents of the PRC and the Republic of China use this term to denote the Chinese living outside China, regardless of their citizenship. It refers to both the citizens of the PRC, the Republic of China, and the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau, residing abroad and the naturalised ethnic Chinese. The diaspora includes the descendants of the Chinese migrants and the people born outside China in multi-ethnic families but preserving their ethnic identity and ties to the homeland.

⁵ After the incorporation of Hong Kong and Macau, on October 31, 2000, amendments were made to the respective laws.

The English language literature often uses a calque of the Chinese term to describe the diaspora (all the Chinese living outside China) — the overseas Chinese.

There can be no doubt about the existence of the Chinese diaspora as — according to the definition given by T. V. Poloskova — a robust cohesive social group (an association of people sharing a distinctive characteristic and participating in joint efforts coordinated by formal and informal institutions) that lives outside the country of the common geographical origin, has a common ethnic identity, and creates social, political, and economic institutions to support their identity and cohesion [15]. However, the varying terminology and principles of statistical recording cause the calculations of the size of the phenomenon to vary dramatically. The estimates of the number of the ethnic Chinese residing outside the country of origin range from 35 to 62 million people. In Beijing, they say with pride: ‘Everywhere where the Sun shines, there are our compatriots’ [12]. However, most of the Chinese community — above 70% — lives in the ASEAN countries. In comparison, the diaspora in Europe looks very modest, although its exact numbers are unknown. In 2011, the Europe — China Research and Advice Network (ECRAN) estimated the number of the ethnic Chinese in the EU countries at 2.3 million people, which is 1.5 times the estimate of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (OCAC) [27; 31].

At the same time, when compared to the other regions of the world, Europe stands out in that its Chinese diaspora is highly mosaic (fig. 3). Firstly, the size of diasporas ranges widely: from 650,000 in the UK to below 1,000 in some smaller countries. Secondly, the ratios between the huaren and huaqiao significantly differ, which translates into the predominant loyalty either to the local or to the Chinese authorities. Naturally, the former are prevalent in most of the EU member states with few exceptions (Italy, Spain, Finland, etc.). Thirdly, there is a dramatic differential among European countries in the proportions of the first-generation migrants with a ‘youth excess’, of highly educated people, and of the qualified specialists striving to assimilate with Europeans and find prestigious employment in science, medicine, business, finance, education, management or arts. Such migrants determine the quantitative parameters of the diaspora. They are responsible for the ‘model minority’ stereotype, entrenched in the American society.⁶ However, this stereotype is only partly accurate, since it applies only to the privileged part of the diaspora. There is another, ‘shadow’ part, comprising the manufacturing and ser-

⁶ The term ‘model minority’ was coined by the sociologist William Peterson in his essay ‘Success Story: Japanese American Style’ published by the *New York Times* in 1966. It referred to Asian Americans as ethnic minorities that managed, despite marginalisation, to achieve success in the US.

vice workers. Although they vary significantly in the demographic parameters, they are brought together by a low level of education and well-being, as well as a poor command of the local language. Many of such migrants are undocumented. This is a separate and, as of yet, poorly studied, field. However, the emergence of what is called in classical political science ‘mutually reinforcing cleavages’ — deep divides between local citizens and deprived immigrants speaking a different language and professing a different religion — is very unlikely in this case [28; 35; 37].

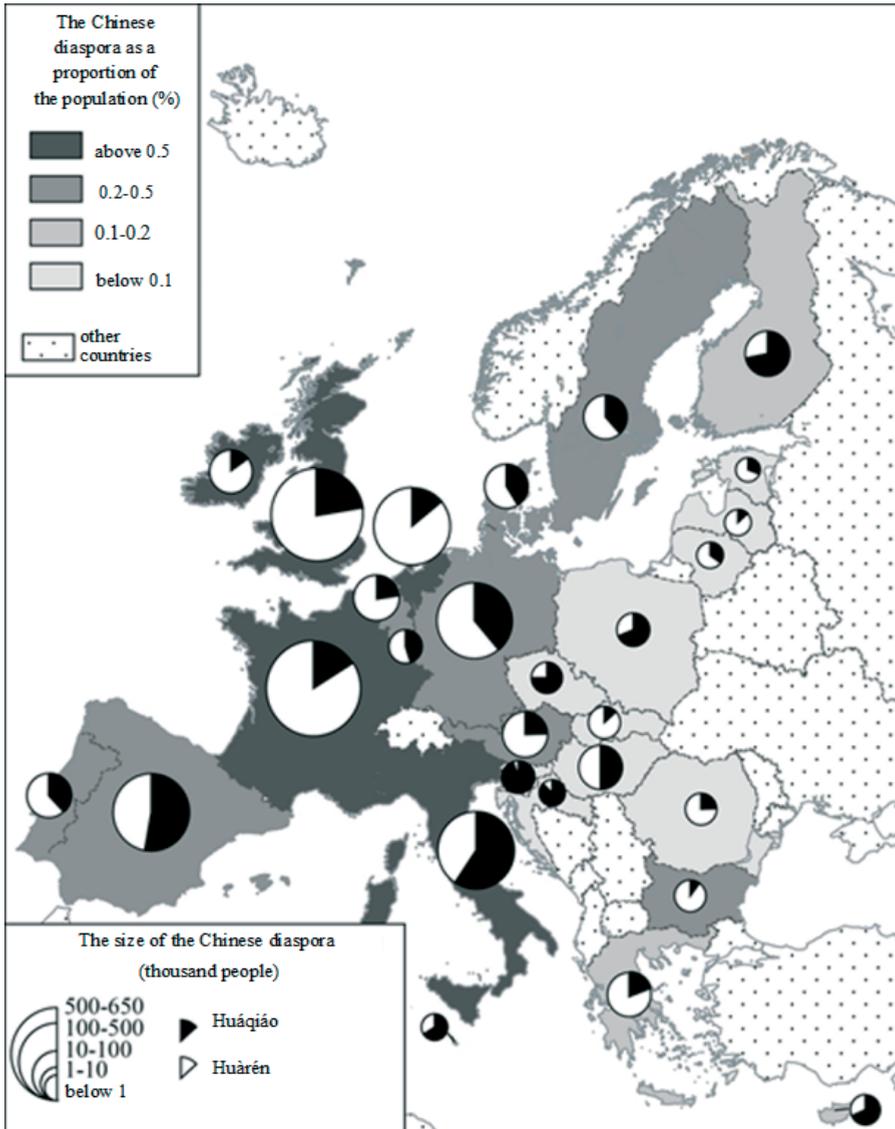


Fig. 3. The Chinese diaspora in the EU, 2011

Compiled by the authors on the basis of [20; 27; 31].

As of today, there exists parity between the first-generation Chinese immigrants (53 %) and the very diverse huayi in the EU. However, in the two thirds of the member states, the Chinese diaspora started to develop only recently, which testifies to the novelty of the phenomenon and stresses the need for further studies. A combined analysis of the size and ‘age’ of a diaspora makes it possible to divide the EU member states into four major groups. Two groups are represented by countries with a significant proportion of the Chinese diaspora. New’ migrants account for less than 50 % in the first group (the UK, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Ireland) and for over 50 % in the second one (Germany and Spain). The two groups characterised by small Chinese diasporas are formed by analogy. Most of such countries have a large proportion of the first-generation migrants (table 2). In a number of cases, for instance, in Sweden and the Baltics, they account for at least 85 % of the respective diasporas.

Table 2

The EU member states grouped by the size and ‘age’ of the Chiense diaspora, 2011

Size category	Size of the diaspora, thousands	‘Age category’ :*	
		‘Old’	‘Young’
Large		Large and ‘old’	Large and ‘young’
	Above 500	UK, France,	
	100—500	Italy, Netherlands	Spain, Germany,
	50—100	Ireland	
Small		Small and ‘old’	Small and ‘young’
	10—50	Belgium, Portugal	Austria, Sweden, Greece, Hungary Denmark
	Below 10	Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia	Finland, the Czech Republic, Poland, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Slovenia, Lithuania, Croatia, Malta, Latvia, Estonia

* The ‘age’ of a diaspora is identified based on the proportion of the first-generation immigrants.

Compiled by the authors on the basis of [27].

The gravitation of the ‘new’ migration towards a few destination countries contributed to a greater differential in the Chinese diaspora distribution. The size of diasporas has a distinct longitudinal gradient — it decreases eastward (fig. 2) — closely corresponding to the geography of the most economically developed and populous countries. In particular,

this is proven by the high correlation coefficients for the EU member states (0.8174 for GDP and 0.7908 for the population size). Over 98% of the diaspora live in 10 countries, with the UK and France being new home to 50% of Chinese migrants. Large Chinese communities emerged in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and Spain. Note that the latter two states — which are often considered migrants exporters' — offered an amnesty to illegal immigrants. The Nordic countries and Eastern European states, the borders of which opened to the Chinese immigration only in the 1990s, pale against this background. The only exceptions are Hungary and Romania, which are characterised by an excessive proportion of the Chinese in the structure of international immigration. In other words, from the perspective of the core-periphery concept, the distribution of the Chinese diaspora in Europe is polycentric, with a distinctive regional core and a vast north-eastern periphery. Experts are expecting the diaspora to grow rapidly in the major countries of the core — the UK, France, Germany, and the Netherlands, as well as in Hungary, which still serves, to some degree, as a transit hub.

Due to a number of circumstances, the Chinese minority is almost absent in rural areas. The Chinese obviously gravitate towards cities. One might say that the distribution of the Chinese diaspora closely corresponds to Europe's urban geography, with an emphasis on capital and port cities. The discrimination against the Chinese at the first stage of immigration resulted in the emergence of ethnic enclaves — Chinatowns.⁷ The elimination of the problem, as well as the new integration opportunities, which arose after World War II, explain why there are no large American-style Chinese enclaves in the European agglomerations. The Chinese live dispersed across Europe. Sparsely populated, the few enclaves serve mostly as a scene for ethnic businesses. In the UK, the main centres of the Chinese diaspora settlement are London (30% of the diaspora), Birmingham, Glasgow, Manchester, and Liverpool. In France, these are Lyon and Marseille; in Italy, Milan, Florence, Turin, and Venice; in Spain, Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, and Alicante; in Germany, Berlin, Hamburg, Bonn, Frankfurt, and Munich; in the Netherlands, Amsterdam; in Ireland, Dublin. The histories, sizes, and structures of the diaspora are very different across these cities. This information can provide the key to understanding the geographical origins of the Chinese immigrants. The diaspora of the German agglomerations is dominated by the people from Shanghai and the north-eastern provinces of China. Most of the Chinese residing in Dublin came from Guangdong and Hong Kong. The Amsterdam Chinese originate, primarily, from Hong Kong and the former Dutch colonies — Indonesia and Suriname.

Ethnic 'diffusion' or a part of the 'European project' in Beijing's global strategy? Not only is the 'new' the Chinese immigration beneficial

⁷ The largest Chinatowns are found in Paris, London, and Liverpool [19].



for the European sociodemographic structures and labour markets but it contributed to the image of the ‘model minority’ and changed the structure and distribution of the ethnic diaspora in the region. Depending on the initial research objective, the Chinese diaspora can be studied from different perspectives. Firstly, one may employ the Euro- or the Sinocentric approach. Secondly, such a research can be either specialised or comprehensive. In both cases, it is crucial to consider the most favourable conditions for immigration and emigration when the economic and cultural globalisation has eliminated the need to make a final decision about a permanent residence. Philip Q. Yang characterised this phenomenon as the ‘transnationalism’ of Chinese migration [36].

Within the transition to the third global integration cycle, the problem of the Sinification of Europeans is assuming a partly local character amid the emerging struggle of major powers for the world leadership. The current positions of the parties involved in the migration processes can be generalised and expressed by oriental proverbs. For China, the most suitable saying is ‘The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now’. For Europe, it is ‘Live in peace. When the spring comes it will take no effort for the flowers to bloom’. Remarkably, China considers emigration to be a part of its global strategy, which can be easily combined with other effective ‘soft power’⁸ tools to engage European countries in cooperation in various fields, including trade, projects and investment, research and development, education,⁹ sociocultural initiatives, etc.

In Europe, the scale of Chinese businesses is much larger than that of all the other Asian minorities. Over the past six years, Chinese investment in the EU has increased tenfold [7]. According to EY Consulting, it grew threefold in 2016 alone — from USD 30.1 billion to 85.8 billion. That year, the Chinese bought into 309 European companies. Here, Germany ranks first (68 companies); the UK second (47); and France and Italy, third (34 each). For the sake of comparison, ten years ago, in 2007, the Chinese purchased 51 European companies [16]. Although the priorities of the Chinese are quite clear, the country’s investment is very diverse in terms of geography. It is present in all the European states, including those of the Baltic region. In particular, the project 16 +1¹⁰ was launched as early as 2012 to promote cooperation with Central and East-

⁸ The term ‘soft power’ is interpreted very differently. In China, it means ‘wise power’. Principally, it stands for the Confucian wisdom and the cultural identity, which serve as major guidelines for the country’s foreign policy decision-making [8].

⁹ For example, according to the Ministry of Education of China, as of the end of 2017, European countries accounted for over 1/3rd of all the Confucius Institutes and Classrooms.

¹⁰ It brings together eleven EU member states and five Balkan countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, the Czech Republic, and Estonia).

ern European states. The central goal of the project is to ‘gain access to technology and research, the international sales channels and the major brands, to ensure the supply of raw materials for the needs of the Chinese economy. Another goal of Chinese businesses is investment in the external infrastructure projects, as well as granting the concessional loans to projects carried out by Chinese contactors’ [1].

In other words, China is ‘here to stay’. Moreover, the official Beijing is shutting down repatriation projects, which were aimed at making up for the human capital losses, and is embarking on a ‘serve the homeland from abroad’ strategy. The new strategy is designed to create a Sinocentric stratum that will serve as a factor of the national influence in the countries with a high proportion of ethnic communities. Later, such interest groups are expected to entrench themselves in the socio-political and economic spheres of the country of destination and, when necessary, promote the interests of China. Thus, the emphasis will be placed on the preservation and strengthening of the diaspora’s national identity as a factor of China’s future global political and economic superiority [3].

This study gives rise to a series of general and specific questions. The former relate to the joint interdisciplinary efforts in studying the phenomenon of ethnic diasporas, the modernisation of the international migrant registration system, and the creation of a single centre for the registration of people living outside the country of birth. The specific questions focus on Russia, particularly, on the development of effective collaborations with the Russian diaspora, on the launch of international projects, and on a comprehensive consideration of the international — primarily, the Chinese — experience in implementing a ‘soft power’ policy.

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