

Beyond Ethnic Enclave: Social Integration of Chinese Immigrants in Paris's "Little Asia"

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the integration of Chinese immigrants in the Triangle de Choisy neighborhood in Paris, which is known for being an exotic hub of Chinese commercial and cultural activities. Based on Serge Paugam's model, we investigated the social integration of Chinese residents in the neighborhood. Our findings show that while dense social bonds allowed for better connection, our respondents are generally reluctant to address political engagement, which Paugam (2017) considers as one of the four key aspects of social integration. The apparent result seems to confirm the so-called Chinese ethics of diligent work and political indifference. However, after closer examination, we found diverse forms of participation that have not been captured by the conventional ethnic-centric understanding of political engagement. First, universalistic welfare policies reduced incentives for community-based mobilization. Second, a high level of internal heterogeneity within the community and exclusion of ethnic-particularistic experience in mainstream politics both led to individualized, subtle forms of participation. By situating individual political choice within their particular memories and life histories and reconceptualizing minorities' political engagement beyond ethnicity, more forms of political engagement can be understood and appreciated. Finally, we argue that the conventional ethnic-centred understanding of minority political participation needs to be challenged.

Keywords: social integration; Chinese diaspora; ethnic minorities; political engagement

importance and complexity of quotidian interactions in the construction of a personal social network. In practice, this model measures social integration by the type and quantity of social ties that make up an individual's social network. Both the quantity and the diversity of social ties are positively indicative of better social integration. These ties can be broadly defined by four categories:

1. Lineal bond refers to ties within kinship such as the obligation to the family. This bond has socialization and identity-building functions. The familial position provides one with an initial sense of belonging. At the same time, lineal bond ensures physical care and emotional security of individuals from the point of birth.
2. Elective bond addresses the voluntary ties like friendships, religious groups, and local communities that are not obliged. These bonds are loosely institutionalized and not subject to strict regulation, and they can provide social support out of the principles of fraternity and selflessness.
3. Organic bond describes the ties that are formed through participation in the labor market, where different positions are complementary to each other and individuals form ties when they have to work together. Professional engagement provides access to basic welfare, income, and symbolic recognition of labor.
4. Citizenship bond is concerned with ties to political recognition and belonging within a society so that people are guaranteed certain rights and are under government protection. Citizenship ensures equal protection of civil and political rights, as well as participation in the public life.

In the context of resettlement, social ties are especially crucial for successful integration for two reasons. First, immigrants who experienced relocation to societies completely unknown to them are faced with two key tasks: they need to adapt to the socio-economic structure of the recipient society, while at the same time maintaining ties with their home community. The community we studied was established by political refugees from countries like Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia since the 1970s, who

Migration studies that focus on Asian minorities tend to have very diverse views about their levels of integration. Flanagan (2010) argued that general stereotypes tend to depict immigrants as an unskilled, uneducated, and minimally employable mass that is a burden on the state. Immigrants are alienated from the mainstream as “disguised foreigners” (Watanabe 2001), which means they are perceived as unalterably Asian, despite their citizenship. In contrast, Asian immigrants are often labeled as the “model minority” because their merits of diligence and hard work co-exist with viciousness, a known example of the latter being the fictitious villain Fu Manchu (Flanagan 2010, 117-161).¹ Moreover, sociological interest in Chinatowns in the United States has grown over the last 20 years (Fong 1994; Horton 1995; Kwong 1979; Zhou Min 1992). Academic research, based on extensive ethnographic works, provides an in-depth description of the multifaceted, albeit important, functions that Chinatowns play in the social, economic, and political life of Chinese Americans. However, Chinatowns in the European context have not received as much attention, and systematic analysis of social integration taking place within ethnic enclaves such as Chinatowns is still lacking. In order to address this gap in empirical research and knowledge, our research combines ethnographic methods with a critical adaption of Serge Paugam’s analytical model of social bonds to investigate the level of social integration in a Paris Chinatown commonly known as the Triangle de Choisy neighborhood.

Serge Paugam’s (2017) model of social bonds provides a powerful analytical tool that allows us to consider the broad range of factors affecting social integration within a structured framework. The model acknowledges the

often had to leave home suddenly due to the persistence of wars on the Indo-Chinese peninsular. This can only have exacerbated the challenges of their transition. Skeldon's (2002) research also provides evidence that migrants are particularly vulnerable to poverty when relocation is forced without sufficient preparation.

Second, racism remains a serious challenge to Chinese minorities in French society, which makes them particularly vulnerable to marginalization and downward social mobility (Charbit 1988, 483). Chinese minorities continue to face discrimination. A recent survey conducted by Mayer et al. (2018) still shows certain negative stereotypes attached to Chinese in France. For example, Chinese are considered to be hard-working but unclean. Despite a lack of social ties outside of the ethnic enclave, ties within the ethnic enclave are much easier for newcomers to access. By forging new ties, newcomers can enjoy social and market services and employment opportunities within a community they feel more comfortable dealing with, albeit long-term integration with the broader society remains challenging (Durkheim [1893] 2018, 55-64; Zhou Min 1992). A critical adaptation of Serge Paugam's (2017) model of social bonds not only allows us to assess the strengths and weaknesses of an integration pattern of Chinese ethnic minorities in the Triangle de Choisy, but also to situate apparent personal choice inside the broader social, economic, and political structure of the recipient society.

While a series of studies have been conducted over the history and cultural life of the Triangle de Choisy neighborhood, rigorous sociological analysis in recent years is still lacking (White, Winchester and Guillon 1987; Raulin 1988, 2000, 2008; Costa-Lascroux and Live 1995). Using semi-structured interviews and participant observation, our research assessed social integration of Chinese minorities in this community based on Serge Paugam's model of social bonds. We found social ties that connected local residents and institutions in a network characterized by dense intra-ethnic connections and fragmented inter-ethnic connecting points. We also conducted research to understand the lack of citizenship

bonds within our samples. Evidence does not support the conventional wisdom that the Chinese are politically indifferent because their culture encourages political submission and upward social mobility within the existing structure (Raulin 1988; Costa-Lascroux and Live 1995; Lem 2010). Our research shows that local socio-political context matters. We found, first, that France's welfare policies, which do not discriminate between legal residents and citizens, have reduced incentives for citizen rights mobilization. Second, a high level of internal heterogeneity within the community and exclusion of the political experience of ethnic minorities in mainstream politics have led to individualized, subtle forms of participation. By situating individual political choice within particular memories and life histories and by reconceptualizing minorities' political engagement beyond ethnicity, more forms of political engagement can be understood and appreciated. Ultimately, we argue that the conventional ethnic-centred understanding of minority political participation needs to be challenged. Individual interest in civic participation is not necessarily associated with ethnic membership and should not be expected to.

Literature Review: Social Integration of Chinatowns around the World

We situate our research within both migrant studies of Chinese migration and the socio-political context of France. In this section, we will begin with research findings and the current consensus in the study of the social integration of Chinese immigrants in host countries. Then we will consider studies that focus on French immigration history and policies, specifically the conditions that shaped the life of immigrants in the French context.

Existing sociological literature that studies Chinese immigrants usually use Chinatowns as their access point to the field. However, rather than simply focusing on the ethnic community itself, scholars also need to situate their observations in the socio-economic and political context of the host country (Horton 1995; Fong 1994), and sometimes even the global political economy (Kwong 1979; Lem 2010). For

example, Portes and Rumbaut's (2014) research on American migration history argues that the rise of Chinatowns is closely connected with racism in mainstream societies. Xenophobia and institutional segregation culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which effectively ended early Chinese labor flow and forced Chinese farm workers into refuge in tightly knit urban communities that became today's Chinatowns (Portes and Rumbaut 2014). These inner-city ethnic communities are marked by prosperous ethnic business entrepreneurship and dense ethnic bonds. However, inner-city ethnic enclaves are also associated with danger and seduction in the Western imagination (Hatziprokopiou and Montagna 2012). Orientalist myths such as Fu Manchu and the Triad persist, condemning those who are deemed as "unmeltable" aliens who refuse to be acculturated vis-à-vis the U.S.'s melting pot model as an ideal form of assimilation (Portes and Rumbaut 2014).

Nonetheless, according to research conducted by Glazer and Moynihan (1970), the resilience of ethnic bonds, far from constituting a "social problem," not only represents an important source of emotional support and social solidarity for newcomers, but is also a consequence of the subordinate position of ethnic minorities in the mainstream labor market (Glazer and Moynihan 1970; Zhou Min 1992). Kwong (1979) also found that the isolation of Chinese Americans was not voluntary, but a product of discrimination and exclusion. He argues that the rise of the ethnic service industry in New York's Chinatown was the product of imposed labor segregation between the Chinese community and the wider society (Kwong 1979). Furthermore, the political economy of the Chinese ethnic enclave is highly reliant on the social capital flowing from social networks and ethnic solidarity, such as access to labor, capital, and market information. The Chinese enterprises are well known to offer jobs to their fellows and relatives for the benefits of both sides: for the newcomers, working for a Chinese business can resolve the problem of having to communicate in a foreign language and provides the possibility of social mobility; for Chinese entrepreneurs, recruiting through co-ethnic connections provides a workforce that is more reliable. For newcomers,

ethnic bonds also offer enhanced economic provision and a rooting point of entry (Simon 1993; Zhou Min 1992).

Later case studies obtained more comprehensive understandings of heterogeneity among Chinese immigrants and their interactions with the local community. Fong's (1994) and Horton's (1995) studies of Monterey Park, an American suburb with a high concentration of Chinese immigrants, both noticed that ethnic tension started to emerge between local residents and newcomers when flows of immigration increased. Nativism, referring to the idea that local interests should be prioritized over those of outsiders, sprawled as the mainstream community felt that the increasing influence of the Chinese language and culture began to challenge their dominant position. However, Fong (1994) pointed out that what seemed to be a racial conflict was, in fact, a class conflict. The new flow of Chinese immigrants to Monterey Park in the 1970s tended to be affluent and well-educated. Consequently, they easily fit into high-profile jobs in the service industry. In the context of global neoliberalization and surging property values, the arrival of these Chinese immigrants was politically weaponized by the nativists, who blamed them for the consequences of socio-economic restructuring, such as investors constructing high-rise, densely resided condominiums for quick profits, traffic congestion, and stress on municipal services.

Conflicts also burst out between the new wave of affluent Chinese immigrants and the resentful earlier Chinese migrants who arrived with few skills and took generations to assimilate into mainstream society. Horton (1995) focused on ethnic confrontation in the political field. He noticed that anti-Asian nativism was not triggered by the mere arrival of newcomers, but when the population of ethnic minorities became so significant as to invalidate the Anglo-American model of integration. The model is based on minorities adopting and assimilating into the dominant white culture and values. The Chinese minorities' development of their own political organizations, such as the Asian Democrats, rather than integrating into the groups and clubs established and dominated by the white population, was attacked as self-imposed

isolation. What was non-white was framed as non-American, reinforcing a pattern of Anglo-domination under the guise of fair play, non-discrimination, and national unity. However, Horton argues that Chinese minorities creating their own political organizations is actually a result of their belief that established all-ethnic organizations are Anglo-dominated and unresponsive to the realities of ethnic inequality.

While earlier studies are mainly based on empirical evidence in the American context, more recent studies of Chinese immigrants in the European context provided us with different stories of integration. Lem (2010) uses traditional Chinese ethics of diligent work and political obedience to explain the systematic absence of Chinese entrepreneurs from political protests in France's neoliberal transformation. She argues that the habitus of Chinese entrepreneur migrants produces an inclination towards political disengagement and refusal to forge an alliance with other classes. Other scholars point out that contemporary studies of ethnic enclaves can essentialize culture and ethnicity, and thus categorize conflicts by the native versus migrant dichotomy, overlooking intra-group divisions (Hatziprokopiou and Montagna 2012).

Scholars also commonly reduce the city into a mere container or backdrop, ignoring the power and the political-economic dynamics that shape it on both a local and global scale (Hatziprokopiou and Montagna 2012). It is important to situate the social integration of ethnic minorities within the political, economic, and social structures in which it takes place. For example, through a comparative study of the different protest strategies and outcomes in London and Milan's Chinatowns, Hatziprokopiou and Montagna (2012) found that political opportunities offered by Britain's multiculturalist policies allowed tension between Chinese residents and the metropolitan authority to be peacefully resolved through consultation. In contrast, the lack of political recognition and a hostile, anti-immigrant public discourse in Italy provoked a violent reaction from Chinese entrepreneurs. Hatziprokopiou and Montagna (2012) argue that while Chinatowns in North America began

as a result of forced segregation, discriminatory laws, and racism, they developed into successful economic enclaves providing alternative upward social mobility. In Europe, Chinatowns became multi-functional, serving as the first place of residence on the immigrant trajectory from inner-city settlements to suburban locations, and staying vibrant through constant streams of new migrants (Hatziprokopiou and Montagna 2012). Patrick Simon's (1993, 383) in-depth study of Belleville, a multi-ethnic neighborhood in Paris, reinforced the view that Chinatowns serve a positive role in enabling Chinese immigrants to settle down in a foreign country. He argues that after a period of restricted migration, the neighborhood turned from a mere first port of entry, where newcomers from a certain origin are greeted and resettled, to part of a prolonged process of assimilation by acting as a rooting point of ethnic groups (Simon 1993, 383). Together, these scholars show us that local socio-economic conditions, public policies, and cultural factors all contribute to the outcomes of resettlement.

Similar to American Chinatown studies, research in the European context also shows that Chinese immigrants have long been labelled as the "model minority" who work diligently for personal success and tend to be law-abiding, despite evidence of social exclusion and isolation of women and the elderly (Hatziprokopiou and Montagna 2012). Nevertheless, recent evidence from France shows that conflicts between newcomers and the state authority have started to rise. News featured illegal Chinese immigrants coming from Wenzhou with the promise of higher incomes and better living standards while usually ending up in small factories without legal protection or social security provision (Gillet 2007). The rising number of Northeastern Chinese prostitutes illegally working on the streets of Belleville and the 13th arrondissement (borough) of Paris also drew academic attention (Lévy and Lieber 2011, 16). More recently, Paris's Chinese residents became particularly active in demanding more police patrolling their neighborhoods and greater public attention to their rising concerns over racism and street security. This can be seen in a documented case of intense negotiations between a Wenzhou

businessman and Paris's police force (Trémon 2013, 19), and a street protest that was organized after a Chinese man was controversially killed by the police in his home because he was holding a kitchen knife in his hand (BBC News 2017).

Research Context: The Triangle de Choisy

In this section, we give an overview of the site of our fieldwork, the Triangle de Choisy neighborhood. Despite being reputed as Paris's "Quartier Asiatique," the neighborhood was historically built as part of a gentrification plan to replace heavy industry sites and working-class "ghetto" communities in the 1970s (Raulin 2008, 56). The high-rise apartment units met market indifference not only because the slow growth of the population in Paris reduced demand, but also because the indigenous Parisians thought of high towers as unfashionable and not worth the price. The turning point was in 1975 when, with the fall of Saigon in the war in Vietnam, France accepted 86,640 asylum seekers from the Indo-Chinese peninsula (White, Winchester, and Guillon 1987, 55). While the French government intended to send these people to refugee centers in the countryside, the asylum seekers who are ethnically Chinese predominately managed to move into the new tower blocks in Paris by using their kinship networks or the wealth they already possessed (Live 1991, 65; White, Winchester, and Guillon 1987, 55).

These newcomers established themselves in Paris with the assistance of the 13th arrondissement municipal government (the "mairie") and the Saint-Hippolyte Church, as well as a complicated "hui" financial system which enables the immediate lending and borrowing of money within family and clan ties for opening up businesses (Raulin 2008, 56; Hassoun and Tan 1986, 35; Costa-Lascoux and Live 1995, 108-131). According to Raulin (1988, 234), the newly-arrived Chinese took over commercial centers in the Olympiades area, more than half of which were vacant by the time of their arrival, later to form what is considered the Triangle de Choisy. This neighborhood now covers the area between the avenue de Choisy, d'Ivry, the Boulevard

Massena, and also the Olympiades area (Raulin 2008, 56). These commercial spaces were turned into ethnic infrastructures such as Chinese butcher shops, salons, restaurants, temples, and language schools. Gradually, Triangle de Choisy was transformed into what is considered an ethnic enclave. It is both an entry point of acceptance for Chinese immigrants and a commercial and cultural hub, offering Chinese specialties and diverse experiences to the broader Parisian community.

Many French scholars attribute the early success of Chinese immigrants to their ability to be acculturated, hard-working and able adaptors, combined with the generous and tolerable indigenous Parisian community (Costa-Lascoux and Live 1995, 108-131; Raulin 1988, 234). Nevertheless, these claims lacked large-scale empirical evidence. Critics also commented on the lack of attention to negative stereotypes that increased in mainstream culture since the time of the initial resettlement, which would have impacted the development of the neighborhood (Charbit 1988, 483). A recent report by Mayer et al. (2008, 79-81) revealed that racist stereotypes and insults like "Dirty Chink," the belief that Asians constitute "a group apart" in society, and the notion that Chinese are "very hardworking" still remain strong in the French society.

Another primary debate focuses on the relationship between social integration and engagement with ethnic businesses. In his research on the ethnic niche economy in the 13th arrondissement, Pina-Guerassimoff (2005) found that ethnic businesses in general exclusively used ethnic networks to recruit new employees. Positions ranged from food preparation to clothes manufacturing without requiring employees to communicate in a foreign language. Such an opportunity is popular among new immigrants not only because of its low skills and linguistic threshold, but also the fact that it is an entry point to local Chinese social and commercial networks. This gives newcomers the potential to open up their own business in the future (Pina-Guerassimoff 2005, 179; Beja and Wang 2003, 67). However, some scholars held a different view as they state that in the long term, working in an ethnic enclave results in negative impacts on personal

integration into the mainstream community, such as limited opportunities both to advance in one's career and to communicate with the wider society (Lee 2002; Duncan and Waldorf 2009, 17).

In summary, there is an ongoing debate within the literature about whether the Chinese community in Triangle de Choisy has successfully integrated into French society. Positive assumptions are increasingly challenged by recent findings, such as mainstream racism and exploitation of illegal migrants. Political engagement that emerged from recent conflicts between entrepreneurs and the police was not expected due to the taken-for-granted assumption of Chinese diligence and political obedience. Triangle de Choisy, under these conditions, emerged as an

interesting case for sociological study. While it has been labeled as a successful case of Chinese-style integration, empirical evidence is not always telling the same story. Our research helps to fill this gap of knowledge by systematically investigating the degree of social integration of Chinese immigrants in the Triangle de Choisy neighborhood. In particular, we include political engagement, whose importance is often overlooked in the study of Chinese immigrants.

Methodology

We conducted semi-structured interviews and participant observation in a non-profit cultural association called the Art House, located on the eastern edge of the Triangle de Choisy (see Figure 1). Through a key informant, we gained

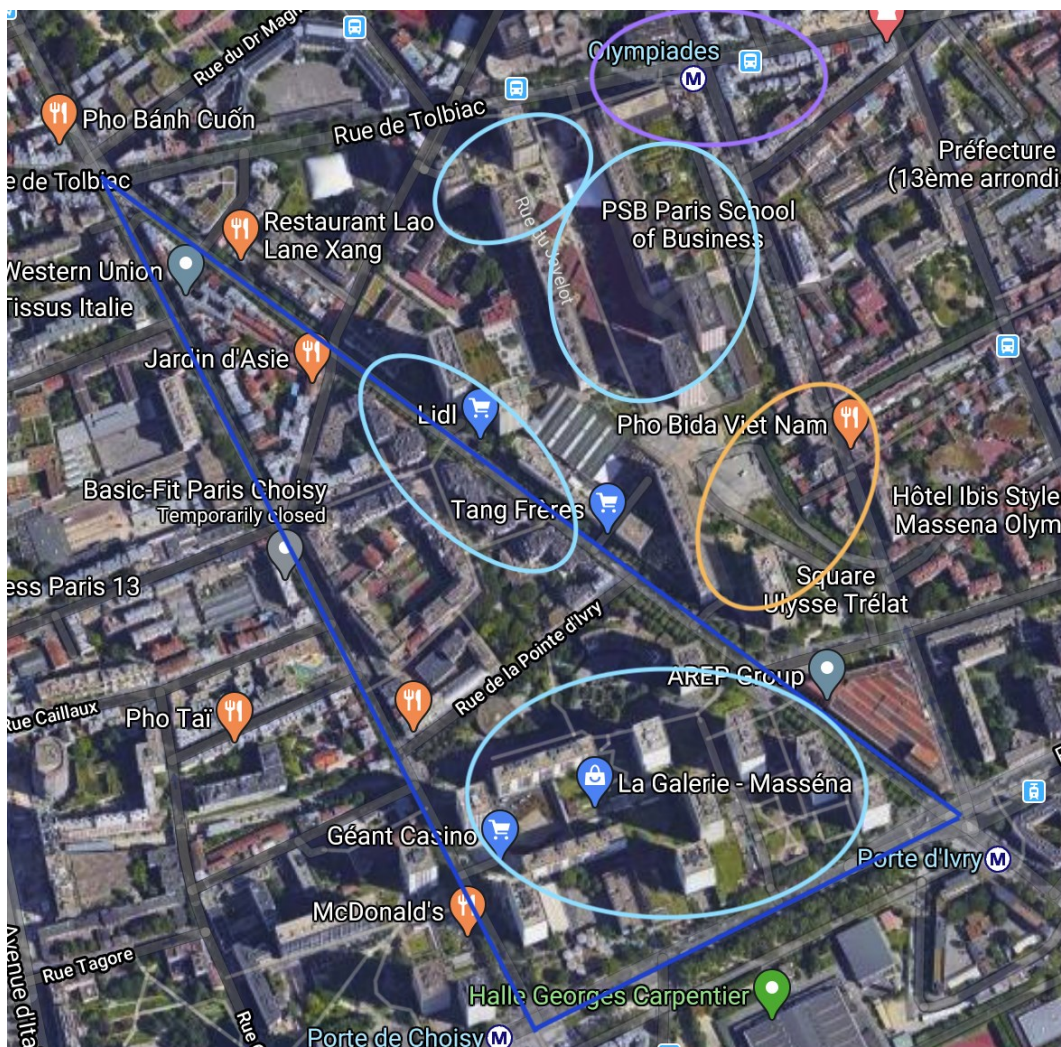


Figure 1. Google Maps perspective of Triangle de Choisy. The Triangle, marked in deep blue and bounded by avenue de Choisy, d'Ivry, and the Boulevard Masséna, is considered to be where ethnic businesses concentrate, while the Olympiades neighborhood (metro station circled in purple) is also considered to be a hub of Asian migrants, though more residential. Some of the high-rise towers are circled in light blue, and the Art House is located within the orange circle, which is on the edge of the Triangle de Choisy. (Source: Google Maps, 2018)

access to the association's cultural events and language lessons. We chose this association as our entry point for two reasons. First, it was founded in 2001 as a local center for cultural exchange, offering language classes (both Chinese and French), welfare application assistance, and museum tours. It was also the only Chinese-led association that was receiving municipal funding at the time of our fieldwork. The Art House's history and localized operation strategy made it attractive to both residents and newcomers seeking connections and support. Second, by offering cheap courses and workshops sponsored by the municipal government, the Art House provides an inclusive environment for local residents. This allowed our interviews to take place in a relaxing and informal manner. Since our interview topics covered life histories, economic status, and political engagement, this aspect becomes more important for opening up an in-depth conversation.

Our research was conducted between February and April 2018. Our team participated in weekend workshops and part-time French lessons organized by the association and conducted semi-structured interviews with eight respondents. Audio recordings of the interviews were made with the consent of respondents and deleted once the transcription was completed. In order to protect confidentiality, all names and key information were anonymized. Among our respondents, six live in the neighborhood while two commute from other areas of the Paris metropolis; three are students in the 18-25 age group while the rest are above 55; seven are ethnically Chinese while one is Laotian-Chinese; five are women and three are men. This pattern documents a diversity of age, ethnicity, and gender, contributing to a comprehensive observation. We are aware that our findings are not generalizable or representative of all Chinese residents in Triangle de Choisy due to our small sample size. Nevertheless, our research does not intend to reach an overarching description of Chinese integration in Paris in general. As our goal is to challenge the conventional wisdom that social integration of Chinese immigrants follows a particular pattern, representativeness is not necessary at this stage.

Findings and Analysis: Compensated Integration

Our research investigated the social integration of Chinese immigrants in the Triangle de Choisy neighborhood according to Serge Paugam's (2017) integration model. By analyzing the density and variety of social bonds as reported by our respondents, we found that all of our respondents are in what Paugam defined as compensated integration: while most of them are short of lineal bonds and citizenship bonds, by actively forging elective and organic bonds, our respondents integrated successfully in some fields but not others. To break the data down, three informants had no contacts in France before migration, while the rest only knew a few contacts. None obtained citizenship before migration, and only one has obtained citizenship since arrival, while another is in the process of applying.

In our study, compensated integration took two forms. First, protection and recognition usually provided by lineal bonds were compensated by a dense network of elective and organic bonds, which mostly consisted of Chinese friends, classmates, and colleagues in the workplace instead of familial linkages. Through the mediation of better-connected members of the Art House, members who were marginalized by the mainstream society due to their lack of social capital or linguistic capacity gained access to resources and information that were not available within their immediate neighborhood. This finding allows us to challenge the conventional wisdom that ethnic enclaves are isolated from the wider society. Second, while Paugam (2017) argued that citizenship bonds are crucial for obtaining welfare and state protection, all our respondents rejected political engagement in the French context. While the immediate result seems to reaffirm the "Chinese ethics" stereotype of diligence and political disengagement, closer examination of their reaction shows differently. We found that the inclusive welfare system in France combined with both the heterogeneity of individuals' life experience and the marginalizing effects of mainstream discourse all contributed to shaping this attitude towards political engagement.

1. Social integration: A compensated model

Paugam (2017, 18) defined protection as “all resources (family, community, professional, social) on which individuals can draw when facing difficulties in life.” Based on the social network constructed through membership with the Art House, we found that elective and organic bonds are relatively dense and tend to echo within a Chinese-speaking community. Individuals within the network tend to be well-connected to many other members, instead of being loosely in touch with a few informants. As they use Mandarin Chinese as the lingua franca, it tends to include Mandarin-speaking members while deterring non-Mandarin speaking outsiders. While some respondents did not have a choice as their French skills are not sufficient for daily communication, others would still mostly befriend Chinese-speaking people due to cultural similarity and comfortability, even for the younger generation. Bobby, a Laotian-Chinese political refugee who arrived in Paris during the 1970s, said, “I really enjoy living in the Chinese neighborhood. There's a similar Chinese neighborhood in the 19th arrondissement, where I lived for 19 years. After coming here for so many years, I still like to be surrounded by so many Chinese people.” When faced with racist comments, Lucy, a university exchange student from China, explained that, “I would talk to my Asian friends, because I think they can understand me better.”

Despite the pattern of Chinese immigrants and residents forming elective bonds mainly amongst themselves, this did not result in a collectively marginalized position. The circuit of ties among members of the Art House brought members together while the association provided them with resources and information from outside of the Chinese social network. By talking to each other during events and daily interactions, these people pass around information they learned from people they encounter in everyday life. In the Art House, one channel includes cooperation with the mairie to provide services in Chinese. The Art House cooperates with the 13th arrondissement mairie to assist with accessing welfare and funding for their Paris day trips. They also have their volunteers trained by the post office to

offer guidance in Chinese for how to use post office services:

Sometimes they [the municipal officials] come to meet us and look for opportunities to cooperate. For example, now the post office is working with us, because many people don't know how to use their machines. It's a bit complicated; some people who cannot read French cannot understand...They became aware of this, and came to us to give us some support...our volunteers had to take lessons at their place, and come back to teach local residents how to use their machines. There are many foreigners living here but their machines are only available in French.

While being culturally Chinese, the Art House is by no means an exclusive club. During our interview, Louisa, the founder of the Art House, mentioned several times how other local residents are connected to and included in their social network:

We have a full-time employee...the Brazilian lady...she has her own association, but it was not funded by the government...she is very kind to older people. She doesn't speak Chinese, so I invited Chinese students to translate, as I am not here every day. Because of her skin color (laugh), French people quite like her. So we are having more and more French members.

For Louisa, what marks out the “French” French and the Other does not just depend on citizenship, but on ethnic origin as well. The “French” members of the Art House that Louisa mentions are presumed to be the white French, while the “we” and the Brazilian lady are the minorities. Speaking with laughter, Louisa seemed very glad to attract members from other ethnic groups, especially from the white French. These intra-ethnic bonds expanded the Art House's social network to form an ethnic circuit that effectively transmits information and provides support for the internal members' mutual benefits. The particular convenience of the Art House's location, where they gather for daily leisure, contributes to this. Moreover, there are also non-Chinese members who gained access to the group by knowing someone who is already inside, such as the municipal officials who cooperated with Louisa

to install a consultation point for welfare applications. In another case, a North African member of the association delivered a couscous workshop. When members of the Art House exchange information, they also bring input to the group and penetrate the boundary between the co-ethnics and ethnic outsiders.

Sometimes, when a Chinese member is well-connected to the wider society, their role is also modified to become both a group member and a source of information for those who are less connected. For example, by knowing officials in the 13th arrondissement mairie, colleagues in other associations, and members of her own association, Louisa occupies a well-connected position. Using the space provided by the Art House, she is able to transmit news and information to members who are less connected and obtain government funding to organize cultural exchange events. In this way, although there exists a Chinese-based social group in Triangle de Choisy, it is not marginalized from the rest of society even at the point of the least connected, since information, resources, and support constantly flow in and out of the circuit.

This finding allows us to challenge the conventional wisdom that participation in an ethnic-based community will result in isolation from the wider society (Lee 2002; Duncan and Waldorf 2009, 17). Our finding provides strong evidence for Portes and Rumbaut's (2014) and Glazer and Moynihan's argument that the resilience of ethnic bonds in Chinatowns is not a social problem in itself. Instead, our respondents benefited from the information and support it offers, especially the less connected members who are not able to speak French and are therefore unable to access resources outside of their ethnic network.

2. Citizenship bonds: De-mystifying Chinese political disengagement

The availability of support does not always mean that individuals are incentivized to use the service. While our respondents from the Art House are engaged with civic institutions such as public health insurance and other forms of benefits, most of them immediately claimed they are not interested in political participation when we mentioned the term, which is key to forging what Paugam (2017) called citizenship

bonds in the process of social integration. Paugam argued that by acquiring citizenship of a democratic country, one gains access to equal political and civil rights, as well as fundamental welfare provisions. He described the formation of citizenship bonds as a mutual, interdependent process: “[the] nation-state makes efforts to ensure that all citizens are treated equally, and together form a body with a shared identity and values” (16). For an ethnic minority like the Parisian Chinese, Paugam's conventional way of defining and analyzing political engagement might do them injustice and thus needs to be problematized. As discussed in previous literature (see Kwong 1979; Lem 2010; Trémon 2013), researchers easily equate studying how Chinese inhabitants participate in local politics with looking for cases where Chinese participate in politics as a Chinese *collective* for an ethnic-related interest, be that against discrimination or demanding more rights. On the contrary, prioritizing the “Chinese” characteristic of identity politics downplays the multifarious histories, regional origins, genders, and sexualities associated with each Chinese member of that community, reducing these variations to an internal difference or neglecting them as a whole. It turns out that quite often our respondents are involved in some form of political activity, but not as a member or *representative* of the Chinese *per se*. We will come back to this discussion later in the article.

However, when we openly asked our respondents if they engage in French politics, all of them replied that they were not interested in politics in the first place. Indeed, previous literature has documented this apparent political disengagement and attributed it to the Chinese culture and their work ethics (Raulin 1988; Costa-Lascroux and Live 1995; Lem 2010). Nevertheless, we should not take an answer at face value. As Bourdieu (1977) has famously argued, what people say they do during an interview is not necessarily identical to what actually takes place. Further attention to the way they articulated their disinterestedness provides rich evidence of their awareness about what goes on around them and the shape of politics in everyday life. We identified two discourses that our respondents used to justify political disengagement.

First discourse: Universalistic welfare policy reduces incentives for naturalization

Many of our respondents consciously referred to easy access to state welfare provisions to justify their lack of interest in naturalization. The French policy provides equal health insurance and other forms of state protection to its citizens and legal immigrants. As all of our respondents claimed to have obtained legal residential status by the time of our interview, they did not see much pragmatic motivation in naturalization since welfare is not barred by citizenship, against what Paugam (2017) suggested. Helena, a migrant from Northeast China, explained to us that buying social insurance is a legal requirement and she thinks it is "fair, if you have money, you pay the tax; if you cannot afford it [medical bills], the government pays it for you." Exceptions are Louisa and Bobby, though they were both motivated by pragmatic necessity, not political rights: Bobby was seeking political asylum when he fled political chaos on the Indo-Chinese peninsula in the 1970s, while Louisa needed French citizenship to "bypass a lot of inconveniences foreigners will face if I want to open a school."

Thus, the local community is not politically mobilized because there was no strong incentive for collective action. Our case contrasts with the collective action of migrant labor in Saudi Arabia (Chalcraft 2011) and transnational activism of Filipina domestic workers (Constable 2009; Wui and Delias 2015), where these communities are closely tied by a shared identity and a set of common interests that can drive political action. Working as foreign domestic workers, Filipina nannies in Europe are collectively disadvantaged in the labor market due to local regulations that threatened their right to stay once they leave their employers. Often nannies are left with no choice but to tolerate arbitrary working hours and dehumanizing treatment (Parreñas 2015). On the whole, our evidence supports Hatziprokopiou and Montagna's (2012) argument that local policies influence the forms and opportunities of Chinese immigrants' political mobilization. The non-discriminatory principle in the French welfare system that provides state protection to all citizens and legal immigrants reduces incentives for Chinese

immigrants to undergo naturalization. On the other hand, since our respondents are not in a situation of being denied welfare protections based on their immigrant status or ethnic identity, they simply did not find sufficient motivation for collective action framed around their ethnicity. However, political engagement on the level of ethnicity is not the only way of doing civic participation, as we see next.

Second discourse: Internal heterogeneity and external marginality hinder collective action

The lack of common interests is also associated with the heterogeneity of social groups within our respondents, who come from different classes, age groups, genders, regional origins, and historical contexts of arrival. It is common for existing literature to essentialize Chineseness as a convenient tool of analysis (Raulin 1988; Costa-Lascroux and Live 1995; Lem 2010). The socio-economic success of Chinese immigrants is explained away by this idea of distinctive Chineseness made up of diligence and ambition to climb up the social ladder rather than to challenge unfair structures of opportunity. However, this is not a valid argument since, first, it is based on a very weak culturalist explanation, referring to a culture of success that can trump broader racism and other structural disadvantages, and second and more importantly, it overlooks heterogeneity within the Chinese population. There is no reliable evidence of an obedient culture among the Chinese population on a large scale. Members of the Art House share an interest in Chinese culture, but it is hard to say if they share any common *political interest* that can mobilize them. This is the case in our study because our respondents include Taiwanese, mainland Chinese, and various Indo-Chinese diasporas. When asked if he identifies as Chinese, Bobby, who is Chinese-Laotian by heritage, explained: "When I first came here, there were not so many Chinese [nationals]. We were all Chinese [ethnic]... [I think I am] Chinese by ethnicity but not nationality. Because the Chinese nation is not the same as the Chinese ethnic. I was born in Laos and that I have the Laotian blood."²

Disproportional rejection to political participation could be partly explained by

shared traumatic memories of conflicts and censorship in mainland China's authoritarian societies from which some of our respondents migrated to Paris. Traumatized memories might, therefore, hold them away from imagining and utilizing an alternative form of political participation even when it is generally less violent and risky, as Louisa addresses: "My husband...he was an active student protester when he was studying aboard...which rendered him a political refugee because his photo was taken and published by journalists...he has become less radical since then and somehow agreeing with the government."

When hearing questions on politics, some other mainland respondents also replied, "politics is a sensitive issue...," or simply "I don't care," or asked us "are you still recording? You've turned off the microphone, haven't you?" In another case, Helena was afraid and refused to talk about politics. She said: "This is not my business. I definitely won't participate. Whatever you say, the government can monitor." Her rejection to political engagement here is more related to traumatic fear rather than cultural indifference, as much of the literature suggests (see Robben, 2005). Wendy, on the other hand, denied interest in politics during the recorded interview, but gradually started to deliver long and well-thought-out political critiques after we confirmed that the recording had been turned off.

The Many Faces of Political Participation Beyond Identity Politics

As Shih (2010) argued in *Against Diaspora*, the Chinese diaspora was considered both by itself and outsiders to be the margins of China and Chineseness, something that is always missing, always incomplete, and not the subject of itself. This tendency to subsume individual experiences and particularistic memories under the grand narrative of a nation overlooks the complexity and diversity among all individuals who are associated with Chineseness, or in Shih's conception, the Sinophone community, which they themselves create and define. The assertion that overseas Chinatowns tend to be politically passive is built on the assumption that the Chinese people are essentially one ethnic group, and by all means, researchers should assess their political engagement

according to the ethnic unit. Participation is only observed when collective action is organized in the name of "the local Chinese community." Our respondents' diverse individual histories affirm the complexity among Chinese residents in Triangle de Choisy. In this regard, at least three of our respondents revealed their interests in politics, if not active engagement. For example, while Wendy initially told us that she does not read about French politics as she does not understand French, as the interview went on, she mentioned how she made use of the internet freedom in France to access information banned in China:

In my free time, I use a lot of WeChat. Oh... and I watch a lot of videos, many of them you can't see in China. I feel I broadened my eyesight after coming aboard, and China is too closed. Actually...people like me do not really feel bothered by politics, but...it is too unfree. People should have a bit more freedom, right? Here everything is more objective, they tell you what happens as they happened. It does not tell you whether it is good or bad and lets you judge by yourself. But, domestically [in China], what I don't like is that they want to impose something upon you, it wants to teach you something, as this. It seems you must think in one way or another. I feel people do need a freer, more relaxing environment, so that they can feel comfortable.

As mentioned, researchers need to understand political participation by situating individual behaviours within the person's own life history. Only accepting political opinions that are discussed out loud is a Western-centric practice that ignores mediated dissents embedded in lives under authoritarianism. For example, Wendy, who always stayed in China before she retired, first denied participation in French politics and stated that "people like me do not really feel bothered by politics." However, she not only made use of the internet freedom that France offers but also made a clear and well-articulated argument about the importance of freedom of speech. In another case, Louisa, originally from Taiwan, told us about her own experience of political engagement:

I think we cannot live outside of their society, even though we are *foreigners* ourselves, we

will definitely go to vote. I also read political news and participate in petitions. The 13th arrondissement media chairs a "Foreigner confrontation group," which expresses their dissatisfaction against the society. They also asked me to attend when I was working for a different association, but I didn't go because I was about to be naturalized...I learn about strikes, but I don't get involved. Because *as Asians*, we disagree...I think striking brings more harm to the society; thus, it's not a very moral behaviour. I don't really sympathize them that much.

Here Louisa occupies a nuanced position in citizen identities. While she has earned the status and rights of a French citizen, her Asian identity remains and makes her forever a stranger in the political arena that belongs to the "French," who are *white*. She addressed herself as "we Asians" and her assistant as "the Brazilian" in contrast to "the French." She would consciously participate in important decision-making processes, but still consider herself as a "foreigner."

Furthermore, all of our respondents have a weak sense of national belonging to France. They see a very clear distinction between themselves as "Chinese people" and the "French people." This also includes Bobby, who still addressed himself and the Chinese community as "us," as the "Chinese," and used "those French" to refer to the white French, despite having French citizenship since the 1970s. Although the construction of French nationalism claims that it is sufficient for one to become French by *parler français* (speaking French) (Hobsbawm, 1990), such a statement marginalizes those who are not fluent French speakers. At the same time, it cannot provide enough confidence to foreign French speakers to feel fully accepted in France if they feel that their legitimacy of participation is constantly challenged by the local-born white French. In Lucy's case, she demonstrated comprehensive understanding of and reflection on French and Chinese politics, yet was deterred by others' constant questioning of her entitlement to the discussion:

They have a lot of freedom in terms of political speech. You can scorn whoever you like, say whatever you want, no problem.

But...emm...I know the 94 province here [one of the *départements* in the Paris suburbs] they are left-wing, that means they are more acceptive to immigrants. But the right people they are right-leaning. In one family, the French family I used to live in, when they vote, the man and the woman supported different parties. They are...quite rational, they do not come into conflicts because of different political views.

Have I participated in political activities? Ah... no. *We don't have a say in this kind of thing.* They will say, oh, why do you only have one Communist Party in China? (laugh) They say this every time, why do you Chinese only have one Communist Party? You don't have other parties? (How did you respond?) I would say because we didn't find other parties to replace it. (laugh) On top of that, they are doing quite well at the time, so we would follow. Because they are actually curious [about] why we are so submissive, why we have no dissent opinions. And then I say dissent does exist but should not be identified [by the party] because whatever dissent you post online will soon be deleted. So, I think our patriotic education was done very well, once you go to school, they teach to you love the country, love the party and raise the national flag every Monday...not like them [the French people] who say everything.

In sum, internal heterogeneity among those loosely bounded by the Chinese culture means that the political participation of Chinese individuals should not be expected to happen under a united ethnic banner as one political entity. By freeing ourselves from this Western-centric assumption, we discovered various ways our respondents would make use of their political and civil rights allowed by the French state. Different forms of participation need to be understood under specific personal and historical contexts. Older generations from mainland China like Wendy showed reluctance to participate in explicit activism due to traumatic memories; however, these respondents remained engaged in subtler ways. Louisa engaged with state institutions as an integral part of her work at the Art House, collaborating with the local municipality. Lucy, a

young student, had more curiosity about French politics and was not fearful of expressing her opinions, but was deterred from further participation because her legitimacy to discuss politics was challenged by the French mainstream.

Our findings provide strong evidence to challenge the culturalist argument claiming that the “Chinese ethics” of diligent work and submissive attitudes are the most responsible for Chinese immigrants’ political disengagement (Raulin 1988; Costa-Lascroux and Live 1995; Lem 2010). However, while Horton (1995) suggested that Asians in the United States would benefit from identity politics by mobilizing themselves as an ethnic interest group, such as the Democratic Asians, we argue that individualistic experiences, particularly traumatic memories, lead to diverse paths and degrees of civic engagement. Of equal importance is Horton’s (1995) discussion of the marginalization of the Chinese experience by labeling it as “particularistic” while normalizing the white experience as “universalistic” in the political arena. The same phenomenon also exists in France and has a deterring effect on the political participation of Chinese immigrants and possibly other ethnic minorities. Our respondents felt that they are not accepted by the political community and that their voices are not entitled to equal concern as those of the white French. Both factors resulted in alternative political engagement that is less recognized by the mainstream community. One of the greatest challenges our participants faced on the way to gaining more social recognition was the language barrier. While mastering the French language was seen as a basic necessity for engaging in civic affairs, some respondents’ inability to speak fluent French hindered them from being recognized as French citizens and participating in the public arena (for the connection between language and citizenship in French, see Fanon 2008; Brubaker 1992).

In addition, while our study gained insight into the daily lives of Chinese inhabitants in the Triangle de Choisy, our respondents are predominately young students and seniors, and therefore cannot claim representation of the Chinese population as a whole. As we mentioned, we expect the situation of residents

without legal status to be hugely different, as they are not covered by state protections and tend to be extremely vulnerable to crime and violence (Lévy and Lieber 2011, 16). Their situation needs to be further assessed with a particular understanding of their circumstances and challenges.

Conclusion

Our paper used Serge Paugam’s (2017) model of social bonds to investigate social integration of Chinese immigrants in the Triangle de Choisy neighborhood in Southeast Paris. We found that Paugam’s *compensated integration* model, which states that friendships and connections in the workplace can functionally substitute for the shortage of support usually provided within the family. This applies to our case where Chinese immigrants moved to an unfamiliar French society, while their closest contacts were mainly co-ethnics, by allowing information, resources, and emotional support available in the wider society to flow into respondents’ social networks, less integrated members are put in a better position to receive support. For example, the Art House organizes volunteers to translate key government documents related to welfare standards for immigrants. In another case, support is gained through regular gatherings to share information about how to overcome difficulties immigrants commonly face during their early stages of resettlement.

Our first finding reaffirms the positive role of ethnic bonds, as Glazer and Moynihan (1970) argued. Secondly, we noticed our respondents are not particularly interested in obtaining French citizenship and tend to shrink back from political engagement when interviewed. Both are part of what Paugam (2017) considered to be citizenship bonds, which are crucial for social integration. However, a closer examination of the discourse that our respondents used to justify their disengagement does not support the conventional wisdom that the Chinese are essentially submissive in political culture. We argue, on the one hand, that France’s non-discriminative welfare policies between legal residents and citizens reduced incentives for the Chinese immigrant community to mobilize for citizen rights. On the other hand, the high internal heterogeneity within the Chinese community and the exclusion of ethnic-

particularistic experiences in mainstream French politics both led our participants to apparently remain silent over public affairs. Nonetheless, by situating individual political choice within their particular memories and life histories, we found that Chinese individuals are aware of and actively evaluate their political surroundings.

Our findings challenge the culturalist approach to Chinese political disengagement. We further argue that minorities' interest in civic participation is not necessarily associated with ethnic membership and should not be expected to. Our recommendation for future research is that studies of persons of an ethnic minority should regard them as individual social subjects rather than as agents representing their ethnic communities. Only by overcoming this Western-centric conception of the political unit can we better understand and analyze the structural obstacles and incentives under which individuals make their own choices.

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Endnotes

¹Fu Manchu was first introduced by Sax Rohmer's novel series and became extensively featured in Northern American popular culture. Fu Manchu, described as a mysterious, vicious but powerful Chinaman, reflects the racist ideology of Yellow Peril in Northern American societies (Frayling 2014).

²The interview was conducted in Mandarin Chinese. In the Chinese language, Chinese as an ethnicity concept (huaren 华人) differs from Chinese as a nationality concept (zhongguoren 中国人). The first word, huaren, refers to a culturally Chinese person. The second word, zhongguoren, literally "China country person", implies belonging to the country of China.

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