

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### FACTORS COUNTERVAILING IMMIGRANT PHOBIA: A PARADOXICALLY SUCCESSFUL CASE OF CHINESE MIGRATION

CIPRIAN NICOLAE RADAVOI\*

**Abstract.** *The purpose of the research was to reveal the hidden ingredients that can make migration successful in a European society prone, to immigrant phobia. The case of the Chinese migration to Romania was studied as an apparently paradoxical one: with all the factors that normally trigger immigrant phobia in place, the coexistence of the dominant and migrant group is peaceful. The study was conducted as a quantitative research meant to test the hypothesis that the positive attitude of Romanians towards Chinese migrants is influenced by their early and exclusive contact with the Chinese imported goods, during the Communist dictatorship of Ceausescu. In turn, the hypothesis was derived by using theories, secondary data and the author's previous knowledge. Data on both independent and dependent variables were collected by a poll financed with the author's own funds and done by a specialized institute, and then analyzed using SPSS to test the degree of correlation and signification. The results proved relevant and they are further discussed in a socio-psychological analytical frame, leading to the conclusion that previous contacts with trade as a vector of a culture soften the interaction with migrants linked to that culture.*

**Keywords:** *China, Romania, migration, immigrant phobia, dominant group, trade.*

### *Introduction*

#### *The European Context*

In the post-Cold War era, breakouts of the growing tension between host societies and immigrant groups have often inflamed parts of Europe. Even more worrisome is the hidden side of the iceberg, as shown by the various polls

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\* Doctor of Law, Lecturer in Law at the University of International Business and Economics, Beijing; radavoi@uibe.edu.cn.

conducted in Europe on the host societies' feelings towards immigrants. Results of the last Global Advisor survey (Global Advisor, 2011) confirm that seven in ten (71%) Britons say there are too many immigrants in the country; other countries with similarly high levels of agreement are Russia (77%), Belgium (72%), Italy (67%), and Spain (67%).

On the other hand, European Union needs migrants to counterbalance its demographic stagnation. While Muslims have lived in Europe for centuries, being already accepted and somewhat integrated, the increased number of Chinese raises new challenges for the governments and the host societies in general. It is a widespread belief among societies and researchers that Chinese are inassimilable; voicing that belief, Marsot states that 'however long they remain in a foreign country, and even if they settle for good... they mingle with the host peoples without ever becoming indistinguishable from these ... The inassimilable character of these Chinese colonies inevitably posed problems for local authorities' (1993:103). Given this claimed inassimilable character, the Chinese migration to Europe deserves particular attention, thus the research subject of the present study is the interaction between the dominant group and the growing Chinese community in Romania – a country with a steady and dramatic decrease of population between 2001 and 2012 and a decreasing trend expected for the next decades (Eurostat, 2013), thus expected to allow more immigrants in general in the years to come. Recent political evolutions, such as premier Li Keqiang visit to Romania for the summit China-Eastern European Countries, in November 2013, followed by a sharp increase of Chinese investments in Romania, suggest that a large proportion of this increased migration to Romania will be accounted by Chinese.

### *The Research Problem*

A huge amount of literature has been written on socio-cultural interaction between host societies and immigrant groups, and within this framework, many studies aimed to explain the immigrant phobia. As far as the latter is concerned, the existent literature focuses on the causes of hostility towards immigrants, especially in Europe and USA. Drawing upon the reasons of hostility and conflict, Alexseev (2005) develops a "security dilemma" model to describe anti-immigrant feelings of host societies all around the world. Similarly, O'Connell (2005) designs the realistic conflict theory, emphasizing considerations of economic well-being, while Paxton (2006) prefers the social identity theory, claiming that societies react to the danger of their cultural identities being altered by large influxes of immigrants. To sum up, all the authors give main prevalence to the racial, the cultural or the economic aspects, in different proportions.

There are however cases of low immigrant phobia even when the above listed perceptions are high. Such is the case of Romania, where as emphasized in the next chapter, all the factors that theoretically might trigger a high immigrant phobia are in place; in spite of this, the lack of any violent incident suggests a normal cohabitation between the Chinese migrants and the dominant group.

When the causal factors identified by the theory of immigrant phobia are absent in a particular country, the peaceful cohabitation with the migrant group appears as logical and generally valid; on the contrary, if the causes for hostility are there but the migration is still successful, explanations should be looked for in the specificities of each *dominant group – migrant group binomial*. Therefore this study will scrutinize the Romanians – Chinese relation, focusing on the post 1968 period, when bilateral contacts, either direct or indirect, took off as explained in the next chapter.

### *Research Question and Design of the Study*

This study attempts to emphasize the major role played by the host society's previous contact with vectors of the immigrant group's culture. In doing so, the study will focus on the contact of the Romanian people with the Chinese imported merchandise prior to 1989, the year that marked the end of the Communist rule in Eastern Europe; the peculiar conditions of the Romanian market, as shown in the next chapter, make these goods very strong vectors of the Chinese culture in the country led iron hand by Ceausescu and his Communist Party between 1965 and 1989. Given all these, the research question is as follows:

*How Does the Early Contact with Markers of a Culture (Consumer Goods, in our Case) Influence the Late Contact with Migrants from that Country? What Are the Socio-Psychological Mechanisms of this Process?*

This study's aim was testing a hypothesis – the one that early contact with Chinese merchandise positively shaped the attitude of the Romanians towards the Chinese migrants. Thus, we will check the correlation between the following variables:

1. *Independent variable*: perception of the quality of Chinese goods imported before 1989

2. *Dependent variable*: degree of tolerance towards the Chinese migrants today

The study used primary data collected through a nationally relevant poll conducted in Romania on questionnaires designed by the authors. 1230 persons answered the questionnaire in 226 check points across the country.

Chapter 2 explains why Chinese migration to this Romania can be seen as a paradoxical success. Various possible explanations provided by the Romanian context are reviewed, and the one that seems the most plausible is selected, thus becoming the hypothesis of the quantitative study. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the statistical analysis of the survey's findings, while Chapter 4 further discusses these results, in a socio-psychological analytical frame.

## *Chinese in Romania*

### *Background*

The communist regimes of China and Romania established diplomatic relations in 1949. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the Party and state leaders of the two countries exchanged frequent visits, with the contacts reaching a peak in late

1960s – early 1970's, for reasons to be found in the international political situation. As openly opposing the 1968 Soviet Union's military intervention in Czechoslovakia, Romania feared a military aggression from its huge Eastern neighbor; since the Sino – Soviet relations were on their turn at a very low level, strengthening ties with China appeared as a logical step. The good political relation was mutually beneficial, as Ceausescu – at that time, the spoiled child of the Western democracies – played an important role in negotiating the normalization of the Sino – American relations. For instance, President Nixon saw Ceausescu as “the most useful of all the intermediaries” in the process of Sino-US rapprochement (*Times*, 26 July 1971).

Economic, the 60 million US dollars credit granted by China to Romania in 1972 was welcome for a country that was already experiencing economic problems due to excessive centralization. To be noted that half of the loan was in goods – mainly cheap consumer goods – that flooded a market dominated by the low quality indigenous products. The economic relations kept developing and by 1980, Romania was China's most important trade member in the CMEA<sup>1</sup>, with the 1980 volume of trade reaching 1,200 million US dollars, 50 per cent more than the Sino – Soviet trade (*Tanjug*, 16 March 1983). Romania was delivering to China oil equipment, other machinery and plants, metallurgical and chemical products, products of the timber industry, while China was delivering oil and again consumer goods – which in early 1980's had become a scarcity as Romania was deeply affected by isolation and the Ceausescu's forced savings policy.

As far as cultural relations are concerned, it is relevant that from 1980 to 1983, about 4,000 Chinese specialists in political affairs, economics, technology, science, culture, and tourism have visited Romania (Radio Beijing, 3 May 1983). At the same time, Romania was actively promoted in the official media in Beijing as a “sister nation”, which can explain why it became a preferred destination for migration in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. By 1999, according to unofficial estimates, around 20,000 Chinese migrants had come to Bucharest – one percent of the Romanian capital city's population (Adevarul, 1 August 2005). More recent official statistics provided by the General Inspectorate for Immigration show a lower figure, 7,000 (*Ziua*, 24 May 2013), but official figures counting legal residents are usually significantly lower than the actual number of migrants.

Although not as impressive as in other European capitals, the number of Chinese migrants is expected to grow, in spite of the more restrictive immigration norms adopted by Romania after the accession to the European Union. Romania will most likely follow the European trend, which shows a significant increase in Chinese immigration for the last decade (Council of Europe, 2001); under these circumstances, with the phenomenon expected to take proportions, it is important to evaluate the host society's response.

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as COMECON, the Council for Economic Assistance was created in 1949 by Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, East Germany and initially Albania.

*A Paradoxical Success*  
*Theories on Prejudice against Immigrants*

A diverse set of theories on animosity towards immigrants has been generated by scholars, completing and sometimes competing with each other. Quilian for example (1995: 587) sees the individual-group dichotomy as comprehensive in explaining prejudice against immigrants, which he defines as “antipathy accompanied by a faulty generalization”. He identifies three main streams of *individual prejudice theories*. The first one seeks the causes of prejudice as the psychological displacement of fear or anxiety onto others. A second stream of research focuses on individual features, as attitude surveys show that people from the working class, from older cohorts, and who have less education express more prejudice. Finally, the self-interest theory postulates that individuals develop negative affects and rigid stereotypes toward individuals with whom they are in competition and conflict.

As far as the *group level theories* are concerned, it is to be mentioned Blumer’s ‘Racial Prejudice as a Function of Group Position’, in which he sees prejudice as a defensive reaction against challenges to the dominant group’s exclusive claim to privileges. Moving the analysis one step forward, Bobo creates the model of realistic conflict theory, which posits that the subordinate group is “a threat to real resources” of the dominant group (Bobo, 1983: 1197). Focusing on competing economic interests as source of tension, the realistic group conflict provides explanation for immigrant phobia in periods of scarcity in a country’s history. Consistent with this theory is for instance the documentation by Dollard (1938) of the growth of anti-immigrants feelings in an American town, proportionally to the deepening of the economic crisis. More dramatically, Dollard’s research was confirmed in his times by the rise to power of the Nazi, in the context of the deep crises of the 1930’s.

Seventy-five years afterward, the voting patterns in Europe still confirm the theory of realistic group conflict: in constituencies experiencing high unemployment and economic problems, the far-right gets high scores with a strong anti-immigrant discourse. This was the case in Romania, where in 2000 the candidate of the far right, Vadim Tudor, leader of the ‘Greater Romania’ Party, scored very high in the presidential elections and was defeated only in the second round by the highly popular leader of the 1989 anti-Ceausescu coup – Ion Iliescu. At that time, Romanian economic performance was one of the lowest in Europe.

However, as O’Connell (2005: 62) observes, the conclusions of sophisticated research in the last decade have become increasingly skeptical about economic forces having a direct, unproblematic and unidirectional effect on attitudes towards immigrants and related behaviors, including voting patterns. Thomas Pettigrew for instance makes the distinction between the old-fashioned form of prejudice, centered on competition for resources, and the new type, based on perceived threat to the culture norms and values.

Blatant prejudice is the traditional form; it is hot, close, and direct; (...) Subtle prejudice is the modern form; it is cool, distant, and indirect. It taps the perceived

threat of the minority to traditional values, the exaggeration of cultural differences with the minority, and the absence of positive feelings toward them (Pettigrew, 1998: 83).

Furthermore, elaborating on quantitative analysis undertaken in six Western European countries, O'Connell (2005:63) gets to the conclusion that the right-wing extremism was facilitated by rising levels of immigration but *not* by a declining national economy, which was actually found, on the contrary, to correlate with a dampening down of the extremism.

To sum up, while the classical theory points to the new comers as a threat to the jobs and more generally to the economic well being of the dominant group, the newer theory sees the threat to the national identity as the ultimate explanation for the immigrant phobia. Romania, as we show in the following, is an interesting case at the borderline between the two theories, offering grounds for the validity of both. Prior to that, it is worth over viewing the newest of the theories explaining immigrant phobia, which blends the previous ones with a very fashionable concept nowadays: security.

In his 'Immigration Phobia and the Security Dilemma' published in 2005, Mikhail Alexseev develops a security-based model to describe anti-immigrant hostility in host societies. This model takes into account the following perceptions in the host society: *anarchy*, which relates to the host population's perception of their government's ability to secure their borders and protect the host population from excessive immigration intent of the migrant population; *groupness*, which relates to the immigrant population's resistance to assimilation and also to their visual and perceptual distinctiveness of the migrant population; *intent* of the migrant population, referring to the host's society perception of whether the immigrants are integrating into society, and whether they maintain loyalties to their sending state; *socio-economic impact*, including impact on income and jobs, education, the environment, and crime. Alekseev (2005) posits that the level of these perceptions and their interaction will determine the level of threat experienced by the host population, and consequently the level of prejudice.

#### *Romania and the Failure of the Theories*

In light of the above listed theories, Romania gives enough ground for the realistic conflict theory. With the highest score in EU in people at risk of poverty in 2011 (Eurostat 2013), with large inequalities and deep social frustration against corrupt and inefficient governments, with a large share of the GDP growth covered by privatizations and remittances from the Romanian emigrant workers (3 billion in 2010, a peak year of the financial crisis, according to *Ziarul Financiar*, 8 June 2011) – it is easy to see the immigrants as the scapegoat. The nationalistic parties, constantly credited with around 20% intention of vote in the first decade of the new century, were doing a 'good' job catalyzing animosities against minorities on grounds of affecting the economic well being of the indigenous people.

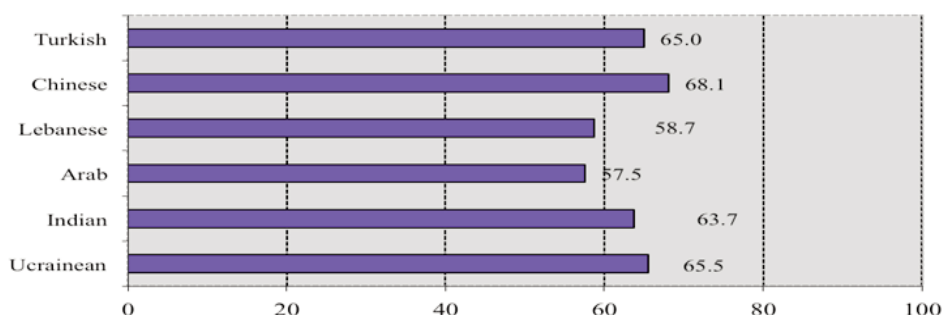


Even more corrosive is the activity of these parties in light of the “modern” theory on immigrant phobia – the one that touches upon national culture and identity. Although the Chinese are not under target yet, frequent verbal attacks on Jewish and Gypsies show the potential of the nationalistic current, rooted in Ceausescu’s era, when the personality cult was blended with theories on the Latin purity of the Romanian blood.

As for Alekseev’s ‘security dilemma’, in theory, the four triggers of immigrant phobia perfectly apply to Romania:

- *Anarchy* relates to the host population’s perception of their government’s ability to protect it from excessive immigration – which in Romania is very low, because of the corrupted administration and inefficient bureaucracy;
- *The intent of the migrants* refers to the host’s society perception of whether the immigrants are integrating into society; Chinese are seen as inassimilable and maintaining strong ties with the mainland;
- *Groupness* relates to the immigrant population’s visual and perceptual distinctiveness, evident in the case of Chinese. In support of this aspect, one may also refer to the distance theory which posits that the more unknown is a culture, the more difficult it proves bridging with another;
- *Perceptions on socio-economic impact* were discussed above; on the social side, to be added that in early 90’s, homicide within the Chinese community was one of the favourite subject of mass media, due to its frequency and bloody character.

In spite of all these, neither blatant nor subtle prejudice against Chinese developed in the Romanian society. A case of violence against a Chinese was never reported, let alone group conflicts. The welcoming character of the Romanians can be ruled out as an explanation; at times, violent conflicts occurred when it comes to Hungarian or Gipsy minorities, or to Arab immigrants. As for the subtle prejudice, the graph (part of our survey that is the foundation of the next chapter) bellow, showing the positive answers to the question: ‘*Would you agree to have as neighbor a person/family belonging to the following nationality...*’ clearly emphasizes the lack of hard feelings towards the Chinese immigrants, if not in an absolute manner, at least as compared to other ethnic groups.



*'Would you agree to have as neighbor a...?'*

Explanations of such an evident misfit between what theories suggest and what practice shows is to be found in the peculiarities of the Romanian socio-cultural and historical context.

### *Possible Explanations*

There is a variety of contextual explanations consistent with the Romanian socio-historical circumstances. First of all, given the above mentioned frequent conflicts with Hungarians and Gypsies living in Romania, one could say that Romanians 'invest' all their resources of group conflict and racism in the relation with these scapegoats. The scapegoat theory can provide an explanation also when seen in an international context: after the attacks on 9/11, Europe is so focused on Muslims that it might 'neglect' the non-Muslim immigrants. This second aspect seem to be confirmed to some extent by the graph above, which shows that Romanians are more reluctant to people coming from the Middle East than to other immigrants.

Another line of reasoning could lead us to the migration of Romanians to Western Europe as explanation for our case; indeed, countries which are both sending and receiving migrants rarely experience conflicts among the dominant and subordinate groups. However, the phenomenon of Romanian labor force migration is relatively new, having taken amplitude only after Europe opened its borders to Eastern-European workers, which makes it an unlikely reason for low prejudice against immigrants.

A tempting explanation lies in the size of the Chinese immigrant group, which one may say has not reach a critical mass yet. Blalock (1967) outlines two reasons for a connection between intergroup relative size and prejudice. First, competition for resources increases with the size of the minority group; second, large immigrant group size can increase the potential for political mobilization and result in a greater threat to the dominant group.

However, a two-fold argument stands against the size of the Chinese migrant group size as explanation for low prejudice among Romanians. Firstly, after reviewing the literature on the topic, Quilian (1995: 189) argues that these studies do not conclusively support the relation between increased size of the subordinate group and increased discrimination. This relation may be a valid explanation for prejudice against African Americans in USA, but as far as Europe is concerned, as Quilian's study emphasize, size of migrant group is of little relevance. Secondly, putting our case in a different analytical frame, we will find that far from being a reason for low prejudice, small size of the migrant group could on the contrary have a negative influence. Indeed, small size of the migrant group means low contact with the dominant group – and contact is beneficial for reducing prejudice. As McLaren (2003: 929) posits in the conclusion of his multivariate analysis study, "contact does matter for reducing hostility toward immigrants to Europe". Not having the opportunity of direct, physical contact with the Chinese, the



Romanians' perceptions on the new comers were shaped through the filter of mass media, which as shown in the previous chapters focused mainly on the negative aspects.

Some of the above discussed factors undoubtedly play a positive role in shaping the attitude of Romanians towards Chinese migrants, but none of them seems to be the ultimate cause. Given that, this study adds a new one, provided by the recent past of Romania. It is possible, we argue, that Romanians do not show prejudice against Chinese migrants because their image of China and the Chinese was built in the 1970's, *through the Chinese consumer goods that flooded the country at that time*.

Indeed, tables on the evolution of trade of Romania between 1966-1970<sup>2</sup> show that at time, USSR and China were the main trade partners of Ceausescu's regime; however, while in the imports from USSR, food accounted for 1 percent and consumer goods for 3 percent, in the imports from China, food accounted for 17 percent and consumer goods for 34 percent.

What made them strongly imprinted in the collective memory, as we will argue, is the fact that *they had monopoly on the Romanian market as far as imported goods were concerned*. With the Western 'imperialist' products practically forbidden, with a very low trade with other Eastern European communist countries (except for USSR which is a special case), with most of the indigenous production being poor quality – the high quality going to export in order to pay the country's debt – Chinese toys, school supplies, tools or clothes were a delight for a deprived population. For over a decade, it was the only contact of the ordinary consumer with the outside world; as for the quality, it was incomparably higher than the local products' one.

#### *Correlations. A Quantitative Study Operationalization of the Variables*

The hypothesis we test is that *immigrant phobia against Chinese is inversely proportional to the favorability of the vectors evaluations of the Chinese culture* – in our case, the consumer goods made in China. To operationalize the research, the two variables were identified as follows:

- Immigration phobia, *the dependent variable*, was defined by two basic concepts, derived from the discussion in Section 2.2.1: perceived threat and hostility towards migrants. Accordingly, the respondents were asked whether they see the Chinese migrants as having good or bad intentions, on the one hand, and whether they would agree to have as neighbor a Chinese person/ family, on the other hand.

- Favorability of the evaluation of the Chinese culture's vectors, *the independent variable*, was on its turn operationalized on three axes: satisfaction with using the consumer goods made in China, the qualities attributed to these goods, and the qualities attributed to Chinese in general.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic\\_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=5034CA05-96B6-175C-9D1E985BB79D8B4B&sort=Collection&item=Romania%20in%20the%20Cold%20War](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=5034CA05-96B6-175C-9D1E985BB79D8B4B&sort=Collection&item=Romania%20in%20the%20Cold%20War).

*Key Findings of the Survey**Strong correlation perceived threat / qualities attributed to Chinese*

TABLE 1

			Chinese migrants – good or bad intentions?
Spearman's rho	Chinese migrants: good or bad intentions?	Correlation Coefficient	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	Diligence	N	1230
		Correlation Coefficient	,611(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
	Inventiveness	N	1230
		Correlation Coefficient	,623(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
	Discipline	N	1230
		Correlation Coefficient	,650(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
	Devotion	N	1230
		Correlation Coefficient	,684(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Data revealed a strong correlation between the perceived characteristics of Chinese people and the nature of the Chinese migrants' intentions, in the Romanians' view. The correlation coefficient is similar for the qualities listed in the questionnaires; however a higher correlation is found for inventiveness and devotion.

*Relevant correlation between hostility and the qualities seen as attached to Chinese made goods (only for urban segment, more than 200,000 inhabitants)*

The research found good correlation between the qualities seen as specific to Chinese made goods and the hostility against Chinese, but only for cities of more than 200,000 inhabitants. This is due by the fact that vectors of Chinese culture, be them movies or consumer goods, did not penetrate the rural market.

TABLE 2

			Would you agree to have a Chinese as neighbour?
Spearman's rho	Would you agree to have a Chinese as neighbor?	Correlation Coefficient	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	279
	Good quality	Correlation Coefficient	,203(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,001
		N	279
	Durable	Correlation Coefficient	,224(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
		N	279
	Ingenious	Correlation Coefficient	,216(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
		N	279
	Minutely worked	Correlation Coefficient	,182(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,002
		N	279
	Complicated	Correlation Coefficient	,179(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,003
		N	279
	Efficient	Correlation Coefficient	,181(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,002
		N	279
	Attractive	Correlation Coefficient	,210(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
		N	279
	Nice	Correlation Coefficient	,213(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
		N	279

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### *Conclusions of the Survey*

Both of the basic concepts used to define immigrant phobia showed relevant correlations with the independent variable, and high statistical significance. However, only the first one, namely the perceived threat, proved relevant at the national level; hostility only showed a relevant correlation at the urban level. The explanation is twofold. On the one hand, hostility was operationalized as the

degree of acceptance of a Chinese neighbor, which is hardly conceivable in the rural area, while perceived threat was operationalized as the intentions of Chinese, a more abstract concept that allowed more freedom for respondents. On the other hand, the contact itself with the Chinese culture's vectors was very limited in the rural areas prior to 1989. Items like Chinese made toys, clothes or food were only available in the urban supermarkets before 1989 – not to speak about movies, as the villages didn't have movie theatres. The results of the poll show a sum of the 'Don't know' and 'Don't answer' answers roughly equal to the rural population of Romania, around 50%, allowing us to assume that it was the urban population who actually experienced the contact with the Chinese goods.

The split results on national/ urban, far from affecting the relevance of the survey all together, on the contrary confirm the correlation between the independent and dependent variable. As far as the cities' inhabitants are concerned, the survey results confirm beyond doubt the correlation between the good memories on this contact and the good attitude towards Chinese migrants today. The next chapter further explains this correlation by using concepts and theories of social psychology.

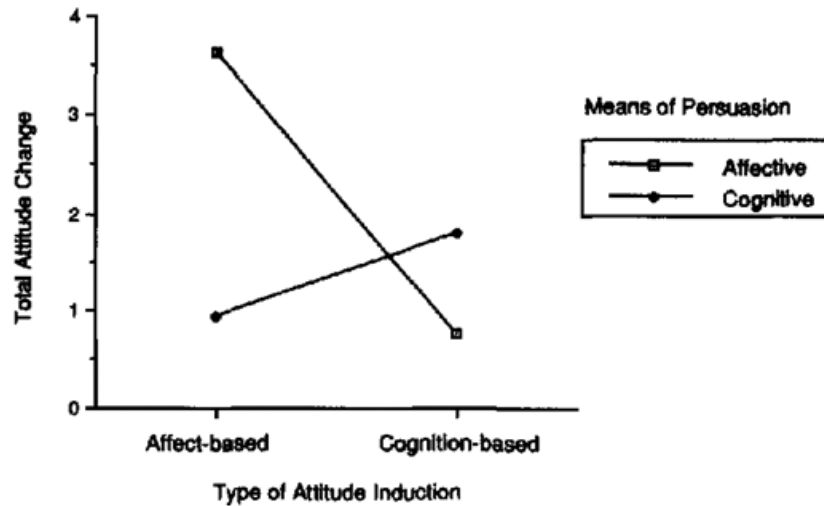
### *Socio-Psychological Considerations*

#### *Affective Attitude and the Resilience to Attitude Change*

In social psychology, attitude is defined as “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly, 1992: 693). The entity in this case – or ‘the object of attitude’, as referred to in the literature – are the Chinese in general and the Chinese immigrants in particular. As for the process of ‘evaluation’, as Fazio et al. (1986: 230) note, it is seen in a very broad sense, ranging in nature from a very hot affect (the attitude object being associated with a strong emotional response) to a colder, more cognitively based judgment toward the object. Depending on the role played by emotions in knowledge acquisition, the attitudes are *affective* or *cognitive* – a classification with important consequences as far as the present study is concerned.

For *affect-based* attitudes, affective reactions exert a primary and powerful influence on the individual, and the attitude is initially acquired with minimal cognitive appraisal. Relevant information that is acquired subsequent to these affective reactions may serve to confirm or bolster the initial attitude. The cognitive structuring that takes place is likely to be in service of the affect and does not constitute the basis of the attitude. For *cognition-based* attitudes, domain-relevant information is acquired first, and affective factors come into play only after, and as a result of, considerable cognitive appraisal. Although affective processes often occur in cognition-based attitudes, their role in shaping attitude development is minimal (Edwards, 1990: 204).

The explanation for the low effectiveness of the counter-attitudinal factors in the case of Romania may lay in the nature of the attitude's origin; we argue that the primacy of the affective factors in shaping the Romanians' attitude in the late 60's – early 70's made it resilient to change.



The explanation is two-fold. On the one hand, the tensions at the Russian border, after Ceausescu's opposition to invading Czechoslovakia in 1968, gave Romanians a tremendous feeling of insecurity, increased by the mobilization of the Army decided by Ceausescu. The country feared a war with the huge Eastern neighbor, with zero chances of winning; in these circumstances, the perceived support from China was seemed as vital, even though China has never shown any intention to get involved. It was mere propaganda and the propagandistic effect of the many visits of Ceausescu to China that made this country "the protector from the shadow" and persuaded the Romanians to credit it for the happy end of the story. On the other hand, the access to the Chinese imported goods, at a time when no other imports were allowed, contributed to the positive attitude toward China and the Chinese. In the dark decade that followed the relative opening up of the early 70's, owning Chinese products was almost a prize for a deeply deprived population. These are two strong arguments that the origin of the Romanians' attitude was mainly affective.

One may identify cognitive elements as well, especially in the first factor – feeling of support and protection against Russia. Actually, as Edwards (1990: 204) emphasizes, the distinction between affect and cognition based attitudes is not dichotomical; that is to say, it is unlikely that we ever form pure affect based and cognition based attitudes. In reality, the author explains, attitudes are positioned along a continuum, according to the primacy and the relative contribution of affect and cognition in their acquisition and further development. In our case, deeper reasoning would have told Romanians that is unrealistic to expect open support from China in a military conflict with Russia. Similarly, a comparison of the Chinese goods with Western ones would have revealed the actually poor quality of the former. Instead, affective factors were at work – mainly gratification and perceived support against threats, which are pointed by the above quoted author as main contributors to affect based attitudes.

Correctly identifying the type of attitude is important as it casts an influence on its ability to withstand counter-attitudinal information. As affect based, the Romanians' attitude towards Chinese was, in the light of Zajonc's work (1980), expressed with more conviction and more resilient in time. Affect based attitudes are difficult to change, Zajonc claims, because the counter-attitudinal information tends to be discounted or at least assimilated. Zajonc's work was consistent with Festinger's dissonance theory: people experiencing cognitive dissonance are likely to avoid exposure to information they have reasons to believe may increase dissonance (Festinger, 1957: 163).

In light of these theories, it is to be mentioned that, when it came to identifying the origins of Ceausescu's change of leadership style after 1970, Romanians avoided putting the blame on Chinese. Most of the authors agree Ceausescu's Eastern Trip (China and North Korea, 1971) opened his eyes to the use of ideological mobilization of the masses and the cult of personality (see Almond, 1988, and Deletant, 1999). However, although in 1971 Ceausescu visited China *and* North Korea, anybody in Romania would tell you that he turned to the far-East style of communism, with the personality cult, after having visited North Korea; nobody would mention China.

The mechanism was further explained by Edwards (1990), whose empirical studies led to valuable conclusions on the influence of the various factors of persuasion to different types of attitudes. The graph (from Edwards, 1990) shows that affect based attitudes are difficult to change by cognition, while affective pressures are conducive to attitude change.

In the Romanians' case, the counter-attitudinal factors that came into place after 1990 – the ones identified in the immigrant phobia theory as triggering hostility against migrants – were cognitive factors. Be it fear of losing jobs, of altering the cultural identity of the nation, or of rising criminality, these were reason based factors with little impact on an affect based attitude.

#### *Factors Limiting the Impact of Counter-Attitudinal Information*

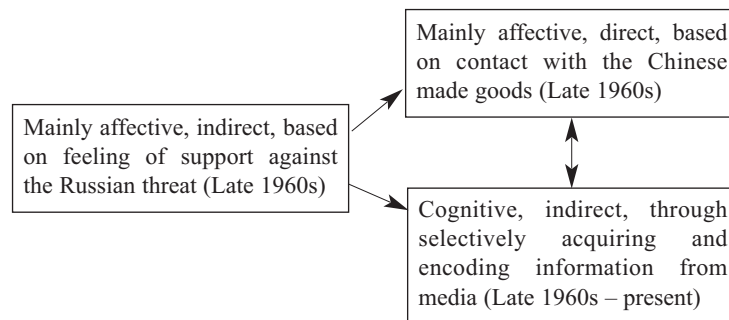
There is in the socio-psychological literature a substantial body of empirical work on attitude change, with many different possible factors of change being put under the researchers' microscope. Aside from the affective versus cognitive character of the knowledge acquisition, already discussed, the researchers focused on the implicit/ explicit type of attitude (Rydel and McConnell, 2006), on the source credibility (Wu and Shaffer, 2006) the prior contact with the attitude object (Fazio et al., 1986), the attitude importance (Holbrook et al., 2005), or the amount of persuasive information (Davidson et al., 1985). A brief overview of the mechanisms by which some of these factors work shows they perfectly fit as explanations for our case.

Personal importance, for example, has been recognized as related to the strength of one's attitude. Holbrook et al. (2005: 750) explore the two mechanisms of this effect: personal importance lead people to selectively expose themselves to attitude-relevant information, and on the other hand, once exposed



to such information, personal importance instigate people to process it more deeply and richly, thereby facilitating later retrieval. According to Holbrook's findings, people are better able to remember information relevant to important attitudes. Since he defines as important the attitudes that bring at stake people's material interests, security interests or simply their values, we can conclude that Romanians' attitude towards China were important in early 70's. During Ceausescu's honey-years with China, information about this country was abundant in the Romanian media, allowing elaboration and encoding in the long-term memory of the Romanians, thereby equipping them to resist persuasion.

Information from mass media, referred to above, was an indirect and, in the light of the previous paragraph, a selectively cognitive way to acquire attitude. At this point we can describe the acquisition and development of the Romanian's attitude towards China and Chinese from the late 60's until the 80's by the following model:



Prior contact with the attitude's object – in our case, the direct contact with the Chinese goods pointed in the triangular model – also plays an essential role, as emphasized in the literature. Wu and Shaffer (1987), building upon Fazio et al. (1986), find that direct-experience attitudes are on one hand more affectively charged than indirect-experience attitudes, and on the other hand, they bear a higher influence on an attitude relevant persuasive appeal. Specifically, direct-experience attitudes are found to trigger negative reactions to counter-attitudinal factors, and more positive to pro-attitudinal ones. Again, theory and empirical findings of scientific research support the assumption that immigrant phobia factors activated after 1989 failed to alter the good perception on Chinese due to the circumstances in which the initial attitude was acquired.

Finally, strength of the attitude is a concept that has to be evoked, as especially important when it comes to the automatic activation of attitudes. Attitudes, as Fazio et al. (1986: 229) explain, can be either spontaneously activated, without any conscious effort from the subject, or on the contrary, activated through a more reflective process, by weighting arguments. The three experiments presented and discussed in the above quoted study point to the idea that automatic activation of attitude is far more likely when the association between object and evaluation is strong, that is to say, when it comes as the result of a previously

well learned set of associations, and equally important, Fazio et al stress (1986: 236), when it is an affective attitude. Both of these conditions are fulfilled in our case, which can explain the automatic activation of Romanians' attitude towards Chinese after 1990, and consequently why they construed the available information on the object in a selective way. Upon the mere exposure to the subject, the key word "Chinese" activated the affective linkages and blocked the further reasoning that normally should have led to immigrant phobia.

### *Conclusions*

The starting point of the paper was the apparent misfit between the trend in Europe and the situation in Romania, as far as immigrant phobia is concerned. Using historical and statistical data, author's pre-existent knowledge as someone having grown up in Romania in the 1970s and the results of a poll designed by the author, the study argued that Romanians have a positive attitude towards Chinese immigrants, *in spite* of all the conditions for immigrant phobia being fulfilled. The study then tried to identify and explain the motives beyond this apparent paradox. After having ruled out some other possible causes, the author focused on the previous contact with vectors of Chinese culture that have occurred in the communist recent history of Romania.

The poll conducted nationwide confirmed the correlation between the contact with Chinese made goods between the late 1960s – late 1980s and the positive attitude today. Using an analytical frame derived from social psychology, a model explaining the link was designed; it came out that it was a combination of factors in the initial acquisition of attitude towards China and the Chinese that made it resilient in time and resistant to counter-attitudinal information available after 1990. The affective character of all the components of attitude's acquisition was the key ingredient that made it difficult to change in spite of its exposure to factors that otherwise would have triggered the immigrant phobia.

Although the findings of this thesis were heavily influenced by the very specific conditions of the host society – immigrant group interaction, there is still enough room for generalization to make it relevant for policy makers anywhere. Basically, the study found that in the *direct* (although mediated through products) – *indirect* ('told' by others, through mass media) communicational binome, the bias is on the former when it comes to attitude acquisition. This suggests that rather than focusing on mass media in their strategies to fight immigrant phobia, governments should turn to media.

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