中國宗教評論

Fiery Dragons:
Chinese Communities in Central and Eastern Europe, with Special Focus on Hungary and Romania

Dorottya Nagy

The 26th of May 2010 will not be easily forgotten by many Chinese migrants in Romania. At dawn on that day, a huge fire broke out at the Red Dragon Market Complex (Complexul Comercial Dragonul Roşu), situated in the north-eastern outskirts of the country's capital, Bucharest. It was real money-burning for a few hours. Dozens of Chinese entrepreneurs had their stored goods, authorization papers, official documents, cash money, and other, more personal items turned to ashes. The event was not a ritual burning of paper offerings to commemorate deceased ancestors, yet such an interpretation after the event becomes part of the hermeneutical package connected to bereavement. Nearly two-thousand stores, and about forty million Euro, went up in smoke.

This was not the first time the Red Dragon caught fire. Minor "fire events" are quite regular in this area. In November and December 2009 there were smaller incidents in the area of the market.[1] In April 2010 numerous shops run by Chinese merchants were closed down due to "illegal transactions." Romanian media reported on firemen injured by furious Chinese merchants, who were "illegally" conducting their commercial activities in the marketplace. One report mentioned that firemen were rescued by some twenty policemen who, it appears, happened to be at the right place at the right time.[2]

The Red Dragon,[3] the extension of an already-existing Chinese Market opened in 2003 (situated at the Piata Europa, Europa Market), was the firstfruits of the still-to-be completed Chinatown project owned by the Niro Group,[4] which also planned to build a resi-

Dr Dorottya Nagy, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen, Germany, completed her PhD in theology at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, in 2008 with a thesis entitled "Migration and Theology: The Case of Chinese Christian Communities in Hungary and Romania in the Globalisation-Context." Dorottya Nagy is also an ordained minister of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Hungary. The following text is her contribution to the 8th European Catholic China Colloquium "Chinese in Europe – Trends and Catholic Perspectives," Freising, September 16–19, 2010. A German translation of this text was first published in *China heute* 2010, No. 4, pp. 235-245.

1 www5.libertatea.ro/stire/doi-pompieri-batuti-de-chinezii-din-dragonul-rosu-266902.html, accessed on 29 June 2010.

2 *Ibid.*

3 www.dragonulrosu.ro/, accessed on 27 July 2010.

4 The Niro Group has a controversial history and status both among Chinese migrants and non-Chinese in Romania, being often associated with criminality and corruption, rooted in the Communist secret service ancestry of its leadership.

dential area[5] called China Towers and an office area called the China Business Center. All these would spread over eighty thousand square meters and would require a planned investment of two hundred million Euro. The Red Dragon commercial centre is one of the largest Chinese markets in Central and Eastern Europe with about six thousand stores. It attracts an average of ten thousand visitors during the week and some twenty thousand visitors at weekends.

Romanian language media commented on the May incident from different perspectives. The focus of the reports was the death of a Romanian fireman who, by trying to save the life of some of his colleagues, lost his own. The fireman hero was commemorated both as a victim of the "Niro mafia" and the "illegal and criminal Chinese entrepreneurs." There were speculations that the cause of the fire should be traced back to Niro leadership, suggesting that it was in their own interests[6] to clean up some commercial buildings in order to make the Chinese merchants move into the newest locations of the complex, which were about to be opened a few weeks later. Tensions over the payment of taxes between the Chinese entrepreneurs and the Niro leadership were also mentioned. The Romanian media did not give any attention at all to the actual victims, the Chinese businessmen and women. Reader responses demonstrated a polarized interpretation of the Chinese presence in Romania. On the one hand there were those fuelling anti-Chinese discourses, labelling Chinese migrants in Romania as criminals, clear signs of the bad effects of globalisation, as dirty, and as parasites; on the other hand there were those who viewed Chinese entrepreneurs as providing many Romanian citizens not only with job opportunities but literally also with affordable clothes and goods.[7]

The incident reached even *The People's Daily Online*, but this latter, on the 27th of May, reports in a very general way on *a* fire in *a* Chinese market, on the death of *a* fireman "but so far there has been no report of casualties."[8] Reader responses were almost absent.

While the Dragon was still on fire, a group of Chinese Christians gathered for prayer. People's dreams had gone up in smoke and there were prayers for friends and enemies and most of all prayers for comfort. "… and again I lost everything. I left behind my roots and moved to the city. With hard work I made a living there. Then I came to Romania and hoped that I could make it further. I am working day and night, I try to be honest and follow the rules. … and again, I have lost everything. How often can a man start anew?" asks a middle-aged Chinese businessman while rummaging around his burned-out shop.

This vignette highlights some of the important dimensions of Chinese migration: unpredictability, tensions, trade, prosperity, and spiritual/religious dimensions. The following article offers a general and short description of Chinese migration to Central and East-

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5　The plans around the residential area, the dreams of Central and Eastern Europe's largest China Town, seem to have been abandoned.

6　The fact that the burned-out buildings had valid insurance became part of the argument against the Niro group.

7　E.g. www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-7319509-update-incendiu-proportii-complexul-dragonul-rosu-din-capitala-pompier-pierdut-viata-alti-4-sunt-raniti; www.adevarul.ro/locale/bucuresti/Bucuresti-_Pompier_mort_la_datorie-la_incendiul_de_la_Dragonul_Rosu_0_268773362.html, accessed on 15 June 2010. Some of the responses even make theological statements about God's judgment on the Chinese and the Romanian politicians who were responsible for the death of the young fireman.

8　http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/7002582.html, accessed on 19 June 2010.

ern Europe (CEE) with a special focus on Hungary and Romania.[9] The article pleads for attention to the human dimension within the migration processes discussed here. In order to shape space for the human dimension, the present paper introduces the case of the Chinese Christian communities in CEE and their significance in shaping the dynamics of migrants' behaviours, community formation, and contacts with the "local"[10] population. The main argument of the presentation is that the globalisation of Chinese migration and the globalisation of Chinese Christianity go hand in hand and that the latter influences to a high degree the shape of what is called contemporary world Christianity.

Globalisation – Modernity – Mobility

The Chinese presence in CEE can be placed in the theoretical framework pinned down by three keywords: globalisation, modernity, and mobility. The appearance of the Chinese element in the globalisation discourse, the post-1978 modernity rhetoric of the PRC, and the role and means of mobility accentuated within both discourses connect the case of Chinese migration to CEE to the larger picture of Chinese contemporary migration worldwide.

Chinese globalisation has been conceptualised and perceived in its diversity as "China's increased diplomatic and military prowess and role as an emerging regional or even world superpower, the massive flows of capital and commodities to and from China, the much greater prominence of Chinese language and culture outside China, and the spectacular growth and much greater heterogeneity of migration from China."[11] The post-1978 modernity rhetoric conceived mobility as a necessary means through which, in manifold ways, civilisation, success, and development could be pursued. In this sense, the "new Chinese migration" is realized through adventurous yet responsible, successful, and patriotic individuals,[12] but most of all through "modernizing" people. The negotiation and construction of the meaning of "Chineseness" belongs organically to the constructed framework, as does the interpretation of Europe and within it the encountered realities of CEE.[13] In these exercises a remarkable rivalry of nationalism-bounded modernity arises. Chinese migrants view most of the CEE countries where they reside as left behind, un-

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9   Data originates in fieldwork done among Chinese migrants in Hungary and Romania between 2003–2010.

10   The term "local" refers to the non-Chinese population of the region. The author is aware that Chinese migrants residing in this region are also locals.

11   Frank N. Pieke *et al.*, *Transnational Chinese: Fujianese Migrants in Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004), p. 12. Chinese globalisation here is defined as "multiple, transnational social spaces straddling and embedded in diversifying smaller regional or national systems on the one hand, and, on the other hand, as a part of a unifying global system," p. 11.

12   See Pál Nyíri, "Expatriating is Patriotic? The Discourse on 'New Migrants' in the People's Republic of China and Identity Construction among Recent Migrants from the PRC," in: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27 (2001), pp. 635-653; "The 'New Migrant': State and Market Constructions of Modernity and Patriotism," in: Pál Nyíri – Joana Breidenbach (eds.), *China Inside Out: Contemporary Chinese Nationalism and Transnationalism* (Budapest: Central European University 2002).

13   "Modernizing" here underlines the active involvement of Chinese migrants in modernisation processes not only within the PRC but also in the places and countries of their migration. In this imaginary it is also through Chinese migration that new modernities in CEE become visible. See also Aihwa Ong – Donald M. Nonini, "Chinese Transnationalism as an Alternative Modernity," in: Hong Liu (ed.), *The Chinese Overseas: Routledge Library of Modern China*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge 2006), pp. 344-372; and Pál Nyíri – Igor Saveliev, *Globalizing Chinese Migration: Trends in Europe and Asia* (Burlington: Ashgate 2002).

derdeveloped, less modern compared to the phenomenal modernisation they partially experience and largely imagine in PRC cities. In their turn, many CEE citizens perceive Chinese migrants as underdeveloped, lacking civilization, and backward.

The globalisation, modernity, and mobility framework has not only economic, cultural, and political dimensions but an influential religious dimension as well. Chinese Christian communities in CEE are but one concrete manifestation of the religious dimension of the globalisation – modernity – mobility triad.[14] Europe, and within it what is called CEE, has become the platform where this triad once again manifests itself in new times, under new circumstances, and with new actors.[15]

Chinese Migration – CEE Correlation

After placing Chinese migration and CEE into the larger framework of Chinese globalisation, a short note on the Chinese migration – CEE correlation has to be made. The labelling of geographical areas is meant to support communication and facilitate understanding. Similar to the geographical label "China," "Central and Eastern Europe" is more than a geographical label. It evokes not only geographical categorization debates (which countries belong to this area, and within it, which countries are Central and which are Eastern) but also debates over cultural, religious, political, social, and economic heterogeneity. China is big and complex. Compared to it, CEE is small, yet still complex. This observation should guide any study on the Chinese migration – CEE correlation. Despite the existence of constructs and shared meta-theories, Chinese migration is further diversified due to the specific characteristics of a given country. Some of the shared mega-terms are: post-communism, post-socialism, xenophobia, nationalism, economic and political transition, and (the fight against) corruption, but these have particular manifestations and practical consequences for the Chinese migrants dwelling in the different CEE countries. For example, a Chinese migrant in Romania and Hungary will often be compared with Romani people, whereas in the Czech Republic such a comparison would not easily be made, and if it were made it would mean something else.

The history of the diplomatic relations between China and the different Central and Eastern European countries is also diverse. Although most of the CEE countries recognized the new Chinese state in 1949, in most cases, the recognition was more an act of communist solidarity than friendly enthusiasm. On the other hand, most of the CEE countries developed cultural and technical relationships with China. The break between China and the Soviet Union in the 1960s again influenced these international relations. It can be also observed that throughout the 1990s CEE did not have "China fever"; rather, the Chinese got "CEE fever" (or at least the Eastern Europe fever, *Dong'ou re*). After 1989,

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14   See Peter Beyer, *Religions in Global Society* (London: Routledge 2006). Although globalisation calls for revisiting the very concept of religion, the phenomena denoted by the term play an important role in contemporary world-shaping processes. Christianity, perceived as a religion, continues to be formed and re-formed through migration processes.

15   For more on new Chinese migration to Europe see Gregor Benton – Frank N. Pieke (eds.), *The Chinese in Europe* (London: Macmillan 1998); Flemming Christiansen, *Chinatown, Europe: An Exploration of Overseas Chinese Identity in the 1990s* (London: Routledge 2003). Vol. 41 of the *International Migration* (2003) is also dedicated to this topic.

CEE became one of the distinctive locations of new Chinese migration. During this time, CEE countries were still in the euphoric celebration of getting rid of the Communist system (at least formally) and they looked more to the West. They hoped for encounters with "the West," for investments and western development. This "catching-up" with the West did happen to a certain extent: much effort was made to join NATO and the European Union as safeguards of democracy.

Times changed. The first four CEE countries entered the EU,[16] which imposed an already-developed or developing China policy.[17] Yet interest in China soon became part of national policies as well. The interest of the CEE states in China can be easily explained by China's growing economic and political power. Yet, the flipside of the question: why China showed interest in CEE remains puzzling. In any case, since the turn of the millennium, China-CEE relations have intensified and strategic and structural steps have been undertaken to develop further economic, technological, and cultural partnerships.[18] The present paper argues that Chinese migrants to CEE have been crucial within this process. Something which started on an individual, fortune seeking level at the time when the first Chinese small entrepreneurs appeared on the post-1989 CEE stage, has gradually been transformed into a corporally and structurally dominating Chinese presence in the region. And it is thanks to such a transformation that after the fire accident in the Red Dragon, the Chinese Embassy in Romania could mediate between different groups of interests.

The increasingly visible Chinese presence in CEE may be captured in the image of the dragon, both iconographically and connotatively. Dragons' fire is not only about damage and loss but also about fuelling socio-economic, cultural, and religious change. CEE, initially perceived as a transit area for Chinese migration to Western Europe and North America, has also become a place of settlement, where Chinese migration can be perceived in terms of both first and second generations.[19]

Historicizing Chinese Migration to CEE

Taking into account the complexity factor described in the previous section, it is difficult to sum up the more than twenty years of history of Chinese migration to CEE. Reviewing

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16   Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland, are also known as the Visegrád Four.

17   See *The China Quarterly* 2002, No. 169, dedicated to the topic of China–Europe relations. Relevant to this issue is the work of the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM, founded in 1996 and its only physical institution, the Asia Europe Foundation, ASEF, founded in 1997) which provides room for "greater mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges." Migration, in its complex forms, is one of the constant agenda points of the meetings. See www.asef.org and www.aseminfoboard.org, accessed on 21 July 2010.

18   Representatives of China and nine CEE countries (in this case: Lithuania, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Slovakia) held a meeting at the Poland Pavilion of the Shanghai Expo 2010 in order to further develop and strengthen cooperation. "Advanced technologies, low-cost labor, talents and strategic location were mentioned as the strong points of the region for the expansion of Chinese companies. […]. The opening of several Confucius Institutes in the region (Hungary, Romania) is a clear example of China's cultural globalisation. Executives from several Chinese corporations shared their success stories of business development in Central and Eastern Europe." See http://en.expo2010.cn/a/20100726/000009.htm, accessed on 28 July 2010.

19   The author does not favour the first and second generation terminology, yet the scope of the present paper does not permit the introduction of alternatives.

the academic literature on the topic, it becomes obvious that the popularity of the research into the Chinese migration novelty which characterised the late nineties and early years of the new millennium has somewhat stagnated. More up-to-date field research on the topic and an analytical approach would be desirable.

Numbers

One way of historicizing the phenomenon is to look at statistics and numbers. Such an attempt in the present case is a contested one. Numerical data on Chinese migration to CEE are highly deficient. Considering pure government-provided statistical data on Chinese migration in CEE, it can be observed that after an initial spectacular growth of the Chinese presence, there followed in almost all CEE a period of stabilisation, and even decrease in the number of Chinese migrants (in the broadest sense of the word). Providing plausible numerical data on Chinese migrants in CEE is difficult. Estimates always differ somewhere between the strict official statistics and the local legends and myths about the Chinese population. Therefore obtaining and presenting accurate numerical data seems to be a "mission impossible," yet it is worth speculating on this line of historicity.

For the first decade of the new Chinese migration to CEE some conventionalised estimates have been made. If the historicizing exercise starts with the visa-free agreement signed in 1988 between the PRC and Hungary, then the size of the Chinese population in CEE (in Hungary) shows a spectacular growth from zero to some fifty thousand migrants in the early nineties. The Tian'anmen events also contributed to the enlargement of the group. After a short life of less than three years, the visa-free agreement between Hungary and the PRC ended. As a consequence, many Chinese migrants left Hungary and tried to settle in other CEE countries, especially in Romania, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. Another centre of dispersion of Chinese migrants to CEE was Russia, from where migration channels flowed to Belarus, Ukraine, and other CEE countries. The importance of the numerical data in this period lies in the emergence of Chinese migration into a regional phenomenon which also generated research and much attention from the media. It is incontestable that Chinese migration to CEE also has an illegal dimension, which further modifies the numerical statistics.

The Chinese migration expert Pál Nyíri made an attempt to systematise the numerical data of the first ten years of Chinese migration to CEE. According to his research, around 1999–2000, ten years after the initial Chinese migration boom, the number of the Chinese migrants was between ten to twenty thousand in Hungary, around two thousand one hundred in Poland, some five to six thousand in Czech Republic, between fourteen and twenty thousand in Romania, some five thousand in Bulgaria, some twenty to thirty thousand together in Serbia and Montenegro, only about two hundred in Croatia, and about three hundred in Slovenia.[20]

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20 Pál Nyíri, *Chinese in Eastern Europe and Russia: A Middleman Minority in a Transnational Era* (London: Routledge 2007), pp. 49-75.

For recent years, official figures report on roughly five thousand work permits issued to PRC citizens in Romania in 2008,[21] yet local informants talk about twenty thousand Chinese living in Romania. Between the period 1996 to 2006, China was sixth out of the ten top countries (and the only Asian country) with the highest inflows to Romania. For 2007, Hungary reported that eight percent of the almost twenty-three-thousand immigrants were PRC citizens. It also mentioned that asylum applicants from China were still frequent. The size of the Chinese migrant groups in Hungary and Romania were more or less equal, with numerical stabilization of Chinese migration taking place in both countries. Poland reported some eight hundred work permits issued for PRC citizens for the same year. Reports from Slovakia do not report on the significance of the Chinese migrants in 2008 and 2009.

This short attempt to gather and interpret the numerical data helps to show that, after active initial attention given to the new phenomenon, more recently even the already poor statistical data provision has dropped. This may be explained by the still underdeveloped migration policies in CEE, but it can be also a sign of an official denial of the migration question. For the scope of the present study it is sufficient to note that the importance and relevance of Chinese migration to CEE does not depend on the support of spectacular numbers. The story is more about a small group of people, who are part of a larger group of people (the Chinese Overseas Community) and connected to an even larger community which is being conceptualised in terms of its Chineseness, whatever that might imply.

Social Stratification

A second attempt in historicizing could start with the question: who were and are the Chinese migrants in CEE? Field research immediately pushes on to the next question: who were they in China and what do they become, who are they in CEE? Detecting geographical origins is not the biggest difficulty, yet it does bring with it the danger of oversimplification. Detecting social stratification is much more difficult, because social positions are flexible.

Conventional categorizations acknowledge regional diversity concerning places of origin. In this way, the population of Chinese migrants in CEE consists of a clear group of Fujian and Zhejiang migrants, respectively a group of Northeast people, mainly considered less educated, and the so-called Northern people, who are generally considered more educated. The new Chinese migratory flows to CEE present a complex socio-demographic picture. Diversity appears also in methods of entry (legal – illegal), age of migrants, and "occupations" of migrants. In addition to small and substantial entrepreneurs typical for the first decade, in recent years, low-skilled workers (used and misused in the textile or construction industries and in agriculture) and students colour the palette.

The appearance of second-generation migrants also indicates changes in social stratification. Children of first-generation uneducated or less educated migrants may reach higher social status through education. As one twenty-four-year-old Chinese man for-

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21   Data gathered from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, www.oecd.org, accessed on 26 July 2010.

mulated: "The pure fact that I can speak both Chinese and Hungarian perfectly, and that I studied English as well, puts me in the luxury position of being able to reject certain jobs I do not find interesting. Many of my Hungarian friends do not have such choices." Although it is legitimate to research Chinese migration along such divisions, field work testifies too many exceptions which question the existing prototypes. Social stratification goes beyond the argument of places of origin.

A note has to be made on the attitude of the so-called local population of the CEE countries towards Chinese migrants. Generally speaking, nationalistic and xenophobic manifestations are regular in CEE. In this context, Chinese migrants are often mentioned in discourses on criminality, mafia, human smuggling, and the "yellow peril." Yet, there is a visible "local" circle (employees, lawyers, physicians, journalists, translators, etc.) constructed around Chinese migrants, which through their direct encounters with the migrants help in constructing a different image of the Chinese people in CEE.

High mobility, including migration and settlement practices, continue to characterize Chinese migration to CEE and act as the major means through which global transnational networks are formed, maintained, and shaped. Chinese migrants also remain one of the major groups through which to perceive and understand the transformation of CEE countries into immigration countries and arenas of transnational migrations.

The present study avoids speaking about "the" Chinese community in CEE. It is important to note that Chinese migrants create multiple types of communities and/or community-like associations (business, language, culture, charity, and others) and these effectively contribute to networking and create a sense of belonging. Community formation based on religious affiliation is one of the stronger means of networking and nurturing communal belonging. The present paper focuses on the community-forming role of Christianity for the Chinese migrants in CEE.

New Developments in Hungary

For a substantial period of time, starting in the early nineties, Hungary, with its Four Tigers open area market situated in Budapest, used to be the distribution centre of Chinese imports to CEE. Other dominant open-air markets in CEE countries were connected to this and in this way wholesale business was conducted. In recent years, the distributive role has been taken over by Poland.[22] Yet Hungary still preserves a strong position in China-CEE relations and its Chinese population is still one of the largest in CEE. Examples of the prospering China-Hungary relationship are: important investments by the Chinese Party in Hungary; Hainan Airlines, together with Malév Airlines, having started direct flights between Beijing and Budapest; Hungary was the first CEE country to open a branch of the Bank of China; and a Chinese-Hungarian bilingual school has been opened with about two hundred pupils (of which sixty percent are Chinese).

The current role of Chinese migrants in Hungarian society is often compared with the role of the Jews at the beginning of the twentieth century: they are needed but they are

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22   However, the China Brand Trade Center, which operates in the Asia Center of Budapest, claims to be the European distribution centre of Chinese goods.

not necessarily loved. The more than two decades of Chinese presence in Hungary show that those Chinese migrants who have managed to "settle" in Hungary have achieved remarkable economic success. Next to the image of the Chinese small trader and the Chinese restaurant keeper there is developing the image of a "respected" Chinese business partner.

New Developments in Romania

The history of Chinese migrants in Romania is inseparable from the history of corruption in Romania. Corruption is the condition which shapes thousands of Chinese lives in this country. Economic, political, and social instability, which still characterises present-day Romanian society, is another condition which has influenced the history of Chinese migration to Romania. During the last decade, an influential, successful Chinese business class has become visible, yet next to this there is still a large group of small traders whose daily struggle with corruption and instability makes the future of the Chinese presence in Romania unpredictable.

Starting in the last few years, a new phenomenon of Chinese migration to Romania can be observed. As a consequence of the spectacular mass labour emigration of Romanian citizens to Western Europe, the Romanian labour market has been opened up for Asian, predominantly Chinese, workers. The "import" of these workers is, however, once again part of the story of corruption and instability. The experience of Chinese workers in the textile and construction industries is characterised by labour misuse (in 2007 Chinese women brought to a textile factory in Romania were offered around 350 Euros' salary per month) and the breaking of promises by intermediating agencies. As a consequence, reports on strikes and protests by these workers have become frequent headlines in Romanian newspapers. Frustration, disappointment, and despair dominate fieldwork stories.

In spite of these difficulties, the Chinese represent the third largest community of migrant workers in Romania after Moldovans and Turks. It seems that the Chinese migrants in Romania have found their way within the social reality of corruption, instability, and high risk and to a certain extent have succeeded in integrating into the post-1989 Romanian society.

Chinese Migration to CEE – Christianity Correlation

The present study has already pointed out the importance of religion in its relationship to the migratory processes. Interactions between Chinese migrations and Christianity have a long history. The appearance of the first Chinese migrant churches in the North American migration context of the second half of the nineteenth century are one of the best places to start investigating these interactions. With time, Chinese Christian communities in North America, and later also in the United Kingdom, founded countless missionary organisations through which to realize their vision to Christianize their fellow Chinese migrants and indeed the whole Chinese people, firstly in North America, and later within the global Chinese overseas community. Besides these Chinese missionary organisations founded on

non-Chinese language territories, there also emerged Chinese missionary organisations on Chinese language territories, these as a result of Western missionary enterprise.[23]

It is through diverse migratory processes and, within them, the encounters of Christianity with Chinese people, that, at the beginning of the third millennium, through the formation of global networks and their parallels in Chinese missionary organisations, Chinese migrants are targeted worldwide. As such, Chinese churches, Christian fellowships and communities as well as Chinese missionary organisations are influential actors of what is called the globalisation of Chinese migration. It is within this framework that Chinese migrants to CEE encounter the Christian message and, as a consequence, Chinese migrant churches and Christian communities are formed.

From the early period of Chinese migration to CEE, several Chinese missionary organisations started to operate in the region. In some countries (e.g. Hungary, Bulgaria) this resulted in the formation of several smaller Chinese Christian communities. These communities can be labelled as charismatic or evangelical, corresponding to the missionary encounters. One of the most active missionary organisations in the region is the UK-based Chinese Overseas Christian Mission (COCM) which operates with the motto "Reaching the Chinese to Reach Europe." COCM has planted churches in most European countries and it aims at an ecumenical cooperation amongst all Chinese churches in Europe. In this way, Chinese churches in Europe offer an alternative means of networking for Chinese migrants, where social, cultural, and spiritual "capital" can be shared. Migrant churches, communities, and fellowships create a sense of close belonging, while the language of sisterhood and brotherhood helps give a feeling of family. A sense of moral obligation and accountability is created by the frequent and intensive meetings and the shared and collectively confessed faith. This makes the church community the most influential organisation in the life of Christian migrants. Migrant Christian communities enable migrants to create new social networks and social support systems in a foreign, unfamiliar, and from time to time even hostile environment.

The present paper argues that Chinese migration to CEE and its encounters with Christianity create communities with great potential to shape the everyday life and history of the wider group of Chinese migrants, and that they also play an important role in shaping the image of Chinese migrants among the "local" population. The paper proceeds to develop these arguments through the examples of Chinese Christian communities in Hungary and Romania.[24]

Chinese Christian Communities in Hungary and Romania

The political leadership in both Hungary and Romania often accentuates the Christian character of these societies. Christianity, and her historically negotiated representatives,

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23   It is important to note that Chinese people, and Chinese migrants, are also targets of non-Chinese missionary organizations. This leads to exceptional cases, where the formation of Chinese migrant churches is connected with the activity of non-Chinese missionaries. E.g. the first Chinese Christian converts in Budapest are linked to the missionary activity of a Korean missionary.

24   A thorough study on Chinese Christian communities in Hungary and Romania can be found in Dorottya Nagy, *Migration and Theology: The Case of Chinese Christian Communities in Hungary and Romania in the Globalisation-Context* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum 2009).

are given a prominent role in these societies through their Christian heritage, with Hungary as *regnum Marianum*, and through the strong interwovenness of the Romanian Orthodox Church with state affairs. Yet it is not these forms of Christianity which appeal to Chinese migrants.

As already stated before, it is not through "local" Christians that Chinese migrants experience conversion to Christianity. The Christianity of Hungarians and Romanians often appears in the rhetoric on Hungarian and Romanian backwardness. "They say they are Christians, yet if you do not keep your eye on them, they steal as much as they can" – complained one of the informants when talking about the issue of Orthodox Christianity and Romanians. "The taxi chauffeurs hang crosses on their car mirrors but often they refuse to give us a ride" – explained another informant. Chinese migrants encounter "real" Christianity through the lives of devoted, born again missionaries, "who in spite of leading a successful life in the West, in spite of high positions and success in society, listen to God's call and leave everything behind to serve Chinese people all around the world." Chinese migrants encounter Christianity in such incarnational ways and it is expected that once they become Christians they follow the incarnational model as well. Christianity for Chinese migrants in Hungary and Romania is all about life-conduct and witness. "Words do not help. You can't speak to your fellow-countrymen who know who you are, where you come from, and what kind of life you had before; you have to show them that you have changed, that money does not save you."

Although missionization occurs through the channel of missionaries who often have little or no knowledge about the "host" societies, Chinese migrants tend to show a high eagerness to contextualise their faith. Bible-studies, prayer-meetings, women's and youth groups are excellent occasions on which to observe such contextualisation. Chinese migrants read the Bible with the question in mind: what does this have to say about the present situation? What kind of implications does this have for one's life and work in the given circumstances? Missionaries do influence theological thinking but the ultimate faith paradigm is constructed in terms of its pragmatism and functionality.[25]

Historicizing Chinese Christian Communities in Hungary and Romania

Similar to the general issue of Chinese migrants in CEE, one can approach the history of the Chinese Christian communities through numbers, social stratification, and other sociological categories. The number of Chinese Christians in Hungary and Romania is much easier to indicate than the number of Chinese migrants in CEE. Chinese Christian communities are open organisations where members can be easily counted, yet it is important to say that numbers of members and communities frequently change. It can be said that most of the Chinese Christian communities were founded in the capital cities (also the locations of highest concentrations of Chinese migrants) but fellowships and Bible study groups have also been formed in places with smaller Chinese populations. The size of Chinese Christian communities varies between twenty people and a hundred-and-eighty to two hundred people attending some of the Sunday services.

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25   Missionaries often complain about the immaturity of Chinese migrants' Christianity. It would be the topic of another article to investigate the question of immaturity versus that of contextualisation.

Mandarin is the *lingua franca* of these communities and it is in Mandarin that the unifying message of Christianity is preached (sub-ethnic identities are given less importance). The issue of identity construction is raised through asking what it means to be a devoted citizen of the PRC and a devoted Christian. Patriotism and Christian devotion (*women Zhongguoren* [we Chinese] and *women Jidutu* [we Christians]) go hand in hand. Being a good Christian means becoming an even better Chinese person, and through it a witness to the wider world, outside China, "wherever God calls us to go."[26] Contrary to the classical sociological arguments that religious belonging contributes to assimilation and social integration into the "host" society, fieldwork highlights that while Christian communities of Chinese migrants in Hungary and Romania choose to interact on different levels with the "host" societies, the primary aim is never assimilation or socio-cultural integration. Chinese Christian communities are among the few (im)migrant NGOs which provide charity and social services for the needy.

From the Beginnings to the Present in Hungary

The beginnings of the Chinese Christian communities in Hungary (CCCH) go back to 1991, when a Korean Methodist missionary gathered a core of already Christian Chinese migrants and started a fellowship for and with them. At first, church services were held in a school building. Later, the community was able to use the rooms of the Hungarian Methodist Church in Budapest.

The official registration of the church with the Hungarian authorities could only happen in 1992. By that time more than one hundred members were attending the Sunday services. In this first period, COCM helped the community with short term missionaries and Christian literature. By 1993 the church had developed a clear structure with the leadership of six co-workers: one responsible for mission, one for service/worship, one for education, two for finances, and one without a special task. Through the contacts with the COCM, CCCH developed contacts with other Chinese missionary organisations worldwide and also with other Chinese Christian communities in Europe. The most important of these was the contact with the Chinese Christian Church in Vienna, which also supported the CCCH financially. In 1995 three new Chinese fellowships were started in three other Hungarian cities with larger groups of Chinese entrepreneurs (Szeged, Nyíregyháza, Miskolc).

Informants, recalling the history of their community, mention that in 1994 inner tensions disturbed the life of the community. Tensions resulted in divisions and, after the first division, splits and the emergence of new communities became a regular pattern characteristic of CCCH. Many new, mutually competitive missionary organisations arrived in Hungary and their work also led to the emergence of new communities or splits within already-existing communities. Missionaries themselves often explained this phenomenon as due to the "immaturity" of the Chinese Christians in Hungary, but one could pose

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26 On Christianity and Chinese nationalism see Dorottya Nagy, "Where is China in World Christianity?," conference paper presented at "From World Mission to Interreligious Witness: Visioning Ecumenics in the 21st Century," Dublin, 16–18 June 2010.

questions also about the missionary strategies adopted and to what extent those were responsible for the divisions and separations. Theologically speaking, one can observe that divisions occurred on the charismatic versus evangelical line.

At the present time there are four larger Christian communities in Hungary and, depending on the activities of the missionaries currently ministering, from time to time efforts are made to bring these groups together. On the level of the individual believers there is a higher degree of mobility. Some attend Bible study groups at one community and church services at another. Youngsters also move with much greater flexibility around the different communities.

The first almost two decades of CCCH history tell a story of complex community formation and growth. It is evident that these communities are part of the global network of Chinese Christian communities but they also try to act locally. Acting locally means being "missionary" towards other Chinese fellow citizens in Hungary and, beyond that, being missionary towards Hungarians or other ethnic groups in the country. One of the four communities is engaged in mission work among the Romani people in Hungary. This is an exceptional example of how two differently marginalised groups in the same society encounter each other in the dimension of missionary activities. Acting locally also means diaconal engagement among the "local" population.

Contacts with Hungarian Christians are sporadic or non-existent. One of the communities rents one of the Reformed Churches of Budapest and through this, mutual contacts were at first initiated between the Chinese and Hungarian communities. However, communication problems (not being able to speak each other's language) discouraged the contacts, and later, when the second generation started to become visible, these contacts were not re-established. In this sense, the CCCH represent one of the many Christian lines paralleling each other on the palette of Christian communities in Hungary.

From the Beginnings to the Present in Romania

The history of the Chinese Christian communities in Romania (CCCR) has from its very beginning been connected with the COCM. Besides this, countless other Chinese missionary organisations have supported missionary work among Chinese migrants in Romania, such as the Chinese Christian Testimony Ministry, the China Soul for Christ Foundation, the Chinese Bible Church of Maryland, and the Gospel Operation International for Chinese Christians. Although there have been internal tensions during the years, the community has managed to stay together.

The first long-term missionary to Chinese migrants moved to Romania in 1997. The first years of church building were viewed in the paradigm of Acts 2: church planting and church building meant the realization of an ideal community. In the initial stages, gatherings and Sunday services were held in the Anglican Church in Bucharest. Later, the community started to rent an apartment for weekly activities and the rooms of the Betania Baptist Church in Bucharest for Sundays and special events. The apartment, maintained by a couple who live there, has become an open house where Chinese Christians can be found every day, where communal meals are served, and problems and joys are shared. In spite of some difficulties concerning the leadership of the community at times, the COCM

has managed to remain the spiritual caretaker of the church, providing spiritual supervision and pastoral assistance in the person of regular itinerant missionaries.

The arrival of Chinese construction workers in Romania has led to the ministry of the CCCR being extended. Local Chinese Christians act as missionaries among construction workers, organising fellowships, evangelisation, and prayer meetings for them. Since these employees have a strict working schedule, CCCR members visit them in their accommodation. "This is a new way of being church. You can't expect them to come to our church; they work more than twelve hours per day; they are exhausted. We go to them and have fellowship with them. Our life is not easy but in most cases we are our own boss; they are misused. Their life is full of hardships and suffering. They do this for their families." Chinese construction workers are also present in other Romanian cities, in one of which (Iasi) the CCCR has already started a fellowship.

After several failed attempts to register the community as an independent Christian Church in Romania,[27] the leadership of the community agreed on "officialising" and "localizing" themselves through the Baptist Union in Romania. In 2009 the CCCR, with about seventy members,[28] became a member church of the Romanian Baptist Union, and had to choose a biblical name for their registration. The identity marker "Chinese" was not allowed to be adopted, with the argument that the Baptist community in Romania does not want to accentuate ethnic differences. The official name of the CCCR therefore became Bethlehem Baptist Church. Within COCM discourses this name is always completed with the addition of "Chinese" to it.

The wish of the community to have its own, permanent minister has still not been able to be fulfilled, but most of the members are content with the work of the itinerant missionaries. One of them is an ordained female missionary, which from time to time causes tensions in the relationship between the CCCR and the Baptist Union because the latter does not allow or recognize female ordination.

The CCCR has recently bought 1500 square metres of land where they plan to build their own church building and community centre as well as a building where they could start running a Chinese school. The dream of a self-owned church building has been in existence for many years. These developments demonstrate that there is a group of "settled" Chinese Christians. The COCM leadership considers the CCCR a strategic community, from where missionary enterprises to neighbouring countries (in the Balkan and CEE) can be developed.

Through its incorporation into the Baptist Union, the CCCR has become part of a minor Protestant network in Romania. It has also, at least in matters of structure, chosen a denominational route. The history of the CCCR remains open-ended. The coming years will demonstrate how this structural incorporation, the links with the COCM, and the power of the CCCR itself will shape the life and ministry of the community.
In the concluding remarks on Chinese Christian communities in Hungary and Romania, Nagy writes about the complex reality of the migration – Christianity – ethnicity trian-

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27 The registration of new churches in Romania involves strict legislation that is not geared towards small communities.

28 One hundred to a hundred and twenty people regularly attend Sunday services.

gulation. "It can be concluded that theology and migration always come together within that triangulation. […] this triangulation takes place in three major concentric circles. The circle of the personal 'I', the so called autobiographical circle; the circle of 'we' which is being realised through the formation of migrants' new homogeneous ethnic communities and churches; and the circle of 'they', which is the circle of relating to the environment outside the two previous circles."[29]

The cases sketched above portray the dynamics of the "I" circle, where individual migrants, in their search for a better life, encounter or re-discover the meaning of the Christian message for their lives. The conversion and "confirmation" stories then contribute to the creation and strengthening of the "we" circle. Individual believers consciously work on community formation. For these two circles, transnational missionary involvement is crucial. The emerging of the third concentric circle is still in an embryonic state but here and there some signs of its existence can be detected.

The future of these communities depends to a great extent on the socio-political and economic dynamics both within China and in CEE countries. Such dynamics can further encourage or discourage Chinese migration to CEE. The future of the already existing "settlements" will be shaped by the attitude of the second generation now growing up: children born in CEE and children born in faith-practising families. The question of whether these children will be able to form the bridge between Chinese Christian communities and the non-Chinese Christian communities in CEE cannot yet be answered.

Concluding Remarks

The Chinese migration to CEE – Christianity correlation calls attention to the human dimension of the migration process. Migration is always about people, individuals, and communities, who relate to each other through complex relationships. Migrants are people; with unique life stories, desires, aspirations, successes, and misfortunes. It is important that while studying new, exotic migration phenomena and analysing complex socio-economic and political processes, the human dimension does not get lost.

Chinese migration to CEE not only colours the map of worldwide transnational migration but also calls attention to the changes within the colourful map of worldwide Christianity and to the consequences this might have on the localities where these changes appear. Within the context of CEE, it was not African migrant churches but Asian migrant churches, and more specifically Chinese migrant churches, which embodied the new phenomenon of the so-called "non-Western" Christianity's (missionary) presence in the so-called "Western" and "western-aspired" territories. The dynamics of Chinese Christian communities worldwide calls for further research with respect to the globalisation – modernity – mobility framework.

Chinese migration to CEE highlights a shared post-socialist context and a shared Communist past, which play important roles in the encounters between Chinese migrants and "locals." How migration, and in particular Chinese migration, contributes to new develop-

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29   Nagy, *Migration and Theology*, p. 194.

ments within the transitory communities of China and CEE still needs to be investigated. Another topic of investigation could be the worldviews which guide people, both migrants and non-migrants, within the post-socialist, post-communist context.

The introductory vignette in this paper reported on a fiery dragon. One could go on playing with the symbol of the dragon, so powerful within Chinese culture. One of the ways to do so is to talk about "taming fiery dragons." This, instead of rounding up and drawing conclusions, opens up manifold trajectories for discussion and creates room for questions about Chinese migration to CEE, and even beyond. In the endlessness of possibilities in talking and identifying fiery dragons, it is important to note the existence of dragons that are on fire in ways that do not "go up in smoke."

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