

Today, many transnational migrants live "dual", even "multiple", lives transcending national borders and across diverse worlds of experience, often sustained by their communities and compatriots locally and from a distance. Fernando Ortiz's construct of transculturation, in acknowledging the intertwined processes of acculturation, deculturation and neoculturation, provides a useful framework for examining cross-cultural adaptation. At the same time, the exponential growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs) over the last few decades has shaped these contemporary trends in migration and cultural adaptation. A growing number of scientists and researchers have begun to examine the social impact of these new technologies interacting with the increased geographical mobility related to global migration. The burgeoning of initiatives, studies, journals and forums has created a dynamic infrastructure for migration studies scholars. Once viewed as a marginal topic, global migration and its implications for the world at large is now a central concern in the social sciences, economic and political debates and dialogues. This scintillating collection of nonfiction writings by authors around the world contributes to these ongoing conversations across borders and disciplines through thoughtful and thought-provoking articles, empirical and theoretical, situated within an interdisciplinary framework. Readers will acquire a balanced, nuanced and in-depth understanding of the constellation of circumstances and processes associated in large-scale migration that affect a significant portion of the world's population today and which will continue to have a significant global impact on millions of people in the decades ahead.

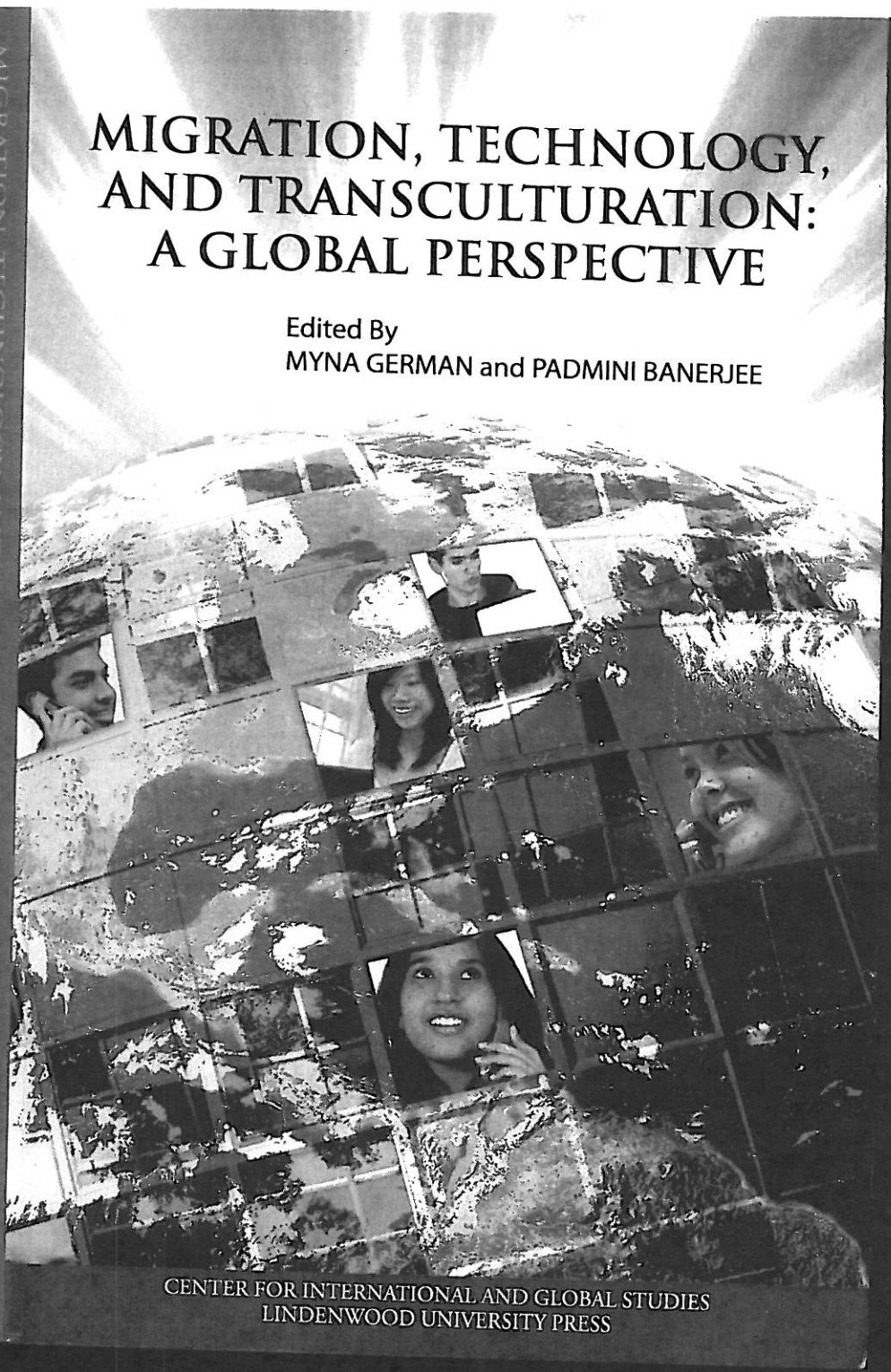
There is today a great amount of talk about transnationalism and cosmopolitanism as defining features of contemporary migration. This lively, thought-provoking book has the merit of looking in depth to the role played in these development by the new communication technologies. An important step toward an adequate understanding of contemporary world-society and culture. (Giuseppe Sciortino, Sociology, SMMS, University of Trento, Italy).

Apart from the dramatic technological development at the root of today's globalization, the rapid growth of a new kind of migration and cultural diaspora is arguably the most significant aspect of contemporary global culture, given its transformative role in the identity formation of both the individual and the nation. The assemblage of global scholarship to examine a global issue, the combination of theoretic discourse and case studies, and the penetrating insight made possible by this approach as well as by the extensive literature review are some of the virtues that have made this book a laudable addition to scholarship. (Professor F. Odun Balogun, Global Studies Program, Delaware State University, USA)

# MIGRATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND TRANSCULTURATION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Edited By  
MYNA GERMAN and PADMINI BANERJEE

MIGRATION, TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSCULTURATION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE  
GERMAN AND BANERJEE



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### *Fernando Ortiz on Transculturation*

*"I am of the opinion that the word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word acculturation really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation. In addition, it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation."*

- Fernando Ortiz in  
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**SECTION ONE**

**MIGRATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND  
GLOBAL IDENTITIES:  
BEING ONESELF AND BECOMING GLOBAL**

## SECTION TWO

### TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSCULTURATION: BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS WORLDS

## Chapter Five

### *"Asian Betweeners" Second-Generation Asian Subculture in Milan's Chinatown: An Ethnographic Exploration*

Lidia K.C. Manzo

#### *Italy*

This chapter describes a field study conducted in Chinatown in Milan, Italy. By using the ethnographic method, this paper aims to explore both young Asians' subculture and their everyday life in this urban space. The Chinese district in Milan can be defined as "one large and condensed contact zone in which borders and ethnic boundaries are blurred and where processes of hybridization are rife inevitably because groups of different backgrounds, ethnic and otherwise, cannot help but enter into relations with each other, no matter how great the desire for separateness and the attempt to maintain cultural purity" (Ang, 2001, p. 89).

#### INTRODUCTION

The Paolo Sarpi Street district in Milan, Italy's Chinatown demonstrates an innovative character, a cosmopolitan ethos, and a transnational lifestyle best observed through a close study of second- and third-generation Chinese immigrants. This study shows that young Chinese in Milan bear multiple and hybrid identities that cross transnational borders. Through ethnographic research, I explored this ethnic subculture to understand the peculiarities of "Asian Betweeners'" identity. One could ask: What happens to the unique quality of "Chineseness" and Chinese diaspora identity in contemporary global-cities? This paper advances the argument that the everyday use of digital technology and the popularity of social networks are a worldwide phenomenon, regardless of geographical location or cultural background. This global factor is likely to impact all diasporas fairly equally insofar as young people in many places around the world are so attached to modern digital technologies.

The Chinese district of Paolo Sarpi Street in Milan constitutes a privileged ethnographic observatory for "living" and drawing social, cultural, and policy inferences in an urban setting. By exploring experiences of some young Chinese cosmopolitans, this chapter seeks as much to describe the "process of cultural othering that have intensified with transnationality" (Ong, 1999, p. 24) as to understand the phenomenon itself. Indeed, this neighborhood is a Creole metamorphosis area; the hybrid diversity emerges

both in consumption culture and in the creative life style.

The urbanity of this place is appreciable from different points of view: from a window on trade, from the different systems of mobility, and from the buildings that delimit public spaces. The semiotic system of this ethnically-connoted district allows an observer to reflect on the relationship between public space and private space, as well as on the ability of contemporary metropolises to attract creative populations through cultural networking. This chapter is based on an exploratory study of the subculture of young Asians who live in the spaces of the Sarpi district, known also as Milan's Chinatown. Once again, the city demonstrates the possibility of discovering unexpected cultural synthesis, cases of serendipity, the possibility of discovering something quite by chance, as Hannerz points out (1980), "While you are looking for something else." This is also typical of urban life, in general, and it explains how the city has always been a "center of cultural innovations."

## CURRENT RESEARCH AND LITERATURE

### *Conceptualizing the Chinese Diasporas*

The recent debates over the concept of diaspora, as well as over its contentiousness, highlight many issues. As Clifford (1994) emphasizes, "Taken as a whole, these debates have expanded the idea of diaspora from relatively narrow and particular experience into a field for the conceptualization of many intertwining processes" (p. 316). Over the past decade, a revival of the concept of diaspora and the formulation of related new concepts such as transnationalism, globalization, and deterritorialized nation-state have suggested alternative perspectives on diaspora peoples, which avoid "looking at them just as streams" of people merely feeding into or flowing along the margins of national and civilization histories. The diasporic perspective would complement and expand upon nation-based perspectives by drawing attention to global connections, networks, activities, and consciousnesses that bridge outwards from these more localized anchors of reference (Hong-Liu, 2006).

McKeown (1999) observed that the emergence of Chinese ethnicity is a topic best approached from a national rather than a diasporic perspective. It is an area in which the identity and meaning of being Chinese is strongly shaped by local social relations, where Chineseness becomes a heritage, a political status, or merely a color of the skin. Yet, the important marker of difference tended to focus on cultural practice rather than on racial elements. In other words, a modern ethnic Chinese may consider himself or herself as part of the mainstream national culture where he or she lives in terms of clothes, language, and habits, and yet he or she may be considered as a minority. On the contrary, Creoles may be physically indistinguishable, while they distinguish themselves by cultural markers. Moreover, an understanding of both Chinese migration and ethnicity need to incorporate a historical perspective different from the one shaped by nation-states. Indeed,

[w]e need to direct attention to the roles played by transnational institutions, flows and connections, as well as to the way that local transformations are embedded in larger, global processes. . . Transnational labor movement and diasporic nationalism are topics that have already received scholarly attention, but global perspectives on migrant networks, ethnic identity, and cultural flows can still provide many new insights, and further dissuade us from taking locally or culturally bounded depictions of social groups as historically absolute (McKeown, 1999, p. 337).

As Ong (1999) states, for over a century, overseas Chinese "have been the forerunners of today's multiply displaced subjects, who are always on the move both mentally and physically" (p. 24). In light of the above, this perspective shows that migration and diasporic identities are not characteristic qualities that define a group; on the contrary, they are strongly linked to particular social perspectives at particular times, such as global trade networks, the views within particular nation-states, the modern international system as a whole, and different socio-economic classes (Hong-Liu, 2006). According to McKeown (1999), if we accept postmodernist visions of diaspora as a site of multiplicity and diversity, then ethnic Chinese could be conceived as a diaspora, and the label "Chinese" signifies something slightly different in each local context. No ethnic group emerges in complete isolation, in that contemporary ethnicity is very much a product of modern global politics. The bonds that hold together Chinese networks as well as the imagined communities of nationalism and ethnicity have some common aspects that could be described as "cultural." However, as McKeown (1999) stresses, there are some fundamental aspects in the construction of a self-conscious global Chineseness that are not necessarily linked to China. This is the case of the increasingly "mobile Chinese," who travel around the world, meeting other Chinese with whom they had no prior connections through networks or national citizenship.

The first cultural process is the way that shared forms of inscribed behavior can facilitate the construction of networks in a practical sense. People previously unfamiliar with each other find out that they speak a similar language, eat similar food, have ancestors from nearby villages, and can read each other's body language (Kotkin 1992; Lever Tracy & Ip 1996; Redding 1990). These similarities help them understand what to expect from each other and provide a basis for trust for one another, thus laying the groundwork for business deals, social encounters, and extended relationships in which differences of personal experience can be overcome, and an even richer texture of common practices and attitudes can be produced (McKeown, 1999). The debate over the conceptualization of Chinese diasporas focuses on "the roles played by transnational institutions,

flows and connections, as well as to the way that local transformations are embedded in larger, global processes" (McKeown, 1999). These global perspectives on migrant networks, ethnic identity, and cultural flows can still provide new insights and "further dissuade us from taking locally or culturally bounded depictions of social groups as historically absolute" (McKeown, 1999).

## QUESTIONING GLOBAL CHINESENESS IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

Armenian American scholar Khachig Tololyan (1991) claimed that "diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment" (p. 3), so what can diasporas say about the social and cultural processes of globalization that we are experiencing today? (Ang, 2001). Globalization, as Tololyan (1991) writes,

...is pre-eminently characterized by the increasing interconnectedness of disparate parts of the world through the intensification of transnational networks, relationships and flows. In this sense, the growing visibility of diasporas—formations of people bound together, at least nominally, by a common ethnic identity despite their physical dispersal across the globe—makes them without doubt one of the key instances and symptoms of today's globalizing world. As such, they are also suitable sites for a reflection on the ramifications of globalization for social relations in contemporary societies, societies which we still tend to define predominantly in national terms, even though the eroding effects of globalization itself are felt by all national societies as their borders are transgressed and worn down by ever-increasing transnational social and cultural traffic (p. 3).

Tololyan argues that the term diaspora once described the historical dispersion of Jewish, Greek, and Armenian peoples, while today this term tends to be used much more generically, referring to almost any group living outside of its country of origin, such as Italians outside Italy, Africans in the Caribbean, North America or Western Europe, Cubans in Miami and Madrid, or Chinese all over the world. "Indeed, as Tololyan (1991) remarks:

...the significant transformation of the last few decades is the move towards re-naming as diasporas...communities of dispersion...which were known by other names until the late 1960s: as exile groups, overseas communities, ethnic and racial minorities, and so forth (p. 3).

As a consequence, Ang (2001) points out that the burgeoning language and consciousness of diaspora are both the manifestation and the effect of intensifying cultural globalization:

[w]hile migrations of people have taken place for centuries and have been a major force in the creation of the modern world of nation-states since the nineteenth century, with the increased possibilities of keeping in touch with the old homeland and with co-ethnics in other parts of the world through faster and cheaper jet transport, mass media and electronic telecommunications, that migrant groups are collectively more inclined to see themselves not as minorities within nation-states, but as members of global diasporas which span national boundaries (p. 89).

While "overseas Chinese" used to be the common English expression to describe the dispersed migrant Chinese communities around the world, for the past decade, Chinese have been collectively described as the "Chinese diaspora."

## HYBRIDITY AND CHINESENESS IN THE GLOBAL CITY

In the age of globalization, neither nation-states nor cities are ethnically and culturally homogenous. On the contrary, many nation-states, especially those that represent nowadays the destination of mass migrations, are undergoing a process of what Kobena Mercer (2000, p. 234) defines as "multicultural normalization." This is a massive process of social transformation whereby states are increasingly multicultural, with different, overlapping, and intertwined groups and identities of multiple loyalties and cross-border attachments, exchanges, and interactions. Ang (2001) emphasizes that the metropolitan space of the contemporary global city is more representative of this state of affairs than the nation-state as a whole, where non-metropolitan areas, such as rural Australia, are still characterized by real and imagined homogeneity, and militantly commit to its protection.

A crucial difference between nation-states and cities is that within the latter, spaces characterized by the constant circulation of various types of locals and non-locals, cannot police their territorial boundaries: there is no border patrol at the perimeter of the cities. At the same time, many metropolitan cities nowadays are becoming deeply internationally oriented, in that they are supported by the cross-border activities of their dynamic and heterogeneous populations in various fields such as trade, finance, media, and tourism. Therefore, they can be described as translocalities: spaces with a sense of place and identity which are "substantially divorced from their national contexts" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 44).



In this sense, the global city may be appropriately described as a transnational formation par excellence, in that its "membership," both permanent and temporary, typically consists of individuals and groups of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, with ongoing connections all over the world. Yet, in contrast with global diasporas, defined by Tololyan (1991) as the exemplary communities of the transnational moment, the imagined community of the global city is principally unbounded and open in the sense that no one is a priori excluded from its space on the basis of predetermined kinship or criteria such as race and ethnicity (Ang, 2001). As transnational formations, global cities and diasporas represent contrasting metaphors, as Figure 2 shows.

Global city Ethnic diversity, spatial convergence Local hybridity Actual social/territorial space Together-in-difference	Diaspora Ethnic unity, spatial scattering Transnational nationalism Virtual de-territorialized space Sameness-in-dispersal
--	--

Ang (2001) argues that, "while diasporas are constituted by ethnic unity in the face of spatial scattering, global cities are shaped by ethnic diversity through spatial convergence." While what matters for a diaspora is the connection with a symbolic "elsewhere," a long-distance, virtual relationship with a global community of belonging, it is the firm orientation towards the "here," the local, this place that grounds the global city. Similarly, while the transnationality of diasporic communities is one of "sameness in dispersal" across global space, the transnationality of global cities is characterized by intense simultaneity and co-existence, in other terms, by territorial "togetherness in difference."

#### MILANO, VIA PAOLO SARPI: AN ETHNIC NEIGHBORHOOD

The proximity of the Sempione Park to the historical center and the fair zone, as well as the post-war reconstruction, were the main causes that led to the gentrification of the neighborhood, where both lower and middle classes coexisted, and to which Chinese immigrants belong, together with Milanese financiers and businessmen (Novak, 2002). The area most inhabited by Chinese, which is both residential and productive, constitutes in this phase the "backstage" of the neighborhood. It runs through via Rosmini, via Giordano Bruno, via Giusti, and via Aleardi, which are minor transit points, where owned housing also includes laboratories in courtyards and basements. Between the 1980s and the 1990s, Chinese visibility in the neighborhood increased. In addition to leather laboratories, markets, bag shops, and restaurants spread with the developing Chinese import-export. The neighborhood is increasingly marked by a Chinese presence, and the Association of Chinese in Milan organizes feasts and shows such as the traditional dragon parade for the Chinese New Year's Day. In the mid-

1990s, the business development increased in the Canonica-Sarpi area and its internal structure changed.

The new law on trade simplified the procedure to start new business activities, and this led to the growth and stabilization of Chinese immigration in Milan, and this was also the cause, together with the crisis of small neighborhood shops, of the proliferation and diversification of Chinese trade activities. "The transformation of the Canonica-Sarpi neighborhood from a residential and craftsmen's area into an ethnic area, which is characterized by a socially and economically complex structure, is still an on-going process, which often leads to internal conflicts due to social status diversity and different social needs" (Novak, 2002, p. 24). Traditionally, the function of Sarpi neighborhood for Chinese in Milan was predominantly an area of services: a place for socialization and as well as a place of "symbolic domiciliation" for Chinese identity in the regional context. According to Novak, the neighborhood is rapidly evolving toward something more visible and deep rooted as well as more stable and complex. It is not a mere place of residence, but a growing place of financial and service exchanges, trade, and both national and international relationships. Moreover, the neighborhood is characterized by the "dynamics of village," with relationships among neighbors, trade, meetings, and sharing; and, at the same time, it is characterized by the "dynamics of global relations," such as the international exchange of goods, information, capitals, and persons (Novak, 2002).

Via Paolo Sarpi shows spread micro-transformations, which, "after a certain threshold, create processes of metamorphosis, and role and sense transformations of entire urban populations" (Lanzani, 2003). This analysis leads to the question stated at the introduction of this section: What happens to Chineseness and Chinese diasporic communities in contemporary global cities? In order to answer this question, I analyze the Paolo Sarpi district case, taking into account demographic features and population movements as well as those socio-cultural contexts and ideological currents that influence the formation of local identities and communities.

#### THE "ASIAN BETWEENERS"

The analysis of the literature on the Chinese diaspora has already shed light on the complexity of the contemporary concept of Chineseness. Contemporary anthropologists do not consider the Chinese as a racial category. Consequently, the borders of the Chinese physical traits are not really defined. To be Chinese nowadays is definitively a cultural element; hence, it is more appropriate to call them "Asian Betweeners," rather than reducing the phenomenon only to young Chinese. However, the origins of the Chinese diaspora show that this social diasporic system is stratified and in constant evolution.

Following the theoretical debate of British cultural studies, a good starting point to reflect about identity and ethnicity in a global environment is to

move from what identity is to how identity is produced. Hall argues that "the diaspora experience is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (1990, p. 401-2). From this perspective it is not important to understand who the young Chinese are, but how they recognize themselves, how they mark differences or express belonging. These are the reasons that ground the choice to call/name/define this subculture as the "Asian Betweeners." Perhaps it may be a risk and certainly it is a neologism, but it represents unequivocally the ethnographer's perception of these youth, "in-the-middle" of the Chinese hybrid network.

### CHINESE COSMOPOLITANISM: AN EMERGENT CHINESE IDENTITY?

In globalization studies, culture is prominent in the work of anthropologists and sociologists, and in media and cultural studies in comparative literature. Some diagnoses have linked globalization with enduring or even increased cultural diversity (Appadurai, 1990; Hannerz, 1992). From this perspective, globalization theory examines the emergence of a global cultural system that acquires meaning within the social context in which it is embedded. It suggests that global culture is influenced by a variety of social and cultural developments such as the existence of a world-satellite information system, the emergence of global patterns of consumption and consumerism, the cultivation of cosmopolitan life-styles, and the decline of sovereignty. Globalization has been described as "the concrete structuration of the world as a whole. In other words, it is the growing awareness, at a global level, that "the world" is a continuously constructed environment.

Globalization has encouraged several important changes in the contours of community. In opposition to some expectations, the rise of supra-territoriality has not led to the end of territorial solidarities that are centred on the nationality principle. In addition, globalization has promoted the development of various non-territorial affiliations, the growth of cosmopolitanism, and increasing hybridization (Scholte, 2000). These reticules tend to find connection in other Chinese communities that are part of the diaspora process, which obviously reflects the process of global economy at the macro level. Furthermore, cultural co-presence often produces a greater quantity of new meanings and forms inasmuch as it is provocative. This brings to mind Semi's (2007) suggestion that the urban dimensions outlined by social mix and diversity do not represent a happy and idyllic model made up of different people, "but a way to look at the configurations of our society from the perspective of what people do and say they do, and are and say they are" (p. 56). As Ong (1999) also argues, "an anthropology of the present should analyze people's everyday actions as

a form of cultural politics embedded in specific power contexts" (p. 6).

According to Campani (1994), the Chinese diaspora has the necessary characteristics to achieve economic, transnational operations, as well as a vast ground of promising investments originating from the motherland. As direct products of the diaspora, the transilient migrants are people full of resources, skilled and experienced, devoted to the promotion of international trade. Moreover, they can overcome the links between the nation states, and they are able to represent themselves as the new immigrants of the globalization era. The changing status of diasporan Chinese with the operations and globalization of capital and their cultural experiences have raised the need for a new focus on the study of Chinese identities that acquire meanings in dialectical relation to the practices, beliefs, and structures encountered in the spaces of flow across nation and markets (Ong, 1999).

Kwok Bun Chan (1997) argues that these spatially displaced families constitute strategic nodes and linkages, which characterize an ever-expanding transnational field within which a new type of Chinese identity is emerging: Chinese cosmopolitanism. Accordingly, family displacement is not simply a "consequence" of migration; and families are not "passive actors" in the diaspora process. On the contrary, they actively create their migration project aiming for strategic investment. Of course, this process involves costs, strains, and stresses. As we can see in the interaction reported in this field note, a new Chinese identity emerges, which is a cultural hybrid in that it is transient and cosmopolitan, and characterized by provisionality and multiplicity.

Oriente Store is one of the oldest and best organized ethnic shops of the area, which sells Chinese clothing products, gift items, and handicrafts. It is located in via Paolo Sarpi 19, at the corner with via Bramante. Peiling Wang welcomes me in this fascinating oriental shop. She manages this activity together with her brothers and cousins, who all belong to the Wang family. Peiling Wang came to Italy eight years ago, and has been educated here. This woman is characterized by a conscious post-modern irony, which emerges as she declares: "I would define myself an Italian with a slight deformation of the eyes and as a clearly anomalous Chinese!" (Peiling Wang) (Field note, 05.31.2008).

In this continuous global evolution, "home" does not have to be "here," or "there"; on the contrary, it is tentatively and potentially everywhere. This radically alters the meaning of "home" and, consequently, of homelessness, so that the search for a new vocabulary becomes a priority. Hybridity is by nature multi-stranded and heterogeneous; it does not respect the primacy of center over periphery, origin over destination, and exit over entry. As both ideology and reality, it revitalizes and renews the ideals of cultural diversity,

relativity, and pluralism (Chan, 1997).

Chan argues that the scattering of family in a duality or plurality of places provides for a crucial context within which Chinese cosmopolitan identity emerges. Other relevant contexts include the development of a system of intimately intertwined world economies characterized by multidirectional flows of trade and investment, the emergence of a Chinese diasporic economy with ethnically structured networks of nodes and poles (Lever-Tracy & Ip, 1996), and the modern technological development of communication and transport, which facilitate the transmission of popular culture (Cohen, 1994). "Correspondingly, the phenomenology and anthropology of this new, emergent Chinese identity necessitate a re-thinking of such issues as traditional *versus* modern Chinese culture; culture loss *versus* culture gain; and assimilation *versus* the persistence of ethnic consciousness" (Chan, 2005, p. 117). As a group or class, the resulting diaspora is constituted by the so-called "transilients" (Richmond, 1991), who are the new overseas Chinese (Skeldon, 1994), or the new middle-class Chinese (Li, 1983). This emergent Chinese identity may be defined as *zhonggen*, which could be translated as multiple rootedness or consciousness. The Chinese word *zhonggen* has three meanings: multiple; regenerative, as in "born again"; and treasuring one's diverse roots. It leads to an image of succession, with sinking roots as the process and multi-stranded roots as the outcome (Chan, 1997). It is close to what Lee (1991) called "Chinese cosmopolitanism."

## SECOND-GENERATION ASIAN SUB-CULTURE IN MILAN'S CHINATOWN: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION

In this way, Paolo Sarpi shows an innovative character, a cosmopolitan ethos, and a transnational lifestyle, with particular respect to young Chinese of the second as well as third generations. They show how multiple hybrid identities do not make them feel as "linked" to a specific territory. This is the main reason why the local government has committed to struggle against this hybridization process. Through the creation of limiting laws, the local administration aims to establish a sort of "institutional standardization."

As Tony Jefferson and Stuart Hall (1976) argue in *Resistance through Rituals*, goods can be "acquired" by a certain group and "homologated" according to its problems, needs, and self-perception. A large part of juvenile culture, including radical culture, involves consumption (Sassatelli, 2004a). The Chinese young people in Milan are very attentive to accessories, brands, and symbols, as well as to eccentric and innovative clothing. Consumption is an "ambivalent ground" (Sassatelli, 2004), where a social actor builds his or her own identity through practices of consumption, reflexivity, and habit.

Many Chinese of second and third generation assume different nationalities, speak different languages, profess different religions, and adopt different lifestyles. Hence, a network of Chinese families not only creates successful transnational trade for Chinese companies working in the

Sarpi district. Indeed, these family connections, which are embedded in a plurality of places within a new and favorable global environment, promote skills and experiences of young Chinese, who consequently acquire new cosmopolitan identities. As a result, Paolo Sarpi Street can set itself as a place "soaked" in multiple meanings, a transnational and intercultural phenomenon that recalls the ethnoscape imaginary described by Appadurai (1996). The purpose of this study was to analyze how a hybrid urban space can be characterized by flows of movement and instability.

As for the group under study, it seems that the Asian Betweeners have a fervent imagination. In their cosmopolitan practices, one can identify an experiential use of urban space, which is influenced by global flows and local networking. Moreover, this imagination is increased by the actual or virtual chances to travel. These youth have received both local and "Chinese" education, and, perhaps, this leads to the detachment from urban localisms. As one of the members of Associna says, the Asian Betweeners are starting to discover themselves as citizens of the world:

[t]he classic question is "Do you feel more Italian or Chinese?" It is very curious that many Chinese prefer answering "citizens of the world." Then, some important aspects concern future and job opportunities. It is very easy that when you ask a young Chinese "Where would you like to work or live..." Certainly she or he will answer "Everywhere," where there are more opportunities to create a great future. In reality, the membership in a nation state is not so important for Chinese second generations that grow up abroad." (Jlanyi, male 27 years old, came from Zhejiang) (Field note).

As described, the diaspora allows overcoming time and space fragmentation. It also offers to the youngsters both freedom and "technologically skilled" components: they can connect themselves in a re-invented and indeterminate place. In this sense, the space of Paolo Sarpi district may be a hub for the Asian Betweeners global cultural trends. As Colombo (2008) wrote:

[w]hat is reality at macro level can only be based on the real actions and interactions, choices, construction of meaning that occur in more micro and ordinary dimension of our existence. But, stressing, in the same time that these real and concrete actions occur in structured contests, characterized by asymmetries of resources, power and personal capacity which are required to be carried out and from which it is inevitable also to start in order to transform them and overcome them. The centrality taken by the micro level is firstly possible because there are specific structural conditions in

contemporary society which require that: the terminals of the networks must be relatively autonomous, capable of perception and have the option of encoding, decoding, develop languages. There must be some resources socially shared to allow to individuals the opportunity to work as broadcasters and receptors of information flows (p. x).

My attention was attracted by the expressive ethnicity, as Zamagni would say (2001), that the young Chinese display on the field. This is clearly visible on Saturday afternoons along the roads and the shops of the Sarpi district. An emergent subculture exists, that shows compliance with micro-social structures in which it is possible to identify common fashion, style, and music with other Asian Betweeners. It is relevant to show an aesthetic style that does not necessarily adapt to the local mainstream because it is directly connected to the Asian cultural model. These practices create a mere distinction because the Asian Betweeners cross over their body surface and mark them culturally.

### COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND CHINESE IDENTITY

The young Chinese in Milan use the social networking system to construct their transnational adaptation. For instance, they use Facebook because it is a powerful tool for communication, but they also use other types of social networks such as Renren, a Chinese Facebook equivalent. They use it every day to communicate with Chinese classmates. Kaixin is another social network, which they like even more than Renren, because users can express their preference for different topics or play online games like "trading friends" and "happy farm." They can also see their friends' votes and create a new question for everyone. In addition, they can send virtual gifts of love to friends, such as hugs, flowers, candies, and all sorts of virtual emotionality with a wider range of choice than in Facebook. As Chaomin (Luigina in Italian) notes:

I check the messages that my friends left me nearly every day, only if I open the websites, and Renren is one of the webs that I visit more frequently. Before I came to Italy, I had an account on Facebook, but I did not visit it so often. But now that I'm in Italy, I use it to keep in touch with my foreign classmates: I used to play on Kaixin in the summer vacation, but now I do not spend so much time on it. (Chaomin, female, 22 years old, from Hang Zhou) Similarly, *Chat room practices* create social and ethnic identifications with other young people of Chinese origin from all over the world. QQ (Tencent QQ) is popular software in China, and almost everyone uses it. About MSN, young Chinese think that it is

only used by the office workers or those who cannot use QQ during their work time. The major target users are workers, and not young people who are still in schools.

On this issue, Suwen explains:

QQ is for Chinese friends but actually I've rarely used it because all of my best friends have MSN. MSN is useful because it seems much more "professional" and I write my blog in MSN SPACE so my friends can read my life and see my pictures, leave messages or comments on my blog (Suwen, female, 25 years old, from Hangzhou).

The imaginary perception of intimacy offered by the new networked technologies fills an emotional void and becomes a way to escape from reality.

For the younger Asian Betweeners in Milan's Chinatown, this virtual connection to the global cultural flows constitutes a social imaginary, a "mediascape," as Appadurai wrote, and it clearly symbolizes a great longing for freedom. The social entity of communicative function is remarkable, in that its "meaning for participants is to share similar experiences with regards to technologies, codes, contents, social opportunities, and communicative rituals" (Wolf, 1992, p. 131). In order to keep in touch with their parents, who live in their home country, they use the mobile phone every day. With respect to voice calls, they do not use the program Skype very often, neither with parents nor with Italian friends, because parents rarely know how to use the computer, so they call one another cable phone or with the "smart voice" Internet tool. "I am in Italy, so I use Skype to call my parents, my relatives, and my friends in China; I also use it to call friends who study abroad. SMS is a daily routine, everyday I send nearly 40 messages" (Chaomin).

They pay attention to phone companies in order to save money:

I use Wind with Chinese friends in Italy, because most of Chinese students use Wind. I've used Vodafone once because there was an offer for a cellular phone. But I'm thinking to take another number, because I have more Italian friends who use Tim or Vodafone (Suwen).

In respect to media and technology in general, these Asian Betweeners affirm that "it's so important that I can't imagine what my life would be without the computer" (Polly-Yang Fan, male, 25 years old, from Hu Zhou Zhe Jiang).

Within this framework, the computer is basically used for communication activities and also for online entertainment. There are several programs such

as Xunlei (Xunlei Kankan), which provides for video-on-demand service with a web interface, and Youku (literally "excellent and cool") is a video sharing site based in China, and Tudou (literally "potato"), which is one of the largest video sharing websites in China, where users can upload, view, and share video clips. Xunlei has almost all new fiction films as well as programs such as talk shows. If they have time, young Chinese will spend much time downloading films, songs, and videos or only looking for online resources. There was another web portal, BT, which was interesting for boys, as Polly told me: "We young guys like this stuff so much, because we can search out and download a lot of porn, but unfortunately, now it's closed ^\_^" (Polly-Yang Fan). Obviously, they have e-mail accounts for formal and informal communication with friends and for work. They use the 163 mailbox, which is very common in China, but they also have Google mail or Yahoo addresses. Hotmail is not very stable in China, so it may create problems. So what is the importance of communication tools in everyday life for Asian Betweeners? Some of them cannot live without Internet tools:

I'm addicted to updating info with friends. I cannot imagine my life without E.B if I'll ever go back to China, and I hope that my country will open the information and let citizens have more freedom to express themselves" (Suwen).

At the same time Bi is interested in the costs of communication:

[h]ow important are costs? The best is low-cost and unlimited access for daily needs In which way? The best way is Internet, such as e-mail, QQ, MSN, Skype (Bi, male, 28 years old from Hubei province).

Almost everyday, I need to use my mobile phone to keep in touch with my friends and my family. Besides, Internet is the second important tool by which I can finish my homework and communicate face-to-face with my parents (Betty-Cheng Yao, female, 24 years old, from JiangSu).

They are also "essential to keep in touch with friends and with the world (Pan, female, 24 years old, from Shanghai).

But, from another point of view, the communication tools have become one of the inseparable parts of their daily life. And they are playing an increasingly important role.

Now I can keep in touch with my parents and friends, and I know what the outside world really is. They are narrowing the distances between two cities and two countries, especially among persons. QQ, MSN, Skype reduce the costs of communication, and by using them, we can speak to more people at one time. Websites like Youtube, enable us to express our views and to share our opinions. The world is becoming a small town with the help of communication tools (Chaomin).

Therefore, Paolo Sarpi Street may constitute a local driver that provides for transmission of cultural codes on the global scale of the Chinese diaspora. Moreover, this neighborhood represents a sort of showcase: if the urban space is a fluid area, which can transform ethnic subculture style into fashion, we can infer that Milan's Chinatown also has a cool hunting function.

## CONCLUSION

According to the concept of urban vitality studied by Castells (1996), Milan's Chinatown is a symbol of plural urbanity, which involves diverse customs, different functions, and expressions. Moreover, it has active street life, where people interact in the space, and thus give meaning to it. As the development in digital technology and the popularity of social networks show that we are assisting at a process in which space appears collectively built and produces common sense. But how is our capacity to give common sense to a built space? Besides the idea of physical presence, there are relationship spaces, and interaction spaces. But what makes a space recognizable? A first response would be the construction of discontinuity, in the sense of borders that close an area through an act of social power, and that, at the same time, give sense at the centre, through strongly symbolic actions. As Giddens describes,

[i]n the modern era, the level of time-space distancing is much higher than in any previous period, and the relations between local and distant social forms and events become correspondingly "stretched." Globalisation refers essentially to that stretching process, in so far as the modes of connection between different social contexts or regions become networked across the earth's surface as a whole (Giddens 1990, p. 64).

This means that space and time have always been dimensions linked to human experience, and may be understood as the two basic coordinates for the construction of meaning. On the basis of this approach, my ethnographic exploration was focused on new communication technologies and on how

they "represent social resources; in other words, they activate different processes of identification, which contribute to produce, re-produce, or reinforce the sense of individual identity and of belonging to certain social groups and communities" (Boni 2006, p. 205).

The recent debate over hybridization and globalization with regards to "state's integrity" can be brought as a good example of how, today, we are not sure about space as something circumscribed, homogeneous, and centred. Borders are more permeable and there are multiple centres. The challenge for future research is to analyze how globalization causes the end of places and how alternative spaces are developing. Are we evolving into other ways of living, a virtual communicative globscape as another form of postmodern reality?

## NOTES

This chapter is part of an urban ethnographic research which has been developed into a Master's Thesis in Political and Social Communication at the University of Milan, Italy. All the data were collected from 2007 to 2009. They derive either from hundreds of hours of participant observation in the field, (the public and private spaces of Milan's Chinatown, for example, Paolo Sarpi district), or from the qualitative interviews (31 altogether collected among: residents and traders, young people both Italian and Chinese, and local politicians). See Manzo Lidia K.C. (2009) for a more detailed description of field access and methodology.

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