Master's Thesis Evaluation Form

Student's name: Xeniya Yegorova

Thesis title: Are We What We Eat? A Study of Identity Reconfiguration of Russian Immigrants in Prague through the Prism of Food Practices.

Name of the supervisor: Martin Hájek

Name of the opponent: Dino Numerato

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis? Please give your reasons for the suggested grade in detail below.

1.   Does the author show understanding of one or more theories, and use theory to generate a hypothesis or to make the problem area more understandable.

The analysis is framed by the concept of identity and the introductory theoretical sections provide a very detailed overview of the concept. The theoretical introduction contributes to a better understanding of the multi-faceted nature of identities in contemporary societies. Furthermore, a sociological reflection of dietary practices among immigrants is discussed. The hypothesis about the possible substitution of Russian with Czech food practices is also articulated. This hypothesis could have been extended beyond the Czech food, with some references to a much broader category of non-Russian food, considering numerous ethnic/international/global food cultures available in Prague.

2.   Is the research question articulated clearly and properly? Is the research question sufficiently answered in the conclusion?

The research question is articulated clearly and properly. The idea to consider the connection between the ethnic/cultural and consumer levels of identities, as well as the impact of the dynamics between these levels on the overall identity structure represent a good starting point. On the other hand, it is questionable, whether this connection could work well in case of the Russian culture where the food apparently does not have such a central position in the identity building process as in case of e.g. Italian, Arab or Indian immigrants; as Xeniya Yegorova suggested on p. 43, Russia has "*a weak national food identity*". This fact is in fact admitted on p. 80 where we read: "*Coming from a culture with controversial consumer history and a low fixation on the national cuisine, Russian immigrants may not be the best choice for the current research's purposes.*"

3.   Is the thesis based on relevant research and literature and does it accurately summarize and integrate the information?

This introduction provides a solid base for the analytical understanding of the role of food practices and the processes of identity reconfiguration among Russian Immigrants in Prague. The section 4.2. on "*Russian food behavior and traditions*" would benefit of a more nuanced approach that would consider a possibility of different food practices among groups with different social status/habitus. The author quite generally speaks about people. On the other hand, I should add that this problem is addressed further in the thesis.

4. What is the quality of the data or the other sources? Are the sample method, data collection and data analysis appropriate?

The data analysis represents the weakest point of the thesis. Some quotations from interviews are repeated several times, which is quite uneven. The analysis is somehow poor and although the authors anticipated an exploratory approach, the typologies (put it very simply as *resist/adopt and neutral*) identifies are even less rich that those assumed theoretically on p. 48. This raises some concern over the empirical and theoretical saturation of the collected data.

Moreover, on p.52, the author mentioned observations – that, to my view, would provide a big addition to the research - and content analysis. However, it remains unclear how these particular methods were used. On p. 57 is again suggested that notes were combined with interviews but more information about observations and some explicit references to field notes would increase the value of the analysis.

5. Are the findings relevant to the research question? Are the conclusions of the thesis based on strong arguments?

Yes.

6. Are the author's thoughts distinguished unambiguously from the borrowed ideas?

Yes.

7. Is the thesis containing original/innovative research (in terms of topic, approach, and/or findings)?

The theoretical idea and the link between material and cultural identities is not new, the attempt to study this link on the example of Russian immigrants in Prague is. The findings are not surprising, but the theoretical part if quite strong and Xeniya Yegorova demonstrated her capacity to work well with existing literature.

8. What is the quality of style and other formal requirements?

The work is very well written and quality of academic style is good. From the formal point of view, the thesis includes just some minor spelling errors; "*low consumer distrust*" on p. 43

should probably read as "*high consumer distrust,*" a sentence on p 58 ending with "*reconsideration of*" is unfinished. The in-text references include some typographic errors (systematically, there is a space after brackets), quotation on p. 15 does not provide the exact page number and year. The final bibliography after the texts includes a section "*works cited*". In this context, is not clear what is the role of other literature references below the heading Literature, not included in the "*Works cited*" section. The sources in the Literature section are not cited consistently. The photos in the thesis on p. 41 and 42 could include some information about their source.

9.   Are there any other strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, which are not included in the previous questions? Please list them if any.

Xeniya Yegorova very well discusses the limits of the thesis. On the other hand, at one point she tends to assess her qualitative design against the requirements of quantitative research. The criterion of representativeness rather than of empirical or theoretical saturation is used to reflexively assess the research on p. 81.

10.   What topic do you suggest for the discussion in the thesis defence?

On p. 21, Xeniya Yegorova argued that "*the assimilationists and social-constructionists approaches*" were the most "*appropriate theories for the purposes for the study*". The reasons leading to the selection of these two approaches (and to the exclusion of the approach of internal colonialism) could be explained.

What was the role of observations as a data collection tool? How could we elaborate upon the existing methodological approaches and develop the data collection tools?

Overall assessment of the thesis:

Considering the previously mentioned strong and weak aspects of the thesis, I would recommend it for a defence and I would propose the grade *very good*.

Date: 16 June 2016   Signature: