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# **THE WHOLE AND ITS PARTS**

## **CARE CIRCULATION AND CHILDREN'S LIFE PATHS IN QINGTIANESE TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES**

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<sup>1</sup> Filled steamed bun.





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## Introduction

The metaphor of the whole and its parts serves to illustrate the various levels and layers of this research: the dialectics and the different scales on which it operates, the need to relativize phenomena and situate them in context. The ‘whole’ of the title refers to care and its circulation in Qingtianese<sup>2</sup> transnational families, that are split mainly – but not only – between China and Spain. Such circulation takes place within each country and across borders, the transnational dimension being key. This transnational dimension makes it necessary to go beyond viewing migration as a linear journey from starting point to destination (Basch et al. 1994), to take an approach which emphasises processes and ties rather than continuing to reify places and borders. It also highlights the need to acknowledge the role of both movers and stayers as actors in the transnational field (Baldassar & Merla, 2014 a, 2014b; Levitt, 2009; Basch et al. 1994), and to realise that migratory status is not inherited. Defining care is a complex matter. Often, the term is used in a way that assumes a “shared implicit understanding of what care is” (Duffy, 2011, p.9), thereby meaning both anything and nothing (Perez Orozco, 2014). While this research will try to elucidate the meaning(s) of care, in this specific context(s), at an initial level of analysis, it can be useful to think about care as a resource. A resource which circulates among people, within space and over time (Baldassar & Merla, 2014a, 2014b; Baldassar et al., 2014). The ‘part’ refers to the place of Qingtianese transnational families’ children<sup>3</sup> within this circulation; but it also alludes to the place of care within these children's life paths.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, there is not always an automatic and straightforward relationship between the two, as this is not a matter of mathematics. While there may sometimes be a direct dialectic relationship, at other times, the links are more subtle or indirect. The part forms part of the whole, the part reflects it, but the part also overcomes and surpasses it.

In this research, the exploration of care and its circulation becomes a means by which to describe the broader social dynamics articulating the Qingtian-Spain transnational space. A whole in which care, now as a part, serves as the unifying thread. Mobility,

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<sup>2</sup> From Qingtian, in the south of Zhejiang province (China), where the largest proportion of Chinese migrants in Spain come from.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Children’ are understood, in this dissertation, as the youngest generation of these families: from their early childhoods to the point at which they are young adults without descendants (18-31 years old).

<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, ‘life course’ will be used to refer to the life from birth to death, and ‘life path’ will be used to refer to the specific paths taken by the research subjects over the course of their lives so far, including experiences of family, care, education, work, etc.



housing and education are some of the cross-cutting themes which emerge in the ethnographic chapters. In the articulation of this transnational social space, a more in-depth analysis of care, as a social fact, is key. Social facts are “manners of acting or thinking” (Durkheim, 1982, p.43), which exert coercive power upon individuals. They emerge from social interaction and depend upon a collective shared consciousness, indeed, “what constitutes social facts are the beliefs, tendencies and practices of the group taken collectively” (p.54), these differing from their individual manifestations. While social facts exert a coercive power upon people, this constraint is not always experienced as such by the individual, or it incorporates contradicting moral notions “of the good and of duty” (p.47): a duality which is present in the hegemonic conception of care as “a labour of love” (Graham, 1983, p.16). Differing familial and individual circumstances and positions are fundamental in how those constraints are perceived and experienced, and in determining the extent to which those moral notions persist or change. Care as a social fact hinges on its collective nature and its individual expressions: “It is in each part because it is in the whole, but far from being in the whole because it is in the parts” (Durkheim, 1982, p.56).

In order to arrive at the whole, through the parts, I have taken a path that has been far from straight. Instead, I have travelled along a spiral path, which implies conceiving the ethnographic practice as an inductive, fluid and flexible journey (O'Reilly, 2012). My initial research interest was in the lives of Chinese grandparents in Spain, as I had noticed that they were an almost invisible population but their presence – as well as their absence – was the subject of negative comments, based on xenophobic ideas about Chinese people. I was aware of a Chinese family in which the grandparents lived in Spain and took care of their grandchildren, which is what I could see when going to the cafe they run on the outskirts of Barcelona, during my work breaks. I was impressed by the enormous effort those grandparents had made, in my eyes, having travelled all the way to Spain, without being familiar with the language or the environment, to take care of their family members. Meanwhile, the question of whether my grandparents would be willing to do the same kept coming into my mind. My main initial aim, then, was to explore these care practices from the perspective of the grandparents, by focusing on their lived experiences and migratory paths through fieldwork in Spain and, to a lesser extent, in China. During the first months of my PhD studies, my literature review was particularly focused on three axes: the Chinese family, in order to learn about the

background for this kind of care practice; gaining more detailed information on Chinese grandparents and grandparenting; and the migration theory that centres on the transnational families.

Taking the first steps in the Spanish fieldwork confirmed that gaining access to the grandparents' generation was not easy. At that point, as well as trying out various strategies to gain direct access to them, I started interviewing young adults,<sup>5</sup> as a potential gateway to the older family generations. When analysing their life histories, I became increasingly interested in the practice of sending children to China to spend their early childhood with their grandparents. And moreover, these life histories provided a detailed and coherent narrative, which showed the interlinked nature of the various family care exchanges occurring between the generations. A study of grandparenting could not draw a red line around these kinds of practices; it was therefore necessary to look more closely at the various care arrangements and exchanges taking place within countries and across borders, in order to fully understand and situate them. While I continued with fieldwork, a further theoretical review was key at this point, now focused on care theory, including perspectives on family and the life course. Other reading, particularly on care-focused feminism, was also helpful to understand and situate care processes within broader social structures.

The first fieldwork stage was over and it was time to travel to China, as I had been awarded a one-year research grant<sup>6</sup>. I spent the first four months in Xiamen, the city in which my exchange university was located. There, I focused on improving my Mandarin while I continued to read and analyse the data collected during fieldwork in Spain. I also made my first visit to Qingtian: the county in south Zhejiang province where my fieldwork would be carried out, given that a large proportion of the Chinese migrants in Spain come from there. By that point, I had become more involved with the lives and experiences of the young adults I had interviewed, and my initial area of interest – the grandparents – was somewhat missing from my work. I moved to Qingtian in March 2017, where my stay was planned to last five months. The first day there, I met the grandparents of one of my key informants in Madrid. As they were grandparents – indeed, they were taking care of one grandchild at that time – they introduced me to other families in the same situation. It seemed that the grandparents had returned to

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<sup>5</sup> Understood in this research as people aged 18-31 years old, without descendants.

<sup>6</sup> 2016 Confucius China Studies Program – Research Ph.D. Fellowship at Xiamen University.

centre stage in my research. Nevertheless, with the arrival of many young people and children into the area during the summertime, the focus would shift again.

With freshly-collected data and points of view in mind, I returned to Spain for two months, before going back to China with a one-year extension of my research funding. At that point, it was clear that young adults constituted the core of my research. However, through the earlier bibliographic review, I had realised that the adult-centred perspective was hegemonic in research on migration and transnational families. Although I planned to include grandparents' experiences in addition to those of young adults, albeit not as protagonists, the views of those who are currently children were completely missing. I therefore began to review the literature on the children-migration nexus and made some contacts with schools and teachers in my fieldwork sites. In this phase, I combined writing the theoretical chapters of my thesis (October 2017 / April 2018) with fieldwork focused on children and adolescents. In the end, this research developed into an exploration of care in Qingtianese transnational families, with the young adults' experiences and life paths at its centre, but also paying attention to other voices and grounding them in an exploration of broader family care circulation processes.

In an attempt to gradually introduce the data, but also to share the process of formulating, writing and experiencing the various phases of this research, this dissertation is structured in three parts: the theoretical, methodological and ethnographic sections:

- The first part includes the theoretical framework, which takes a critical approach to the research on care, transnational families and childhood, and two additional chapters which serve to contextualise the research: an overview of the Chinese family as an institution, and an exploration of the history and main features of Chinese migration to Spain.
- The second part offers an insight into the research design and practice. The qualitative data was collected through a multi-sited ethnography carried out between Spain (mainly in Madrid and Barcelona) and China (Qingtian county and Lishui city, in Zhejiang province) from January 2016 to August 2018, lasting 6 and 13 months, respectively. In fact, the fieldwork was a continuous process, connected through ongoing participation in virtual platforms, such as the WeChat app. The

main sample is composed of children who grew up in transnational families between Qingtian and Spain and who are now young adults (who are aged between 18 and 31 and have no offspring). There is also a secondary sample composed of informants who are adolescents<sup>7</sup> today; and a complementary group which includes small children, parents, grandparents and, to a lesser extent, other members of the extended family. Diverse strategies were used to collect information on the various generational groups, incorporating participant observation, semi-structured interviews (54 people) and questionnaires (115 responses). Of the questionnaires, 30 were provided by young adults through a Facebook group in the first phase of the fieldwork in Spain and 85 were completed by adolescents in the last month of fieldwork in China, in a summer camp for descendants of Chinese migrants abroad held on Lishui. The last part of this section also includes a reflexive account about my experiences in the field.

- The final part includes two chapters that are driven by the ethnographic data. Drawing on Baldassar and Merlas' care circulation framework (2014a), the first of these provides an overview of how care circulates in Qingtianese transnational families and of the transnational social space in which this circulation takes place. This provides the foundation for the second ethnographic chapter, which reviews the paths these families' children have taken through their lives so far: from their early years to their current position as young adults, combining their retrospective and present-day accounts with their expectations about care and family in the future. An annex to this chapter (Annex 1) presents various forms of public expression and cultural creation about the lives of young people of Chinese origin in Spain. This additional material aims to reinforce their first-person narratives and give an idea of the significant degree of heterogeneity in this group. Finally, some concluding reflections and lines of potential further research are provided.

With care and family as the key concepts which structure this dissertation, a gender-sensitive approach has been inevitable. In taking such a perspective, I do not intend to suggest that gender inequality is particularly pronounced in Chinese families or Chinese society, but to frame them within a broader, global context in which those inequalities are present in similar forms albeit, of course, to different degrees. Indeed, this

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<sup>7</sup> Understood in this research as people aged 12/18 years old.

dissertation will point to various circumstances – within each site and across borders – which may lead to changes in gender roles and ideology in these families, while it also refers to situations in the Spanish context which, far from challenging those gender inequalities, serve to reinforce them. As such, it challenges assumptions based on stereotyped and simplistic views of the different societies and cultures, associated with commonly-used dichotomies, such as Western-Eastern or modern-traditional. Thus, the data collected through this thesis adds shades of grey between the black and white.

Moreover, this research overcomes some common limitations of studies on care and transnational families. Firstly, it focuses on families – including a micro-approach, through a form of ‘transnationalism from below’ (Baldassar, 2007, p.275) – but does not isolate them from context, analysing and emphasising the role of social, structural and institutional forces. Secondly, it explores care from a fully multi-generational and multi-dimensional perspective, going beyond a limited and compartmentalised focus upon dyads or specific care exchanges between generations. Thirdly, and in a similar vein, instead of focusing on specific roles, transitions or life-stages, it offers a life-course approach to the lives of these families’ children. And finally, it situates practices and meanings in context, questioning hegemonic ideals about care, family and childhood, rather than taking such models as given. On the whole, it has aimed to avoid giving a fragmented perspective, and rather, to take a holistic approach. As such, this dissertation provides a contribution to the emerging body of research about care and transnational families and, more specifically, to how these phenomena interplay with the Chinese culture-system. Finally, it also increases our knowledge of the heterogeneous lives and circumstances of people of Chinese origin in Spain, seeking to overturn some of the prevailing stereotypes about this community and to make them more visible to society and its institutions.

**PART I: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND  
CONTEXT**



# CHAPTER

# 1

## 1 CARE AND TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

### 1.1 Transnational families

#### 1.1.1 Defining transnational families

Migration shapes families in multiple ways over time (Dreby, 2010; Da, 2003; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Lam et al., 2002) and has distinct impacts on different family actors and their associated roles (Baldassar et al. 2014; Lam et al., 2002; Parreñas, 2005a; Waters, 2010). Bryceson & Vuorela (2002) define transnational families as those “that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, i.e. ‘familyhood’, even across national borders” (p.3). Authors emphasise the relational nature of these families and their capacity for “unending social mutation” (p.3). The search for collective welfare in these families has been often described as a strategy for maximising resources and minimising risks that mirrors those adopted by multinational companies (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Huang et al. 2008), understanding such families as a ‘transnational corporation of kin’ (Huang et al. 2008, p.4). Further, scholars have pointed to the retainment of their ‘sense of collectivity’ (Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 13), ‘sense of family’ (Menjívar, 2006) or that of ‘being family’ (Graham et al., 2012, p.3), or the creation and/or reconstruction of a feeling of ‘familyhood’ (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002, p.3) or ‘family relations’ (Lam et al. 2002, p.117), as essential features of these families, which share “‘circuits’ of care and affection” (Yeoh et al. 2005, p.308 ) that connect them across borders.

Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) point to transnational families as imagined communities



(p.10) and Yeoh et al. (2005) argue that these are made through “ideologically-charged imaginaries which give coherence to notions of belonging, despite the physical dispersal of their members” (p.307), as well as “lived experiences” (p.307) which involve intimacy negotiation among different family members. Scholars have also pointed to how advances in technologies of communication and transportation are key in mediating those negotiations (Baldassar, 2016; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016; Madianou, 2016; Madianou & Miller, 2012). The transnational perspective incorporates into its analysis the family members who experience physical mobility as well as those who stay behind (Baldassar & Merla, 2014a, b; Levitt, 2009; Basch et al. 1994). Moreover, transnational families cannot be understood without looking to globalisation processes, in which the idea of mobility emerges as essential (Sheller & Urry, 2006).

Transnational families are often seen as “neither here nor there, always in a space of flows, routed but rootless” (Huang et al. 2008, p.7) on the one hand, and as “here and there, multiply routed between and rooted in the fabric of two or more social fields” (p.7) on the other; which enables the articulation of multiple belongings (Raffaetà et al. 2015; Reynolds, 2006) as well as the indeterminacy of identity (Huang et al. 2008). Nevertheless, identity and belonging may be differently experienced and articulated by the diverse individuals within a single family, depending on many factors, such as age, gender, family generation, migration generation and personal circumstances. Similarly, Baldassar et al. (2014) highlight how individual life stages and life courses make a difference to how the various family members experience their transnational lives and to their engagement in maintaining family ties across borders. These authors link those experiences and their outcomes to the dominant ideologies of family:

“The way transnational family members experience absence from loved ones is much more dependent on their interpretations of the quality of their relationships and on the socially constructed meanings of mobility than on the actual distance that separates them” (Baldassar et al. 2014, p.163).

Thus, one of the challenges of studying transnational families is looking beyond the stereotypical view of families as bounded by proximity (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Baldassar & Baldock, 1999). Merla and Baldassar (2016) highlight how transnational families cannot be longer assumed to be “inherently dysfunctional” (p.278) and

distance cannot be understood as synonymous of family disintegration (Landolt & Da, 2005), but of “reorganization and redefinition” (Menjívar, 2006), which should be analysed in context. Nevertheless, that is not to say that distance is not a key matter, nor that family relations are automatically bounded by affect and harmony. Power struggles and asymmetries are part of family relations and need to be taken into account (Baldassar & Merla, 2014a, b; Pantea, 2011; Dreby & Adkins, 2010). Moreover, as a result of migration processes, power hierarchies and family roles may be reinforced as well as challenged and reworked.

### 1.1.2 Morphologies of transnational families

Transnational families are not a new phenomenon (Baldassar et al. 2014; Dreby, 2010), but what makes them different nowadays are new forms of interacting at a distance and the scale of mobility, which is bigger than ever before (Baldassar et al. 2014). Different mobility patterns result in diverse transnational family forms, which are often understood as “a strategic attempt to ensure economic survival or maximise social mobility” (Yeoh et al. 2005, p.307), the latter being a generalised aim (Ong, 1999; Olwig, 2002). Beyond the initial migratory movement, transnational families as “fluid formations” (Huang et Yeoh, 2005, p.382) result in different morphologies which change over time “in response to each family’s life cycle changes, family members’ personal aspirations, as well as the wider socio-economic context” (p.382).

In transnational families worldwide, different family members may experience uneven degrees of mobility and may spend distinct amounts of time separated from others: circumstances which define their transnational form. This temporal distance is often mediated by the impossibility of reunification in the migration destination country, due to migratory and family reunification policies and, as a result, the separation may last longer than expected (Dreby, 2010). Nevertheless, reunification in the host country may not be always the family’s final goal (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). In contrast with an earlier pattern of male-led migrations, in recent decades scholars have documented a growing number of migrations processes in which a woman is the first to move or the only one to do so (Dreby, 2010; Parreñas, 2005a). It is also common that both parents migrate together or within a short time period, while their children remain in the home country being cared for by kin or non-kin (Poeze et al. 2017; Yarris, 2017; Antman,

2012; Guang et al. 2017; Lei et al. 2017; Perreira & Ornelas, 2011;; Tienda & Haskins, 2011; Tymczuk, 2011; Hondagneu & Avila, 1997). In other cases, the children or young people can also become the migrants themselves while their parents stay in the home country, as in the case of labour-migrant children (Yeoh et al 2012; Alipio et al., 2015; White et al. 2011;) or middle-class Asian families' minors who are sent abroad to study (Yeoh et al. 2012; Tsong & Liu, 2009; Zhou, 1998), either alone or together with their mothers (Huang & Yeoh, 2005, 2011). Finally, adult migrants' parents may also experience mobility, either to provide care through transnational grandparenting practices in their adult children's migration destination country (Adugna, 2017; Kassaye, 2015; King et al. 2014; Neysmith & Zhou, 2013; Zhou, 2013; Lie, 2010; Da, 2003; Plaza, 2000); or to receive it, as part of what has been named the 'diasporas of care' (Williams, 2001).

### 1.1.3 Added boundaries: Keeping family ties at a distance

Changes in transportation and communication technologies have been key in reshaping transnational families' experiences, creating new spaces for family interaction and presence at a distance. Spatial dislocation is not synonymous of family disintegration (Landlot & Da, 2005) and family relations can be maintained at a distance. Indeed, distance can even prompt more interaction between family members (De Silva, 2018). Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) use the term 'relativising' to refer to "the variety of ways individuals establish, maintain or curtail relational ties with specific family members", alluding "to modes of materialising the family as an imagined community with shared feelings and mutual obligations" (pp.14). They point out that involvement becomes individual and selective, resulting in different degrees of participation, and unbalanced transfers. Baldassar (2008) identifies four different types of co-presence among members of transnational families who experience distance in daily life. From physical co-presence (through visits), the lowering of transportation costs and travel time having had a great impact on this; to co-presence by proxy (the embodiment of the missed person through objects, such as pictures or recipes, or through the presence of other people); imagined copresence (through imagination and remembering) or virtual co-presence. Contemporary research has particularly focused on new technologies and their impact on the ways in which interaction occurs across borders (Nedelcu & Wyss,

2016; Madianou, 2016; Madianou & Miller, 2012):

“The popularization of social media and smartphone devices have enabled the combination of different types of mediated interaction and co-presence. Polymedia environments often facilitate both ‘connected presence’ (say through a variety of synchronous platforms like Skype, texting or social media such as Whatsapp) and ‘co-presence by proxy’ (for example through the visual content one can retrieve through social media). Polymedia environments also facilitate ‘ambient co-presence’, which is a new, hybrid type of indirect co-presence” (Madianou, 2016, p.187).

This ‘ambient co-presence’ is based not “on direct interactions but on the peripheral awareness of the actions of distant others, made possible through the affordances of polymedia environments” (Madianou, 2016, p.186). On the whole, scholars point out that new technologies help with “de-demonizing distance” (Baldassar, 2016, pp.145) by creating new spaces for “doing family at a distance” (Madianou, 2017). And, as a result, the “familial space and network” (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002, p.11) may be materialised through the development and maintenance of an at-a-distance intimacy (Dreby, 2009; Parreñas, 2005). Nevertheless, virtual presence has been often thought to be unable to provide the intimacy of physical co-presence (Sun, 2017; Merla & Baldassar, 2016; Hoang & Yeoh 2012; Baldassar et al. 2007; Urry, 2002).

The different members of transnational families benefit from new technologies to different degrees (Dreby & Adkins, 2010; Parreñas, 2005b) and the uneven development between countries and geographical areas results in differential access to communication across borders (Beazley et al. 2017; Parreñas, 2005b). In parallel, the degree of access to different technologies and resources affects perceived obligations and expectations, by increasing or decreasing burdens (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Baldassar, 2016; Horst, 2006). On the whole, “everyday activities, such as keeping in touch with family members, are complicated by the micro-politics of power and status differentials, as well as by time constraints and access to means of communication” (Dreby & Adkins, 2010, p.683). Moreover, conditioned or not by the available infrastructure, different individuals may choose to use diverse communication modes,

such as letters, calls, emails, etc., which condition the length and quality of conversations across borders (Adugna, 2017), and how that communication is perceived and conceptualised by both, sender and receiver (Baldassar, 2016; Orellana et al., 2001). Means of communication are not simply material structures, as they carry different attached meanings in different contexts, which influence the delivered content by being considered more or less appropriate.

In sum, transnational families are defined by the spatial dislocation among their members and the relations and ties between them, which can be sustained to different degrees across borders, depending on different factors. As Baldassar et al. (2014) point out, not all transnational families take the same form, nor do they all take on the same practices. This reflection is particularly meaningful when adding the ‘care’ factor to the transnational family reality as, on the one hand, meanings of care and family are not universal but socially constructed; and, on the other, the transnational context does not affect different individuals and families uniformly.

## **1.2 Care within and across borders**

### **1.2.1 Introducing care**

Care has always existed, as people perform and exchange care in order to sustain human life (Carrasco, 2009). Nevertheless, the academy has only recently started to focus more closely on this domain of life. In the last few decades, a growing number of researchers and disciplines have elucidated the different meanings and mechanisms involved in care. Alber and Drotbohm (2015) state that, as result of the “proliferation of care in several disciplinary fields, we are observing not only the expansion of its conceptual meaning, but also an increasing imprecision in its usage” (Alber & Drotbohm, 2015, p.1) Often, the term is used in such a way that assumes a “shared implicit understanding of what care is” (Duffy, 2011). In other words, care could be anything and nothing (Perez Orozco, 2014). What seems to be clearer is the permanent link between gender and care (Oliker 2011; Pérez Orozco, 2014; Harrington Meyer et al. 2000). Care as a social construct “represents a complex set of material and symbolic practices that cannot be separated from cultural beliefs, structural constraints and the rituals of everyday life” (Coltrane & Galt, 2000, p.34). As such, care must be researched and

understood in context. Nevertheless, it is common to define care as a substantive and as a verb, implying feeling or concern and an activity of looking after, maintaining or providing (Oxford online dictionary, 2019).

Care is often imagined as inherent to the family realm while, at a social level, it implies multiple models of organisation. Alber and Drobohm (2015) categorise anthropological research about care as being informed by three different and inter-related fields: work, kinship and the life-course. For them, care work involves “the contexts in which care is carried out as a professional and commoditized activity” (p.1) both in the paid and unpaid spheres, and they point to how these spheres in fact form a continuum in women’s lives. Care as kinship is “understood as a mode of social belonging” (p.2) in which care is essential for making and maintaining kinship. Care is therefore a social and emotional practice among relational groups, ranging from relatives and friends to neighbours and other collectives. Finally, by linking care and the life course, authors focus on cultural and societal normative expectations, rights and obligations and how these change along life paths, as “care contributes to the construction of life stages in a double sense, namely, the normative expectation of receiving care and the duty (or ability) to provide care” (p.11). Alber and Drobohm (2015) suggest that work, kinship and the life-course are complementary and interdependent concepts when dealing with care research. In this dissertation, several references to paid labour and broader gendered contexts will be made, but the focus is on unpaid work – in its multiple dimensions – as the engine of family functioning along the life-course.

Relying on the migration-care nexus, two main – alternative but complementary – lines of research coexist: the ‘global care chains’ perspective and the ‘circulation of care’ framework. The ‘global care chains’ approach focuses on the North-South inequalities resulting from care work’s commodification within globalisation (Hochschild, 2000; Yeates, 2012). It has been criticised for presenting an overly simplistic view of the migratory phenomenon, as an economically-driven movement from the Global North to the Global South and back in the form of remittances (Lutz, 2018; Baldassar & Merla, 2014), constituting a one-way flow of support, when nowadays flows are far more complex than that. Similarly, the conceptualisation of care is too narrow. It points to the existence of a ‘care drain’ (Hochschild, 2000) as mothers migrate to rich countries to take care of other women’s children, a circumstance which prevents their own children from receiving care. Firstly, this picture serves to portray only a small – albeit

important and meaningful – part of the circumstances in which transnational families and care come together. Secondly, by emphasising that migrant care workers’ children suffer the effects of the care drain, care is reduced to physical co-presence; moreover, care delivered by other kin is neglected (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) through the assumption of shared and universal meanings of care and family (Parvati, 2012). Thirdly, due to its focus upon the negative consequences and causes, some of the attention is taken away from agency (Tyldum, 2015). Finally, the ‘global care chains’ perspective has been also criticised for ignoring other families in which migration is not female-led or does not fit into the normative hetero-centred model of families (Fresnoza-Flot & Shinozaki, 2017), by assuming care to be inherently related to the female sphere (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) and essentialising women by equating them with mothers (Oso, 2016; Catarino & Morokvasic, 2005).

Going beyond these limitations, the ‘care circulation framework’ (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) takes a more inclusive vision of family, care and migration as its starting point. Firstly, it implies a view of migration which goes beyond a back-and-forth movement, in which the reasons triggering mobility are not solely of an economic nature, and it conceives both movers and stayers as actors in the transnational social field. Secondly, it focuses upon the family as a unit of analysis, in its extended and multiple forms, decentring research from specific care roles or actors. And finally, it understands care to be multidimensional and the expectation of and ability to care to be shaped by context(s).

### 1.2.2 Defining care

Due to the lack of agreement about what care is, I have relied on several scholars’ definitions to provide an open definition of what is considered care. Fisher and Tronto (1990) posit that caring – as a verb – encompasses **orientation** and **practice**, it **permeates people’s lives** and seeks to **give continuity, wellbeing and/or to repair**. It encompasses four phases:

- 1) ‘Caring about’ is “an orientation, rather than a motivation” (p.42), extending beyond sentiments such as “love and affection connect us to others” but “caring about assumes a connection with others” (p.42).

- 2) 'Taking care of' is understood as practical care, as it involves action. The proactive nature of the taking care of phase "implies the responsibility for initiating and maintaining caring activities" (p.36).
- 3) 'Caregiving' "is the concrete (sometimes hand-on) work of maintaining and repairing our world. It requires more continuous and dense time commitments than taking care of. It requires experience, skill, and, ultimately, judgment" (p.43).
- 4) 'Care-receiving' is "the response to caregiving by those toward whom care is directed" (p.40) although the response may not be intentional, conscious, or even human.

Fisher and Tronto suggest that "each phase operates as the general precondition for the next; that is, in order for a person or persons to take care of, some person or persons must care about" (p.40), the historical and cultural context conditioning care processes. Thus, looking at care implies looking at the broader social context. In recent decades, care-focused feminism has explored the caregiving role as part of women's life experiences. Feminist scholars refer to social reproduction as 'the creation and recreation of people as cultural and social, as well as physical human beings' (Glenn, 1992, p. 4), linked to the notion of reproductive labour, including the "various kinds of work - mental, manual, and emotional - aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, **defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation**" (Laslett & Brenner, 1989). In Glenn's (1992) words: "The array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on **a daily basis and intergenerationally**" (Glenn, 1992, p.1).

This definition posits that care is essential to human survival and implies a broader scope of activities. Similarly, this is the case of the definition of care(s) [*cuidados*] – in plural – by Perez Orozco (2014) as being those activities of everyday life that generate people's physical and emotional wellbeing and that are informed by three different tasks, all of them involving material-corporeal and emotional-affective dimensions. These tasks are:

- **Domestic care** as a material **pre-condition** for care.
- **Direct care**, focusing on **bodies and emotions**.



- **Mental** management tasks, involving monitoring, evaluation and supervision.

Finally, Glenn (2000), points to some additional features related to care:

- Firstly, **we all need it**. Thus, this means going beyond the stereotypical image of care as being linked to dependency.
- Secondly, care creates relationships in which **agency** and **power** matter.
- Thirdly, caring as a practice may imply different types of organisation in both the **paid** and **unpaid spheres**.

In sum, care is understood as an orientation and a practice that permeates people's lives and is essential for their maintenance and continuity (in the present and intergenerationally). It seeks to provide wellbeing and/or to repair, and it may include different sets of tasks, such as domestic, bodily and/or emotionally-focused and mental tasks, encompassing agency and power dimensions in both the paid and unpaid spheres. In this thesis, 'care work' refers to the set of care activities that, besides additional demands such as mental planning, involves a large degree of physical effort and extensive and regular dedication, such as hands-on care (feeding, washing bodies, dressing, etc.) and domestic tasks.

Moreover, when dealing with migration, the boundaries between the reproductive and productive spheres may be particularly blurred, making the concept of social reproduction useful (Gregorio-Gil, 2017). Despite all these insights, the social reproduction perspective is largely missing from migration research, which is dominated by other approaches focused on the care domain, and particularly on global care chains (Koffman, 2016). Acknowledging this gap, Koffman (2016) proposes an alternative approach to migration research through the concept of social reproduction, in which analyses of the different migratory circuits which configure social reproduction in different ways – including work in the labour market, family and education – are integrated. The different migratory circuits, and the circumstances which circumscribe them, shape how care is organised and deployed, in which forms and directions, and how it affects individuals, families and communities, including movers and stayers (Koffman, 2016).

### 1.2.3 Family, care and society

#### 1.2.3.1 *The caring family*

The romantic view of the family incorporates the idea of it being a place for love and good care (Cancian, 2000). Nevertheless, families may be a place for care that is good and not so good; a place for different levels of interdependence, social conflict and power relations (De Vault, 1991; Perez Orozco, 2014). Folbre (2012) suggests that in caring relations often “willingness is treated as natural and inexhaustive resource” (p.45.). Responsibility, duty and reciprocity are the core notions sustaining family care, but social and cultural context is key for analysing the degree to which caring for family members constitutes a social or moral obligation. Finch and Mason (1993) refer to two key concepts in analysing family exchanges and reciprocity: normative obligation and negotiated commitments. ‘Normative obligation’ is based on notions of duty and responsibility (Finch & Manson, 1993). Perceived obligations are culturally-specific, related to particular notions of care and adequacy. A clear example is that of the hands-on care of frail ageing parents. While, in certain societies, the expectation of and social duty to provide family care prevails, such in Asian countries – through the ideology of filial piety (Toyota et al. 2007); in others, institutional care is the norm, such as in most countries in northern Europe. Nevertheless, cultural expectations are not static and may evolve as part of changing social processes; the question here is whether the states in the first set of countries are willing to take on these responsibilities as they do in the second set, as this involves high costs for the welfare system that can be obscured through arguments anchored in a cultural order. By avoiding the classification of care as a social duty, care remains linked to the family sphere, in which burdens tend to be unevenly distributed.

The second key concept proposed by Finch and Mason (1993) is that of ‘negotiated commitments’, which alludes to how “people become committed to accepting certain sorts of responsibilities, to particular individuals, over time” (pp.60). This commitment is developed through negotiation with other individuals and there is a power dimension involved in it. In the context of the United Kingdom, Finch and Mason (1993) suggest that family commitments are gendered, resulting in different expectations for males and females, and the greater commitment and willingness of women to take care of other family members, compared with men. Moreover, gender also matters in the extent to

which different excuses for not taking part in care are legitimated or not.

Barret et al. (2014) focus on family support networks as a source of social capital, in which caregiving is conceived as “part of being a member of a family or living in a close relationship” (pp. XIV). By focusing on situations of dependency, which require extensive hands-on care and supervision, the authors point to a broad spectrum, in which care is seen as an experience involving positive or negative outcomes. These kinds of situations are especially resource-consuming. And the variety of resources consumed is broad: ranging from time to physical energy, emotional strength and money, among others. When the dependency situation becomes the everyday norm for the main caregiver, the burden becomes too heavy and may include social disconnection (Brunh, 2014). Different variables can lighten or worsen the burden, such as the availability of different people to share the caregiving role, support from state and community institutions, or distance. If a situation of dependency arises in a transnational family, it leads to rethinking the various care arrangements and looking for alternatives within and across borders. Often, the view of women as natural caregivers conditions their choices as well as their ability to choose. Through this view, women tend to become invisible and unpaid caregivers and “caring is experienced as a labour of love in which labour must continue even when the love falters” (Graham, 1983, p.16).

### *1.2.3.2 Women as carers*

“By doing the work of ‘wife’ and ‘mother’, women quite literally produce family life from day to day, through their joint activities with others” (DeVault, 1991, p.13).

The subordinate status of women around the world has driven scholars to find common features that cause this. Nevertheless, this quasi-universal condition is shaped by different, sometimes contradictory and context-specific “cultural conceptions and symbolizations of woman” (Ortner, 1974, p.67), as gender is a historically-variable social construct which is institutionalised through families, school, politics and culture (Laslett & Brenner, 1989). In modern industrial societies, care and autonomy are socially constructed as opposites, corresponding to the female and male spheres (Clement, 1996; Abel & Nelson, 1990). The autonomy versus care dichotomy positions

women as dependent and the female sphere as encompassing “private matters, familial duties, unpaid labor, and personal relationships” (Fisher & Tronto, 1990, p. 36). This model emphasises the role of men as being breadwinners in the outside world and women as housewives in charge of household tasks and care of their husbands, children and other extended family members (DeVault, 1991, 1999; Chodorow, 1999; Ortner, 1974), as “middle-class women were supposed to realize their ‘true’ nature by marrying, giving birth, and most importantly, tending children” (Coltrane & Galt, 2000, p.88). Nevertheless, Abel and Nelson (1990) point to the lack of relevance in women's real lives of the commonly-cited dichotomies of autonomy/nurture, reason/emotion and public/private. All of these can be shown to be meaningless by analysing women's daily lives, as both elements of the dualities are often interrelated and interdependent. This is the case for the public/private dichotomy, as empirical evidence indicates that women perform same kind of work in both spheres and that these are interrelated (Abel & Nelson, 1990; Duffy, 2011). As a result, it is not a matter of being positioned on one or other side of the dichotomy; rather, involvement in both results in double work burdens. These dichotomies function as a social construct in a system in which ideas and ideals about the female sphere continue to shape their subordinate status – in both symbolic and practical terms – in society. As DeVault (1991) suggests, the caring woman is a powerful image in acknowledging “what a woman should be” (p.1), taking part in both the representation and construction of social reality (DeVault, 1991). In a similar vein, Fisher and Tronto (1990) suggest that:

“By stressing women's emotional and moral superiority, the middle-class ideal of femininity made caring about an ideal by which to judge all women. Women who lack the time, knowledge, skills, or resources to meet the white, middle-class standard of feminine caring about are often seen as defective in their femininity. Such failure becomes a failure in achieving a basic gender identity” (Fisher and Tronto, 1990, p.42).

This approach dominates the literature on transnational mothering, in which physical distance between the mother and child is posited as impeding mothers from taking care of their children, regardless of the care at a distance that these mothers provide. Therefore, the aptitude for caring becomes not only an imposition and a burden, but a

moral imperative (Tronto 1987; England, 2005; Laslett & Brenner, 1989) by which to rank and sanction women's different choices or capabilities. The femininity ideal pointed out by Fisher and Tronto (1990) relies on the nineteenth century 'cult of domesticity', resulting from the capitalist division of labour. The cult of domesticity emphasises:

“(...) women’s emotional and moral sensibilities (versus the physical work of caring that could be done by servants), the duty of caring (versus the right to compete and express individual interest that was exercised by men), and the intensely private nature of caring (versus the public business of politics and profit-making)” (Fisher and Tronto, 1990, p.38).

The – constructed – view of women as natural caregivers (Clement, 1996; DeVault, 1991; Fisher Tronto, 1990; Harrington Meyer et al. 2000) considers caring to be “like a natural expression of one’s personality rather than work” (Clement, 1995, p.59) and a “moral calling” (Coltrane & Galt, 2000, p.88), being understood as unlimited and taken for granted (Folbre, 2012). According to this conception, care as a natural duty is derived from women’s biological functions. The mother-child link is used with particular frequency to talk about real, original and natural care (Cancian, 2000; Coltrane & Galt, 2000), with motherhood conceived as the path to the realisation of womanhood (Laslett & Brenner, 1989). In her book about the reproduction of mothering, Chodorow (1999) criticises the view of mothering as a natural fact which needs no explanation. This view emanates from the assumption that “what seems universal is instinctual, and that what is instinctual, or has instinctual components, is inevitable and unchanging” (p.14). As Chodorow indicates, this view ignores the meaning of mothering in different social and cultural contexts, by equating it with the universal experience of women's pregnancy. Chodorow (1999) questions such a view, by pointing to socialisation of children by mothers as key in the construction of what is perceived to be a natural instinct. The role of socialisation in intergenerationally transferring the image and roles of women is key because its result, “especially when one continues to live in such a gender-structured society, is a reduced ability to critically reflect on the roles one plays” (Clement, 1996, p.60). Having left the home and joined the labour force, those women who refuse to carry the double burden of productive and

reproductive work represent a failure of their own femininity, their own nature and by extension, of themselves, their families and society.

Over the last few decades, feminist scholars have focused on the caregiving role of women and their generally subordinate status worldwide. Marx and Engel's original concept of reproductive labour was based on the differentiation between the production of goods in the economy and the reproduction of the labour force necessary to maintain that productive economy (Duffy, 2007). From the 1970s onwards, feminist scholars extended this concept, to refer to “[A]ctivities such as purchasing household goods, preparing and serving food, laundering and repairing clothing, maintaining furnishings and appliances, socializing children, providing care and emotional support for adults, and maintaining kin and community ties” (Glenn, 1991, p.1). In short, to “the array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally” (Glenn, 1991, p.1). In doing so, they questioned the private/public dichotomy and the naturalisation of linking women to domesticity and its subordinate status (Duffy, 2011; Glenn 1999), which leads to the differences between the work performed inside and outside the home being overlooked (Clement, 1996; England 2005; Cancian, 2000 ; Glenn, 2000) and thus, to the work performed at home being classed as non-work (Clement, 1996; Chodorow, 1999; De Vault, 1991). The intersection between the domestic and market spheres is key in the concept of reproductive labour. Firstly, because through domestic work women create the necessary conditions for market workers’ maintenance; and secondly, through reproduction and childrearing, they replenish the future labour force (Duffy, 2011). In other words, women literally produce and reproduce workers, and the concept of reproductive labour links the capitalist system to their reproductive work.

Although reproductive labour was first coined to highlight the invisibility of unpaid work and its key role in the market economy, its meaning has expanded to include caring occupations in the labour market, which are also performed mainly by women and therefore undervalued and underpaid (Duffy, 2005, 2007, 2011). Socialist feminism views the classification of reproductive labour as women's work as related to care’s use as an instrument of oppression (Abel & Nelson, 1990; Alber & Drotbohm, 2015). This view is based on the scarce opportunities to choose this form of work, the disadvantage of women in the labour market as a result of performing care, the invisibility of their

work and alienation from it, and their embeddedness in capitalist networks through childrearing, which is seen as supporting the system with an endless supply of new workers (Abel & Nelson, 1990). This is a system in which women help to reproduce their subordinate status in society through caring (DeVault, 1991).

In contrast with the concept of reproductive labour, which focuses on women's relationship with a broader economic structure to maintain the labour force (Duffy, 2005), the concept of nurturant work highlights the emotional and relational side of care work (Duffy, 2011). Here, the emphasis is upon the unique value of caring as part of feminine morality. The feminist 'ethic of care' (Tronto, 1987; Nodding, 1984) considers women to have a distinctive and superior moral orientation (Clement, 1996). In addition, they posit that caregiving might be meaningful and fulfilling for many women, suggesting that the practice may humanise people and serve as a pattern of behaviour for building a better world. From this perspective, this school calls for the ethic of care – based on contextualism, attachment and interdependence – to be appropriated to apply to all social relationships, in contrast to the dominant ethic of justice – based on separateness, universalism and an equality/inequality duality. Both theories are 'gender-coded' and therefore hierarchical (Clement, 1996). Nevertheless, this perspective partially helps to perpetuate women's subordinate status, through the link between care and the female domain. Carrasco et al. (2011) point out how the use of the term 'care' works to support patriarchal ideology, helping reaffirm women's normative submission, because it avoids classing the practice as work, and focuses instead on the 'mysticism of care' [*mística del cuidado*], which is linked to feminine identity and emotionality, and is therefore devalued.

In summary, the efforts of care-focused feminism can be divided into two research perspectives: those who focus on paid and unpaid work, with the caregiving role seen as instrumentally oppressive (Abel & Nelson, 1990); and those who highlight its meaningfulness and positive component (Abel & Nelson, 1990; DeVault, 1991; Tong, 1998). While these approaches may be seen as contradictory, both perspectives coincide in their regard of women's capacities for care as a "human strength rather than a human weakness" (Tong, 1998, p. 163), and their common aim of fighting against gender inequalities. Moreover, while the image of the woman as carer and the subordinate status of this role is dominant across the globe, there is no unique and universal woman. There is a diverse range of women, with many different circumstances and contexts that

matter in their everyday lives and that condition them. Several scholars (Glenn, 1992, Duffy, 2011, 2007) urge us to address the fact that gender is not the only key factor when thinking about care and subordination, and that other interrelated factors, like ethnicity or social class, are also important in shaping the image and social position of women. Moreover, in transnational contexts, nationality or migration status are also influential (Duffy, 2011; Huang, 2016; Abel, 2000; Glenn, 1992; Duffy, 2007). Hierarchies are not only a matter of middle class white women versus other women. The ‘other’ covers a great diversity of countries of origin, sometimes prompting racialised hierarchies (Huang, 2017; Zontini, 2010). Finally, age, generation and the specific cultural and societal roles attached to them shape the different experiences and positioning of women in different social settings.

### **1.3 Researching Transnational families and care**

#### **1.3.1 Introduction: Care and transnational families**

Care concerns are central to the different phases of migration and often shape the different morphologies of transnational families:

“(…) the family is best conceptualized not only as a structural unit, but also as a series of relationships or a network of individuals bound by an ideology of shared kindred that engages in social production and reproduction, caregiving and feeding work” (Landolt and Da, 2005, p.627).

The social production, reproduction, caregiving and feeding work mentioned by Landolt and Da needs to continue, even when faced with the challenge of distance. As Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) state, in the first migratory stage, different family situations and family members' diverse individual paths and age stages condition the decision to migrate or not, as well as who migrates and who stays; later on, the need either to give or receive care instigates mobility (Baldassar, 2007). Particularly, children and the older family generations circulate between countries, seeking to lessen the expenditures associated with social reproduction (Haller & Landolt, 2005). As a result, a growing body of literature has focused on the process of growing up (Lam et al. 2019;



Friedman &, Schultersand, 2011) and ageing (Dossa & Coe, 2017; Horn & Schweppe, 2017; Näre et al. 2017; Walsh & Näre, 2016; Sun, 2017; Zontini, 2015; Baldassar, 2008) transnationally, as well as the struggles of adult children to cope with the care needs of their ageing parents (Baldassar et al. 2007; Baldassar & Wilding, 2014; Lam et al. 2002; Baldassar & Baldock, 1999) and children (Chib et al. 2014; Kilkey et al. 2014; Hoang & Yeoh, 2012; Parreñas, 2008) across borders. Nevertheless, the caregiver and care receiver roles are not exclusive, and grandparents can perform both roles sequentially or simultaneously (Baldassar, 2007; Merla, 2011; Mujahid et al. 2011; Lam et al. 2002).

Certain contexts serve to adjust family gender roles as a result of migration processes, while in others, the male breadwinning and female caregiving roles are reinforced (Lam et al. 2002; Gamburd, 2000). In general terms, migration incorporates a potential for the freedom and empowerment of women (Dreby, 2010; Huang & Yeoh, 2005; Yeoh et al. 2005; Lam et al. 2002; Hadi, 2001). This is particularly true regarding women who, in their home country, are subjected to a strong patriarchal ideology; for these women, a new role as breadwinner challenges family power dynamics and distance provides them with more autonomy. Nevertheless, they may be also subject to greater supervision from their husbands' families or the broader community (Plaza, 2007; D'aubeterre, 2002). In recent decades, the literature on care and migration has focused on transnational mothering (Chib et al. 2014; Parreñas, 2005a; Peng & Wong, 2013; Boccagni, 2012; Madianou, 2012; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997) and, to a much lesser extent, on transnational fathering (Lutz, 2018; Kilkey et al. 2014; Parreñas, 2008), by assuming that they constitute very different phenomena (Carling et al. 2012). Mazzucato and Schans (2011) have criticised this perspective, pointing out that the nuclear family model is assumed to be the universal family form, without paying attention to specific contexts and cultures. As such, physical proximity between parents and children is seen as the norm. Particularly, the mothers' migration is seen as an obstacle to fulfilling their normative mothering role, despite the fact that they perform the dual role of breadwinner and nurturer (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). The gendered ideologies of mothering – and fathering – affect children's expectations and the broad conceptualisation of migration and its adequacy (Abrego, 2009; Dreby, 2006; Parreñas 2005b, Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). While the role of women as caregivers is scrutinised, so is that of men as breadwinners (Abrego, 2009; Dreby, 2006). Despite all these factors, ideas about mothering are reshaped in certain

transnational contexts (Da, 2003).

Returning to the global care chains perspective, in which many transnational mothering studies are framed, its focus on motherhood can lead to the essentialisation of women (Oso, 2016; Catarino & Morokvasic, 2005) by reducing the category of ‘woman’ to that of ‘mother’. The permanent equation of women with the role of caring mother is present in this and broader literature through the use of such expressions as ‘other mothers’ (Bloch, 2017; Bonizzoni, 2012; Carling et al. 2012; Graham et al. 2012; Schmalzbauer 2004; Orellana et al. 2001; Alicea, 1997) to refer to the people who are in charge of daily childcare in families in which mothers do not cohabit with their children. Despite the fact that the ‘other mothers’ approach may help to make care work and female networks beyond the nuclear family visible (Bloch, 2017), it reifies the mother-child bond and essentialises women through their mothering role. Similarly, the concept ‘mothering father’, (Lam & Yeoh, 2018; Lutz, 2018), in reference to those fathers who engage in care, assumes caring to be a female attribute and, moreover, a motherly one. Additionally, based on the social importance of the mother role, children who are cared for by other female members of the extended family may refer to them as their mothers (Yarris, 2017). While the literature on transnational families has been dominated by these trends and biased approaches, a more nuanced research perspective is emerging, in which the links between family and care in transnational contexts are explored from a holistic perspective.

### 1.3.2 Grounding in the Care Circulation Framework

Based on their own experience in research with transnational families, Baldassar and Merla realised that previous approaches failed to capture the circulation of care “in all its formulations, across distance and over time” (Merla & Baldassar, 2016, p.276). In order to fill this gap, they proposed the notion of care circulation as both a methodological lens and conceptual framework. Baldassar et al. (2014b) conceive of caregiving as a common feature of families which “binds members together in intergenerational networks of reciprocity and obligation, love and trust” (p.7). Nevertheless, they suggest that such networks encompass unequal power and exploitation, the exchanges of care in these families being “inherently reciprocal and asymmetrical, governed by cultural understandings and histories” (Merla & Baldassar,

2016, pp.276). Overall, they are based on a mechanism of generalised reciprocity, through which “people give care without measuring exactly the amount they receive, but with the expectation and obligation that care will be returned to them” (Baldassar & Merla, 2014b, p.7). Because of this, they suggest, care roles – caregiver and care-receiver – are dynamic (Kilkey & Merla, 2014; Gherghel & LeGall, 2010; Merla & Baldassar 2010), being determined by individual life paths, family-cycles and specific family events or crisis situations (Kilkey & Merla, 2014).

The care circulation framework incorporates actors beyond the hegemonic model of the nuclear family, through reference to the notion of family network, including both those who migrate and those who stay behind. As such, the authors define family as based on relatedness or the engagement – to various and changing degrees – of the various individuals in “family survival and maintenance” (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) through their practical, emotional and symbolic care activity (Merla & Baldassar, 2016). This approach challenges the assumption that family and care are bounded to proximity, and conceive of care as multidimensional, recovering Finch and Mason's (1993) care typology, which includes “hands on” care, emotional, practical and financial support, and accommodation. The different dimensions condition the ways of exchanging care which are seen as suitable, whether proximate caring practices, proxy caring practices or at-a-distance care (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Baldassar, 2008a). Based on these features, research on care circulation in transnational families requires engaging with a life course approach – and, if possible, a longitudinal study (Koffman, 2006) – incorporating a multi-sited methodology and surpassing the boundaries of physical experiences to inquire into virtual ones (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

The care circulation framework posits that care circulates between different family members, across distance and over time (Baldassar & Merla, 2014a, b). Nevertheless, this does not mean that such a circulation is not shaped or constrained by other factors. Indeed, the willingness to exchange or perform care cannot be equated with the capability to do so. In Merla & Baldassar's earlier work (2011) they created the ‘care-giving capabilities framework’ through which they pointed to six factors which affect families' abilities to care across borders, including: mobility, communication, social relations, time allocation, education/knowledge and paid work. Later on, Baldassar & Merla (2014) suggested that macro-, meso- and micro factors affect the capacity and sense of obligation regarding care within transnational families. As mentioned above,

‘normative obligation’ is “based on notions of duty and responsibility” (Baldassar et al. 2007, p.14) which govern family and related social behaviours in a determined society (Finch & Mason, 1983). As such, micro factors are linked to the normative obligations which define cultural expectations regarding care within the individual and family cycles (Baldassar, 2007). The meso factors refer to the community level and “encompass the relevance of networks of co-nationals over time, trajectories of settlement, and community contexts and services” (Baldassar, 2007, p. 278). Finally, Kilkey and Merla (2014) coined the concept of ‘situated transnationalism’ to emphasise how institutional contexts may affect the capability of the different members of transnational families to participate in the circulation of care. They pointed out that “the capacity to care transnationally is influenced by migrants’ and their kin’s respective positioning in the migration, welfare, gendered care, and working-time regimes of their societies of origin and destination” (Merla & Baldassar, 2017, p.170), linking local, national and global contexts. Moreover, they included transportation and communication policies as influential factors. On the whole, in their framework, the notion of ‘regime’ refers to the conglomerate of institutional factors which condition care arrangements and care resources in transnational families. They define the different regimes as follows:

- The *migration regime* includes three main dimensions: firstly, the policies that regulate “exit/entry/residency rights” (p.215); secondly, the regulations that entitle migrants to access social benefits; and thirdly, the migration cultures in both sending and receiving countries
- The *welfare regime* includes the rights to access the health system, an income, housing and education (Kilkey & Merla, 2014).
- The *gendered care regime* focuses on whom care responsibilities fall to; it includes policies regarding the right to receive care, either through state provision or financing of services, and the right to arrange time to care (leave, changes to working patterns, etc.). These factors are linked to gendered care cultures, which determine the “norms on appropriate gender division of labour and appropriate forms of care for dependants” (p.216).

- The *working-time regime* refers to the policies which serve to regulate working hours.
- *Transportation and communication policies* regulate the availability, accessibility and affordability of these services.

Finally, Huang et al. (2012) suggest that “care is ‘made over’ as it moves transnationally” (p.130). In this process of being made over, care is reworked according to the social and political-economic context in which it occurs. As a result, the authors argue, the extent to which care may be transposed without change taking place must be reconsidered. Moreover, they suggest, research needs to focus on how conceptions and understandings of care change based on the context in which it is performed, including the “different spheres (such as care as paid work in the public sphere versus unpaid work in the private sphere) and at different care sites (such as household versus institutional spaces)” (p.131), given that the broader social and cultural context(s) shape how care is conceived – and as a result practiced and experienced – by different actors in their diverse settings.

In summary, research on care circulation in transnational families requires a focus upon family networks or the “transnational domestic sphere” (Gardner & Grillo, 2002), through a micro perspective which encompasses a form of “transnationalism from below” (Baldassar, 2007). It also requires acknowledging and shedding light on how specific migratory paths, and the cultural and institutional contexts which circumscribe them, affect the circulation of care, and as a result, the social reproduction of families (Koffman, 2006).

# CHAPTER

## 2

### 2 TRANSNATIONAL CHILDHOODS

#### 2.1 Contesting childhoods

##### 2.1.1 Normative childhoods

In recent years, scholars have highlighted the need to go beyond the adult-centred perspectives formerly predominant in migration research and to focus on children and their experiences (Gardner, 2012; Ni Laoire, 2011; White et al 2011; Dobson, 2009; Thorne et al., 2001). This focus upon minors may also involve questioning hegemonic notions of the child and childhood, as these are socially and culturally constructed (Fass, 2005; Katz, 2004; James et al.1998; Zelizer, 1985) and vary with location and history. As Orellana and her colleagues (2001) state:

“Age divisions, like those of gender and ‘race’, vary in organization and meaning; in different cultural and historical contexts, there may be different assumptions about the needs, capacities, and appropriate activities of children of different ages” (Orellana et al. 2001, p.573).

Zelizer (1985) suggests that over the course of the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth century, the value of children in the United States shifted: from being useful contributors from a productive point of view, they became useless from this perspective but emotionally priceless. In her historical research about migration and childhood in the United States, Fass (2005) suggests that children cannot be conceptualised solely as victims or innocents and questions the idea “that the normal

state of child life is stability” (p.937). She refers to the hegemony of the Western notion of the child as being part of globalisation and points to the struggles against the exploitation of child labour in factories as the first step towards this contemporary construction of childhood, which is based on their dependence upon adults and the conception of this specific age-stage as the time for play and schooling. Nevertheless, there are places “where children’s ‘adult-like’ tasks are considered normative, an important contribution to family functioning, and also essential in preparing the child for adulthood” (Bauer, 2016, p.25). In some contexts, even small children can participate in the household economy through tasks like feeding animals (Leinaweaver, 2010). As Bauer (2016) highlights, while such contributions from children are generally portrayed as child labour, carrying connotations of abuse and inappropriate treatment, they must be understood in context.

Aitken (2010) highlights the tendency to separate childhood from adulthood, either to protect children or to exclude them. From the perspective of the ethics of care, Cockburn (2005) posits that adults’ and children’s autonomy or dependency depends on the context and is not based on their age condition; thus, he highlights contextuality as key in caring relations. Furthermore, Cockburn suggests that this perspective allows children to be situated “within the context of the here and now rather than in terms of their ‘futuraity’” (p.77), attending to their immediate needs. Cockburn draws on Thorne’s (Thorne, 1987 in Cockburn, 2005, p.82) statement about children being defined in opposition to adults, as children are understood to be a sort of work-in-progress. Moreover, as Valentine (2000) suggests, “children are increasingly conceptualized in terms of their family dependency” (p.258), being objects of a higher level of control from parents and society (Thorne et al 2001).

### 2.1.2 Who are children?

If childhood is a social construction, the question of who children are needs to be addressed. Fass (2005) and Michael (2009) highlight the importance of differentiating between younger and older children who, they point out, are often described using the same label. Pantea (2011) points to the lack of research on older children and young people, in contrast to the increasing body of research on children; in her research she defines ‘young people’ as individuals aged between 14 and 20 years old. Dreby (2007)

distinguishes between the preadolescent and adolescent stages and she states that, while the concept of children is constructed in opposition to adults, she has found different features and degrees of agency management in children of different ages. Again, where the category of children ends and the category of young people begins is a matter of context; taken in isolation, concepts like young children, preadolescents, adolescents and young people mean nothing. Nevertheless, Fass (2005) suggests that, while childhood remains culturally-specific, adolescence “may have become a universal identity in the context of globalization as the accoutrements and culture of youth have spread everywhere through the very channels that define globalization” (pp.348-349). She points to the construction of adolescence as a product of capitalism and she links it to the contemporary ideal of childhood as the time for play and leisure, which is extended through institutionalised education. Conversely, Valentine (2000) focuses on how, through a process of individualisation “the category child/youth is dissolving into adulthood and erasing relationships between childhood and adulthood based purely on hierarchy and deference” (p.257). These competing conceptions about what adolescence is demonstrate the need for each study to be framed in a specific context, in which different constructions of age-stages must be made explicit, if we are to get the whole picture. Moreover, as Gardner (2012) suggests, it is worth taking into account the importance of the “temporality of social life” (p.897) as children move through the life course. As Gardner reminds us, the life course itself is also “historically and culturally variable” (p.897) and it intersects in different ways with migration processes, as well as with other family and social contexts.

In what follows, I will refer to children as those individuals who, irrespective of their age, are named as such in the studies I refer to, making some explicit clarifications at certain moments. On the whole, this chapter focuses on the roles and experiences of those people who are generally conceptualised as non-adults, despite the fact that becoming an adult refers to different ages and processes in diverse social settings of the research.

### 2.1.3 Children's agency

Olwig (1999) points to children as pivotal points in the construction of transnational social fields. Nevertheless, children are often portrayed as ‘luggage’ (Thorne, 2001;



Orellana et al. 2001) or “objects” (Dobson, 2009, 356) when dealing with migration, as they are perceived as dependents and “too young to understand anything” (Hoang & Yeoh, 2015, p.190). Fass (2005) highlights the role of children as migration drivers, as migration is often described by migrant parents as a path towards giving children a better future and the various processes of separation and reunification usually have children as their central concern (Hoang & Yeoh, 2015; Dreby, 2010; Thorne et al. 2001). Although decision-making is rarely shared with them (Beazley et al. 2017; Hoang et al. 2015; Dreby, 2007; Michael, 2009), a few scholars have shown that children's agency has an impact on planning further migration steps (Dreby, 2010; Bonizzoni, 2015). Moreover, Orellana et al. (2001) and Valenzuela (1999) highlight the role of children in how families settle and make a living in migrants' destination countries. As Gardner (2012) has noted, children facilitate the making of new contacts and networks in the destination country; they also may serve as link to the origin country, through their physical presence there or through the parents' desires to maintain their ties with the homeland for future generations (Orellana et al. 2001; Mand, 2010; Thorne et al. 2001; Soto, 1989). Through confronting or reformulating parents' desires and understandings, children act as cultural agents to create new meanings about practices and perceptions of place and space in transnational context (Gardner, 2012).

Research on family migration tends to neglect the power dimensions of adult-children relations or assume that vertical hierarchies cannot be questioned. Nevertheless, some scholars have pointed out how children employ different strategies of “resistance, resilience and reworking” (Hoang et al., 2015, p.263) to get their voices heard “by whining, nagging, complaining, protesting, or refusing to engage with adults' agendas” (Orellana et al., 2001, p.587). They have even been shown to use the idea of children who live at a physical distance from their parents being victims to disguise spoiled behaviour, making this socially acceptable and creating sympathy for them (Pribilsky, 2001), all of which means that some children are able to exert a certain degree of agency in managing their own lives. Particularly, children who stay in their home countries with caregivers who are not their parents find themselves in an empowering situation, due to parental distance and the caregivers' dependence on remittances (Dreby, 2007; Poeze et al. 2017). As a result, they have a greater ability to shape family decisions and to influence family reunification processes (Bonizzoni, 2015; Dreby, 2007; Olwig, 1999). Pantea (2011), in her research on Romanian transnational families, highlights

how migration may challenge the power hierarchies within families and suggests that vertical hierarchies tend to relax, becoming more or less flexible at different stages of migration. Moreover, age and the process of growing up are key to understanding children's levels of power and agency within their families (Hoang & Yeoh, 2015; Dreby, 2007; Thorne et al. 2001).

#### 2.1.4 Children's care roles

Children are commonly positioned as dependents and therefore understood to be care-receivers in caring relations (Cockburn, 2005). Nevertheless, this positioning is too simplistic as, firstly, care can flow in more than one direction in caring relationships. It is possible for a child to receive but also give care; for example, she/he receives care from her/his parents and at the same time provides care for her/his younger siblings. Secondly, care encompasses a broad range of activities and tasks, through which children contribute, to a greater or lesser extent, to the daily functioning or well-being of other family members or the family unit as a whole (Becker, 2007). As Thorne et al. (2001)'s research suggests, as children grow up, they become more independent and contribute to systems of household labour through the performance of such tasks as housework, care or gardening, these generally being divided according to gender. For example, domestic tasks tend to fall to daughters more than sons (Valenzuela, 1999; Lee & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2011, Parreñas, 2005). As children's contributions generally occur outside of the formal labour market and therefore do not result in direct economic remuneration, they tend to remain invisible and do not carry social recognition (Becker, 2007). Orellana et al. (2001) highlight this double dimension of children, as care-dependents on the one hand and family-workers on the other; they also suggest that some children may perform additional jobs, such as helping in the family business or on the streets.

It is important to understand children as active agents, as they are able to care for themselves but also for other family members (Cockburn, 2005). In migrant families, the role of children as family caregivers is salient, as they may contribute to family functioning through their translation and interpreting tasks (Menjivar, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999; Bauer, 2016). As such, they perform the role of tutors (teaching and translating), surrogate parents (interactions in the school) and advocates (mediating

official formalities) in various circumstances (Valenzuela, 1999). Bauer's analysis suggests that the interactions between migrant families and institutions or other social actors are biased, often being affected by “racial, ethnic, class and linguistic stigmatization” (p.28). This drives children, when carrying out their interpreting task, to select and manipulate the information given to their parents, in order to minimise the possible damage that reality may cause them, while ensuring that this omission will not affect tangible matters (*ibid*). Finally, some scholars (Adugna, 2017, Baldassar et al. 2014) have highlighted the role of children in teaching family members from other generations how to use new technologies, this being key in creating and maintaining ties across borders. The roles of children in families and society should not be taken for granted and the boundaries between the caregiver and care-receiver roles must be understood to be theoretical categories more than practical realities.

## **2.2 Transnational childhoods and processes of growing up**

De Vault (2003) suggests there is a “taken-for-granted association of family with children” (p. 1296), as the presence of children determines family routines. Furthermore, she highlights the role of “joinings and separations” (p.1303) in time and space in family-making, pointing out that “this continual movement – together, apart, together, apart – is constitutive of the structures of social life for both children and families” (p. 1303). Her research is based on families who live under the same roof on a daily basis, a condition that does not apply to transnational families; nevertheless, her focus is useful when studying such families. These ‘joinings’ and separations should be understood to include not only those mediated by physical co-presence, but also other ways of joining together in daily life, such as: co-presence by proxy, through the embodiment of the missed person in objects or other people; imagined co-presence and virtual co-presence (Baldassar, 2008). Distance between family members and the strategies used to minimise or counter its impacts are key to understanding transnational family lives.

Different types of childcare arrangements take place in the diverse range of transnational families. A first level of analysis may consist of making a division between those which take place in the so-called origin and destination countries, respectively. While it is useful to make analytical distinctions, the lives of the children

and other family members involved in these kinds of transnational arrangements should really be understood as a continuum, as isolating specific care practices or age stages will provide only a partial understanding of them. Nevertheless, the literature on transnational childhoods tends to provide a very limited contextualisation of these practices within broader personal and family cycles and relies instead on specific circumstances or moments. Regarding transnational childcare arrangements in the home country, the relevant literature can be divided into two main lines of research: on the one hand, focusing on those children born in the homeland who stay there while their parents migrate, commonly known as ‘left-behind children’ and, on the other hand, studying children who move from the migration destination country to the country of their parents. In both cases, the literature reports different types of arrangements in which extended family members, particularly grandmothers, take over the role of main caregiver. Regarding childcare arrangements and the experiences of the children in the destination country, most studies focus on reunification processes (once the children join the nuclear family after experiencing spatial dislocation) and the process and outcomes of growing up in a transnational family, with a focus on identity construction and transnational engagement.

## 2.2.1 Childhood in the home country

### 2.2.1.1 *Child circulation and kin-based fostering practices*

Mothers are expected to be the primary childcare givers. Nevertheless, models of families in which this is not the case can be found all around the globe. Child circulation is defined as “the relocation of a child or young person into a new household for locally meaningful reasons” (Fonseca, 1986, in Leinaweaver, 2007, p. 164). These kinds of practices have been documented in various countries worldwide “as part of a common survival and betterment strategy in the context of social and economic inequality” (Leineaweaver, 2007, p.163), all parties receiving part of the benefit of relocation – through companionship, instrumental support or both – and the practice potentially driving the expansion of kinship networks through relatedness (Leineaweaver, 2014, 2007; Walmsley, 2008). In some regions, these sorts of practices reflect a concept of childrearing as a collective responsibility, as is the case in the Caribbean and some parts

of Africa (Poeze et al. 2017; Ho, 1999). Nevertheless, while understood as a collective responsibility, it is generally women who are in charge of day-to-day care (Poeze et al. 2017; Ho, 1999; Soto, 1989).

In those areas in which child fostering prevails, transnational care arrangements have been conceptualised as extensions of these local practices, these being key in enabling and maintaining migration fluxes worldwide (Poeze et al. 2017; Walmsley, 2008; Moran-Taylor, 2008; Ho, 1999; Soto, 1989). As such, when the parents migrate, they are not substituted with a surrogate or adoptive parent, but childrearing responsibilities continue to be shared by the remaining pool of relatives (Leinaweaver, 2014). Under these circumstances, migration is conceptualised as positive for these families (Olwig, 1999). Nevertheless, as a consequence of the intersection of these local practices with global influences, they are being reshaped. On the one hand, regarding care of ageing family members, some scholars have reported that traditional care expectations that were based on generation or gender are shifting, in certain settings, towards care-related responsibilities based on economic resources linked to migration (Leinaweaver, 2014). On the other hand, families have to face a growing stigmatisation of child fostering practices, as these practices do not fit with the hegemonic model of the nuclear family that is bounded by proximity and in which the role of physical co-presence between child and parents is key. This is occurring in the origin country, where new normative family ideals are starting to replace earlier understandings and care expectations (Tymczuk, 2011; Leinaweaver, 2010; Pribilisky, 2001), as well in the destination countries, where families may be confronted with negative stereotypes. An illustrative example is that documented by Soto (1989), regarding the preference of West-Indians in New York for naming this type of practice ‘minding’ or ‘caring for’, because the word ‘fostering’ is associated with migrants’ experiences of discrimination in the United States, where these non-normative practices are socially sanctioned.

Research on transnational families often becomes research about separation, as an immense and all-consuming hole which swallows up families. Here, researchers face the same challenge: being able to understand practices in their context(s). To do so means reconsidering what the implications are for childhood, family and migration beyond hegemonic models and understandings. As mentioned above, scholars have documented practices across the world of the circulation of children when parents do

not migrate, and families in which childcare is a shared responsibility among a wide pool of relatives. As a result, migration processes in those areas are not seen as challenging or breaking families, rather, migration has become part of their routines. Nevertheless, the meanings of migration, as well of family and childhood, are not static but a constant work-in-progress, meaning that hegemonic models can penetrate different societal spaces, for example, through public discourses about normative childhood in the media (Binah-Pollak, 2014; Tymczuk, 2011). Keeping in mind the unavoidable shadow of these hegemonic models, the following subsections focus on the care arrangements and experiences of children in transnational families.

#### 2.2.1.2 *The literature on left-behind children*

While one of several family members migrate, others – who are more or less close to the migrant – remain in the origin country. Scholars argue that insufficient attention has been paid to those who stay behind, compared to those who move (Toyota et al. 2007). Moreover, the amount of consideration given to different family members' relationships at a distance is very uneven, with the focus of family migration studies tending to be parent-child separation: a circumstance which is portrayed as a painful and traumatic process. The left-behind children discourse (Pantea, 2011) tends to focus on the unnatural condition of parent-child separation and its negative consequences, ranging from detrimental physical conditions to emotional damage and its derived consequences, such as aggressive behaviour or addictions (Antman, 2012; Guang et al. 2017; Lei et al. 2017; Perreira & Ornelas, 2011; Suarez- Orozco et al. 2002; Tienda y Haskins, 2011; Tymczuk, 2011).

Families often follow the serial migration model, in which parents migrate first and the children are later reunited with them in the destination country (Orellana et al. 2001; Phoenix & Bauer, 2012). This means that reunification often takes longer than expected, resulting in frustration and resentment for various family members (Dreby, 2010). Different institutional contexts and cultures shape different migration and reunification patterns for families, particularly those migrating from poor countries. Parental migration is often understood as a sacrifice in the search for a better future for the family, and especially for their children's future. Those parents who migrate also worry about how their children's lives are going while they are absent, about their health, the

adequacy of their substitute caregiving, the dangers that their physical separation may create, driving to a distant emotional relationship within their children (Orellana et al. 2001). The decision to migrate and physically leave the children behind is not an easy one. In many cases, parents decide to migrate alone, as working conditions in the host country do not allow them to manage childcare, get access to basic rights (such as healthcare or schooling) or it involves a dangerous journey (Dreby, 2010). The advances in transport and communication technologies are key in their willingness to migrate, as it allows them to keep active relationships with their children, despite spatial dislocation, and to travel back quickly if needed (Dreby, 2010).

Relating at a distance has been reported to affect their present and future parent-child relationships. Bonizzonni (2015) argues that the length, continuity and progress of interactions and communication over time are key in shaping children's experiences and feelings; and has also been reported to affect children's subjective well-being (Graham et al. 2012). Particularly, the quality of conversations is important, as children may feel bored or controlled if the conversations are centred on schooling or instrumental matters (Hoang et al., 2015). Whether it is the father or the mother who migrates also matters, as it appears to affect children's subjective well-being differently, the absence of mothers being regarded as more damaging (Graham et al., 2012), as a result of the different cultural contexts shaping maternal and paternal roles and expectations (Abrego, 2009; Dreby, 2006; Parreñas 2005b, Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). While receiving presents from their parents (Hoang et al. 2015), and improving their material living conditions due to parental remittances, children may feel that their effort is still insufficient (Parreñas, 2005) and suffer due to their separation from their parents (Dreby, 2010; Schamalzbour, 2004). Scholars have reported that this kind of care arrangement may result in a double "set of disruptions in attachments" (Suarez-Orozco et al. 2011, p.224): from the parents in the initial stage of migration, and from the caregiver once the family is reunited in the destination country. The anguish is expected to be stronger when they have not been told about departure beforehand. Occasionally, the children's caregivers in the home country use white lies to minimise the impact of the parents' departure, as a culturally legitimated way to protect them, while also focusing on the parents' sacrifice (Hoang et al., 2015).

Regarding childcare arrangements, grandparents – and particularly grandmothers – are commonly the children's physically-present carers on a day-to-day basis (Yarris, 2017;

Bonizzoni, 2015; Dreby, 2010; Moran-Taylor, 2008; Tse & Waters, 2013; Parreñas, 2005; Schmalzbauer, 2004; Orellana et al. 2001). These grandparents are often claimed to be inadequate caregivers by the media in countries such as Mexico (Dreby, 2010), Ukraine (Tymczuck, 2011) and China (Binah-Pollack, 2014), through the portrayal of child neglect, which may lead to a broad range of problems, from physical issues to psychological problems or addictions. These problems, they suggest, would be avoided if the children lived with their parents and the parents would privilege emotional relationships over material provision. The discourse emanating from the media in these countries reduces migration and its outcomes to a set of questionable decisions, obscuring any structural constraints and the lack of alternatives.

Nevertheless, in contrast with the portrayal of children cared for by their grandparents in the Mexican and Ukrainian media, Dreby (2010) and Tymczuck (2011) found that most children are not neglected. Similarly, it is possible to look to parental migration as a possible cause of some children's negative outcomes but gaining a deeper insight into the wider context means finding additional causes for emerging problems (Pribilsky, 2001). Additionally, many scholars have pointed to benefits resulting from these kinds of circumstances, such as better educational outcomes (Morooka & Liang, 2009). On the whole, the experiences of children who are separated from their migrant parents are not black or white, nor are they homogeneous. Beyond the left-behind discourse, the feelings reported by those children are diverse and often contradictory (Graham et al. 2012; Popa, 2012). On the one hand, children understand the reasons why their parents have migrated and they acknowledge the efforts their parents have made and their positive outcomes, such as improving their daily living conditions and future prospects (Hu, 2017; Hoang et al., 2015). On the other, they miss their parents and often their feelings of vulnerability and loneliness compete with resentment (Jia & Tian, 2010; Dreby, 2007). The individual and subjective experiences of each child are framed within different local and global settings, which result in different degrees of approval or refusal of their parent's migratory practices. Moreover, factors such as different childcare arrangements during parental absence, transnational communication, the former parent-child relationship, age, gender, social class and the legal status of parental migration – allowing them to visit or not – also matter in determining the different experiences of children, which are highly heterogeneous and mutable (Hoang et al. 2015; Dreby, 2010).



### 2.2.1.3 *Sent-back practices*

Sometimes children are sent to their family's origin country, where they are cared for by extended family members, while their parents remain working in the migration destination country. These offspring are labelled 'sent-back children', nevertheless this may not imply a journey back home for them, as children are often born in the so-called destination country and as such, through this type of practice they get in touch, for the very first time (in a physical sense), with their families' home country. While these types of practices are often discursively anchored in cultural conceptions, such as enabling children to get in touch with the home country, its culture and their extended family members (Soto, 1989), they are also subject to the broader social and economic context and conditions (Orellana et al., 2001). Scholars have reported that these practices are instigated for different reasons: one of them being the difficulties experienced by parents in the migration destination country in coping with work in the labour market and childcare, as in the case of Turkish (Inglis & Manderson, 1994) and Chinese (Bohr & Tse, 2009) families; or the emergence of crisis situations, such as health problems which prevent them from providing extensive care to children (Soto, 1989). Moreover, they have also pointed to transnational discipline (Foner, 2009; Orellana et al. 2001) as a way of avoiding adolescents getting in trouble and re-shaping their behaviour through the ideological link with the home country, as a less flexible and more disciplined context than the migration destination country (Thorne et al., 2001; Soto, 1989). Similarly, the family's home country is often perceived as safer (Soto, 1989), this being linked to the parents' gendered concerns about their offspring. An example of this can be seen in Yemeni migrant families, for whom alcohol and other substances are perceived as boy's risks, while for girls the main concerns are related to romantic relationships (Thorne et al., 2001). Finally, some families conceive sending-back practices as part of schooling strategies (Orellana et al., 2001; Ho, 1999) and others send the children to the home countries for holidays, in order to establish ties with their extended family members and the families' homeland (King et al. 2014).

These transnational care arrangements allow families to lessen the expenditures associated with social reproduction (Haller & Landolt, 2005), maximising their available resources (social, cultural and economic) across borders by taking advantage of the more positive aspects and opportunities in both, the so-called home and

destination countries, while circumventing the negative ones. These practices, in contrast to the aforementioned ones (left-behind practices), are generally described in more positive terms, as they may serve to address children's behavioural problems or to provide them with additional cultural capital. The key point is the fact that, in most cases, sending-back practices tend to take place at later age, when the deviance of parental-child physical distance is more tolerated. Nevertheless, this is not always the case: the so-called Chinese 'satellite babies' (Wong, 2015; Bohr & Whitfield, 2011; Rodriguez García, 2011; Bohr & Tse, 2009) actually fall in between 'sent-back' and 'left-behind' practices. On the one hand, these children are born in the migration destination country and then they are sent to China, but as this happens at a very young age (generally under one year old), the differences between these practices are blurred.

#### 2.2.1.4 *The caregivers*

As Toyota et al. (2007) state: "leaving behind' often entails emotional and psychological struggles as well as complex rearrangements of the material aspects of daily life" (p.157). Once the parents migrate, other caregivers are in charge of the children who remain in the family's home country, or who are sent there. Despite their key role in care arrangements and family-functioning across borders, the role of children's caregivers has been largely neglected (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). Graham et al. (2012) suggest the need to focus on the "care triangle" (p.1) as an essential means of exploring the experiences of left-behind children, through and between their interactions with parents and other caregiver(s). Several researchers have described the tense relationship between caregivers and parents, due to the reticence (Mummert, 2009) or the scarcity of resources and economic burdens (Orellana et al. 2001) of the former, and the different points of view about children's needs held by each side. Poeze et al. (2017) emphasise how caregivers carefully select the information that they give to migrant parents to avoid any suspicion about their management, particularly regarding remittances for expenses and especially if the grandmother is not the main caregiver. Nevertheless, in most cases, grandmothers, or other female kin, are the children's daily caregivers (Bonizzoni, 2015; Moran-Taylor, 2008; Tse & Waters, 2013; Parreñas, 2005; Schmalzbauer, 2004; Orellana et al. 2001) while parents migrate. The networks of female caregivers (Carling et al., 2012; Ho, 1999), also referred as 'middle women'

(Dreby, 2010, p.33), coordinate and provide physically co-present care to children on a daily basis through a joint effort with the mother. Furthermore, non-kin members can also be in charge, such as close friends or pastors (Poeze et al. 2017) and, to a lesser extent, paid caregivers may also be involved (Hondagneu & Avila, 1997).

Scholars have highlighted the role of caregivers in the home country as mediators between physically-distant parents and children (Dreby, 2010; Hoang et al. 2015, Poeze et al. 2017), as caregivers' day-to-day interaction builds a close relationship with the children, which is not always possible to develop at the same level with parents, due to restrictions on communication across borders (based on limited infrastructural development, economic resources, time – including different time zones – and/or parents avoiding calling, as they blame themselves for not being able to provide with remittances). The strong bonds between children and caregivers may even condition the willingness of the children to be reunited with their parents (Bonizzoni, 2015) and, as mentioned above, for some children this may imply a double level of suffering: first through the separation from their parents when they migrate and later from the caregiver, when children are reunited with their nuclear family in the host country (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Nevertheless, while this suffering is emphasised by researchers, the literature lacks recognition of how children may receive positive outcomes from developing a close relationship with a broader pool of relatives, receiving care and warmth from all of them. The idealised relationship between caregivers in the home country and children may also incorporate power struggles, with children lacking in discipline and/or complaining to their parents about caregivers' behaviour, particularly regarding the use of remittances (Foner & Dreby, 2011).

Finally, through these skipped-generation arrangements – in which the parents' generation is physically absent on a daily basis – both children and grandparents may experience mutual benefits (Leineaweaver, 2010; Dreby, 2010; Moran-Taylor, 2008): from emotional care and companionship to sharing household responsibilities and migration remittances. Particularly when the grandparents are economically dependent on their adult children, they find these types of care arrangements to be a “double incentive to send support to the home” (Olwig, 1999, p.268) by filling the care slot for both generations (Leinaweaver, 2010). Nevertheless, caregivers in the homeland may also struggle to find alternative solutions – such as borrowing money – when remittances are scarce (Poeze, 2017; Yarris, 2017; Moran-Taylor, 2008), putting them

in a very delicate situation, in which they are expected to be able to provide for themselves and the children

## 2.2.2 Childhood in the destination country

While the previous section focused on childcare arrangements in the home country, in this section, the focus shifts to those present in the destination country. Firstly, it addresses the process of reunification between children and parents that takes place after they have been physically distant on a daily basis for varying amounts of time. Secondly, it explores the practices of transnational grandparenting that occur in the so-called destination country. And thirdly, the scope is widened to encompass the experiences of growing up in these circumstances, particularly with reference to the negotiation of identity and transnational ties.

### 2.2.2.1 *Reunification processes*

Despite the fact that distance between the parents – whether the mother, father or both – and children is presented as an undesirable consequence and reunification as the desired end, these processes – even though surrounded by good intentions – may also be difficult (Foner & Dreby, 2011; Menjivar 2006; Artico 2003; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2002). Reunification can be perceived to have arrived too late, while parent-child bonds have been lost on the way, resulting in a struggle to recover or to build the relationship (Bonizzoni, 2015; Menjivar 2006; Artico 2003). In her research about mother-child relations in migrant families in Italy, Bonizzoni (2015) argues that this phase is perceived by both mothers and children as being characterised by a gap “in intimacy and reciprocal knowledge” (p.173) and that to develop intimacy requires time and effort. The lack of familiarity is often reflected first in their physical estrangement, as they may not be able to completely recognise each other when they are reunited (Bonizzoni, 2015; Menjivar 2006), this depending on the age of the children at the moment of separation and reunification, as well as the level of interaction across borders, which is often constrained by economic and structural factors. If they lack strong earlier relational ties, the new care arrangements, in which the mother / father or both live under the same roof with the children, may inconvenience both. This feeling of a gap in intimacy may be stronger for children if, when they reunite with their parents, there

are new members in the family, such as parental partners or new siblings (Bauer, 2016; Menjivar, 2006; Phoenix & Bauer, 2012), which may lead to a renegotiation of their role and position within the family.

Menjivar (2006) emphasises the meaning of the reunification of parents and children as family “reorganization, redefinition, accommodation, and change” (p.232) which lead to conflicts regarding parental authority (Artico, 2003; Menjívar, 2006), the children’s ages and earlier parent-child ties being key factors influencing these. Beyond the family sphere, children who move to other countries are also faced with their unfamiliarity with a new physical, social and cultural environment (Bonizzoni, 2015; Menjivar, 2016). This often implies learning a new language and, on some occasions, learning to survive in unsafe neighbourhoods (Menjívar, 2006). On the whole, the child may face challenges on multiple levels, in which having access to different kinds of support networks (like family, community and also institutional networks) may determine their ability to navigate through the new circumstances. Unfortunately, even if parents are able to achieve family reunification, they sometimes lack different resources which may help children to tackle this stage successfully, particularly time, as work demands in the labour market may be extensive. In these cases, caregiving arrangements such as the grandparents travelling to the migration destination country may be helpful. Nevertheless, such solutions are not the norm.

#### 2.2.2.2 *Transnational grandparenting*

While sending the children to the homeland to be cared for by extended family members is an alternative in order to cope with different and changing care demands, other families decide to invite the grandparents – and, to lesser extent, other members of the extended family – to the country where they are settled, either for a short-term stay or for the long-term. Both cases – either the children moving to the home country to be cared for by the grandparents or the grandparents moving to the destination country to take care of the children – correspond to practices of transnational grandparenting; nevertheless, their features vary, being shaped by the different contexts. The length of such a caregiving arrangement in the destination country depends on diverse factors, ranging from the age of the children and the willingness and availability of the grandparents, to the restrictions imposed by migration laws (Neysmith & Zhou, 2013;

Lie, 2010). Such laws often being determined by economic priorities and requirements, neglecting family-care bonds and needs (Zhou, 2013; Neysmith & Zhou, 2013). As such, in general terms, transnational grandparenting arrangements that occur in the home country are the most common solution for many working-class families from poor or underdeveloped countries, while transnational grandparenting in the migration destination countries tend to take place in middle-class families.

Circumstances in which the grandparents' generation – and particularly grandmothers, such as the so-called flying grannies (Plaza, 2000) – move to another country to become family caregivers, including childcare and other domestic tasks, have been documented by scholars. Such is the case of Chinese families in Australia (Da, 2003), the United Kingdom (Lie, 2010) and Canada (Neysmith & Zhou, 2013; Zhou, 2013); and other transnational families worldwide (Adugna, 2017; Kassaye, 2015; King et al. 2014; Lie, 2010; Plaza, 2000). While these transnational care practices respond to the families' different circumstances and are often shaped by culturally-specific understandings of care and family, there are several characteristics which are broadly shared among families in which transnational grandparenting in the migration destination country takes place. Firstly, the role of grandparents is key for family functioning, as they make very valuable contributions to their offspring's daily lives, enabling the family's social reproduction. Secondly, although transnational grandparenting is considered mainly to be a practical care arrangement, as a result of compelling family-work demands, all these families also highlight the role of grandparents as cultural agents, by teaching grandchildren the language and culture of the families' home countries. Thirdly, the lives of the grandparents in the host country have a double dimension: the joy of being with and helping their families on the one hand, and the work burden and lack of agency on the other. The lack of agency is experienced on a social level, as they do not speak the language and are unfamiliar with the new environment, but also within the family realm, which leads us to the fourth common feature: intergenerational conflict. In these families, two kinds of generational conflicts arise: that resulting from the grandparents' and adult children's different points of view about childrearing practices; and that resulting from the loss of status of the grandparents' generation within the family through the empowerment of the middle generation, and particularly of the daughter-in-law in Chinese and Albanian families (King et al. 2014; Da, 2003). On the whole, the notion of the “three nots identity” coined by Zhou (2013) is very illustrative, as she

describes how the Chinese grandparents, while in Canada, feel that they are “not a master (because they cannot make decisions for families here), not a guest (because they have to do housework and childcare) and not a servant (because they are not paid)” (pp.290-291). Finally, although these studies provide an insight into transnational care arrangements, the children-grandparents nexus, which is essential to such arrangements, is broadly neglected.

### 2.2.2.3 *Identity, belonging and transnational paths*

Another line of research dealing with children and migration focuses on the children’s relationship with the so-called origin and destination countries. These studies focus on the maintenance family’s origin-country culture in a different spatial setting (Said & Zhu, 2017; Li, 2011), identity construction (Sigad & Eisikovits, 2010; Glick Schiller & Fouron, 2002; Louie, 2006), and transnational links and experiences (Gardner & Mand, 2012; Haikkola, 2011; Kim, 2009; Levitt, 2009; Bartley & Spoonley, 2008;; Levitt & Waters, 2002). A stronger attachment to the home country, both at a symbolic and an interactional level, is expected for those who have had direct and prolonged experiences in the home country, as is the case of the migrants; and a lower – and decreasing – level of attachment and transnational interaction is expected for migrants’ descendants as time and generations pass by. Gender and generation are key in these relationships (Zontini, 2010). Nevertheless, Levitt (2009) calls for researchers not to underplay “the power of being raised in a transnational social field” (p.1225), pointing to the double socialisation of children who grow-up in transnational families and suggesting that “the lines between the home and the host country and between the first and the second generation blur, making them one interconnected social experience” (p.1126) which may nevertheless be reorganised (Haikkola, 2011). Moreover, for children who have been raised in a transnational context, home and away can be the same place (Gardner & Mand, 2012); trips being essential to their development of their own connections to the so-called home country (Haikkola, 2011; Garner & Mand, 2012; Frandberg, 2008).

Transnational identity, Sigad and Eisikovits (2010) point out, is inherently compartmentalised, involving dual feelings of belonging. Nevertheless, they suggest, gendered differences apply in the case of the children of transnational Israeli families,

as girls feel suspended in no particular place (in-between Israel and the USA), while boys feel that they belong to both countries. Similarly, sometimes contradictory conceptualisations of gender must be learned in different places – such as in the home or at school – children of migrant families having to navigate through different meanings and contexts to construct their own identities (Strzemecka, 2018). As identity is not an outcome, but a process (Reynolds & Zontini, 2006), they may be able to adapt their behaviour to the different social settings and situations (Said & Zhu, 2017; Sigad & Eisikovits, 2010). As such, identities can be multiple, as in the case of the Chinese migrants' descendants in Italy (Raffaetà et al. 2015) or Caribbean communities in the United Kingdom (Reynolds, 2006), who navigate between their multiple local, regional or transnational identities, depending on the situation, as they both live in discriminatory and marginalising contexts. Indeed, discriminatory contexts may prompt processes of re-ethnicisation (Skrobanek, 2009), as ethnicity encompasses positive as well as negative forms of social capital (Reynolds, 2010). Identity can also be linked to religion, as in the case of Bengali youths in the UK, who vindicate their religious affiliation as Muslims as their public identity (Kibria, 2008). Similarly, for those belonging to families affiliated to minority religions in the migration destination country, such a condition may be determinant in negotiating their social identity (Kivisto, 2014). It is not the aim of this dissertation to focus on the identities and transnational ties of children from migrant families, these being highly heterogeneous. Nevertheless, given their interrelation with broader family networks and care processes, it was worth providing a brief introduction to this area.

### 2.2.3 Towards research on growing up in transnational families

As posited in this chapter, research on migration and transnational families needs to go beyond adult-centric perspectives and focus on children's experiences (Gardner, 2012; Dobson, 2009; White et al. 2011). This may include their own voices and points of view, collected in the present (Strzemecka, 2018; Graham et al. 2012; Haikkola, 2011; Ni Laoire, 2011; Pantea, 2011); but also their retrospective accounts, once the children have grown up (Phoenix & Seu, 2013; Phoenix & Bauer, 2012; Olwig, 1999), as this allows for a life-course perspective to be developed. In so doing, a more coherent and less fragmented picture of their experiences and paths could be presented, by avoiding



focusing only on specific moments or ages, as if these were self-contained stages. While a micro approach is key to exploring the realities of children in transnational families, it is also insufficient. A broader perspective on the circumstances which shapes children's – and their families' – experiences and paths is required (Alipio et al. 2015). This broader perspective implies looking from the local to the global and back again. It necessitates exploring how mobility and care are shaped by different cultural, structural and institutional contexts. Moreover, a complete shift of focus means questioning hegemonic notions of childhood, family and migration. Firstly, the idea of mobility being hopelessly linked to “deviance and danger” (Ni Laoire et al., 2010, pp.158). Secondly, that of physically distant families as being “inherently dysfunctional” (Baldassar, 2016, p. 278) and thirdly, that of children as being naturally dependent, passive and lacking in agency (White et al. 2001). To do so, research on transnational childhoods needs to be context-specific, while these meanings need to be revisited in both local and transnational contexts, by focusing on how they are shaped by global forces and the paths by along which such meanings are constructed.

Moreover, to overcome the hegemonic models' limitations means exploring broader sets of relationships within the family. In other words, it implies going beyond centring the analysis of family relationships in transnational families on parent-child – and particularly mother-child – relationships and exploring other family connections. Finally, children's experiences of growing up in transnational families cannot be analysed in isolation of broader family networks and the care fluxes flowing within them. As such, child-related care arrangements and exchanges – in which they are either caregivers, care receivers or both – may be grounded and understood as part of the circulation of care taking place in transnational families, between different family members, across different spaces and over time (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

# CHAPTER

## 3

### 3 CHINESE FAMILIES

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the Chinese family as a social institution. It will outline the main characteristics and circumstances that help to differentiate between the meaning and specificities of the *jiating* (家庭), and the general features commonly associated with its English translation as family. Nevertheless, the purpose is not to give a static definition about what *jiating* or family is but, through the social changes that have occurred in China since the beginning of the twentieth century and their repercussions, to provide a background that fits with the different experiences and points of view of the various family generations and members.

#### 3.1 Brief ‘history’ of the Chinese family

##### 3.1.1 The Chinese family as institution

“To have five generations living under one roof is not rare in China because of the custom of early marriage. (...) After the death of parents, the brothers may break up the family and live separately. They may still live together in the same household if they choose to do so, in which case authority is vested in the eldest brother (...) In practice, his authority is not absolute. Important questions of the family are not decided by him alone, but by the concurrent opinion of all the adult male members of the family. (...)The Chinese family is seldom an independent unit, but a member of the greater-family. In the Chinese village,

families bearing the same surname live together. The members of the greater-family generally number hundreds and sometimes thousands. They have a common ancestral temple which is the center of their social and religious life. Whenever a person of the greater family dies, a tablet made of wood bearing his or her title and name is put in the shrine of the ancestral temple (...) The greater-family is well organized. A board of elders consisting of the oldest member of each family is in charge of the greater-family affairs. At a certain time of the year a regular meeting of the board is held. Among other things, the birth of a male child and marriages are recorded at this time” (Wu, 1927 p.316-317).

In 1927, Wu described the Chinese family as a unit in which gender, generation and age criteria were key in establishing the power hierarchies within it. Aware of the malleability of the Chinese family as an institution and of the significant changes and challenges occurring at the beginning of the twentieth century, Wu noted:

“Such is the general feature of the Chinese family. For the last few decades changes have been going on in this system. The conditions which bring about this change are: contact with the West, the slow but sure emancipation of woman, and the industrial revolution. The trend is evident; but what final shape the Chinese family will in the future assume, is, as yet very hard to tell” (Wu, 1927, p.318).

Indeed, early twentieth-century trends anticipated changes that would create great uncertainty regarding their effects. This would be the general pattern during the twentieth century, whose vertiginous political circumstances were mirrored in family and social life. Consequently, the family as an institution was forced to reinterpret and adapt itself at all levels: from discourse, anchored in the political agenda, to implementation of this agenda.

Maurice Freedman’s works can be considered a starting point of modern Chinese anthropology. In the 1950s and 1960s, through the information obtained in his field work and from academic literature, he systematized information about lineages into a

structural model (Freedman, 1958). In so doing, he created the paradigm in which the fundamental model of Chinese society is assumed to be based on patrilineal descent, and which misses other key concepts such as class, affinity and ethnicity (Watson, 1982). He emphasized the distinction between family and kinship, which were often used as synonyms:

“Kinship bound together large numbers of people in Chinese society and exerted an important effect on their political, economic, and religious conduct at large. Family is another matter. Essentially, its realm is that of domestic life, a realm of co-residence and the constant involvement in affairs of the hearth, children, and marriage. Kinship is something different” (Freedman, 1961, p.323).

Freedman proposed that lineages were the fundamental social institutions over the course of China’s history: they functioned as social and economic corporations, sharing resources and properties (Watson, 1982), and could be as large as to encompass villages or towns (Freedman, 1961). This static conception of Chinese society – unchanged throughout its history – focused on groups of patrilineal descent or *zongzu* (宗族), in which the ancestors are venerated and whose importance relies on the construction of a unit where the social order is maintained. This model was adopted by the academics of the time without further assessment of the possible implications or alternatives. Freedman also predicted a new phase of social anthropology in China, which finally took place in the 1980s, as a result of the Reform era and the country’s opening up to the world (Pieke, 2014). Prior to this, due to restrictions of access to mainland China, social scientists mainly carried out their fieldwork in Taiwan, Hong Kong and among ethnically Chinese groups in Southeast Asia (Beltrán Antolín, 2014; Pieke, 2014). This new phase led to more dissenting voices being heard about the Freedman-driven model.

### 3.1.2 The ‘traditional family’

As mentioned above, talking about a ‘traditional’ family as an immutable institution throughout the long history of Chinese society could be an oversimplification. Nevertheless, we will use ‘traditional Chinese family’ to refer to the family model

prevailing during the Qing dynasty era, which immediately preceded the Republican period, the stage which would lay the basis for the changes carried out in the subsequent periods. This vision of family, which has often been cited as a universal form along the history of China to this day, corresponds to Confucian ideology and is structured according to patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal order. The traditional family is governed by a system of hierarchies based on age, generation and gender that defines the different roles within the family institution and implies total obedience, veneration and respect for all the older generations, both living and dead (Lam, 2006). This domestic structure was reproduced at the societal level, resulting in citizens' submission to the emperor as the father of the nation (Freedman, 1961; Lam 2006; Du, 2013). That is, the imperial order drew on the Confucian code, meaning that all institutions of the community, from religion to education and politics, were built around and based on the family model (Fowler et al. 2010; Lam, 2006; Beja & Bustamante, 1993).

Most of the literature prior to the first third of the twentieth century assumed the extended family or 4G joint family, to be the preponderant model in China; one which involved co-residence of all descendants under the same roof. Nevertheless, later studies indicate that this was an ideal that, for practical reasons, was not viable for most (Chu, 1974; Freedman, 1958; Parish, 1975). This model was only feasible for rich families: "The more married sons and the more generations under one roof, the greater the prestige of the family." (, 1984, p.230). The most common model was the stem family, involving co-residence of the parents, their eldest son and his wife and children, and the other unmarried sons (Chu, 1974). Furthermore, Freedman (1961) suggests that in low-status families, the power of individual brothers and their wives was higher than is usually portrayed, as it is assumed that the primary family relationship was father-son, which prevailed over conjugal bonds (Du, 2013). Due to the practice of patrilocal residence, the daughters moved to the home of their husband's family once married, resulting in a loss of relations with their natal family or these being mediated through specific rules for visiting (Zhang, 2009). As such, daughters were perceived as 'spilt water' as they were transferred to their husband's family (Wong, 2016; Zhang, 2009). Moreover, patrilocal tradition was a way of excluding women from political and economic issues (Stockman, 2000).

In this dynamic of gender-based inequalities, women were held in a lower status position through systematic submission to their father, husband and their male children

(Wolf, 1972). Moreover, the relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law has been portrayed as highly conflictive, due to the lack of blood ties between them and the hierarchical power relationship, whereby the daughter-in-law must exercise submission and unconditional and unidirectional obedience towards her marital family (Zhang 2009; Sáiz López, 2001; Ebrey 1993). The mother-in-law exercised her 'matriarchy' when men were absent from the domestic sphere, age legitimizing her power (Du, 2013). As such, the daughter-in-law suffered from a triple disadvantage "as a woman, as a member of the family by incorporation, and as a member of a junior generation" (Freedman, 1961, p.328). They – the daughters-in-law – were seen as family outsiders whose function was reproduction. Giving birth to a male child who continued the family name was their means to improve their status in the family. Through her reproductive work, the woman integrated herself into the patriarchal system and, with the arrival of the next generation, took on the role of mother-in-law as an established member in the family institution. Margery Wolf (1972) proposes the concept of 'uterine family' as an alternative point of view, in which the role of women in the Chinese families is highlighted. The paternal line's offspring are born and grow up within the uterine family, created through the woman's reproductive work, which is the real protagonist of this model, despite its social invisibility. Similarly, Sangren (2013) understands the ideal traditional Chinese family as a desire. From a gender perspective, and following the line proposed by Wolf, Sangren highlights the irony of the 'institutionalized fantasy' of the patrilineal family, when it is women who are the family's primary producers and reproducers in the real world (Sangren, 2013)

If the woman did not give birth to male children, the husband was permitted to take one or more concubines until he was able to guarantee succession of the family line. The concubines not only met a reproductive need but also served to make economic power visible and increase social prestige (Sáiz López, 2001). On the other hand, marriage was "a building block in the basic institution of society, the family." (Wolf, 1984, p.215). It was considered an economic transaction between families: the wives' natal families – who had raised their daughters to be transferred to another family at a later date – received what is known as a 'bride price' in compensation for raising and taking care of them. When a family was too poor to cope with the wedding expenses, the practice of 'child brides' or marriage with minors was a possible solution, whereby a family would receive a girl who they would raise in their own home and who would

later marry their son. Although this practice was severely sanctioned and eradicated during Maoism, the expression ‘child bride’ continues to be used today to refer to the poor or despotic treatment of the daughter-in-law by the mother-in-law (Du, 2013). The uxorilocal version of marriage consisted of the adoption of a son by the parents of the bride, in order to conserve their surname (Sáiz López, 2001). Other alternatives also existed, such as deferred transfer or ghost marriage (Palmer, 1985; Sáiz López, 2001).

The Confucian corpus is composed of the values of filial piety or *xiao* (孝), humaneness or *ren* (仁) and the rites/rules of correction or *li* (禮), that regulate interaction and behaviour between the different members of the family and society in general, resulting in the social order (Sáiz López, 2001). *Xiao* (孝) or filial piety, condenses Confucian patriarchal thought into a code of obligations and reciprocities, based on the father-son relationship (Lam, 2006). On the one hand, parents must care for and provide education to their children. Those children, in repayment, must show respect and unconditional obedience, and later on, care for and support their parents in their old age, and bring honour to the family name (Lam, 2006). In this sense, Confucian morality seeks an interconnection between generations along the life course, based on interdependence and reciprocity. The intergenerational code of interaction between parents and children is conceptualized by Stafford (2000) as the cycle of *yang*, which places emphasis “on feeding, nurturance and care” (p.63). Stafford posited a double meaning for *yang* on the one hand, referring to childcare as ‘to raise’ (*yang haizi*, 養孩子), and on the other considering it ‘to care for’, or repayment from adult children to their elderly parents (*yang lao*, 養老). The *yang* cycle consists of small daily interventions, which are seen as an obligation by parents and children. These obligations extend beyond consanguinity and patrilineal descent – to include those who are raised by the parents even if they are not descendants; and beyond life – to include those who have not yet been born and those who have already passed away (Stafford, 2000). Nevertheless, Stafford avoids suggesting that the *yang* cycle overlaps with Chinese patrilineality and filial piety. Instead, he suggests that *yang* relational ties are more flexible and may lead to kin configurations which deviate from the norm, not being based on blood ties. Thus, the *laiwang* cycle involves reciprocal ceremonial transactions between people outside the patrilineal line, including friends, neighbours and acquaintances. Stafford also argues that the importance of women is undervalued in Chinese families. When considering the practicalities of daily care provision rather than theoretical

prescriptions, it is wives who receive the real debt of *yang*, through marital ties. In sum, although the axis of the traditional Chinese family was the father-son relationship and the obligations derived from the concept of filial piety, it was the daughters-in-law who took care of their in-laws, within a gender-based division of care work that naturalized care as being part of the female role.

### 3.1.3 Towards a socialist family

After the Qing dynasty's collapse, the Republic (1912-1949) was established in 1911. During this period, small improvements were made at the legislative level to eliminate patriarchal society. Access to divorce and remarriage was facilitated for women, as was payment of the expenses related to legitimate and illegitimate children. Nevertheless, women's liberation was not a priority on the state agenda and women were asked to adapt to political reality: first, a new political and economic order would be established and that would then lead to secondary measures (Sáiz López 2001; Beja & Bustamante, 1993). At that time, the country's political situation was very unstable and the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Nationalist Party confronted their political projects. The Communist Party championed a new China, driven by the demands of the working class and against Confucian society, in opposition to the traditionalist claims of the Nationalist Party. The country was divided into two areas dominated by the communists and nationalists, respectively, in which they governed according to their own rules and laws. The nationalist party protected the Confucian family model and the role of woman as virtuous wife and mother through a civil code that supported the patriarchal and patrilineal family, although a woman's right to choose a husband and to access property were established, and concubinage was prohibited. On the other hand, the communists appealed to the woman as patriot, revolutionary and suffragist (Sáiz López, 2001). They called on women to participate actively in political life and recognized the freedom of marriage and divorce, as well as the right to access property (Sáiz López, 2001). In 1949, the Communist Party of China came to power and established the People's Republic of China while the nationalists sought refuge in Taiwan. After the proclamation of the socialist state, the power of lineages – which were seen as an obstacle to the new government's authority (Wolf, 1984) – and the



elites of the local communities were replaced by the power of the state, which was able to reach the public and private sphere of each household (Yan, 2011).

Throughout the 1950s and until the fall of Maoism, the discourse of national salvation and the liberation of women would be linked (Du, 2013; Greenhalgh, 2001; Sáiz López 2001). The Marriage Law of 1950 was an attempt to "democratize family relations and neutralize the hierarchy of authority established by the therefore dominant criteria: generation, gender and age" (Sáiz López, 2009, pp.170); that is, to free women from their subordination to men and young people from their subordination to the older generations (Wolf, 1984). There was freedom of choice in marriage and, for the first time in Chinese history, the children of a married couple did not automatically and exclusively belong to the paternal family in the case of divorce (Sáiz López, 2009). In the same vein, family violence was punished and polygamy was prohibited. According to Chen (2009), this law served to encourage young couples to establish nuclear families, resulting in a change in the status of intergenerational relationships. Thus, conjugal ties prevailed over father-son relationships, which had been essential in previous generations (Chen 2009; Fowler et al. 2010). The Agrarian Reform Law was launched as a complement to the Marriage Law of 1950, to facilitate women's access to employment and to give them the same level of ownership and inheritance rights as men.

The Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) deprived families of their basic social functions: childcare and domestic services (Stockman, 2000), through the system of mutual aid groups and communes, which were units of production and consumption in which both men and women worked. On the other hand, in urban areas, state enterprises were created or nationalized in the 1950s and 1960s, with the aim of developing industry and national-level business that would further contribute to the country's economic take off. In the state enterprises, the *gongzuo danwei* (work units 单位) provided all kinds of resources (housing, medical care, education, etc.) to employees, by organizing their work and social life (Sáiz López, 2009; Stockman 2000). This meant that the functions fulfilled by families in former eras were now taken on by the state: for example, permission to marry depended on the work unit (Wolf, 1984). In 1961, Freedman wrote: "If we begin a discussion of whether the family now exists in China with a definition of the family which lists a number of functions, it is possible that we shall deny it to present-day China" (pp.333), family being "an institution for producing babies and

enjoying the leisure time left over from the major pursuits of everyday life” (Freedman, 1961, p.333). Nevertheless, in contrast with those who have portrayed the Communist Party as looking to destroy the family as institution, others have reported that it actually reinforced and reworked the family (Freedman, 1961; Wolf, 1984): for example, through the legal system, as the Marriage law required sons and daughters to care for their parents, and this provision would be reinforced in the law of 1980 (Wong, 2016). The resources offered in urban areas by the *danwei*, or work unit, caused a growing movement of the population from rural to urban areas. To prevent this and ensure the proper functioning of the new Chinese cities, a registration system (Hukou, 户口) was created to limit and control population mobility (Sáiz López, 2009; Stockman, 2000). As a result, people could only live and work where their registration card indicated. The real problem was the inability of rural migrants to access the most basic services, such as housing or food, because during the socialist era these were subject to rationing by the state (Fisac & Tsang 2000; Stockman, 2000). Therefore, migrating to urban areas during this period was practically impossible.

In this socialist society, characterized by the weakening of the patriarchal system, family roles were redefined. The clearest example is the inversion of the power relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Prior to Mao's rise to power, the tyrannical role of the mother-in-law in the Chinese family was criticized in the ‘red’ areas that were controlled by the Communist Party, the daughter-in-law being seen as a good daughter of the Party and the mother-in-law as an evil figure (Du, 2013). This duality would remain as one of the State’s means of attacking the Confucian family, in its struggle to mobilize women and young people for its national reconstruction project (Du, 2013). Through the incorporation of young women into work and the social sphere, the mother-in-law would be relegated to the domestic sphere, caring for grandchildren and tasks at home (Sáiz López, 2001). Moreover, the general trend during the Maoist era was towards family nuclearization, increasing the number of family units and decreasing their size (Beja & Bustamante, 1993; Zhao & Chen, 2008). On the one hand, the residential structure of Chinese cities made it difficult to cope with the multigenerational family model under one roof; on the other hand, after the elimination of private property and collectivization in rural areas, the economic incentive related to having a multigenerational household no longer existed (Chen 2009; Huang, 2011). As a result, from the 1960s onwards, the prevalent trend

would be towards the multi-house family, that is: an extended family split into several households, which remain linked through properties and income (Huang, 2011). In 1975 – one year before Mao Zhedong passed away – Parish (1975) identified three main characteristics of families in rural China at that time. Firstly, he pointed to the peasant household as a distinct production unit, which focused on balance, as the size of its plot depended on the number of people in the household, resulting in a “tension between having more children to ensure more male hands in the future and having fewer children to minimize the number of mouths to feed” (Parish, 1975, p.616). Secondly, Parish stated that welfare systems continued to be based on the family. For example, when the grandmother was not available, the mother needed to take care of the domestic chores and the children. This gendered division of labour resulted from the scarcity of communal childcare services in rural areas, the persistence of family gender roles and the lower income of women's work, as their work was considered lighter than men's work. Thirdly and finally, due to the restrictions on mobility, adult children mainly remained in their home villages, working as peasants.

As mentioned above, the call to construct a new country relied on the eradication of inequalities. But this ideal was far from being fulfilled: private property was abolished, resulting in a much more equal population at an economic level, but inequalities persisted between rural and urban areas; and in new forms, such as through the class labels assigned to those favoured during previous regimes – class enemies like landowners, capitalists, etc. – who were persecuted during this period (Fisac & Tsang, 2000). Further, the significance of women's liberation at the discursive level in socialism was not matched by reality. Women gained rights as individuals (inheritance, property, divorce, etc.) and enjoyed greater freedom to join public life through work, and this ability to provide economic resources, in turn, had repercussions on their family status, but they failed to break free of the ties that naturalized domestic and care work as feminine, still having to carry that double burden. As Sáiz López (2009) points out: "family and work, reproduction and production, private and public, constitute a continuum in the social life of women in general, and of Chinese women in particular" (p.171).

After Mao Zhedong's death in 1976, the ideals of communist society would give way to consumerism and capitalist ideology (although with specific Chinese characteristics). China would open up to the world and adopt a market economy, leading to

unprecedented economic growth. The four decades separating the beginning of the Reform era and the present day have served to redraw the Chinese family and society, in a continuous process of negotiation and adjustment between external influences, the eradication and resurgence of old forms and norms, and the search for a modernity within the nation's own identity.

#### 3.1.4 The modern Chinese family

From 1978 onwards, the new government led by Deng Xiaoping resulted in the opening up and economic reform of China. Chinese society, both rural and urban, faced major changes in drawing the lines of a new country that constantly appealed to the modern and the new. In contrast with Mao's political motivations in mobilizing the population – especially women and young people – in this new stage, the driving force was the economy: men and women would be necessary for the construction of a modern country, although the latter would be disadvantaged by age and gender within a labour market structure (Du, 2013). Rapid modernization, urbanization and industrialization would primarily leave its trace on the demographic structure through the implementation of the one-child policy and internal labour migration – from rural to urban areas –. The inertia resulting from the new work and residential structure would lead to a reduction in the size of the family unit, neglecting the ideal of the extended family under one roof and thus continuing the trend that had already started in the previous period. The Reform period, after the dissolution of the communes, led to a return to the system of family responsibility and individualistic relations or *guanxi* (广 西) (Fisac & Tsang, 2000). The state de-collectivized production and encouraged development of the private sector through family and small businesses at the local level (Chen & Korinek 2010). The scarcity of arable land and the rapid, extensive development of the coastal cities that joined the global market resulted in increasing inequalities in social service provision and living standards between regions (East-west) and rural and urban areas (Du, 2013). As a consequence, an enormous wave of internal labour migration started: thousands of young people left their homes, seeking work opportunities in the cities. Nevertheless, due to the restrictions of the *hukou* registration system, this floating population belonged nowhere and therefore did not benefit from any social services available in the cities, despite the fact that they lived and worked

there (Sun, 2012). Still, migration is seen as the only means for rural people to move upwards in social and economic terms, given that in most rural areas there is no social service provision and poverty rates are the highest (Du, 2013). This type of migration leads to the division of the family unit, which is commonly known as split-household. Leaving aside the emotional implications of physical absence, such arrangements maximize use of the high income gained from work in the city by taking advantage of the more affordable resources back in the rural areas, where part of the family remain (Fan et al., 2011; Chen & Korinek 2010). Another relevant phenomenon arising from China's opening up to the world is the rise of international migration, although the strategy remained the same: strategic dispersion and maximization of family resources (Beltrán, 2003; Waters, 2002).

The road to modernization entailed breaking ties with the past and preparing the society for the future. New or revisited laws for a new country: the land, labour and marriage law reforms and the implementation of the one-child policy played a great part in shaping today's Chinese society and families. The 1984 Labour Law promoted the sexes' incorporation into work that was consonant with their biological qualities and thereby institutionalised a gender bias, while promoting a system of incentives for women workers to leave their jobs in state enterprises (Sáiz López, 2001). Privatization and radical reform measures led to the decline of the public sector and moved China towards a new system which "destroyed the institutional mechanism that internalized the costs of reproduction and permitted a more equitable gender division of labour under socialism, and no adequate measures were put forth to replace it" (Ding et al., 2009 p.168). It started a process of privatization which resulted in the loss of the social benefits that came with public-sector jobs, which in the preceding period had accounted for 95% of total employment (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). The consequences were more severe for women, leading to a rise in temporary jobs, sex discrimination in the job market and a more uncertain old age, as tend have lower pensions in comparison to men (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). Women's employment was expensive, due to the obligation to provide child day-care centres, as well as maternity leave and menstruation allowances, which were included in the legislation at that time (Sáiz López, 2009). It was in the late 1990s when urban enterprises ceased to offer childcare aid, making it even more difficult for women to participate in the labour force, given the high cost of private childcare services. This led to a re-emergence of patriarchal

values through the increasing pressures on women to return to the home (Zhang & Maclean, 2012; Ding et al. 2009). Working conditions benefited the return to the breadwinner-homemaker family model that placed men outside, in the social sphere, and women inside (Qian & Qian 2014). That is, male domination is realized through the displacement of women to other sectors (Sáiz López, 2001). Nevertheless, Sáiz López (2009) points out that this return to the home occurred gradually and was met with opposition by some women, which resulted in a female labour force that was redistributed from state enterprises to private and foreign-capital businesses.

Studies carried out in the twenty-first century on women and labour in China note the gender differences that still exist in the labour market. Zhang and Pan (2012) report that women's job changes are motivated by family-related issues while men make such changes for reasons related to their careers. Similarly, in the study by Zhang et al. (2008) the authors conclude that it was only women who were negatively affected in terms of pay and status at work, for reasons related to marriage and family. Likewise, marriage reduces the probability of re-employment for women but not for men (Zhang & Pan, 2012). Thus, gender misalignment in the field of labour and the disadvantage of women are evident. Finally, retirement policy establishes the retirement age for white-collar workers – or qualified workers – at 60 years for men and 55 for women, reducing this to 55 for men and 50 for women who are manual workers without qualifications (Ding et al., 2009). Women are viewed as natural caregivers; their return home therefore occurs earlier, in order for them to take care of grandchildren and the associated tasks in the home (Giles et al., 2015). This also entails a lack of independence for women, who become dependent on their husbands, as the only people bringing money home (Dasgupta et al., 2015; Giles et al., 2015)

The first reform of the Marriage Law in the Reform Era took place in 1980, but it was not until 2001 that it was considered complete. Chinese lawmakers reviewed and amended it by defining not only the different roles in marriage but also the different roles in the family and the legal responsibilities associated with each of them (Fowler et al., 2010). This law emphasizes family protection and points to the family as the primary agent of socialization (Palmer, 1995). Moreover, it sets out the obligation of adult children – both sons and daughters – to support their parents, and also to financially support their grandparents if they are able to do so. As a result, Wolf (1984) suggested that this regulation reinstated the traditional family generational duties on the

one hand; and, on the other, it broke them by also placing this obligation on the maternal line. Moreover, it proclaims the freedom of marriage and divorce, including the lack of love as a criterion for divorce, and establishes conjugal obligations to comply with family planning programmes and other official measures (Fowler et al., 2010). The reform of the law carried out in 2001 penalizes bigamy, extramarital relations and family violence, establishing the right to divorce in such cases and imposing economic sanctions and administrative arrest (Sáiz López, 2009). The third and most recent reform of the Marriage Law became effective in 2011. This reform created a requirement of greater protection for the most vulnerable groups: the elderly, women and children. It establishes the adult children's filial obligation to care for parents in their old age and non-interference if one parent dies and the other wants to get married. Wives have the right to an abortion even when the husband does not know about it or disagrees, and it provides compensation in the case of infidelity on the part of the spouse (Shi, 2013). Regarding domestic violence, the new marriage law does not establish specific, new protocols to prevent such situations or dissuasive sanctions, although it prohibits such violence, and encourages the creation of harmonious marital and family relationships (Hao, 2010). The most innovative aspect of this law is the delimitation of property rights. It specifies the solution for cases related to the increase in value of one of the spouse's premarital property when the mortgage has been amortized by both, specifying that the value generated after the union should be treated as common property (Shi, 2013). Nevertheless, the advances in the legal field are not always matched by reality. In 1984, Wolf reported that even if freedom of marriage – which had already been recognized in the 1950 Marriage Law – was present and valued on a discursive level, her informants in rural areas were not able to articulate the differences between free marriages and the old arranged marriages (*baoban hunyin*/ 包办婚姻). Moreover, she suggested that while marriage was understood as the passage into adulthood in urban China, in rural areas its significance continued to be linked to the woman's transfer from the natal family to the marital one. Similarly, Palmer (1995) referred to the prevalence of officially-prohibited forms of marriage – such as the aforementioned minor marriage or ghost marriage – in rural areas, despite their early prohibition.

The one-child policy has been the most controversial measure of those launched since 1978, due to its direct and immediate – as well as medium and long-term –

repercussions on people's lives. The implementation of this policy in 1979 was countenanced as a national necessity to alleviate the demographic pressure resulting from the baby boom of the previous decades (1954-1957/1962-1970), which was portrayed as a burden for China's modernization. The policy allowed for exceptions for some couples and ethnic minorities (Basten & Jiang, 2014). Likewise, the restrictions varied between provinces and villages, since most provinces were allowed some control over the applicability criteria at the local level (Basten & Jiang, 2014). Failure to comply with the legislation in the cities entailed economic penalties and the loss of public-sector jobs, access to schools, health coverage and the right to live in state-owned housing, all of which led to the successful implementation of the policy. In contrast, resistance to it was greater in rural areas, due in part to the absence of social services and the future dependence of parents on their male children during old age, as well as the smaller amount of land available. Thus, having a second child was allowed if the first child was female (Basten & Jiang, 2014, Sáiz López, 2009). The Chinese state highlights the progress achieved through the one-child policy in the field of female empowerment and women's liberation from the patriarchal burden and reproductive work, by enabling active participation in education and social production, as opposed to the persistence of feudal thought (Lee 2013; Fong 2002; Greenhalgh, 2001). In contrast, the Western media and academics mostly cite a correlation between the implementation of the one-child policy and figures showing a trend towards inequality in the sex ratio between boys and girls, and an increase in abortion rates and infant mortality (Apter, 2014; Greenhalgh 2001).

The selective abortion practice was declared illegal in 1995, and the 2001 reform of the law lay down penalties for physicians who use ultrasound to determine the sex of the baby. Nonetheless, the practice of female abortion was not completely eradicated (Fowler et al., 2010). In addition, the abandonment of girls increased during this period (Apter, 2014) and many births were not reported. To Greenhalgh (2001) the implementation of this policy made women resulted in the commodification of the female bodies, women's reproductive health was damaged. Moreover, due the persistence of the preference for sons, women had to bear the pressure from their family if they gave birth to a girl (Fong, 2002). In 2002, the Law on Population and Family Planning was approved, in which both husbands and wives were called to be involved in the family planning process. However, it is still mainly women who bear the burden



of contraceptive use. From late 2013, the Chinese government allowed two children per couple when the parents were only children, and since 1st January 2016, all couples have been allowed to have two children.

### **3.2 Plural Chinese families and households**

Research on modernization in China has mainly focused on family nuclearization and changing intergenerational relationships, often lacking attention to the specific context (Cartier, 1995; Xu & Xia, 2014). The ‘World Revolution and Family Patterns Model’ (Goode, 1963 in Yan, 2011) has been applied to the Chinese scenario. It has been assumed that industrialization and urbanization will change the family patterns that sustain the extended family as the predominant model, leading to an inevitable nuclearization and the growing importance of marital relations (Yan, 2011). Conversely, Huang (2011) proposes an alternative framework for understanding Chinese modernity, in which the extended family as production unit remains key. To do so, the author highlights the differences between Chinese and western modes of industrialization. He states:

“The development of handicraft manufacturers in China did not lead to its separation from farming, nor did it lead to the vigorous growth of towns, nuclear households, and earlier marriage and population increase” (Huang, 2011, p.467).

As a result, Huang suggests, the Chinese peasant family unit remains present in a family-based economy today by combining “farming and sidelines production” (p.487), and there is a growing “part-peasant urban informal economy” (p.487) to serve the new middle class which, despite the aspirations of many to join it, accounts for only around 15% of the population (Huang, 2011). Moreover, he suggests, this results in two interdependent economies: “one modern and the other semi-modern and traditional; one founded on individuals and nuclear households as the basic social unit, the other on families and three generation family” (p.487). The idea of a household as a single unit of production and the ‘mom and pop shops’(Huang, 2011, pp.473) in which husband, wife and children work together in a workplace characterized by unskilled work and long working hours is key, not only for understanding the link between the economy

and family in China, but also the settlement features of Zhejanesse migrants in southern Europe.

In the same vein, Xu and Xia (2014) refers to the inadequacy of Western modernization theory, which predicts linearity in family transformation, while families are plural and fluid formations in China. In 1985, Chen predicted that the Chinese extended family would not disappear in favour of the western nuclear family type. Instead, he predicted that “conflicting influences of the one-child policy, a consumer orientation, the constraints of the housing shortage, and the opportunities at different socio-economic levels” (pp.200) would result in the diversification of family forms and residential patterns. Thus, as Logan and Bian (1998) suggested, changing family patterns in China are not only linked to urbanization and industrialization, but also to state policies. Finally, with regards to housing structure, there was a severe urban housing shortage before the Reform era, meaning that young people had to delay marriage or co-reside with their parents or parents-in-law (Logan & Bian, 1998; Wolf, 1984). Since housing was privatized, families have been free to buy their own apartments (Xu & Xia, 2014).

In their review of the Chinese census, Hu and Peng (2015) point to an increase in the number of households – both in rural and urban areas – and a reduction in their size, which does not necessarily lead to nuclear households but to diversification. Nevertheless, the nuclear household is reported to be the dominant form, and the Chinese state’s public discourse promotes the ideal of a modern family with a stable male breadwinner along with his wife and offspring. The percentage of three-generation households has remained stable since the beginning of the 1980s, accounting for around 15% of the total (Hu & Peng, 2015). This three-generational household mainly corresponds to the modified stem family model: ageing parents with one married child and her or his nuclear family (Go &Kuzinski, 2010). Nevertheless, Hu and Peng (2015) state that nowadays, living together does not mean sharing wealth. Additionally, there are other household types, such as “single-person” households, “elderly-only households”, “two generations elderly-only households” (the younger and senior elderly generations) and skipped-generation households (grandparents living with grandchildren).

Another factor worth noting is that the “relationship between households within the kinship network is dynamic and interactive” (Xu & Xia, 2014p.36). As such, household

configurations may vary over time, different members of the extended family being included, depending on specific family needs and life cycle stages, and influenced by history, culture and policies (Xu & Xia, 2014). Similarly, the changes in household composition patterns do not mean that intergenerational family support is discarded. Xu and Xia (2014) emphasize the uniqueness of Chinese families, which are extended in nature, as they constitute a net of mutual benefits and obligations. Several authors have used the concepts of the networking family, multi-house family, or two nuclear families in one extended family to refer to families which maintain high level of exchanges and strong ties, even if parents and their adult children don't live under the same roof (Chen 2009; Sereny 2011; Shen, 2011). These types of arrangements are particularly salient in urban areas, where living apart but close allows families to maintain a 'distance that keeps soup warm', as the Chinese saying goes (Lin & Ke, 2010). There are additional alternatives, such as the 'turns households', an example of which is grandparents' movement between their adult children households to take care of grandchildren (Sereny, 2011), or to be cared for by them (Xu & Xia, 2014; Zhang & Wang, 2010). As such, new family configurations are based on practical or economic needs, rather than purely cultural prescriptions (Chen, 2009; Logan & Bian, 1998) and are not static, but fluid (Xu & Xia, 2014).

Finally, the normative nuclear family, composed of a heterosexual couple with offspring, can make other family forms invisible, such as those consisting of homosexual couples or single mothers. The Chinese government decriminalized homosexuality in 1997 and stopped considering it a mental disorder in 2001. Nevertheless, homosexual marriage is not allowed by law and homosexuality is still not normalized in Chinese society today, although its visibility has increased since the 1980s, especially in large cities, despite the stigma attached to AIDS (Cao & Lu, 2014).

Reflecting on marriage on the basis of their fieldwork in rural China, Parish and Whyte (1978) suggest that young people's individual decision-making power in choosing their spouse is one of the most important changes in Chinese society in the second half of the twentieth century. Similarly, Yan (2011) reports that most couples who met through a third party in the 1990s were introduced by a friend, rather than someone hired by their parents, the choice shifting from a collective effort to a personal decision. The author argues that the exercise of independence and rebellion against parental authority were performed at the conjugal level rather than the individual one. Nevertheless,

marriage in China continues to be understood as a union of families, rather than a union of two individuals (Pan, 2010, in Xu & Xia, 2014, pp.40). On the other hand, as a result of the implementation of the one-child policy there is a significant disparity in the sex ratio, and young boys may have difficulties finding spouses (Abrahamson, 2016). In parallel, there is the phenomenon of sheng nü (剩女), or ‘leftover women’, with reference to professional woman who remain single into their 30s and beyond.

### **3.3 Intergenerational ties, gender and family care in contemporary China**

#### **3.3.1 Generational and gendered care dynamics**

According to Confucianism, family structure is based on age, generation and gender, resulting in static roles within a hierarchical family structure. The socialist-era efforts to eradicate Confucian ethics from the Chinese family and the country’s later period of opening up to external influences have helped to erode the old hierarchical structures, redefining them and promoting more horizontal relations. As such, the prevailing trend is towards change, bringing flexibility and intergenerational dialogue. Nevertheless, scholars point to the existence of a generation gap:

“(…) between the only-child generation, the *balinghou*, and their parents because such vast changes have occurred over a relatively short period of time. The older generations grew up during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution and experienced famine, dislocation, arbitrary punishment and a host of other evils. By comparison, the only child generation grew up when economic growth rates soared and if they were not spoiled, at the least they experienced intensive care from two parents and four grandparents. Furthermore, they had access to education and, later, jobs in the urban economy” (Abrahamson, 2016, p.335).

This generation gap is often portrayed as leading to a process of inverting power relations between the young and older generations (Shen, 2011), with the ageing parents ending up in a lower position, due to their limited resources, caused by the lack of social

and pension programmes (Xie et al., 2007; Ching et al., 2002). Hence, hierarchical relationships in which the older generations hold the highest status and authority are declining, due to changing circumstances and the increasing importance of economic power in China nowadays (Qi, 2016; Xie et al., 2007).

Similarly, the gradual dissolution of strong patriarchal ties, as well as the positioning of women as workers have served to increase the autonomy of young women, strengthen ties with their natal family (Zhang, 2009; Wolf, 1984) and increase their decision-making power in households (Shen, 2011). Nevertheless, Shen (2011) criticizes the fact that studies of power relationships often focus on the husband-wife dyad, neglecting the existence of other family members. In her own research into urban households, she concludes that the improvement of young women's status within Chinese families does not result from an equal relationship with their husbands, but from the lowering status and increasing work burden for women from the older generation. Furthermore, the power and voice of Chinese women within a couple gradually declines as they advance through their life paths, in contrast with men. She coins the term 'post-patriarchy' to refer to this reality that has resulted from the conjunction of global trends and Chinese contextual specificities, in which "status and hierarchy can no longer be based on age or generation, and the status of the father can no longer serve as the basis for dominance (...) However, no substantial change has taken place in the relationship between genders" (p.20). Similarly, Liu (2016)'s research about ageing and intergenerational support in rural China shows that it is grandmothers who have the largest burden of work in providing practical support and personal care to several generations, which is reinforced by adult children's migration. In sum, as Palmer (1995) suggests, gender equality has been achieved on a legal level but is not a social reality.

The one-child policy has had consequences that go beyond the sphere of women or the couple, having led to an unprecedented demographic slowdown. As a consequence, serious social repercussions have arisen, challenging the concept of piety and expectations of caring for ageing parents, in a new scenario in which the current family model is known as 4-2-1, meaning: four grandparents, two parents, one child (Wong, 2016; Chen & Lewis, 2015; Fowler et al., 2010;). Qian and Qian (2014) point out that in contemporary Chinese society there are no longer any perfectly delimited roles inherited from Confucian ethics and that each person simultaneously holds various

social statuses. Nevertheless, the family as a social institution remains key in Chinese society and “family bonds and obligations remain strong” (Qi, 2016, pp.39). Generally, families adopt the mutual aid or corporate model which means that, despite the lack of co-residence, support is received when necessary through family networks (Qi, 2016; Wang 2010; Xie et al., 2007). Filial piety is bidirectional (Ching et al. 2002; Stafford, 2000). Thus, ageing parents often compensate their adult children for being filial by helping with and caring for grandchildren, and the family operates as “a reliable welfare agency” (Qi, 2016, p.47) for both ageing parents and adult children (Xu & Xia, 2014).

### 3.3.2 Ageing in China

For Chinese people, turning 60 years old means entering into a new life cycle named *huajia* (花甲), linked to new family events, roles and obligations. At the same time, old age is commonly associated with diminishing physical and cognitive capacities. A dual perspective also applies to the Chinese government’s view of elders as both victims of modernization and a burden to society (Thogersen & Ni, 2008). Care for the ageing parents has been mandatory by law in China since 1979, although it was already mentioned in the 1950 marriage law. Since 2013, a new law has ruled that adult children have to visit their ageing parents frequently (Gustafson & Huang, 2014). For those people who fit into the ‘three nos’ rule – no work, no income, no children – the Chinese state guarantees a minimum subsistence level through the five guarantees system (Thogersen & Ni, 2008). This system provide them with food, clothing, housing, medical care and it covers the burial expenses (Chen, 2009). Nevertheless, care within the family is the normal form of care in China (Chapell & Funk, 2012). This is not just because of cultural prescriptions like filial piety but because, to date, China lacks a social security system which covers the entire population. Often family care is the only option for most people because they have no available resources: neither a pension nor a retirement plan (Guo et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the speed of population ageing and the resulting dependency ratio, the 4-2-1 family structure and the high rate of female workforce participation, results in a shortage of available caregivers. Moreover, a large number of adult children migrate to urban areas and cannot take care of their ageing parents in a hands-on way (Sun, 2012; Thogersen & Ni, 2008; Silverstein & Cong, 2013). As such, children's repayment, or *bao* (報) to their ageing parents is challenged

by the new social circumstances (Wong, 2016). As Gustafson and Huang's research (2014) reflects, only-child families report being very worried about caring for their ageing parents in the future. Still, there is evidence of generational interconnection throughout people's lives, according to values of interdependence and reciprocity, although this is being re-interpreted in different contexts as a response to new ways of life and specific needs (Liu, 2016; Qi, 2016; Tu, 2016; Zhang & Montgomery, 2003) through the new intergenerational contract (Ikels, 1993; Croll, 2006). As a result, filial obligation "is no longer a fixed norm but a guideline which parents and young people negotiate to operate it more flexibly and effectively" (Qi, 2016, p.44). Qi (2015, 2016) emphasizes that the adaptations of filial piety come from both the ageing parents and adult children generations. This contradicts the assumptions derived from the individualism thesis, which predicts that the growing tendency towards individualism in younger generations – and particularly the association of the only-child generation with selfishness – will lead to the end of intergenerational support (Xu et Xia, 2014; Yan, 2011). Similarly, Liu (2008) points to the construction of the 'filial self', as an interplay between "the only-child status and a series of other factors, such as strong filial norms, increased individual autonomy and choice, consumerism, lack of social security, socio-economic status and gender" (p.427). The author suggests that the portrayal of the only-child generation as selfish, spoiled individuals who refuse their family duties is too simplistic; on the contrary, the young adults in her research sample are willing to balance individual and family needs.

Ageing Chinese parents see co-residence as the most preferable option, although this preference is less prevalent among wealthy families (Sereny, 2011). Lin and Ke (2010) suggests that co-residence of adult children and ageing parents depends on economic factors, aspects related to the parents' health, their place of origin and the nature of the intergenerational relationships between them. Nevertheless, in general terms, the preference for co-residence is decreasing (Silverstein & Cong, 2013). Alternatives such as the rotation of elderly parents between their adult children's houses also exist (Xu & Xia, 2014). On the other hand, Chinese society attaches a strong social stigma to families who use institutional care, nursing homes being regarded as an undesirable alternative and often equated with family abandonment. Nevertheless, more and more ageing parents – especially those from urban areas – are receptive to alternative types of care arrangements (Gustafson & Huang, 2014; Ching et al. 2002; Thøgersen & Ni,

2008; Zhang et al. 2011). Moreover, this does not mean giving up family care; families can remain actively involved in economic, emotional and even hands-on care through visits (Ching et al. 2002; Zhan et al. 2011). In summary, as Huang et al. (2012) suggest, the changing situation and the commodification of care result in the expansion of the concept of filial piety, which is no longer based solely on cultural norms but also on specific family needs (Lin & Ke, 2010; Ching et al. 2002). As such, other forms of care – whether outside the family through formal care, or at a distance through economic or emotional support – can also be considered as a reinterpretation of a filial attitude (Qi, 2016; Chapell & Funk, 2012; Huang, et al., 2012; Zhang et al. 2011). Shen Lan (2002) labelled these flexible practices for coping with filial obligations in migrant families as ‘subcontracting filial piety’ (p.812), with reference to the transfer of care duties to a hired person as a way to maintain filial behaviour. Further, he refers to a “transfer chain of filial care” (p.813), incorporating two types of transfers: one involving gender – transferring the care duties from the son to the daughter-in-law – and a second one involving the market – from family caregivers to care workers.

Nevertheless, Lin & Ke (2010) notes a general preference for care within the family. Additionally, women are expected to be the primary caregivers (Huang et al., 2012; Lin & Ke, 2010): long-term family care is provided by women in 75% of Chinese families (Glass et al. 2013, in Abrahamson, 2016). In the traditional Chinese family, the oldest son is responsible for his parents’ care, while daughters take care of their parents-in-law; but since the 1950 marriage law, both sons and daughters are expected to be involved in elderly parents’ support (Wong, 2016). More and more daughters are taking part in caring for their own parents and have a closer relation with them (Chapell & Funk, 2012;; Guo et al. 2011; Chen, 2009; Hsueh et al. 2008; ; Zhan & Montgomery, 2003; Fong, 2002; Ching et al. 2002, Stafford, 2000; Wolf, 1984), in some cases, resulting in less care being directed to the parents-in-law (Chapell & Funk, 2012). Still, support from daughters is not perceived as normative, as exemplified in the Chinese saying ‘sons provide the basics, daughters support with premium’ (*erziguanchibao, nüer guanguohao*, 兒子管吃飽，女兒管過好) (Wong, 2016, pp.63).

As well as receiving care, grandparents are often child-caregivers in China. Approximately a 58% of grandparents perform this role (Ko & Hank, 2014), and taking it on is more of an obligation than a choice (Xu & Xia, 2014). Cong and Silverstein (2011) understand the care of grandchildren by grandparents as a form of



intergenerational exchange that involves care in exchange for money or material aid ('time for money'). In general, adult children appreciate the support provided by their parents and parents-in-laws and are not ashamed of reversing the flow of care (Chen & Lewis, 2015). Sun (2012) puts forward the 'productive ageing' (p.58) concept to describe these grandparents, who offer their help both in urban and rural areas by taking care of the so-called left-behind children. This concept underlines the usefulness of ageing people in helping the family and as educators who share their accumulated knowledge (Sun, 2012).

### 3.3.3 Raising the only-child

In Chinese culture, caring for children is not the responsibility of the parents alone, but of the whole family. Moreover, as Salaffa and Greve (2004) point out, in contemporary China – in contrast with the socialist period in urban areas – mothers do not follow a sequential cycle in their roles of mother and worker, but perform both roles simultaneously and as such, they need a support net in order to handle their double work burden. Furthermore, formal care is scarce and expensive, and paid caregivers are often not trusted by parents (Xue & Xia, 2014; Goh & Kuczynsky, 2010). Therefore, the role of grandparents as child caregivers in China enables women to keep working outside the home (Xue & Xia, 2014; Zhou, 2013). With reference to a 13-month period of fieldwork with middle-class families in Beijing, Binah-Pollak (2014) highlights the distance between the reality of grandparenting practices and the official discourse promoted by the Chinese state. She points out that it is grandparents who are usually the primary caregivers, and the education they provide emphasizes obedience and disciplining through the body. This contradicts the official state discourse that promotes a modern and scientific approach to raising children as autonomous individuals, focusing on creativity and individuality.

The impacts of the one-child policy are visible in the revaluing of the child within the family and Chinese society, which have become child-centred. Having an only child means channelling all hopes and expectations for a future family into a single person. Therefore, Chinese families seek to raise the perfect child by making all possible resources available to him or her (Sáiz López, 2009; Fong, 2002, 2004). As a result, girls in mainland China have been revalued (Fong, 2002). By comparing the

experiences of girls born under the one-child policy to those of their mothers and grandmothers, Fong (2002) shows how gender norms are being remodelled over the generations. Together with low fertility, the author argues that other factors, such as the previous work experience of the mothers' generation – who had to demonstrate their capability to support their ageing parents – influence their view of their own daughters as being as valuable as sons. Moreover, daughters are perceived as providing more emotional support to parents than sons (Wong, 2016). Fong (2002, 2004) has shown that single-daughters' parents allocate the same resources to them as if they were sons, and in some cases perhaps even more, as if they raise a single female child they don't need to save extra money to buy a marital house for her and her family, as expected for sons, and therefore more resources are available (Fong, 2002).

In recent decades, the meaning of childhood in China has shifted. The official discourse of the Chinese government and media emphasizes children's status as individuals and childhood as a time to play and be happy (Naftali, 2010). In practice, children's lives in China are strongly shaped by their educational performance and their family's aspirations. On the one hand, this only-child generation is perceived as selfish and spoiled, often referred to as 'little emperors' (*xiao huandi*/ 小皇帝). On the other hand, they experience a high level of pressure, as a child's career is seen as the only path for the family to achieve social mobility and they are embedded in a highly-competitive educational system (Goh & Kuzcynski, 2014; Crabb, 2010; Fong, 2002, 2004). Through the privatization and marketization of the educational system, education has become a commodity, through a discourse articulated around the concept of *suzhi* (素质) or quality (Crabb, 2010; Naftali, 2010; Fong, 2002, 2004). Such a system, designed for the urban classes, tends to increase the disparities between the urban and rural population, hence it is rural parents who spend a greater proportion of their income on providing private tutoring for their children (Crabb, 2010; Fong, 2004). Elsewhere, Fong's research (2007) deals with the tensions in parent-teenager relationships as a result of parental expectations. By focusing on five case studies among a larger sample, she points to parents' difficulties with articulating the cultural model they want to teach their children and how it involves contradictory values that result in children's frustration. The values that Fong has identified as being the most important are excellence (*youxiu*), independence (*zili/duli*), obedience (*tinghua*) and caring/sociability (*zhaogu/guanxin/hui jiao pengyou*), values that are also exalted by

the Chinese media and whose failure is associated with the one-child-policy generations. She concludes that parents expect that their children will be able to articulate all these values by incorporating their desirable aspects and avoiding the undesirable ones. Nevertheless, these values can be contradictory. Moreover, Fong points to the difficulty in balancing these values, and in choosing the most important one in each situation. She concludes that the difficulties of teaching and learning, respectively, are exacerbated by rapid social and economic changes and the differing influences of Confucianism, socialism and capitalism.

### **3.4 Concluding remarks**

In today's China, families are diverse and plural, and family roles and their associated responsibilities continue to be reworked. New trends and the re-emergence of old forms co-exist in a changing social context in which family continues to be a key institution. As in any society, care is mandatory to ensure human continuity, both "daily and intergenerationally" (Glenn, 1992, pp.1) and the greatest challenge is reconciling the different, and often conflicting, social trends occurring in China which may jeopardize the ability to care; such as rapid population ageing, the return to a family care-based system and migratory phenomena (both internal and internationally). While trying to picture the multiple realities of Chinese families who live in China is challenging in itself, adding a transnational lens brings additional demands. The degree to which different people – or their differing ages, gender and family and migratory generations – incorporate and/or interpret influences from the Chinese context – in either the past or the present – varies significantly. Thus, there is not a single path by which to understand their multiple realities, but many single realities travelling along multiple paths.

# CHAPTER

## 4

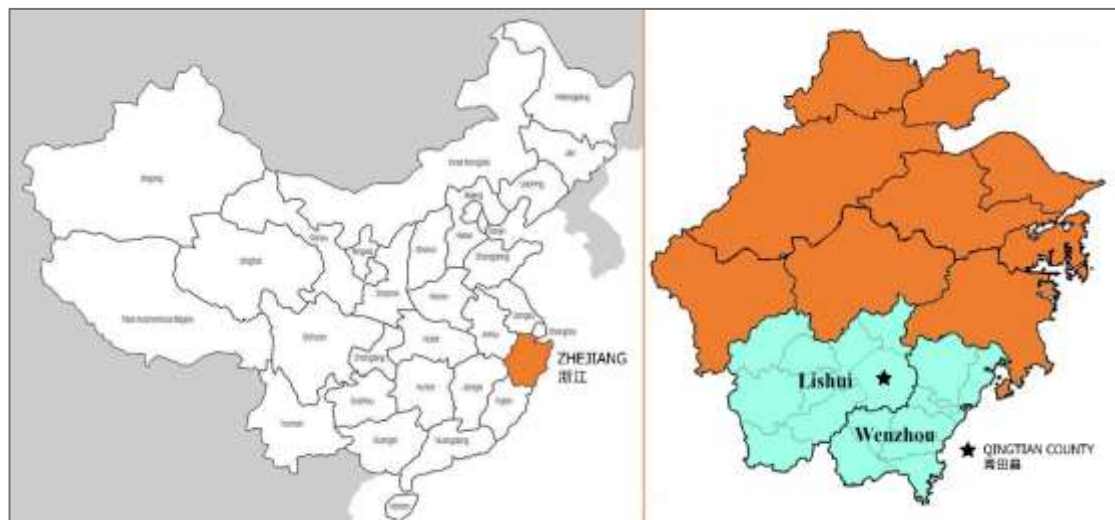
### 4 CHINESE MIGRATION IN SPAIN

This chapter introduces the migration history and settlement patterns of the Chinese population in Spain. Moreover, it offers a preliminary sketch of the transnational flows in which these families take part, serving as a transition chapter between theory and practice. The Chinese in Southern Europe mainly come from Zhejiang province, following a migration chain that – on a very small scale – was initiated a long time ago (Thuno, 2003). The presence of people from Qingtian county (Zhejiang province) in Europe was linked to merchants of stone carvings at the end of the nineteenth century in countries of Western Europe, such as the United Kingdom, Italy and France (Benton, 2011; Thuno, 2003), arriving in Spain in 1920s and the 1930s (Beltrán Antolín, 2003, 2006). Similarly, at the end of World War I, about 2,000 men from Qingtian county who fought with the Allies remained in France (Thuno, 2003). This first migratory phase was characterised by being male-led and not involving a settlement project. It would be after the Second World War that they would make their entry into the catering sector (Beltrán Antolín, 2006), leading to long-term settlement.

It was after China's opening and Reform era that large migratory flows to Europe began, about two-thirds of the total migrants originating in the Wenzhou and Qingtian Districts in Zhejiang Province. From the 1980s onwards, a significant number of Chinese people started arriving in Southern Europe, taking advantage of new economic opportunities in the region (Benton, 2011; Beltrán Antolín, 2003). Many of these migrants moved from other European countries, where they had already settled and had businesses (Beltrán Antolín, 2003, 2006). In addition to new opportunities in the Southern European economies, the extraordinary large-scale migrant regularisation

processes carried out in these countries served to pull Chinese migrants from other European countries, and within the various Southern European ones (Beltrán Antolín, 2003; Li, 1998). This circulation between countries is not unusual, as it is common for different members within an extended family to be spread over different European countries, maximising their economic opportunities and minimising their risks (Beltrán Antolín, 2003; Ceccagno, 2003).

*Map 1: Map of China (left) and Zhejiang province (right).*



Source: Produced by the author.

\*Wenzhou and Lishui are prefecture-level cities, both in Zhejiang province. Lishui city jurisdiction is subdivided into nine county-level divisions, one of them being Qingtian county

Wenzhou and Qingtian are the migration origin areas for Chinese people living in Spain, Italy and Portugal (Chang, 2012; Oliveira, 2010; Sáiz López, 2005; Beltrán Antolín, 2003) and, to a lesser extent, France, where most of the Chinese people who have settled in the country come from Rui'an district, also in Zhejiang province (Guerasimof, 2003). Spain is the country with the largest proportion of Qingtianese-origin people and, together with the flux of people from the neighbouring city of Wenzhou they constitute about 70% of the total Chinese-origin population there (Sáiz López, 2005). Their migratory project is family-based, starting with a man, a woman or both, depending on the available kin network in Spain, followed by other members of the nuclear family (Saiz, 2005; 2012). Their main economic niche in Spain during

the 1980s and 1990s were Chinese restaurants, before diversifying in the mid-1990s when the sector became saturated (Beltrán Antolín, 2003, 2006; Sáiz López, 2005). At that time, Chinese families started to broaden their businesses by including budget bazaars, corner shops, shoes shops and wholesalers; in the last decade, they have also moved into import trade and clothing manufacture and, to a lesser extent, co-ethnic client services in big cities (Beltrán Antolín, 2006). There has also been a trend of Chinese families taking over local business, such as Spanish bars, which continue to offer the same kind of service, but are run by Chinese people (Beltrán & Sáiz, 2015; Masdeu Torruella, 2014 a, b; Beltrán Antolín, 2006).

These family businesses employ nuclear-family members and sometimes hire additional workers from the extended family, or friends and neighbours from the origin town, enabling and sustaining the migration chain and settlement process (Beltrán Antolín, 2003). The cycle starts with a migrant working as an employee in one of these businesses, which serves to pay off their migration-related debts and save money – in combination with an austere life style – as well as enabling them to learn the basic skills to later run their own family business, created by using their savings and/or informal loans (Beltrán Antolín, 2006). Other practices are also carried out in the search for social mobility. In order to allow young migrant couples to focus on the productive sphere, families choose between hiring carers or transnationalising childcare (Sáiz López, 2012). This is particularly important, as Chinese women in Spain are also family entrepreneurs (Sáiz López, 2005, 2012) and their entrepreneurial role contributes to increasing their status within the family, because their activity promotes the whole family's social mobility, which is their main reason for migrating (Sáiz López, 2012). Nowadays, migrants' descendants get university degrees and start new and more ambitious entrepreneurial projects, in which educational capital has become key (Beltrán Antolín, 2006), in contrast to the earlier business model, which was characterised by involving non-skilled work. Another way of investing in the younger generation's educational capital is through the children's attendance at Chinese schools in Spain to learn the Mandarin language and other expressions of Chinese culture.

Although their migratory project is family-based and their aim is to achieve reunification in Spain (Sáiz López, 2005), these families tend to keep strong bonds with their origin town. Beltrán Antolín (2003), through his multi-sited ethnography between Spain and Qingtian, compiled the history of Qingtianese migration to Spain and

sketched out the connections that these families maintained across borders, including with third countries. He highlighted the role of remittances and migration pioneers in the development of the origin towns, through donations to public projects and private investment in business and house building. Furthermore, the development of associations<sup>8</sup> of Chinese-origin people served as a link between both countries, offering information and help for migration and settlement, commercial support within and across borders and promoting the Chinese culture in Spain (Beltrán Antolín, 2015, 2003, 2006; Nieto, 2002); the association's leaders generally having a high status within the Chinese community in Spain (Beltrán Antolín, 2003; Sáiz López, 2005). Moreover, Beltrán Antolín highlights the role of the origin town as a source of workers and marriage partners. Later on, Masdeu Torruella (2014) explored the different mobility experiences of the diverse generations of Qingtianese families between China and Spain, and the influence of transnational links and practices in transforming Qingtian's physical, institutional and social landscape.

Despite the continued prevalence of people from Qingtian and Wenzhou, the area of provenance of Chinese migrants in Spain is becoming more wide-ranging, increasing their demographic diversity. As Benton (2011) highlights, "there is not one Chinese community in Europe but many" (p.62), which does not necessarily preclude contact between them or a shared social class, origin or language, despite the fact that they are often imagined as quite homogeneous. While, in other Western European countries, a significant number of students arrive from China, this is not the case in the Southern Europe countries (Thuno, 2003), although their numbers are increasing in Spain (Zhong, 2018). There is a small percentage of people from Hong Kong living in Spain, who arrived mainly from other European countries, and a recent flux of people arriving from big Chinese cities – such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou – and from provinces like Fujian – in the south – and Shandong, Liaoning, Heilongjiang and Jilin – in the north – (Sáiz López, 2005, 2012). The latter group, in contrast to people from Zhejiang Province, are more like to be employees, they have urban background and

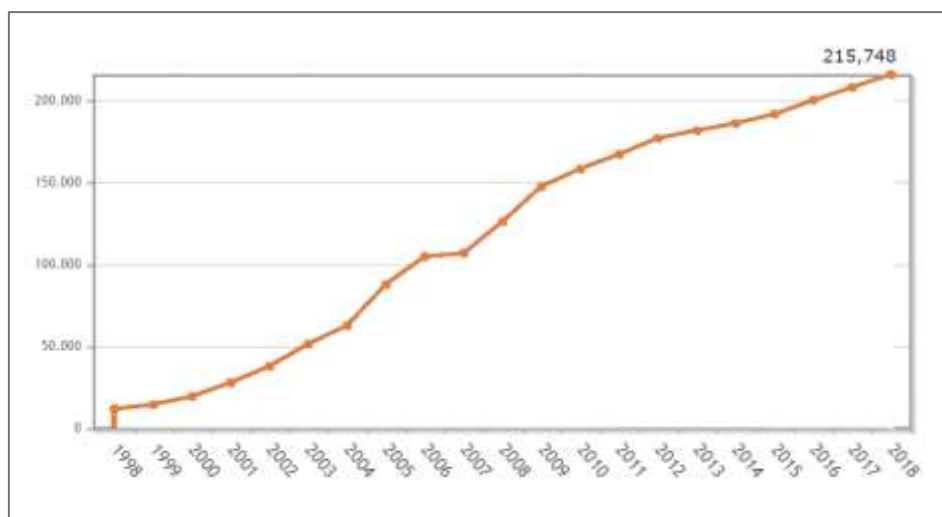
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<sup>8</sup> The different types of Chinese associations in Spain can be categorised using six different labels: firstly, those which group together people performing the same economic activity (for example, vendors); secondly, groups based on their place of origin (for example, the Qingtianese); thirdly, those concerned with general aspects (for example, women's association); the fourth category are groups relating to cultural or artistic concerns; the fifth category covers federations and confederations and finally, there are mixed associations (such as Chinese-Spanish community associations) (Sáiz López, 2005).

higher level of education, and do not have a settlement project in Spain (Beltrán Antolín, 2006; Sáiz López, 2005).

Chinese migration to Spain continues to grow, despite the economic crisis, although the flow of people has decelerated in the last few years (Fig. 1). At the end of 2018, the number of Chinese people settled in Spain was 215,748, the Chinese being the fifth most populous nationality in Spain.<sup>9</sup> Records show that 43,372 of those people were born in Spain, while 172,376 were born in a foreign country. Of the latter, 171,319 were born in China and 1,057 in other countries, the most prominent of which is Italy with 518 people, followed by France with 110, and Portugal with 96.

*Figure 1: Change in the Chinese population in Spain (1998-2018).*



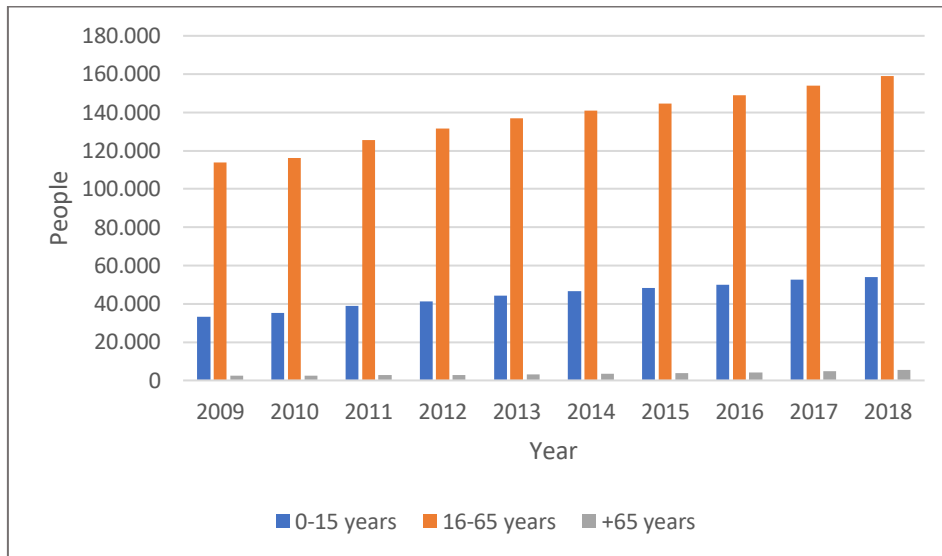
Source: Produced by the author, based on data from the Spanish Statistical Office [INE, Instituto Nacional de Estadística] online database).

As the migration project operates at the level of the family, women and men are present to a similar degree (108.480 men/ 107.268 women). The number of people of Chinese nationality who are under 15 years old makes up a significant percentage of the total Chinese population in Spain. In contrast, as a result of the recent migration and settlement, the percentage of Chinese people aged 65 years old or over in Spain is very low (Fig.2).

<sup>9</sup> The largest foreign population in Spain is from Morocco, the second-largest is from Romania, the third-largest is from the United Kingdom and the fourth-largest is from Italy.



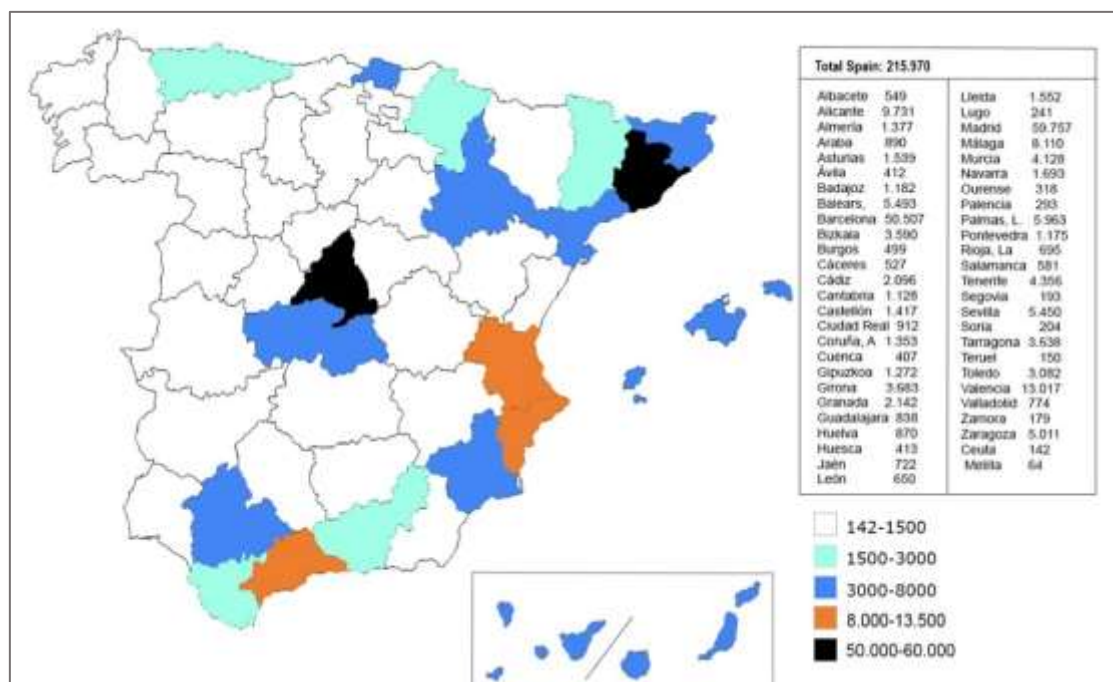
Figure 2: Chinese people in Spain by age (2009-2018).



Source: Produced by the author, based on INE online database.

Although a large proportion of the Chinese-origin population is concentrated in big cities like Madrid and Barcelona, Chinese people are geographically spread all over Spain (Fig. 3), based mainly on the opportunities arising from their entrepreneurial activity, which characterises their settlement project (Beltrán Antolín, 2006).

Map 2: Map of the distribution of the Chinese population in Spain (by provinces) in 2018.



Source: Produced by the author, based on INE online database.

## **PART II: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**



# CHAPTER

## 5

### 5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PRACTICE

This chapter introduces the research design, the applied methodology and my own experience in the field. The first section grounds this research in the iterative-inductive approach and serves as a framework for understanding progress through the project's various stages, including the ups and downs along the way. The second section focuses on the research design and its subsequent implementation, including the different fieldwork sites and stages, the composition of the sample and the data collection and data analysis methods. The third section is presented – and understood – as a reflexive account of my different positionings in the field(s). The final section reflects upon ethical considerations regarding subjects and data treatment, as well as the methodological limitations of this research. The perspective in this chapter juxtaposes the formality and objective gaze sought by the ethnographic methodology with the experienced realities of the person behind the researcher. After all, it reflects a work in progress in which the ethnographic journey's narrative turns on a first-person experience.

#### 5.1 The iterative-inductive approach

“Ethnography is a practice that evolves in design as the study progresses; involves direct and sustained contact with human beings, in the context of their daily lives, over a prolonged period of time; draws on a family of methods, usually including participant observation and conversation; respects the

complexity of the social world; and therefore tells rich, sensitive, and credible stories” (O'Reilly, 2012, p.3).

O'Reilly's (2012) point of departure is the idea of ethnography as a practice, characterised by collecting the data in context and being “essentially a relationship-building exercise” (O'Reilly 2012, p.100), in which body and senses are engaged in the field. Throughout the various research phases, I have used what O'Reilly (2012) termed an ‘inductive-iterative approach’, that is:

“(…) a practice of doing research, informed by a sophisticated inductivism, in which data collection, analysis and writing are not discrete phases but inextricably linked. Iterative implies both a spiral and a straight line, a loop and a tail (...); inductive implies as open a mind as possible, allowing the data to speak for themselves as far as possible” (O'Reilly, 2012, p.18).

O'Reilly suggests, that is not to say that previous theoretical knowledge about the field is not required; it is, in fact, essential. In a non-simplistic inductive approach, theory acts as a mediator, as “all data are theory driven. The point is not to pretend they are not, or to force the data into theory” (Ezzy 2002, p.10, in O'Reilly 2012, p.18). O'Reilly conceives the ethnographic practice as a spiral, in contrast to the idea of research as progressing along a straight path; as such, its design is fluid and flexible, rather than a succession of perfectly-bounded and chronologically-defined research stages in which adhering to a theory or creating a new one is the goal. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, my research interests and aims were reshaped through my fieldwork, which was the tiller that steered this project along its spiral path to this point.

## **5.2 Design and Methodology**

### **5.2.1 Multi-sited ethnography**

In the 1990s, Marcus (1995) referred to a “still emergent mode of ethnography” (p.95), which implied a shift of focus:

“(…) from its conventional single-site location, contextualized by macro-constructions of a larger social order, such as the capitalist world system, to multiple sites of observation and participation that cross-cut dichotomies such as the ‘local’ and the ‘global’, the ‘lifeworld’ and the ‘system’ (Marcus, 1995, p.95).

The arrival of the so-called multi-sited ethnography was an important shift in ethnographic methodology while it also seemed to pose threats to anthropology, regarding the limits of the discipline, the diminishing importance of fieldwork and the loss of the subalternity associated with it (Marcus, 1995). The classic ethnography – which reified place, quasi-equated it to culture and had the faraway ‘other’ as its subject – was challenged. The focus had shifted to the “circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space” (Marcus 1995, p.96), in a setting in which migration and global forces had caught the attention of scholars. Hannerz (2003) emphasises the translocal perspective over the multilocal approach, pointing out that in the former: “The sites are connected with one another in such ways that the relationships between them are as important for this formulation as the relationships within them; the fields are not some mere collection of local units” (p. 206), the relational dimension being key. That researchers have the ability and opportunity to carry out fieldwork in different sites does not mean that the whole field may be encompassed; rather, the field site holds a selection of the whole. Moreover, sites are not watertight compartments, but are fluid and changeable, they are alive. Aware of the inevitability of selection and the mutability of conditions, the research described in this thesis used a multi-sited ethnographic design which incorporated different spaces and social fields, and which recognised the weight and uniqueness of some localities while paying attention to the non-places between them as research sites.

#### 5.2.1.1 *Fieldwork phases and sites*

The qualitative data was collected through a multi-sited ethnography carried out between Spain and Zhejiang province (China) from January 2016 to August 2018. The fieldwork was divided into the following stages:

- *1<sup>st</sup> phase:* January 2016- August 2016 – Fieldwork in Spain.
- *2<sup>nd</sup> phase:* February 2017- August 2017 – Fieldwork in Qingtian.  
For the following two months in Spain, I made new contacts and did some follow-up interviews.
- *3<sup>rd</sup> phase:* October 2017- February 2018 – Fieldwork in Lishui.  
For the following month in Spain, I conducted several interviews in Madrid.
- *4<sup>th</sup> phase:* April 2018- July 2018 – Fieldwork in Qingtian.

The fieldwork in Spain included several locations, but most interviews were carried out either in Madrid or Barcelona and observant participation was mainly performed in ethnic neighbourhoods such as Usera (Madrid) or Fondo (Barcelona). In China, the fieldwork was carried out in Qingtian – as the base location – and, to a lesser extent, in the neighbouring cities of Lishui and Wenzhou<sup>10</sup>, which are both located twenty minutes by train from Qingtian (in opposite directions).

*Map 3: Qingtian/Lishui/Wenzhou area map.*



Source: Image modified by author, original from Google Maps.

Finally, the neighbouring city of Lishui was also included as a base location for four months, for several reasons. Firstly, it was one of the cities of origin mentioned by some of my first informants in Spain. Secondly, as a city that is much bigger than Qingtian –

<sup>10</sup> Wenzhou and Lishui are prefecture-level cities, both in Zhejiang province. Lishui city jurisdiction is subdivided into nine county-level divisions, one of them being Qingtian county.

and much smaller than Wenzhou – Lishui has a *xueyuan* (university) offering Mandarin courses, which I took during my stay there in order to keep improving my language skills. Thirdly, the scale of the city also enabled me to follow through informants' connections and I also found a considerable number of new informants in there. Fourthly, as it is very near to Qingtian, I was able to go and come back to that city frequently. Moreover, once I moved back to Qingtian, Lishui became a place for a quick and easy escape from the field when I felt overwhelmed by it. It was a place I could go to have a tea with some of my teachers or classmates who – in general – were not related to my research, and then go back to Qingtian with just a thirty-minute trip. In the preceding year, my place of escape had been Xiamen, which meant a door-to-door journey of almost seven hours.

While the length of fieldwork in Spain and in China was envisaged to be the same in the preliminary research design, in the end, it lasted for six months in Spain – plus several short periods when I came back from China – whereas the fieldwork in China lasted for 13 months. Several key factors led to this reorganisation. Firstly, I was able to get an extension on my research funding, enabling me to stay for an extra year in China. Secondly, while in Spain the use of Spanish in interviews and conversations was predominant, in China it became secondary. Thirdly, in contrast with my fieldwork in Spain – which I will define as partially fragmented – in Qingtian, the entire physical and social fieldwork site constituted a small, dense and intense research lab, in which every single thing, person, action and word was somehow related to my research. I identified with Bornstein's (2007) reflections about inhabiting her field sites, finding that I stepped in and out of my fieldwork in Spain, but that I inhabited the field while in Qingtian. Further, in that site, I became part of the field and I embodied it. Here, it is worth highlighting the difference between Qingtian and Lishui, which are neighbouring cities; nevertheless, their size, migratory history and social, local and transnational realities make them very different settings. In Lishui, the fieldwork requires having a thread to follow. Qingtian is the thread itself.

#### 5.2.1.2 *Sample*

The main sample is composed of children who grew up in transnational families between Qingtian and Spain and who are now young adults (annex 2). As such, they



narrate their childhood experiences from a retrospective perspective while also incorporating their present-day points of view and experiences, as well as their expectations about the future. There is also a secondary and complementary sample, composed of informants who are adolescents today. The third group includes parents and grandparents – and, to a lesser extent, other members of the extended family – who are also key informants, as they are active actors in managing and building these childhood experiences and the broader care-circulation processes within and across borders. Given that the family is the main point of reference in this research, I will use family generations to refer to my informants as a group, rather than other secondary categories of analysis – which will, nevertheless, be incorporated – such as migratory generation, the place informants were born and raised, or socioeconomic status. Thus, I will refer to:

- The great-grandparents' generation (G4)
- The grandparents' generation (G3)
- The parents' generation (G2)
- And finally, to the children's generation (G1).

The last category is subdivided into children/adolescents/young adults, depending on their current age. In this research, I use 'children' to refer to informants of up to 12 years of age and 'adolescents' to refer to people between 12 to 18 years of age, based on the structure of both the Spanish and Chinese educational systems, which divide the primary and secondary educational levels at the age of 12, which also serves as a social marker. Finally, I use 'young adults' to refer to informants between 18 and 31 years of age who have no offspring. Nevertheless, there are no objective age-stages and that the meanings of these categories are socially and culturally constructed (Fass 2005; Katz, 2004; James et al.,1998; Zelizer, 1985).

Table 1, below, is an attempt to summarise the main sample groups and the data collected directly from interviews and surveys. Nevertheless, diverse strategies were used to collect information on the various generational groups, and pre-arranged interviews or surveys were not always considered key tools or the main informational source, as was the case for the grandparents' generation. Further, the interviews and information collected did not solely cover the aforementioned groups. The range of informants was broad, as I understood any person who inhabited the transnational space

resulting from a migratory process from Qingtian to Europe and the flows between them to be suitable to contribute – from the teacher of a *huaqiao*<sup>11</sup> school to a vendor in the importation market. The totality of these points of view and experiences provides a context for describing and analysing the cases upon which we will focus.

*Table 1: Research sample groups*

Groups	Composed by	Interviews	QTN <sup>12</sup>	Main methodology
MAIN SAMPLE	Young adults (migrant's descendants) <sup>13</sup>	21	30	Interviews Questionnaires Observant participation
SECONDARY SAMPLE	Adolescents (living in Spain)	5	25 <sup>14</sup>	Interviews Questionnaires Observant participation
	Adolescents (living in China)	6	6	Interviews Questionnaires Observant participation
ADDITIONAL INFORMANTS	Children	0	N/A	Observant participation
	Young adults (migrants) <sup>15</sup>	4	N/A	Interviews Observant participation
	Parents	10	N/A	Interviews Observant participation
	Grandparents	8	N/A	Observant participation
	Great-grandparents	0	N/A	Observant participation

Source: Produced by the author

<sup>11</sup> 华侨: Person who lives out of China.

<sup>12</sup> Abbreviation for 'questionnaires'.

<sup>13</sup> All informants were migrants' descendants and have being socialized in Spain, despite some of them migrated from China to Spain as children.

<sup>14</sup> Out of 85 participants in the children summer camp (2018 Lishui 'Roots-seeking Journey') 25 lived in Spain.

<sup>15</sup> Migrated being 18 years old or older.

#### 5.2.1.2.1 Access to informants

Similarly, the strategies used to gain access to the various groups were diverse. In the initial fieldwork stage in Spain, I went to businesses run by Chinese people and directly introduced myself. Moreover, I often spent time in the Evergreen Club (长青俱乐部 /chang qing julebu) – a club aimed at Chinese people belonging to the grandparents’ generation and above – located in Madrid’s Usera neighbourhood. Nevertheless, in both cases, the absence of previous affinity ties or mutual friends resulted in the collection of very generic information and me feeling uncomfortable about asking questions. And, when it came to working with the grandparents’ generation, their lack of Spanish and Mandarin skills and my lack of *Qingtinghua*<sup>16</sup> language skills created communication problems. As mentioned earlier, informants I had viewed as secondary – the young adults’ generation – became the focus, as a path through which to gain access to their older family generations. I posted a short questionnaire on grandparenting and childcare practices in Chinese families between China and Spain on a Facebook group (Annex 1) used by such informants. While the responses provided me with interesting background information on the different generational roles and childhood experiences, the e-mail addresses participants provided in one of the questionnaire’s fields was a bonus. Thus, I later contacted them to arrange interviews. While some of these interviews never ended up taking place, I kept in touch with several of them over the entire course of the research, which enabled follow-up interviews and provided further contacts. One of them in particular became my key informant, enabling my entrance into the fieldwork in Qingtian and the development of a snowball sample which includes all the generations of several families. Once in China, I met other young adults through the same Facebook group and my posts or replies to posts on different topics. Two of these contacts also became key informants, enabling me to collect a great amount of data through several interviews with them in various settings and periods, and serving as links to other interviewees. In addition, I used other strategies while in China, such as regularly dropping by a restaurant run by Chinese people in Lishui, who had previously lived in Spain, or simply talking to people who I heard speaking Spanish while in Qingtian, a situation that is quite common in the summer. Regarding the part of the research that focused on adolescents, I gained

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<sup>16</sup> Language of Qingtian.

access to schools and summer camps through direct contact with these institutions, as well as with the help of some fieldwork informants.

### 5.2.1.3 *Data collection*

The data collection techniques used in this research were semi-structured interviews, participant observation and questionnaires. It also incorporates secondary data sources, particularly in relation to the sample of young adults. This included reviewing several public websites, social networks magazines and books that have been created by Chinese young adults in Spain or are related to them as a group (annex 1).

#### 5.2.1.3.1 Methodology: Observing, participating, interviewing

As O'Reilly notes, interviews carried out in an ethnography take many different forms, from “opportunistic chats, questions that arise on the spur of the moment, one-to-one in—depth interviews, group interviews, and all sorts of ways of asking questions and learning about people that fall in between” (p.116), thus “there may not be a clear distinction between doing participant observation and conducting an interview” (p.74). I have realised that some of the richest information was gained through informal chats. While the pre-arranged interviews had the advantage of being recorded – and thus I only had to focus on the interview itself and not on trying to remember the information – I also sometimes got the feeling that answers were somewhat contained. This seemed especially to be the case for the grandparents’ generations. I therefore decided to place greater emphasis on informal conversations over pre-arranged or more formal interviews, which I kept to use as a last resort in the very last moments: in the weeks or days prior to leaving the field site, even if that meant that the interview may never take place. I believed that, in this way, informants would not need to use evasive strategies or accept taking part in the interview if they didn’t feel comfortable with it. In the meantime, we had rich conversations that were natural and fluid and I had the opportunity to observe people in multiple and diverse situations, even though I never hid my identity as a researcher.

O'Reilly further states: "Ethnographic interviewing is thus an engaged, reflexive, collaborative and time-consuming method" (p.127). I lived in Qingtian city for a total of nine months – plus four months in the neighbouring city of Lishui – which allowed me to discover, and to experience the cities' pace of life and their people's habits. Qingtianese people are very hospitable and, through various informants, I had the opportunity to visit many homes and eat side-by-side with different families from various parts of Qingtian county – and, on a few occasions, in Lishui. Furthermore, I engaged in activities that occurred on a daily basis on Qingtian's public spaces, such as *Tai-ji* (2017) and other sports. I also took on the role of Spanish teacher for several young adults in Qingtian, which gave me access to information, particularly regarding their view of migrants and Spain, and their generational and transnational family relations. Additionally, as I taught them for free, they often took me with them and their families on weekend excursions. By a certain point in the Chinese fieldwork, it was often impossible to draw a line between my role as researcher and my reality as a person in my day-to-day life; or to differentiate between what was data and what was not.

In this research, participant observation was most important for the grandparents' and children's generations, as these are the generations whose daily lives take place in Qingtian. Nevertheless, for the young adults and, to a lesser extent, the parents' generation, semi-structured interviews were also key – particularly those carried out in Spain, where participant observation was limited. The original research design included different scripts to act as a guide for the interviews with each generation. Thus, I used open-ended questions as prompts that often led to new topics being raised and these scripts evolved in conjunction with the research. The length and the subjectively-perceived quality of the interview varied greatly, depending on the informant's attitude, the rapport between us, and also on the research phase, given that my increasing self-confidence and familiarity with the field site was a benefit to later interviews. Regarding the young adults' generation, the style used was usually very informal, the interview resembling a conversation with a friend, while the roles of informant and interviewer seemed perfectly defined with other informants. The role of language was also key. While interviewing the young adults' generation, the fact that we both had native-level proficiency in the Spanish language helped to make conversations more fluid, whereas this was not always the case for those conducted in Mandarin, and small difficulties or the need to clarify some concepts or expressions often arose. Nevertheless, with a few

exceptions, I avoided having to use interpreters or intermediaries. The exceptions were the occasions on which I carried out surveys in schools, when I hired a Lishui University student as an assistant, as the context was formal and time was limited.

#### 5.2.1.3.2 Data collection tools

For those interviews which had been pre-arranged, the voice recorder was the key tool. The fieldwork notebook also had its place in my bag and on my desk. Rather than long sentences or texts, the notebook usually collected short impressions or ideas, through words, drawings or diagrams. The order was not strictly chronological, but thematic or with key ideas as nodes, although each new input came with a handwritten date. In the beginning, I used to take the reflex camera with me while walking around, to capture the various realities, contexts and practices I observed around Qingtian. However, I obviously soon realised that its large size and professional look drew attention to what I was taking photos of and made it difficult to go unnoticed when in public spaces. So, I decided to sacrifice the quality of the images – which were a research tool rather than a research outcome – for the sake of discretion, using the mobile phone instead. Taking pictures or videos of anything with a mobile phone is the most common thing in China and I was just one more person doing it. There was also another tool that became essential during the research. The WeChat app – a mainstream social network in China – contains a ‘file transfer’ tool, through which you can send a message to your own WeChat account – in different formats such as text, voice or video. This was extremely useful when I was in the field and had no time to take out my fieldwork notebook or preferred people not to realise that I was writing down notes. A ten-second voice note was often enough to sum up some key information I had observed, without interfering at all in the normal succession of events and being available to play and replay once I arrived home.

#### 5.2.1.4 *Data analysis*

The semi-structured interviews were recorded – with a couple of exceptions – and, a short time afterwards, were transcribed and analysed for the first time. Through the information obtained and this preliminary analysis, past interviews were reconsidered and interview scripts updated. Further, on a few occasions, I discussed my emerging

ideas about the field with some of the young adult informants, with whom I developed a friendship. This allowed me to contrast my own points of view with theirs and to keep questioning data through their feedback. As “field notes move from first impressions to insider sensitivities” (O'Reilly, 2012, pp.102) these were periodically revisited to compare the original records with the internal transcripts and, through this, create a dialectic interplay. Furthermore, the interview transcripts, informal interviews, other fieldwork notes and additional materials from secondary sources were coded using NVIVO 11 qualitative analysis software. Through the use of an inductive ‘thematic analysis’ approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012), thematic patterns and emerging sub-themes were identified, serving to organise data and shape subsequent fieldwork steps.

### **5.3 A reflexive account**

“We cannot undertake ethnography without acknowledging the role of our own embodied, sensual, thinking, critical and positioned self (...) there is no escaping your own body and this will affect how you are received and how participants interact with you in the field” (O'Reilly, 2012, pp.100).

#### **5.3.1 Being and positioning myself**

When I moved to Qingtian for the first time and I met Meili's grandparents, they were stunned. They were waiting to receive and welcome their granddaughter's friend who, in their minds – I guess – bore little resemblance to me. At that time, Meili was about to turn twenty years old and I was already thirty. I remember that they repeatedly asked me how we had met, as they imagined that we couldn't be classmates. They expected to meet someone in their late teens and they got me: a person whose age didn't match the kind of lifestyle I led. Nevertheless, they were – and are – extremely kind to me. They helped me to find accommodation; I ate at their home every day for the first week; they showed me the scenic and cultural sights around Qingtian, as well as places I would need in my daily life, such as restaurants and markets; and they also introduced me to some people who I could speak to for my research. Over these two years we kept in touch and contacted each other frequently, resulting in mutual affection. Further, my

Chinese language skills improved as we became closer, to the point where I am now able to talk about a broad range of subjects. Nevertheless, there is one conversation topic that they are always keen to bring up: the fact that I am ‘already’ 32 years old (33 *sui*/岁<sup>17</sup>), I am not married and I have no plans to do so. They are really concerned about this because they feel genuine affection for me, and through their concern they also take care of me. Moreover, they imagine that my parents may suffer because of this situation, despite the fact that I have explained many times that they do not, because family and social expectations are different in Spain. Beyond obvious labels that can be assigned to me – such as ‘researcher’ or ‘foreigner’ while in China – or the barriers between us – such as the language, particularly as the grandmother barely speaks Mandarin and I don't speak *Qingtianhua* – the greatest distance and mismatch between these grandparents’ realities and my own relate to the fact that I consider myself an individual and still a girl or young woman, and they consider me a mature woman (which they understand as a female of the parents’ generation, linked to my unfulfilled role of wife and mother).

Similarly, it was not rare when I met someone in Qingtian – without having been previously introduced by a third person – for them to assume that I was there because I was the wife of a Qingtianese man, despite the fact that mixed marriages between Qingtianese men and European women are not usual. Thus, my condition of being a single woman turned into an issue. Often, after replying that I was not married, the immediate question was: are you all alone here? In fact, I was not, I had some friends and a few people who really took care of me. But the ultimate answer was yes, because no, I didn't have a man beside me. I did not have a husband, nor even a boyfriend. My answer used to prompt several reactions, the most common being praise for what they understood to be the courage to go to a foreign country alone and an expression of sorrow for my being ‘alone’, followed by the suggestion – or sometimes advice – about the need to find a local partner.

While in Lishui or Xiamen – bigger cities with the presence of foreigners – people automatically used to think that I was a teacher. It seems that my age and my image – or both – ruled out the possibility of being a foreign student. Nevertheless, in China,

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<sup>17</sup> Sui: refers to the age of a person (years of age) starting from the first day of the Lunar New Year. As such, the age of a person is not related to the day they were born but to their year of birth, in relation to the lunar calendar.



my status as a student mattered. When I was introduced by someone to a third person, they highlighted the fact that I was doing my PhD and that I was linked to Xiamen University: a well-regarded institution in China. Further, if I was meeting a person related to the academic field in some way, my contacts also highlighted the fact that Professor Li Minghuan was my supervisor, as she is a reputed scholar. One of the most phrases I heard most often during my stay in Qingtian – and China in general – came immediately after introducing myself or being introduced by others as a PhD student: ‘*hao lihai*’ (好厉害), which, translated to English, would be something like “how impressive!”. The difference between the status of a PhD student in Spain and China – particularly if related to humanities or social sciences – was evident and, in the beginning, I felt really uncomfortable with it. I often found myself seriously trying to argue that I was not *lihai* but a very normal person.

In her ethnography in Taiwan, Diamond (1970 in O'Reilly 2012) talked about the difficulties and advantages that her condition of being an American female scholar brought with it, and she highlighted how her high status as a scholar counteracted her lower status as female. During my stay in China, there were several times in festival celebrations when I shared a table with men only, this being considered the most important table, while there were other mixed tables or women-only tables nearby. In these circumstances, I would say that the decision was based more on my status as a foreign guest than any other factor. Nevertheless, I was offered cigarettes on many occasions in the field, and I have collected information that leads me to believe that this is not the norm. An example was given by a descendent of Qingtianese migrants that travelled to Qingtian with his Spanish girlfriend, who was a smoker; they received several complaints about her smoking and got disapproving glances while on the street. An incident related to my status as a foreigner, and to the presumption that I have a high status in Spain – which is very far from the truth – was when a mother and her young adult daughter requested that I help them take her to Spain and offered me some financial compensation for it. I told them that I could help them check what documents were needed to apply for a work visa – as they told me that a relative could offer her a job – and that of course, no financial reward was necessary. The following day, after checking the website of the Spanish embassy, I told them about the requirements and documents needed and offered to help translate and fill out the forms. They said that

they were familiar with the procedure and there was no need for such help. We never talked about this again.

Sometimes, my status as a non-Chinese person was obvious. People in informal talks often commented on the impossibility of Chinese people and myself completely understanding each other, due to our cultural differences. Nevertheless, my informants—both in Spain and China – also often emphasised how well I got along with Chinese food and habits. Further, they often noted how my manners were more Chinese than those of their children or grandchildren, such as my polite position while seated – without crossing my legs – or my attempts to use chopsticks even when they offered me a fork or a spoon: an effort that they did not always see their offspring living in Spain make. I remember how I found it difficult, in the beginning, to sit without crossing my legs, but I was told that the politest position is sitting with the legs together, without crossing them, especially when someone invites you to his or her home, so I tried to control this. With time, it became something that I did without realising, indeed, I first noticed this when the mother of my friend in Xiamen reproached her daughter for crossing her legs and referred to me as a good example. In the meantime, when I was alone at my home, I automatically crossed my legs. People often invited me to eat at their homes. A great deal of Chinese social life revolves around eating, which was something that I loved, as I found it very similar to my home region. Thus, these kinds of events which, more than events are part of normal life, were very precious to me, both personally and professionally. I remember that, in the beginning, I was very concerned about two things. Firstly, that they would serve something that I didn't feel comfortable eating, this happened several times and I tried to manage the situation by eating a little bit and covering the rest with leftovers of other food. And secondly, the fact that Chinese people eat their food very hot, compared to Spanish people. This, added to the fact that they use chopsticks faster than me, resulted in their perception that I didn't like the food, because I ate it very slowly, blowing on the food as if I was trying to let time pass by. Eating food hot is considered very important in China and, and as they are used to doing so, they didn't understand that my problem really was only the food's temperature and so my remedy was taking more time. In short, I had to learn to eat very hot food, even if it meant burning my tongue.

Finally, I would like to highlight that after moving to Qingtian, a small town in a mountainous area in China, I didn't experience significant culture shock, even when

there were bigger ups and downs in the initial stage of the fieldwork. Conversely, things often felt familiar to me. I grew up in a very small village in Galicia, in the northwest of Spain, leading a rural lifestyle which I could see reflected in the small villages spread around Qingtian county. I saw similarities in the landscapes and even in the buildings. But this resemblance was not only physical. I find this difficult to explain, to find something to focus on which might provide a coherent explanation; rather, it was more of a general feeling. Perhaps this feeling was linked to very specific practices, such as: customs directly related to the agrarian background; the importance of the extended family and family events; the persistence of particularistic relationships based on codes of behaviour, honour and trust; and, to a much lesser extent, the international migratory tradition of both places. But it may also be connected to these areas' special positioning between spaces and times. I remember the feeling when I was a child: the city of Lugo, which was only a twenty-minute drive from where I lived, was seen as providing all the commodities and amenities that, little by little, drop by drop, were incorporated into our home. But there was always less there than what you could get in A Coruña, a city that was about an hour and a half away by car at that time, which was bigger and had large department stores – where lucky children were taken to shop for weddings and communions – fancy shopping centres and leisure facilities. In China, I saw this city's mirror image in Wenzhou, for the Qingtianese. Nevertheless, nothing compared with the modern way of life that Madrid or Barcelona could offer; in this case, the parallel would be Shanghai, on the far – but less and less far – horizon. Furthermore, my childhood took place in the years following the death of the Spanish dictator, Franco; while a democratic system was taking its first steps; when Spain joined the European Union and, in general, in a context of very rapid social and economic changes. Separated by only one generation, the lives of my parents and my own life were completely different. Although the situation is different in Qingtian, I also noticed this phenomenon. I am not sure if this feeling of similitude creates a bias in my research or if it constitutes a strength. Nevertheless, while analysing the data I tried to contain it and during the fieldwork I enhanced it, as I thought that self-identification could help me to empathise with my informants.

My physical appearance seemed to be interpreted as having Chinese-like aspects. Throughout my stay in China I encountered many people who thought I was Chinese and who only realised I was not when I spoke. In Qingtian, there were many times when

people – especially from the grandparents’ generation – asked me in their local language about practical information – for example, while waiting at the bus stop: about which bus went where or what time the bus arrived and so on – as they didn't realise that I was a foreigner. Similarly, during the 2018 Spring festival, some friends took me to visit their relatives’ house. One of the aunts only realised that I was a foreigner about half an hour after our arrival, because her sister had told her: at that moment she came over to me and we kept talking until I left, as she felt very curious about me. People often referred to my straight black hair and – to a lesser extent – my face, as making me look similar to Chinese people. More specifically, people used to tell me that I could be someone from Xinjiang province (in the northwest of China). My appearance provided me with a really valuable degree of daily peace, as I was able to walk on the street without attracting attention from others, or at least not too much. Moreover, it enabled me to carry out daily participant observation on the streets and other public spaces, as the Qingtianese people didn't have the feeling of being observed, and nor did I. Of course, this was not always the case and I was much more of a chameleon for the older generations than for younger ones. Nevertheless, on the two other occasions that I met foreigners in Qingtian, I could feel how people’s eyes were upon us and how we attracted everyone's attention. The other side of the coin was that people approached them while they were sitting in a café or public space, as they were – and looked like – foreigners. This never happened to me in Qingtian and it seemed to be an easy way to meet new informants and friends, in contrast to the initial difficulties I had with meeting young people there. Finally, whereas it had often felt impossible to establish a great degree of connection with the grandparents’ generation, I often had the feeling that I could have been one more of the young adults I have interviewed. Our shared age-range, our links with China – albeit different in nature – and the experiences there, made the distance between us feel small and sometimes this distance was easy to eliminate. Often, the interviews – formal and informal – ended up working in both directions.

### 5.3.2 The unfamiliar field

While Qingtian felt familiar to me and evoked childhood memories, to a certain extent; there were specific situations and attitudes that I found very difficult or even impossible to interpret or understand. It is difficult to know if the boundaries between the emic and

the etic<sup>18</sup> were real, or simply a bad translation on my part. As mentioned earlier, one of my strategies to find potential informants while in Qingtian, was simply to listen out for someone speaking Spanish then try to talk to him or her. It may sound strange for those who have never visited Qingtian, but it is quite normal – particularly in summertime – to hear people speaking Spanish or other European languages. Young adults recording voice messages on their phones, teenagers talking in Spanish while drinking bubble tea in a tea shop and young mothers talking to their small children are all common situations in which the Spanish language becomes a very easy marker by which to recognise potential informants. Nevertheless, this meant that I, a stranger, imposed myself on their conversations or private time. Usually, I started by speaking Spanish to them, which resulted in them feeling curious. As I was a foreigner living in Qingtian, people wanted to know what I was doing there, thus the topic of my research emerged in a very natural way. When they expressed their interest, I explained it in more detail and invited them to participate. I tried to avoid the word ‘interview’ and to use other formulations, such as ‘talking about your own experience’ or similar phrases. Nevertheless, while their feedback tended to be positive, without expressing any reluctance, once the time came to arrange an appointment, the response was excuses and often silence. This had already happened in Spain a couple of times, which I had interpreted as a problem of people having busy agendas. Nevertheless, after it happened several times in China, I started to think that I was doing something wrong. Otherwise, I thought, there was no reason for a growing number of people to try to avoid me.

The feeling was particularly strong after meeting a young couple while dining in a restaurant in Qingtian in the summer of 2017. I heard them talking Spanish and I decided to approach them and to introduce myself. They were really friendly and invited me to finish having dinner with them, so we spent a while talking about them, about me, about China and Spain. At the moment of saying goodbye, it was even them who suggested exchanging our WeChat contact details. They were about to go back to Spain in a few days, so they were busy and I didn't want to bother them much. Some weeks later, I contacted them because I was going to Spain for two months: I suggested the possibility of meeting and that if they felt comfortable, they could tell me about their experiences. They never replied to my message. Perhaps, the silence was simply

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<sup>18</sup> Emic refers “to the presence of an actual or potential interactive context in which ethnographer and informant meet and carry on a discussion about a particular domain” and, “the operational meaning of etics, in contrast, is defined by the logically nonessential status of actor-observer elicitation” (Harris, 1976 , pp.331).

another type of reply. This was one of the conclusions that emerged when I discussed this issue with my informants/friends and other scholars in Chinese field. I could understand their feeling uncomfortable with talking about their lives to someone that they don't really know, indeed, I always underlined to my informants that they should feel free to say no. However, it seems that inside, I was open to hearing or reading a 'no' when it was the kind I could identify as such, or a evasive response, such as "sorry, but I am really busy, I don't think I can make it"; but I was not so willing to accept that there may be many different ways of saying no, and that silence may be just one more of them.

This unpleasant feeling reached its peak in the spring of 2018. Through my contact in a school in Qingtian – who was introduced to me by the mother of one of the students there – I tried to gain access to the school, in order to conduct a survey. Sometime before then, when talking about my research to this person, they<sup>19</sup> showed interest in it and invited me to pass by the school anytime. On one occasion, they even showed me the school and introduced me to some children. So, at some point, I decided to ask them for an appointment to go to the school to conduct a survey. I sent them the materials I had prepared – together with a Chinese student, to make sure they were intelligible and appropriate – by WeChat, as email is not often used in China. I also expressed my flexibility about changing any content or question if needed, and also that we could arrange a time to carry it out that fitted to the children's and teachers' availability<sup>20</sup>. I also let this informant know that, while the participation of more students would be better for me, I would be happy with the number and the age range they decided on. In short, I was open to any option. For the first few days, silence was again the answer. As this person sometimes even interacted with me through my WeChat posts, I decided to insist and to resend them the information. Again, no answer. A week later, I decided to send them another message as a last resort. This message said that if the survey was not possible, I completely understood, but requested that they please let me know in order to plan my work. At that time, I got a reply, saying that I needed to get permission from the school, which was something that I had already planned for. I asked this person to provide me with the contact details of the person in charge so that I could talk to him

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<sup>19</sup> In this section I have used 'they' as a gender-neutral singular pronoun, to avoid identifying the gender of this informant'.

<sup>20</sup> The material included child-friendly exercises for children up to 12 years of age and a small questionnaire for adolescents between 12 and 16 years of age.

or her. The information I received was the phone number of the school's reception. The school's receptionist replied by saying that she didn't know who I should talk to. Prior to this, I had also emailed the school and sent them the information; when asked if they had received it, they said that they had not. I cannot be sure that they did, but I had opened an account on the same mail server that the school used, in order to make sure the email didn't end up in the spam folder. The official answer was "we don't know who you need to speak to"; I received the same reply at the school's entrance, which you are not allowed through unless you have an appointment. At that point, I felt very discouraged and I didn't want to insist on the matter further, as I preferred not to create an uncomfortable situation. I decided to try to gain access another way, by asking other people I knew in the field, but nobody seemed to be able to help me, and the survey in that school never took place. In the meantime, they asked me back a couple of weeks later, I told them that I had contacted the school in various different ways and received no answer. I asked this person again if they could provide me with the contact details of the person in charge. The answer was evasive, and I decided to step back.

Another –very different kind of – doubt regarding my role as a researcher emerged from my initial experiences on the field. Again, I identified with what I was reading of Bornstein (2007). She – like me – had internalised the idea that, in order to conduct research properly, we should be fully integrated into a family, as the best and probably only way to do genuine fieldwork. "Was I getting 'enough' of 'a perspective?' Where were the boundaries of my research? Who were my informants?" (Bornstein, 2007, pp.492). In my case, moving in with a family was the initial idea, but the lack of options led me to move into a hotel, which was owned by a friend of my key informant's relative, with the hope of moving into a family's house later. It was not a home, but several families and its members – from all generations – frequented that place. Nevertheless, inside, I continued to feel that I was missing something important. In Bornstein's case, she was living under the same family's roof, but she confessed to have confused cohabiting with taking part in a family's life. In the end, she reported feeling like a paying guest and, after moving, she became more productive than before. On my second move back to Qingtian in 2018, I had the experience of living in a family's home, with people who had previously been my informants. While my life was full of comforts, I felt controlled due to their attentive care for me; moreover, I felt that I was interrupting their routines and I didn't write anything new in my fieldwork notebook for

days. Then, I decided to step back and find a new place. This time, I moved to another hotel where I found – like anywhere else in Qingtian – people who were members of transnational families, whose experiences helped me built a rich, coherent background to this research.

Finally, there is another way in which the field was or became unfamiliar to me, this time understanding ‘me’ as a person, and completely forgetting the researcher. Shortly after arriving in Qingtian in 2017, I decided to join a group to do some exercise outdoors. One night, I approached a group of people who were doing *Tai-ji* beside the river and I asked to join them. The people there was very friendly and they agreed to welcome me into their group and even to teach me. Two people were designated as my guides, one who focused on the need to feel the energy running through my body, in order to start doing the movements; and another who used the opposite methodology: first practise the movements, in order to start feeling the energy. As I didn't want to look ungrateful to either of them, I switched between both methods. Days and weeks passed and somehow the presence of one of them did not always feel comfortable to me, so I tried to create some distance. Nevertheless, this person was the one who focused on movements and, as I was a beginner, my position often needed to be rectified, which often involved physical contact. One day, this physical contact meant touching my bottom to change the position of my lower body. On that day, I felt very unpleasant, I tried to concentrate on adopting the right position and avoiding him touching me again. After a few days, it happened again. As a result, I started to feel afraid of going to the *Tai-ji* field and on the few occasions that this person didn't show up, I felt really relieved. This was particularly because often he insisted on walking with me on our way back home, as he could catch the bus at a bus stop near my home. When lucky, I managed to leave the daily *Tai-ji* session before it ended, by creating different excuses so that I could walk back home alone. On the one hand, I enjoyed the *Tai-ji* sessions and the group companionship a lot. On the other, I didn't know how to deal with the situation. During my days of practising with them, I saw this person touching another girl to reposition her body, without any suspicion of abnormality between them or from the others. Less frequently, I also saw him touching other men, although I cannot help thinking that the touching was not the same. It was maybe a feeling, maybe a reality. And what is certain is that the area of the hips, pubis and bottom is key for adopting the



right position to practice *Tai-ji*. That was one of the thoughts I used to call to mind on those days.

What happened next is that, one day, a very experienced teacher came to the field and he was asked by this person to teach me. At first, I said no, saying that I didn't want to bother him, as he was a *Tai-ji* master. Indeed, I preferred to avoid the interaction with the other man, but they insisted and I accepted so as not to offend them. After going through the movements side by side, I had to repeat them by myself while the others watched me. I was very nervous. I started, then they approached to correct the position of my elbows. I followed through the movements, but I could feel their presence very close by, just behind me, and I collapsed. I felt the anxiety and the tears coming to my eyes. In a hurry, I apologised to the master and said that I was not feeling good and had to leave, and I ran away. I spent my walk home crying. The next day, I sent this man a phone message, saying that I had decided to not go back to the *Tai-ji* field and that I would practise at home by myself, as the other teacher had suggested. But still, I felt bad about leaving the group in such an abrupt way, without even saying goodbye to the other members. About a week later, I decided to go back to the ground and say goodbye to the others, hoping he would not be there, but he was. From that point onwards, I always avoided that area.

#### **5.4 Ethical considerations**

All of the informants were aware of my status as a researcher and prior to interviews, detailed information about how the data would be handled was provided. In line with O'Reilly's (2012) accounts, access to informants in the field involved "explaining about our research overtly and then settling into a semi-overt role, where participants know what we are doing but do not always have it in the forefront of their minds" (p.88). In order to preserve informants' privacy, none of the names used in this thesis are real. Nevertheless, those informants who introduced themselves using a Spanish name were given another Spanish name for their pseudonym, while those using Chinese names were given a Chinese one. Further, for one informant, the information provided and used in this thesis is substantial and some of it, although it was not presented as secret, is about a part of that informant's life which they do not normally refer to. Thus, to make sure that I do not give away the informant's identity, I have used two different

names when analysing two different aspects of their experience, as this division does not affect the content. Regarding the surveys in schools and summer camps, while I obtained the permission and collaboration of the teachers and institutions, they didn't ask for parents' permission for their children's participation in the study, which may be a flaw in how this research was carried out.

During my fieldwork, I developed a friendship with several of my informants. At some point, I was faced with an ethical issue regarding the information I collected. One person, who was first my informant and later on became my friend, and who told me about their<sup>21</sup> life beyond the boundaries of any research or formal or informal interview, decided to omit or to make up some information that many months later came to me through a different person, who was also an informant. Due to the fact that we still have a fluid relationship and keep in touch, I faced the dilemma of whether I should tell this person what I know, understanding that failing to tell them that I have this information would be a kind of lie; or whether I should act as if I didn't know anything. In the end, I decided not to say anything and, if some day my friend decides to tell me about it, I will confess that I knew this, and why and when I came to know it. Even though I believe that the information may not be so important, the conscious omission by the informant is important, as this was their decision and it must be respected. Further, the way I received the information involves a third person, and as I am fairly certain that this person didn't reveal this information with any bad intentions, my silence prevents a possible conflict between them.

## 5.5 Limitations

In line with ethnographic principles, this research values qualitative data over quantity or representativeness. Further, as in all research, it is not possible to analyse data from a totally neutral perspective, as “some subjectivity is inevitable, and some interpretation of events always necessary” (p.107). To approach reality – albeit a constructed reality – I tried to incorporate as many points of view as possible, to build a context in which the specific case studies included in the sample of this thesis – some of which are almost life histories – may be grounded. Incorporating different family members, as well as

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<sup>21</sup> In this section I have used 'they' as a gender-neutral singular pronoun, to avoid identifying the gender of this informant'.

different families – in terms of migratory generation and socioeconomic status – may serve to enhance accuracy while ensuring plurality. Moreover, I tried to triangulate the data in various ways. Regarding the young adult sample, the Facebook group surveyed has been a valuable tool. It enabled me to identify whether the same set of ideas and narratives that these informants used during pre-arranged interviews was reflected in their exchanges within a group which – with exceptions, like me – is created, managed and curated by them and their peers. Additionally, I conducted some follow-up interviews. Finally, as an invaluable part of my research data comes from participant observation, my fieldnotes and observations were set alongside and compared with the data obtained from interviews and surveys.

This research incorporates the retrospective narratives of people who are currently young adults and, to a lesser extent, the present-day experiences of those who are currently adolescents. Nevertheless, I am aware that this does not mean that I can track their experiences of growing up or their development from children to adults. In order to be able to trace their development, I would have to study the same informants as they advance along their life paths. In this case, due to time limitations, using a longitudinal research design is not viable. As the circumstances in which those who are currently children and adolescents live are very different to those of the informants who were children one or two decades ago, I cannot presuppose that their respective experiences are similar. Further, the importance of time in constructing memories cannot be underestimated. Therefore, I am only able to focus on each group independently and carefully compare the narratives of those who are currently children with the retrospective narratives of the young adults, while framing them in their respective contexts. In addition, the data collected in this thesis may serve as a starting point for the aforementioned longitudinal research, with the aim of following today's adolescents and young adults as they advance along their life paths and take on different family and social roles. Such research, moreover, could explore how their current experiences become part of their past and are incorporated into their narratives.

## **PART III: ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA**



## Introduction: De/locating Qingtianese transnational families

In March 2017, on my first day in Qingtian, Meili's grandparents picked me up from my hotel and invited me to have lunch in their home. Sitting alongside them, their youngest daughter – who was there on a three-week visit – and their grandson – who lived with them while his parents worked in Spain – I ate home-made Chinese food in China for the first time. Many small plates were spread over the round turning table, filled with different types of dishes and vegetables that I saw for the first time; some of them – they said – were specialties from the area. The chairs, I remember, were very heavy, being made from wood and marble. The cabinets beside us were full of European wines and liquors, and I drank a tasty Rioja<sup>22</sup> wine that they served me. Spanish sausage (*fuet*) had also its place on the table. They repeatedly invited me to eat it as, they said, it came from my country. I used the chopsticks instead of my hands to pick it up – as is common in Spain – as I saw that this is what they did. Nevertheless, at that point, I avoided copying the local ways and dipping it in a soy-vinegar dip. That was going too far, I guessed.

Some weeks later, from my study table in Qingtian, I checked the new notifications on my social media. One of them came from a Facebook group of Chinese migrants' descendants in Spain, where a new post had been posted. It was an article from a newspaper (Amorós, 2017) regarding a girl who had obtained the best grade in the university access exams in the Balearic Islands, in Spain. Her name was Yali Chen and she was a descendant of Zhejianese migrants. When she was very young, she had lived in China with her grandparents, and later on, at the age of four, she was reunited with her parents in Spain. She speaks four languages, she paints and is learning to play the piano by herself. That summer of 2017, she would help her parents in the restaurant as usual, before moving to Madrid to study medicine. The members of the aforementioned Facebook group expressed their pride about her peer, about her endeavour and they emphasised the achievements and the heterogeneity of the paths followed by Chinese people in Spain nowadays. Days later, while eating with a family in Qingtian, they asked me if I was aware of this news and they showed me the Chinese version of it. They told me that the news was circulating across social media and could be found on many WeChat groups and the WeChat walls of their kin, friends and

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<sup>22</sup> A Spanish type of wine.

neighbours. However, the information that reached them was slightly modified, as they told me that she got the best results in the whole of Spain and not in the aforementioned region. Their pride in her achievements, which they extended to the Chinese community in Spain, was similarly present.

The hot temperatures foreshadowed what would turn into a never-ending summer. It was end of June, and Qingtian city became more *renao*<sup>23</sup>(热闹) every day. The streets were unusually full of children and young people who had arrived in Qingtian to spend the summertime there. The fashionable restaurants were crowded and suddenly, free sofas in the bubble tea and *yinliao* (饮料)<sup>24</sup> shops seemed to be hard to find. I went down the riverside to avoid the afternoon sun and I walked along the river path. Before heading to the steps of the *Taihe* bridge (太鹤大桥), I observed three children playing. I thought I had heard Spanish, so I walked slower. And then, it happened: a boy who looked between seven and nine years old used three different languages in one single sentence: Mandarin, Spanish and Catalan<sup>25</sup>. This fact seemed to be remarkable only to me, and the three children kept playing normally.

In 2018, after spending some months in Lishui, I was back in Qingtian. Manuel, who I had met some weeks earlier through a Facebook group, invited me to go with him to his cousin's wedding, as he thought it could be interesting for my dissertation. I loved the idea, but I asked to double-check with his family if it was okay: it was. I saw him the day before the wedding and we agreed that we would meet the following day at 4:30 pm to walk together to the wedding venue. It was around 3 pm and I was trying to tie my hair up when my phone rang. Manuel repeatedly apologised and said that I could not go to the wedding. His parents from Spain had just phoned and forbidden him from attending a wedding with a foreign female, being afraid of who could figure it out or spread rumours about it.

The four circumstances described above are part of my research – and my life – in Qingtian. Nevertheless, in each of them, the spatial and social frame of reference is not limited to the borders of Qingtian, and necessarily extends beyond it. Far

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<sup>23</sup> Lively

<sup>24</sup> Drinks, beverages.

<sup>25</sup> The language of the region of Catalonia, in northeast Spain.

beyond. This frame of reference incorporates a transnational dimension, which further field data detailed in this dissertation will show to be undeniable. This transnational condition surpasses the lives of the migrants and permeates the day-to-day of those who did not migrate: of those who stayed in Qingtian, but also of the new family members born in Europe. All them participate – in different ways – in social fields which go beyond the borders of one state (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). Nevertheless, this is not to say that places no longer matter and that practices and experiences can be completely de-territorialised. For the people whose lives I have tried to understand, spatial references are meaningful, although they have no fixed or uniform weight for different individuals and families. While the importance of Qingtian as a physical, social and emotional space varies for each individual, exploring the patterns and features of social life in this specific location is key to understanding the general and generational dynamics of these transnational families.

*The whole and its parts.* This section of the dissertation, the ethnographic part, is divided into two main chapters. The first one – chapter 6 – has been designed to provide a general overview of how care circulates in transnational Qingtianese families, by highlighting the importance of context(s) and introducing a holistic view, despite the occasional focus upon the different parts. This chapter mainly incorporates fieldwork notes and observations, as well as other external sources – such as scholars’ articles about their work in the field and official institutional data – while individual accounts are not the primary focus. In contrast, these individual accounts emerge as central to the second chapter – chapter 7 – which offers more detail on the lives and accounts of those people who have grown up in transnational Qingtianese families. The different sections of this chapter seek to balance the uniqueness of each case and the heterogeneity that predominates with an overarching view in which the care-driven background described in chapter 6 serves as a framework.



# CHAPTER

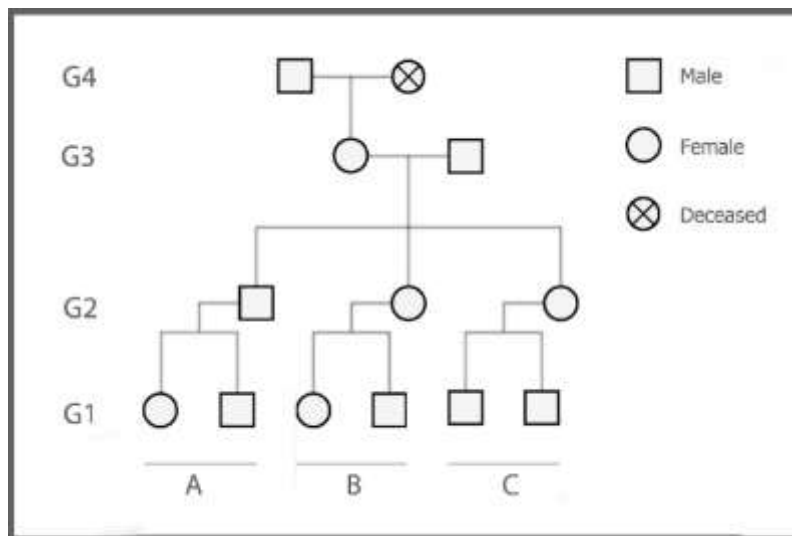
## 6

### 6 CARE CIRCULATION IN QINGTIANESE TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

Situating the reader: An outline of care in a 4G transnational family

In the following lines, the Chang family's care history will be introduced, serving as a quick reference for the different sections of this chapter. Their history is not more or less special than any other that I have encountered in the field, all of them being unique and meaningful. Nevertheless, this family will serve as an example by which to ground the research in a preliminary level of analysis and to give an initial, general idea about how family care operates in transnational space.

*Illustration 1: Chang Family Genealogical Diagram.*



Source: Produced by the author (in Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a).

### *The Chang family*

“In this family, the third generation took advantage of the help of extended family members (spread over six different European countries) to migrate to Europe, and it was their parents (G3) who lent them the money to do so. The two daughters (G2) and their nuclear families are based in Spain (they migrated in 1995 and 1999, respectively), while the son (G2) and his nuclear family is based in Poland (he migrated in the year 2000). The grandparents and the great-grandfather never moved to Europe, and the former never visited the family abroad.

The great-grandfather spent most of his life in a small village in Qingtian county, and his wife passed away when their own children (G3) were toddlers. At the end of the 1990s, his household was composed of: three grandchildren (whose parents worked in Spain); their younger aunt (G2), who would later migrate to Spain; the children’s grandparents (G3) and himself. The grandchildren stayed in China within a four-generation co-residence regime until the ages of four and six, when they joined their nuclear families in Europe. In the meantime, one of the grandsons (B) was cared for by his other grandparents (the paternal ones) in Wenzhou – a city located 67km away from Qingtian city. At that time, communication across borders was realised through several calls per month and a visit by one of the parents every two or three years.

When the grandparents moved to Qingtian city, the great-grandfather chose to stay behind. He was regularly supervised by his offspring and close neighbours. Later on, the entire village was flooded to allow for development of a hydraulic project. Having to move away from there, he decided to relocate to Shanghai with one of his sons. As his health worsened, years later he went back to Qingtian city, where he spent time in hospital and at home under the daily care of his daughter (the grandmother). There were also visits by relatives from China and Europe.

Regarding the grandchildren, once they were reunited with their parents (G2), the mothers became their main caregivers. In the case of family A,

the paternal grandmother (a widow) flew to Spain when the older child was ten and the younger was seven, to help the family manage childcare and home tasks, but she felt out of place and decided to move back to China. Since early adolescence, family A's granddaughter has been in charge of most of the household chores. During this time, the grandchildren have spent several summers in China, staying in both the maternal and paternal grandparents' homes. Additionally, the reference family's grandparents still take care of one of their youngest grandchildren today (C): the son of their youngest daughter.

A couple of years ago, the grandfather learnt to use WeChat (a very popular app in China), which makes it possible to call and see each other frequently through video calls, or to send voice messages. It also enables users to send digital hongbao (红包), or red envelopes, used in China to give a monetary gift during festivals or on special occasions. Even if adult children (G2) do not send regular remittances to their parents (the grandparents), real and virtual hongbao are used to provide occasional economic support. This flow also occurs in the opposite direction, from the grandparents to the grandchildren.

Nowadays, the adult children (G2) organise visits on a rotational basis, to ensure that their parents are supervised and get companionship at least twice a year. When the offspring travel to China, they take all kinds of Spanish products with them. On their way back to Europe, their suitcases are also filled with products bought in the Chinese market, and with home-made specialities which are prepared by the grandparents along the course of the year. During these visits, the various generations all stay at the grandparents' house. Once there, trips and excursions are organised. Despite the fact that their original hometown is submerged in water because of the aforementioned hydraulic project, the family still go back to the nearby mountains to visit their ancestors' tombs. This happens, without exception, during the Tomb-Sweeping festival of *Qingming* (in early April), when the grandparents' generation and other relatives from the extended family – whether living in China or abroad – worship side by side, gathering

a large number of people together. In the opposite direction of travel, the offspring have invited the grandparents to visit Europe twice. The first visit was sponsored by their son and Poland was the sole destination. The second trip took place in 2017 and involved the organisation and shared resources of the three adult children (G2), with four weeks spent in Spain and one in Poland” (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a)<sup>26</sup>

From this family care outline, several themes arise:

- The nuclear family model is not appropriate for describing the reality of this family, involving four generations.
- To a greater or lesser extent, all generations participate in care.
- Care exchanges operate along the life course.
- Care is multidimensional and care roles are fluid.
- After an initial movement which constitutes the migration, care serves as a driver of mobility.
- A gender dimension is incorporated
- Changing forms of interaction across borders are observed.

Keeping in mind the outline of the Chang family’s care, in conjunction with the care exchanges and care arrangements of other families, the following sections will elucidate the ways in which care circulates in transnational Qingtianese families, mainly – but not only – between Qingtian and Spain. To do so, firstly, this chapter provides an overview of the strategies deployed by these transnational families to manage and exchange care within and across borders and the dimensions of care that are involved in them. Secondly, it focuses upon the care cycle and care roles. Next, the asymmetries in burdens and expectations are highlighted and the harmonic functioning of families is questioned. Finally, care arrangements and care exchanges are situated in context.

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<sup>26</sup> The original text that I wrote (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a) has been slightly modified, inverting the generational order from G1 to G4.

## **6.1 Care deployment strategies in transnational Qintianese families**

In line with Baldassar and Merla (2014)'s findings, a quick review of the care histories of the families in the sample reveals that care may be exchanged through physical co-presence, at a distance, and through proxy caring practices: the delegation of in-person support to others. This delegation may be total or partial, depending on whether the subject coordinates the care activities or not, despite the fact that it is another person who carries them out (Kilkey & Merla, 2011; 2014). It also reveals that often, far from being exclusive, these are complementary and depend upon the different and changing circumstances in which families find themselves. This section will provide a general overview of the most common care arrangements and care exchanges in these families, from the perspective of how those are performed, using the aforementioned strategies.

### **6.1.1 Physical co-presence**

Children, grandparents and the generations above them are automatically understood as care recipients in care relations, but the various sections and chapters of this thesis will demonstrate that an automatic correlation between age and care roles is not satisfactory. Nevertheless, based on fieldwork accounts, it cannot be ignored that the arrival of a new member to the family, on the one hand, and the dependent or semi-dependent situation of ageing grandparents or great-grandparents on the other, constitutes a turning point in the management of care for most of these families, as both situations imply extensive care demands and physical co-presence is required.

The birth of a child alters the family configuration and makes balancing new care needs and pre-existing responsibilities inside and outside the household challenging. Workloads for young Chinese couples in Spain tend to be heavy and thus, they have to seek alternatives to balance the productive and reproductive spheres, either by hiring someone or transnationalising childcare (Sáiz López, 2012). As is the case in the Chang family, it is common in these families to incorporate transnational grandparenting practices. Either the grandparents move to Spain or the babies are sent to China, the former being less common than the latter. Nevertheless, both of these childcare strategies, as well as others within China and Spain, may occur sequentially, as the experiences of the children in chapter 7 will exemplify. Regarding transnational

grandparenting in Spain, their circumstances are not unique and academic literature has referred to “flying grannies” (Plaza, 2000) and the role of grandparents as “flexible, mobile caregivers” (Zhou, 2013, p. 292), moving internationally to carry out transnational grandparenting. These Qingtianese grandparents not only take over childcare-related tasks, but are also in charge of general domestic affairs. Meanwhile, they may also take advantage of other types of support from their family members, such as accommodation, food or hands-on care in the case of illness; this blurs, to a certain extent, the boundaries between their roles of caregivers and care receivers.

The length of grandparents’ stay in Spain is highly variable. Pre-partum and postpartum care of mother and child is considered a must among Chinese families, these individuals depending upon the support of a close helper. It is expected that grandmothers – either a pregnant woman’s mother or mother-in-law – will stay by the future mother’s side during these important periods, particularly when it is the pregnant woman’s first child (Wong, 2015). As such, in a few of these families, the grandmother travelled to Spain to attend to the future mothers, by providing hands-on care, practical support through their knowledge and experience, and companionship. But in most cases, counselling was delivered at a distance, by using communication technologies. A pair of grandparents stayed in Spain for some months after the birth, others have stayed a few years, and in two families, the grandparents stayed in Spain from when the children were babies until early adolescence. Also, in recent years, some grandparents – and generally grandmothers – have become frequent flyers, moving between China and Spain. Such grandparents have been settled in Spain for many years; after retirement, at least one member of the couple – generally the grandfather – decides to move their habitual residence to China, incorporating a high level of mobility by taking advantage of holding a Chinese passport and permanent residency in Spain.

The length of the stay was often determined by the grandparents’ feelings of being out of place in Spain, in which case they went back to China within a few months. Other grandparents moved back to China as soon as the children were big enough to take care of themselves, or at least until the older sibling could take over the role of the younger siblings’ caregiver; with their movement back to China, they altered their family roles and family configuration. These experiences are similar to those reported in migration research which focuses upon their experiences abroad as being linked to feelings of

loneliness, loss of independence, and a lowering of their family status (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a; Kassaye, 2015; King et al., 2014; Thomas, 2003; Xie & Xia, 2011; Zhou, 2013; Treas & Mazumdar, 2002). A very short stay in Qingtian serves to realise that the lifestyle that the grandparents have in China is difficult to accommodate in Spain, particularly if the destination is a big city<sup>27</sup>. Despite all this, individual preferences can never be taken for granted. Even when certain patterns of preferences can be tracked, individual accounts still matter. Hsu (2014) proposes the concept of ‘subjective integration’ to illustrate the case of some Chinese seniors living in Montreal’s Chinatown. While the normative expectation dictates that they may feel out of place because they lack language skills and a broad support network, they report that they do not. Similarly, some of the grandparents I got in touch with at the Evergreen club<sup>28</sup> in Madrid’s Usera neighbourhood, were not thinking about moving to China to permanently settle there. Some of them switched regularly between the two countries, while others spent most of their time in Spain. In both cases, they referred to their offspring living there as the main reason to feel like staying. As Hsu pointed out in her research, “integration was not about whether they spoke the official language(s) or lived like the natives but more about whether their contribution in the private sphere supported their next generations’ social and economic success” (p.341).

Regarding transnational childcare arrangements in China, these mirror local practices, as the grandparents acting as the main caregiver is a very common situation there, where internal migration results in split households, in which the parents’ generation (2G) is physically absent on a daily basis. As such, day-to-day habits and social life in Qingtian are also characterised by a high proportion of grandparents – and older generations – and children. Within this ethnography, besides the interviews and participant

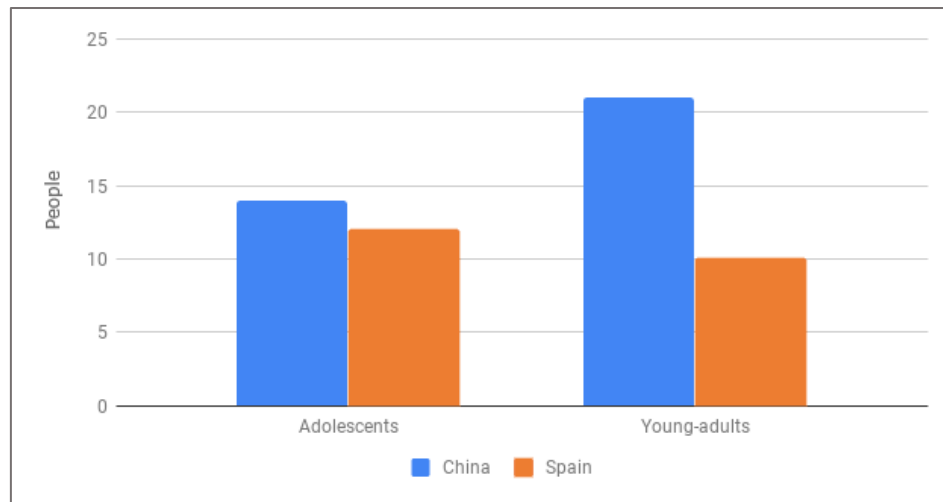
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<sup>27</sup> In China, in the early morning and especially after dinner, the streets, squares, river and seafront promenades and parks are full of people – particularly of the grandparents’ generation and over – doing physical exercise, square dancing, *taiji*, badminton and many other sports, or simply walking. Moreover, after lunch, they congregate to play cards, ma-jong or other games. There, the public spaces are truly public: inhabited, experienced and lived in by the people. In Spanish cities and towns, besides the streets and avenues, public outdoor spaces are scarce and, with exceptions, people’s interaction with these places is less natural. The meaning of ‘public’ is shifted between these two contexts from something belonging to the people to something belonging to the public institutions, which lend them to people. The experience of place in Qingtian is linked to a social dimension, which is also curtailed in Spain. Even in those places in which Chinese grandparents in Spain can find many other co-ethnics who share their language and customs – in neighbourhoods like Usera (Madrid) or Fondo (Barcelona), for example – the social and spatial design will drive them either to interact indoors, or in very specific places, turning it into an isolated activity. Nevertheless, despite the differential social and spatial experience in China compared to Spain, this may sometimes be transported. One example is a group of dancing *damas*: a group of women of the parents’ and grandparents’ generations (approximately 50 to 70 years old), who gather together to do group dancing outdoors. They usually meet at Arco de Triunfo square in Barcelona, as most of them work and/or live in that area.

<sup>28</sup> A club aimed at Chinese people belonging to the grandparents’ generation and above.

observation, questionnaires have served to collect information on the different care arrangements used by these families (Fig. 2). In the young adult sample, the number that spent part of their childhood in China was more than double that which did not; while in the group who are adolescents nowadays the difference is much smaller, and almost half of them were partially raised in China, and half were not.

Figure 3: Country in which informants spent their early childhood.



Source: Produced by author based on questionnaires surveys.

These care arrangements involve a transnational parenting dimension as mothers and fathers are not physically co-present with their children in their daily lives. As such, much of the intergenerational interaction tends to occur at a distance. Nevertheless, visits create opportunities for those parents to be face-to-face with their children, as research has pointed to physical co-presence as enabling closeness which at-a-distance interaction is not able to provide (Sun, 2017; Merla & Baldassar, 2016; Hoang & Yeoh 2012). This view is reinforced by the narratives of those informants who have grown up transnationally; nevertheless, the different sample groups (today’s young adults and adolescents) are characterised by a very uneven number of visits and of interaction at a distance. The time frame in which these arrangements took place and the concurrent development in infrastructural and communication technologies appear to be key in shaping their perceptions of transnational parenting (chapter 7). From the parents’ point of view, the widespread position is that of *mei banfa* (没办法), or ‘there is no alternative’, which supports other research about transnational childcare arrangements in Chinese families (Wong, 2015; Bohr & Whitfield, 2011; Bohr & Tse, 2009). The idea of making



sacrifices in the search to provide better future prospects for the coming generations, through social mobility in the migration destination country, is a common aim. In line with this, the parents' need to keep working and the lack of alternative care arrangements are present in their narratives about these practices.

As Wong (2015) describes in her dissertation about migrants from the Southeastern Chinese region of Fujian in New York, in Chinese *qiaoxiang* (侨乡) – or areas of international emigration, such as Qingtian – the practice of sending children to China is embedded in their local and transnational routines and moreover, it is already integrated into their cultural logic. As the Fujian area has a long migratory history, this practice is conceptualised as a *fengsu* (风俗), or custom. It is not only possible for parents in New York to send their babies to Fujian, it is expected that they will do so. As such, Wong (2015) reports that Fujianese migrant mothers are subject to a lot of pressure from their parents and parents-in-law to send them the babies. In the Qingtian-Spain case, these kinds of practices are similarly embedded in local and transnational routines: people often refer to them not as a *fengsu* but a *xiguan* (习惯), also translated as custom or habit, and some informants from the young adult generation referred to them with the same word in Spanish (*costumbre*). But in the interviews with the parents' generation, I did not identify these kinds of pressures; and their *mei banfa* thought arises from their difficulties in balancing productive and reproductive demands. In most cases, children are reunited with their parents in Spain as soon as their productive demands allow them to do so, matching the age of schooling. Nevertheless, the cultural dimension and the desirability of getting in touch with the homeland and extended family members were mentioned as benefits of this kind of multi-generational arrangement, as is common in other cases of transnational grandparenting (Kassaye, 2015; King et al. 2014; Da, 2003). As the number of people partially raised in China within the adolescent and the young adult sample indicates (Fig. 3, above), this practice seems to be in decline. However, a new – albeit still marginal – trend is emerging, whereby children of families with a medium to high socio-economic status stay in China longer (until late adolescence).

The literature on care mostly understands care arrangements in which children are cared for by grandparents or other members of the extended family to be delegating or outsourcing care. Here, I posit that care is not delegated or outsourced, but simply shared among different family members, as local conceptions of childcare do not

consider it to be the sole responsibility of parents. This perspective aims to contribute to understanding care arrangements and practices in context, seeking to move closer to the emic point of view, which is in opposition to hegemonic ideals of family and childhood emanating from the Global North, these being far from being universal. Nevertheless, this approach is not unproblematic either. If we put it simply, the emic point of view would be that of the Chinese, positing that their definition of family is inclusive and that the responsibility for childcare is shared. And moreover, that in the Qingtianese case, certain transnational practices are embedded in their cultural logic regarding family care. The point here is: Is this the point of view of all Chinese people? Of all Qingtianese people born in China? Or of any person of Qingtianese origin born in Spain? The second part of this ethnography will provide an answer to some of these questions.

Transnational grandparenting, then, is not a care outsourcing or delegation strategy. Nevertheless, in most cases it is a care-related mobility category. Seeking to provide care through physical co-presence, either the grandparents or the children move to the other country to give or receive care. The exceptions are mainly cases in which the children born in China remain there, the parents being the only ones who move (in this first stage of the family migratory project). In these cases, childcare is managed in situ – in China – by the grandparents. That is, while the extended family is split and grandparents perform the main caregiver role, grandparenting does not, at this point, involve care-related mobility, as neither the caregiver nor the care-receiver move to provide or receive care. Similarly, for those families in which the grandparents initiated the migration chain and they are still based in Spain, childcare is also managed in situ, but in Spain. This was the case for the Song family<sup>29</sup>, a four-generation Qingtianese-origin family living in Madrid. In this family, the grandparents – who lived at walking distance from the parents and small children – took over the role of main caregivers without this implying additional mobility. Finally, on some occasions, the care-related mobility may not involve international displacement, but internal movement. For example, when an informant's grandparents moved from Madrid to Almeria (in the south of Spain) to take care of him; or when the Chang family's grandparents moved to

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<sup>29</sup> The only family in the sample with all four generations living in Spain.

Lishui for a couple of years to take care of two of their grandchildren, moving back to Qingtian city afterwards.

At some point, most of these transnational families have been faced with the need to care for a frail grandparent or great-grandparent. Nevertheless, this is not always the case, and some of those family members were active and independent until their last day. In most of these families, the hands-on care needs of the great-grandparents were and are handled in-situ by their adult children (the grandparents). Nevertheless, the situation will be very different if, in the future, it is the grandparents who become dependent, as all their offspring are abroad (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). In these circumstances, based on the degree of dependence and the different resources available, the adult children (the parents' generation) will have to use and coordinate different strategies to cope with their needs. These may incorporate a high level of mobility and/or the delegation of care to others. Regarding care-related mobility, in these circumstances, the flow of care usually circulates from Europe to China. This is for two reasons:

- Firstly, Chinese migration to Spain is quite recent and as a result, grandparents and great-grandparents tend to remain in China while the younger generations live in Spain.
- Secondly, moving the frail person to Spain is rarely considered a real alternative: on the one hand, it involves arduous bureaucratic procedures, in order to manage the entrance of the family member into Spain; on the other, it means moving that person to a new environment in which they lack language skills and a social network (Baldassar et al., 2007). Moreover, in the case of ageing family members, there is a preference for staying in their homeland and passing away there.

As a result, it is the family members in Spain who must move China, either for the short- or long-term. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions, such as the aforementioned Song family, in which all four generations ended up living in Spain. For many years, this family was split between Spain and China, but when the great-grandfather's health deteriorated, he moved to Spain. Once he passed away, he was sent to China to be buried, inverting the direction of the flow, and involving the additional

mobility of other family members who travelled to China for the burial. In this family, care was managed through a network system, in which resources of a different nature and involved in different dimensions of care circulate between two different households situated a very short walking distance from each other in Madrid. It is worth saying that, the four generations being in Spain, the transnational links with the hometown are much weaker than the average in the sample, particularly for the youngest generation. This movement towards Spain to give or receive care – which in this particular context is not widespread, but rather an exception – can be understood as part of the broader phenomenon of ‘diasporas of care’ (Williams, 2001). As with other forms of care-related mobility – such as transnational grandparenting – this demonstrates that reasons to move go beyond economic pull factors, care being a key factor (Baldassar, 2007). Nevertheless, economic resources enable or constrain the capability to move.

With the exception of the Song family, in all others in the sample, it is the family members in Spain who have moved to China when a situation of dependence has arisen. Several families I have met in the field have used a rotational visit system to cope with these care demands, with different family members – generally individuals of the parents' generation – travelling to China and staying there for a period of time, before being relieved by another family member when the first individual goes back to Europe (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). During these visits, they may provide hands-on care and domestic maintenance, while supervising the various conditions and tasks related to their relative's status: such as accompanying her/him to the doctor, talking to health professionals or checking on the care work provided by the hired care worker, if applicable. As such, physical co-presence through visits and proxy caring practices may intersect. An example may be seen in Manuel's family, whose grandfather is a widow who lives in Qingtian city with a paid care worker. In the past, when he had a health problem, the frequency of visits of the offspring or ‘flying kin’ (Kilkey & Merla, 2014) was increased, involving coordination between the different adult siblings to maximise their conjoint capability (based mainly on available time and money resources), so as to offer their father the greatest amount of physically co-present care they could afford. In families in which not all adult children live abroad, more extensive involvement in hands-on care and supervision is expected from those living in China, housing being one of the key factors.

Physically co-present care tends to be sustained, albeit to a lesser degree, when extensive care demands are not present, in order to check on Qingtian family members' condition and their arising needs. This is the case for the Chang and Wu families, in which the grandparents receive visits from their adult children several times per year, despite the fact that, in general terms, they are in good health. Also, the parents whose children live in China often travel to visit them, seeking to supervise their living conditions and routines, and to maintain face-to-face interaction. Moreover, these and other visits, such as those to attend funerals or Chinese festivals, serve to strengthen the ties among different extended-family members and generations. These kinds of visits flow mainly from Europe to China, but they can run both ways, as in the case of weddings (Masdeu, 2014). They may also take the form of tours or holidays, with family members who are settled in Europe inviting their kin (generally siblings or parents) to visit them and travel around. Similarly, trips around China when the offspring who have settled in Spain visit the country also occur, focusing on neighbouring areas and cities (such as Wenzhou or Hangzhou) but also top tourist spots in China (such as Beijing or Xi'an). Nevertheless, the capability to visit – in both settings – in order to be physically co-present is highly constrained by factors of a varied nature, such as financial and institutional aspects.

In summary, in Qingtianese transnational families, care exchanged through physical co-presence includes two types of care arrangements: firstly, those that are handled in-situ through new or increasing responsibilities or tasks being taken on by or delegated to one or several members of the family. And secondly, those in which the care needs that have arisen may be handled by incorporating an element of mobility, with one or several people moving to another country or city to give or – less often – to receive care. Thus, there are different types of care-related mobility, resulting in the intersection of care strategies with new and old migratory processes. This mobility is instigated by various types of situations: transnational grandparenting and illness (long-term or intermittent mobility) and deaths, festivals and family events (short-term mobility) (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). Moreover, it is worth differentiating between those visits that take place at routine times, such as transnational grandparenting, festivals or tourism; and those that result from crisis events, such as serious health problems or death (Baldassar et al., 2007; Baldassar, 2014).

### 6.1.2 Caring at a distance

Care can also be managed, performed and exchanged at a distance. Here, the different dimensions of care – such as domestic and hands-on care, emotional and moral care, practical care, material care and family-social care – are key. These categories will be explained further below, nevertheless, it is worth emphasising that certain dimensions of care are more suitable than others to be deployed at a distance. A clear example is hands-on care – which evidently cannot be deployed at a distance – in contrast to the total suitability of material care: for example, the parents' generation work in Spain, while the children and grandparents receive their material support from abroad in China. They ensure from afar that their children are properly fed and dressed, providing money and sending or bringing different type of objects and items to China, as well as maintaining daily communication with the children and their caregivers. Parents highlight that they provide a good standard of living to them, a toddler having a better life that way than if they were in Spain. A couple of them were proud of showing the flat where their children and parents or in-laws live, with a lot of space – which in most cases their houses in Spain lack – and full of toys, tables to study and all the amenities associated with an urban lifestyle. Similarly, a mother talked about her children wearing Spanish clothes she had brought them, suggesting that they were better quality. Moreover, for those children of school age, parents and other family members I have interviewed emphasised the high fees they pay for their children to study in private schools in China. Despite the fact that the parents' generation is not the focus of this research, I did not find any salient difference in the way each parent talks about their parenting at a distance (mothering/fathering), and both genders emphasise their role as breadwinners and their continuous involvement in staying informed about and providing for their children. Nevertheless, regarding the coordination of care and the daily supervision of care arrangements at a distance, it tends to be the mothers who are in charge (Dreby, 2006; Soto, 1989). This view is backed up by the children's narratives, who report a greater amount of interaction with their mothers than with the fathers, and also more interaction between mothers and grandparents, in most cases grandmothers. In all cases, the role of communication at a distance is key in supervision and coordination, and is also essential for the articulation of the emotional care dimension.

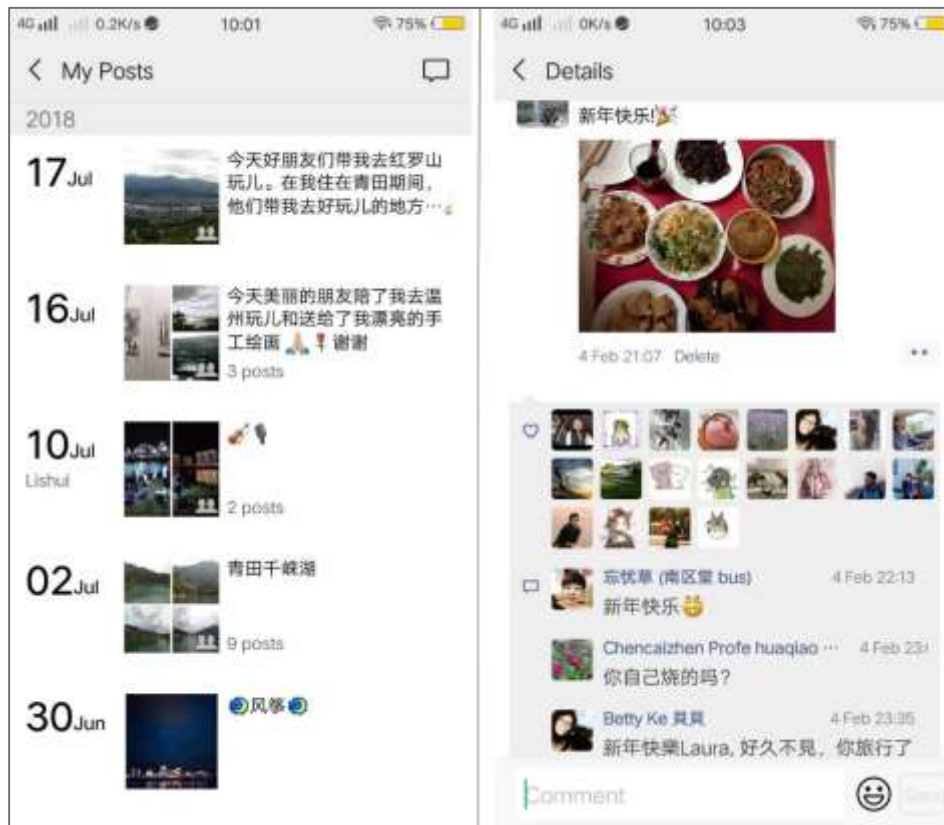
The arrival and popularisation of new technologies have entailed a quantitative and qualitative change in communication across borders. The capability of these Qingtianese transnational families to interact across borders in the past was heterogeneous, based on their economic resources; nevertheless, all of them have experienced an important shift in the last decade, upon the arrival of smartphones. The free WeChat app has become key in articulating transnational communication within these families. The most common way to communicate is either by video chat or voice messages, which does not imply having to read and write in Chinese, making it easier for the younger generations who have been raised in Spain to communicate, as their Chinese language skills are often limited (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). WeChat interaction also brings with it a higher degree of autonomy for the various family members. For example, children and teenagers keep in touch autonomously with grandparents, without having to depend on their parents, as long as they have access to a mobile phone. Therefore, new spaces for developing intergenerational relations are created.

The circulation of pictures and videos of family members across borders – especially of children – is also a common feature within these families. This serves to track how family members, particularly the youngest ones, change and grow up. Videos, or video-calls for special family events or festivals are also recurrent, helping physically-distant kin to feel closer. In the families I got in touch with during my fieldwork, these are intended for sharing moments of joy, nevertheless, Bravo (2017, in Mas Giralt 2018, p. 2) refers to video-communication technologies as a last resort, enabling people to virtually attend funerals if physical presence is not possible. In a very different domain of life, the young adult informants have also referred to the WeChat app as their parents' key tool in circulating suitable partner contacts for their children.

This extremely-popular app includes a timeline that allows users to post various kinds of digital material, from pictures or videos taken on their phone to news or edited text. Therefore, people share their routine events or thoughts, and their own contacts can participate in these by commenting, sharing or merely viewing, rather than interacting. This brings forth new and multidimensional modes of presence while at a distance, whereby different generations can participate in multiple ways, choosing whether they activate different levels of use or not; this also enables an “ambient co-presence” or

“peripheral awareness of the actions of distant others” (Madianou, 2016, p.186). Nevertheless, younger family members have reported purposely hiding certain posts from their older family members, by activating the selective privacy setting available in the WeChat app.

*Illustration 2: WeChat's app's 'My post' section (left) and post (right).*



Source: Produced by the author.

While this peripheral awareness about kin’s lives does not constitute a care exchange, it encompasses an attitude of ‘caring about’. The orientation towards caring is present, the impulse to know about the other’s life. Such an impulse is materialised when the line between observation and interaction is surpassed. Writing a comment or simply giving a like to something the person has written or the picture she/he has posted means openly showing an interest, letting the other know that you are there. Particularly, I have been in touch with several people of the grandparents’ generation for whom checking their offspring’s walls, which are full of information about their lives in Spain, is an active part of their daily routines. They often give likes or make comments, wanting to find out more about specific parts of their lives. And they are filled with joy



when they receive replies to the comments or the likes of those who are physically distant, especially when these come from their grandchildren, as direct communication between these two generations is not as regular as with their adult children.

The use of the WeChat app is widespread among the grandparents' generation and it is often the younger family members who teach them how to use it. Interaction across borders between grandparents and parents generally takes place on a weekly or daily basis, particularly when grandparents are taking care of grandchildren in China, and this interaction may be initiated by both sides. The degree of transnational communication between grandparents and young adults is very uneven, ranging from regular weekly at-a-distance interaction and annual visits, to calls only for Chinese festivals and almost inexistent face-to-face interaction but, in most cases, the relationship is more regular and intense between those grandparents and grandchildren who lived together for some years. For families with four generations alive, the grandparents' generation often take on the role of at-a-distance mediators between the ascendant and descendant generations, and direct interaction mainly takes place on special occasions (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). Despite all this, and in line with the literature on transnational families (Sun, 2017; Merla & Baldassar, 2016; Hoang & Yeoh 2012; Baldassar et al. 2007; Urry, 2002), while new media and new forms of communication across borders are highly valued, especially by those whose family's transnational status extends over decades, it is perceived as complementing but not replacing physical presence, particularly by the grandparents and older generations.

### 6.1.3 Proxy caring practices

Running in parallel with other ways of managing care (e.g. at-a-distance, or through visits), the fieldwork reveals that proxy caring practices become key in articulating the circulation of care in Qingtianese transnational families. Many families in the sample incorporate care workers from outside the family and delegate care to them. Nevertheless, this outsourcing of care, or securing care from an external source or an outsider – that is, someone from outside the family, someone of whom there is no expectation that they will take care of the other person – does not mean that this person will remain an outsider forever. Several cases within this ethnography reveal processes through which childcare workers may become insiders. Nevertheless, I will take the

initial situation as a strategy marker, in order to be able to make analytical distinctions through this dissertation. Categories are also blurred in the case of the dualities of formal/informal care and paid/unpaid care. This is due to the fact that monetary retribution in exchange for care is not always exclusive to paid or formal care workers and may incorporate family members. Finally, different degrees of delegation may occur (Baldassar et al. 2014).

Pregnant women are expected to receive intensive and multidimensional pre- and particularly post-partum care, through the cultural practice of *zuo yuezi* (坐月子) or doing/sitting the month<sup>30</sup>. The *yuesao* (月嫂) or the specialised carer, may offer such specific care and supervision to the mother and the baby. While the type of care that grandmothers (the pregnant woman's mother or mother-in-law) and *yuesao* can provide cannot be equated, it may be understood that, in certain circumstances, a hired *yuesao* may partially supply the role of the grandmother when this is not available. Thus, the culturally-sanctioned flow of care from the female of the third generation to the female of the second one may be delegated, as happened in one of the Qingtianese transnational families, although it is not widespread<sup>31</sup>. Similarly, after giving birth and the end of the confinement period, the newborn's extensive care demands necessitate having a strategy to meet them. When the grandparents or other members of the extended family (such as aunts) are not available, and combining childcare and work demands is not possible, the resulting strategy consists of hiring a childcare worker or *baomu* (保姆). Within this ethnography, several types of proxy childcare arrangements have been documented:

- Care in the family's home by a Spanish *baomu*
- Care in the family's home by a Chinese *baomu*
- Childcare networks with other Chinese families
- Informal circulation of the child, who relocates to a Spanish family

The different care arrangements vary in the degree of involvement and the daily or monthly number of hours that the care worker takes over the children's age being key

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<sup>30</sup>“Confinement to the house for one month after childbirth, with a special balanced diet and modified puerperal behaviour”(Cheung, 1997 pp.55).

<sup>31</sup> At the end of the fieldwork stage I met a Chinese woman who work as *yuesao* in Barcelona, and she reports that many people request her services.

in shaping this (Chapter 7). These proxy caring practices and arrangements are not isolated, but form part of the multi-layered, multi-situated and multi-generational circulation of care in these families. Regarding hands-on care for ill or frail family members, while all generations in the sample refer to family caregivers as the ideal option – with a couple of exceptions in the young adult sample, who prefer professional caregivers – the idea of contracting care at home is also accepted. In the case of ageing grandparents and great-grandparents living in Qingtian, certain dimensions of care related to the filial responsibility towards ageing parents can be managed at a distance, while others appear to be delegated to other siblings or members of the extended family who did not migrate, as has been reported in other transnational families (Fresnoza-Flot & Merla, 2018). A particularly common example of this is the co-residence with ageing parents of those adult children who did not migrate. Nevertheless, on some occasions, those who stayed cannot handle the care demands when they are extensive and all adult family members work outside the home. This circumstance is very common, due to the high rate of female participation in the labour force: it is a situation which may imply hiring additional help, as women are the ones in charge of care in China. Moreover, often it is ageing parents who live alone that receive this proxy care, despite not having a serious health condition.

The delegated care of ageing family members – frail or not – falls mainly to *ayis* (阿姨) or female carers (G2 or G3), who may or may not co-reside with the care-receiver, depending on the circumstances, but who in all cases are displaced to their home. Similarly, depending on the degree of the care-receiver's dependence, their work may be limited to domestic tasks (such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, etc.) and supervision, or it may incorporate hands-on care (feeding, dressing, washing bodies, etc.). In most cases, the *ayis* have previous links with the family, most of them being close neighbours, family friends or extended-family members. In all cases, including those who were relatives, they received economic compensation for their work. In line with the analysis of Baldassar et al. (2007), regarding Italian transnational families, these kinds of in-home care arrangements somehow allow these families to keep care within the family realm, and as such, these proxy caring practices – labelled by Lan (2002) as 'subcontracting filial piety' (p.812) – can be understood as an expression of a filial attitude. In the same way that the Chinese term *ayis* is gender inflexible, designating a female; in the Italian case, they use the expression '*avere una donna*'

which can be translated as ‘having a woman’, in reference to contracting a female person to work at home (Baldassar et al., 2007). Similarly, in Spanish it is common to use the same expression (*tener una señora*) to describe these kinds of domestic arrangements. The different social and cultural contexts, in which similar gendered meanings and practices take place, point to an irrefutably gendered construction of care.

While the concept of filial piety and family care is becoming more flexible in China through the incorporation of in-home proxy caring practices (Huang et al. 2012; Lan, 2002), institutional care arrangements remain stigmatised and within this research sample I did not find any example of this. The informants discursively and practically reject this kind of care arrangement. Nevertheless, while ideas about proper care or obligation are not universal (Baldassar et al. 2014), nor are they isolated from broader social contexts, and as such they may be reshaped. While it is not the case in China, Huang et al. (2012b) report that, due to the trend towards the commodification of care, in some parts of Asia, contracting institutional care services for ageing parents is understood as constitutive of a filial attitude. In this ethnography, the only two people who think about institutional care as a possible alternative are from the younger generation (today’s young adults), who, despite expressing a preference for other kinds of arrangements, do not completely reject the use of institutional care in specific circumstances. One of them said that if those institutional services were very good and looked more like a hotel than a nursing home, Qingtianese people’s perception about them would change. Moreover, he equated paying a large fee with caring about ageing parents, and in summary, with a filial attitude which would make this kind of arrangement socially acceptable.

During my stay in Qingtian in 2018, I observed the progress of a huge building that was under construction in the area of Shuinan (水南), just across the river, behind Qingtian’s main hospital (青田人民医院/ Qingtian Renmin Yiyuan). That building is expected to become a nursing home for ageing people. During my last months there, I asked many people about it, but there was a general lack of awareness about the specific services that the new facility will offer. Many villagers told me that it probably forms part of the Chinese government’s 3NOT programme, which provides institutional care for those ageing people who have no family, no pension and no resources. A smaller number of people suggested that it was targeted at ageing family members whose offspring are

settled abroad. Nevertheless, all of them – including visitors and residents– shared the perception that this kind of business would not prosper there, because, they stated, Chinese people take care of their ageing parents themselves and these kinds of care arrangements are a foreign matter.

*Illustration 3: Nursing home under construction in Shuinan (Qingtian).*



Source: Produced by author.

As noted in the third chapter of this dissertation, while still not widespread, in the last decade, private care institutions have flourished in China. Moreover, the condition of Qingtian and neighbouring areas as *Qiaoxiangs*, or places with a tradition of international migration, make them a reasonable target. Firstly, as has happened in other parts of the world, such institutional care services tend to flourish in these areas, aimed to the so-called left-behind ageing family members, but also at retired migrants (see De Silva, 2018, for Sri Lanka; Coe, 2017, for Ghana). Secondly, with such a high number of ‘transnational villagers’ (Levitt, 2001) the role of social remittances should not be underestimated (Coe, 2017; Levitt, 2001, 1998). Social remittances are “the ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities” (Levitt, 1998, p.926). As such, it can be expected that practices related to institutional care which are perceived as non-Chinese or foreign will be promoted by the migrants, who bring new ideas about care to those migrant-sending areas. In her research about transnational migration and the commodification of care in Ghana, Coe (2017) points to social remittances as one factor involved in such a process, but not the

only one. Instead, she suggests that a conjunction of different social factors related to transnational migration has led to the flourishing of institutional care in urban Ghana. That is, “rather than Western ideas and practices transforming societies through the social remittances of transnational migrants, instead, those ideas and practices are shaped by individuals to fit the local context” (p.544). International migration involves a renegotiation of the intergenerational contract (Ikels, 1993), which is been challenged by spatial location, as well as the evaluation of foreign types of care and the key role of return migrants in the new care market. This role may be double-sided: they may be consumers, but also entrepreneurs, helping to shape the collective imagination about care work abroad. And finally, there is the role of migration in providing economic resources to pay for these kinds of services. Time will reveal the true importance of current social and cultural prescriptions, on the one hand, and emerging care needs and transnational influences in Qingtian, on the other.

## **6.2 The multi-dimensionality of care**

Central to this section are the different dimensions of care deployed by these transnational Qingtianese families. The so-called stayers – that is, those who did not migrate – emerge as key actors, serving to question the widespread view of stayers as being the care receivers in transnational contexts (Boccagni, 2015). The analysis of how care is articulated in these families is based on Finch and Mason’s (1993) care categories – hands-on care, emotional and moral care, practical care, financial care and housing/accommodation – which were employed by Baldassar and Merla (2014a, 2014b) in the care circulation framework. I have reorganised and added additional dimensions to this typology, based on my fieldwork accounts, to produce the following categories:

- Domestic work and hands-on care
- Emotional and moral care
- Practical care
- Material care (objects and items/ financial/ housing).
- Family-social care

Nevertheless, these categories are interlinked and overlap in different ways. On the whole, the complete set of activities, ranging from domestic work as the material pre-condition for all-round personal care, to direct care focused on bodies and emotions, and mental management tasks involving monitoring, evaluation and supervision (Pérez Orozco, 2014), enable and sustain lives both ‘daily and intergenerationally’ (Glenn, 1992, p.1).

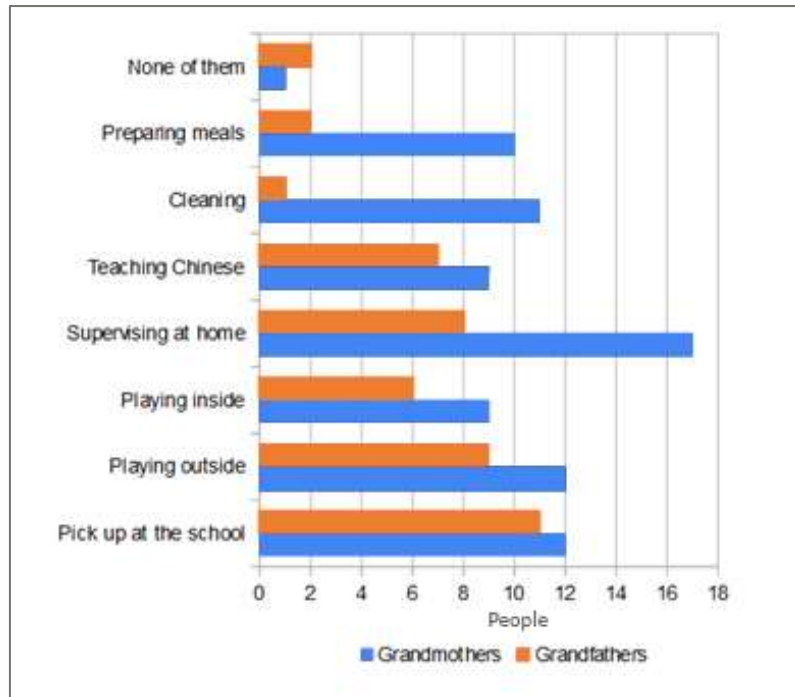
#### 6.2.1.1 Domestic and hands-on care

As Pérez Orozco (2014) suggests, carrying out domestic tasks is the material pre-condition that enables the direct care that is focused on bodies and emotions; as such, such tasks become essential to the lives of those involved in caring. Domestic and hands-on care (feeding, dressing, washing bodies, etc.) are linked in multiple ways. Both imply a link to the household and a significant degree of direct physical effort, in contrast to other dimensions of care, in which physical effort may be practically absent, as in emotional care; or physical effort may be indirect, as in financial support, resulting from a job in the labour market. This condition of being dependent on physical work, may result in tangible care burdens. In most of the families I encountered during my fieldwork, women fulfil the material pre-condition for care, through maintenance and production in the domestic sphere. A quick glance at the different sets of tasks undertaken by the grandmothers and the grandfathers of the young adults (during their childhood) serves to illustrate this (Fig. 4). While all the grandmothers are involved in domestic tasks such as cleaning the house or preparing food, the involvement of the grandfathers in this domain is rather limited; instead, other tasks such as supervision or walking/picking up the children to school are more salient.

Direct care focused on bodies is considered essential for children’s health and wellbeing. As such, before and after birth, the baby receives specific emotionally and practically meaningful care. The focus upon feeding children properly is also essential in their early years, becoming omnipresent in their daily lives as dependent minors. A recurrent image encountered during the fieldwork was that of a grandmother – and to a lesser extent mothers – urging her (grand)children to drink their soup while it was still hot, as this is considered better for the body, and using her own chopsticks to add additional food – especially meat – to the children’s bowls. Moreover, in the adolescent

and young adult informants' accounts, the memories of 'real' Chinese homemade food in their family homes in China was often present, feeding acting as a way of relating, as a link to past experiences with kin and place (Gardner, 2012).

Figure 4: Tasks undertaken by the grandmothers and the grandfathers.



Source: Produced by author based on questionnaires surveys.

Both, informants' accounts and my fieldwork observation, reinforce the idea of the domestic sphere being a female domain. Nevertheless, this is not to say that men are completely absent from this sphere. Some grandfathers take over certain household tasks, particularly hanging out the washing and preparing specific local culinary specialities. Additionally, in one young adult's case, it was the grandfather and not the grandmother who was more deeply involved in childcare-giving, and in another case, the grandfather took over this role after his wife passed away. Nevertheless, in general terms, the grandmothers are in charge of domestic and hands-on care and the grandfathers are the secondary actors who act as helpers and only occasionally get fully involved. Similarly, regarding the parents' generation, while mothers are fully involved in the productive sphere, the involvement of men is rather limited. An exception is that of Chang's family. Chang has spent most of his life in Spain with his migrant parents and brother, but after marrying a woman who grew up in China, they and their son (a



toddler) moved to Lishui, where they have started a new life project. In this new setting, Chang has left behind his productive role and has taken over a reproductive one, because alternative caregivers are not available there. As a result, his daily life revolves around his son's activities and the household domain. In the meantime, his wife is the family's breadwinner.

As mentioned above, domestic and hands-on care differs from other dimensions of care – such as the emotional or financial ones – in its intrinsic nature, as it requires physical presence, thus cannot be exchanged at a distance. The numerous posters and paintings displayed on the streets of Chinese towns and cities, and the images that appear during television commercials and that are displayed on the buses and subway's screens, remind Chinese people of their family duties, which are, by extension, social ones. Young people washing the feet of their ageing family members is a recurrent image (III.4).

*Illustration 4: A poster about filial piety*



Source: Chongzuo local government website. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.czfgw.gov.cn/ztlm/jwmsxfgygg/596080.shtml>

This image clearly illustrates the original link between filial piety and intergenerational hands-on care through physical presence. Nevertheless, migration – whether internal or international – has altered the ability to fulfil such an expectation, particularly as Qingtianese migration to Europe involves a family migration project, meaning that both husband and wife migrate. As the previous section pointed out, filial piety prescriptions

are becoming more flexible; nevertheless, the grandparents within the sample, whose adult children are all abroad, expect that if at some point they become dependents, a son or a daughter will move back to China to perform hands-on care for them. This is due to the fact that kin caregivers are considered the first and best option for hands-on care, as trustworthy people from whom proper ‘caring of’ and ‘caring about’ attitudes are expected, based on the harmonious image of Chinese families.

#### 6.2.1.2 Emotional and moral care

The ‘caring about’ orientation is often equated with the emotional dimension of care, but in this research, it is conceptualised as something which goes beyond that. It implies a proactive caring intention behind the action. In fact, this pro-activeness is key. ‘Caring about’ may be inherent to a relationship with a specific person, as often people care about others without thinking about it, or even against their will. Nevertheless, emotional care implies escalating this ‘caring about’ attitude and translating it into specific actions in the search to secure the other’s wellbeing or emotional satisfaction. The most basic expression of emotional care may be thinking about the other person that you care about, that she or he is on your mind. The aim to be present, either through physical co-presence, virtual co-presence or presence by proxy, then becomes essential to the articulation of the emotional dimension of care for these families. I have seen the smile of a grandfather about a comment or a ‘like’ made by his offspring in Spain in relation to one of his posts in WeChat and his satisfaction while saying that his daughter calls every day, or grandparents’ pride when their adult children spend a lot of money on buying them presents and bring them to China, or when these children visit and carefully take care of them when ill. As such, the emotional dimension interacts with other dimensions of care, such as material and hands-on care. In contrast, care-receiving as a response may not be intentional or conscious (Fisher & Tronto, 1993). In other words, while caregiving practices involve proactivity and a ‘caring about’ orientation, the same is not necessarily true of the reception or response from the care receiver.

The emotional dimension of care is very often invoked in Qingtianese young adults’ accounts of their childhood and their progress along their life paths. The emotional support coming from their parents is a fundamental point in their evaluation of their

parent-child relationship, as well as being central to their ideas about parenting and the role they will play as progenitors (chapter 7). Here, it is important to consider where – and, as a result, how – the different family generations have been socialised, and how different actions and attitudes are automatically interpreted by some of them as good or bad forms of emotional care, or a lack thereof. A quick, but illustrative example: one of my young adult informants in Spain, usually highlights her self-perceived Spanish character in contrast to that of her parents and grandparents. She uses her impulse to hug and talk to express her emotions to point to this generational gap between Chinese and Spanish ways of being (*formas de ser*). Those emotionally-demonstrative attitudes were not present, for example, when her grandparents drove her adult daughter – informant’s aunt – to Qingtian bus station, from where she would go first to Hangzhou, and from there, would fly back to Spain. Instead of the talking and hugging that characterises her personality (which is normative in Spain), the goodbye at that station – at which I was present – consisted of the grandparents helping her aunt to carry her luggage and asking her practical questions to make sure that she had all the documents and items she could need. This included a lot of homemade food that her parents had cooked and packed attentively to ensure that she ate properly during the trip and once in Spain. By making her that food, they would prevent her from getting homesick and help her to go back to her Spanish life, as she believed – and they all knew – that *mei banfa* (there is no way) to stay longer in Qingtian. In that situation, hugging was not normative, not expected and probably even not considered, as the ‘caring about’ impulse and the reception of care took other different forms there. As such, emotional care is contested. This means that emotions, and – or at least – their expressions, are also cultural constructions (Gardner, 2012).

The moral dimension is considered essential to Chinese families, and particularly salient for the grandparent’s generation in this research. They often link it to the condition of being aware and acting on the basis of Chinese social and cultural precepts and standards. In short, for them, it is linked to behaving properly. In this specific context, foreign influences are often perceived to be challenging the correct moral order, these coming directly through their transnational networks and also indirectly, mediated by the rapidly changing Chinese society and globalising forces. Their most common complaints are based on what they perceive as a lack of manners among children socialised outside China, who do not show them respect, nor do they honour

their position in the family hierarchy. While their grandchildren visit them in Qingtian they have to deal with a lack of authority, as these younger people do not obey their orders or ignore them. For example, one grandmother complained about her grandchildren using the Spanish language when they are together, in order to ignore and challenge her, as she does not speak Spanish. Similarly, several times in July 2018, while walking after dining beside the *Oujiang* river (瓯江) in Qingtian city, I saw a grandmother walking with two younger adolescents. I passed by their side twice and heard the two children talking in Spanish about sexual behaviour and sexualised body parts, taking advantage of the fact that the grandmother was completely excluded from the conversation, as she could not understand anything. Such a conversation would never have taken place if the grandmother was aware of the topic. Instead, children used their ability to switch between languages to their own benefit (Said & Zhu, 2017).

Another grandfather told me about his dissatisfaction regarding the values and way of life of his granddaughter in Spain, highlighting her individualism and her physical condition. On the one hand, he considers his granddaughter to privilege her own life as an individual – friends, boyfriend, leisure, etc. – over her family. On the other, in her grandfather's eyes, she is fat, due to unhealthy eating habits and the lack of physical exercise, which contradicts Chinese values. Children's or young adults' preference for using a fork over chopsticks is another repeated example. Some grandparents blame their adult children for what they see as not educating their grandchildren properly, who behave like foreigners. Nevertheless, this mismatch in the views on childcare practices and moral education between different generations (parents and grandparents) is also reported to be common in today's China as a whole (Binah-Pollak, 2014; Gogh & Kuczynski 2010). Conversely, many of the young adult informants who have been socialised in Spain incorporate values such as familism and what they refer to as a work ethic into their narratives, by suggesting that they are Chinese values which they consider not to be important in Spanish society. They incorporate such values as a source of pride and, sometimes, even of identity.

### 6.2.1.3 Practical care

Practical support refers to the information and other resources of a practical nature that create improvements in another person's standard of living or which provide guidance

that help that person reach a desired result. One example is when members of the family who are already settled in Europe help others to migrate and settle there. The information about how to prepare for the trip and the direct management or supervision of the formalities needed to get all the required documents is key during the first stage. It is this support from families and wider social networks which enables and sustains migration from Qingtian to Spain (Beltrán Antolín, 2003). Similarly, while working for other family members, people may get the necessary knowledge to start their own entrepreneurial project, as a part of the family-migration project (Beltrán Antolín, 2006). For example, after working at the family business in Madrid for some years, Sara and her husband decided to move to a new city, which was not yet saturated with bazaars<sup>32</sup>, by taking advantage of their relatives' contacts with the Chinese wholesale providers that supply their business. Similarly, many migrants who start out working in Chinese restaurant kitchens in Spain end up opening their own restaurants.

On other occasions, the stayers in Qingtian provide information and practical support to visitors while they are in China. This involves, for example, picking up visitors from the train station or driving them around during their stay, or explaining how things work there, as a sort of quick China survival guide. This occurs for the young adults who are settled in Spain and visit China. They often lack familiarity with the environment and the Chinese language, meaning that their knowledge about different services and choices may be limited or their access to them curtailed. The ability to use apps in Chinese is one example, as these apps give them access to a broad range of options regarding travel, shopping, leisure, discounts or additional practical information. The children and young people living in China often help these visitors to install and to use certain apps – such as those for ordering food – which later on can be managed through automated usage or by using a translation app. In other cases, visitors rely solely on services being mediated by the stayers, such as when purchasing on Chinese websites – particularly on *Taobao* –<sup>33</sup> as this requires having a Chinese bank account. Similarly, the younger generations based in China are often the ones in charge of training other generations – such as the grandparents – to use different technological devices or applications (Merla & Baldassar, 2016). Another example of this upward care flow – that is, from the younger family generations to the older ones – is with the provision of

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<sup>32</sup> Low-price variety stores. Together with Chinese restaurants, this type of stores is the most common business run by Chinese people in Spain.

<sup>33</sup> The biggest e-commerce site in China.

recurrent and valuable practical care by children and young people living in Spain, through their role as interpreters and translators.

Continuing with this the life course perspective and exploration of intergenerational dynamics, the transmission of knowledge about the experience of pregnancy and customs related to Chinese culture from mothers and grandmothers to the younger generations is another example of practical care. Nevertheless, this kind of support is often double-sided. On the one hand, the accumulated practical knowledge transferred to new or future mothers may help them deal with the changes in their bodies and lives, manage their increasing responsibilities and give them someone to rely on, either by being physically co-present or at a distance. On the other, these new or future mothers may feel overwhelmed by cultural practices and expectations which they do not feel comfortable with or do not fully understand. Similarly, this prompts conflicts regarding children's moral education and life habits.

In summary, the aforementioned situations are just some of those in which practical care may be exchanged between different family members and which help with family functioning. Care circulates in all directions – Spain to China, Spain to Spain, China to Spain, China to China – the two countries serving the various family members as both sending and receiving hubs. Moreover, this multi-directionality also applies to the various actors exchanging care: as such, members of the different generations take on both caregiving and care receiving roles, and the flow of care is inter- and intra-generational. Nevertheless, this quality is not exclusive to practical support and applies, to different degrees, across all dimensions of care.

#### 6.2.1.4 Material care

By reorganising and expanding Finch and Mason's (1993) care categories, the material care dimension is conceptualised in this thesis as encompassing three different types of support:

- The provision of objects (products and items).
- Financial support.
- Housing and accommodation

#### 6.2.1.4.1 *Products and items*

Visits play a key role in providing material care through the circulation of different types of objects. Members of Qingtianese transnational families who travel across borders take various products with them or ask extended-family members or friends to do so, with other kin collecting them in Qingtian (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a; Masdeu Torruella, 2014). The king size variant of the multiple suitcases they take with them each time they travel make these practices visible. Similarly, I have also been asked to take the odd Spanish product with me on my way back to Qingtian, after visiting Spain. To a much lesser extent, at least within my sample, these are also sent by post (Masdeu Torruella, 2014). As a result, their family homes in Qingtian are filled with Spanish and European products. The items carried consist mainly of food and drink, toiletries, cosmetics and medicines. Indeed, in some of these houses, all kinds of self-imported product can be found. In line with Masdeu Torruella's account (2014), my informants often refer to the trustworthiness and higher quality of European products in comparison to Chinese ones, which is particularly salient in the case of baby care products. Following this logic, as well as the big international brands and prestigious Spanish ones, I have seen many own-brand products in their homes, which are the cheaper in Spanish supermarkets. Moreover, creams for muscle pain, remedies for better digestion and many other products for non-serious conditions with Spanish labels sit alongside traditional Chinese medicine. Several times in my fieldwork, the children or young people visiting Qingtian were asked to read the labels of certain medicines to make sure they were the right ones; I have also performed this translation role. In a similar vein, these young people often help their parents in Spain to buy them, taking advantage of their better Spanish language skills (Lamas Abraira, forthcoming a).

In that first lunch I had in Qingtian with the family of my informant, I thought that the Spanish products, especially the sausage (*fuert*), were displayed to please me. As time passed by, I discovered that it was more than that. I found such products in many different homes, being eaten on a regular basis, meaning that they had been incorporated into the diet and habits of these families, as part of the aforementioned social remittances (see Masdeu Torruella, 2014). Moreover, nowadays, families in Qingtian do not have to wait for the arrival of new suitcases and can find these products in the 'Qingtian Import Commodity City' (青田进口商品城), which was opened in 2015

and has 15,000 square metres of commercial space (six kilometres away from Qingtian city centre). Small shops and restaurants selling Spanish and other ‘Western-style’ food are also present in Qingtian city. Nevertheless, some people are suspicious about the authenticity of this shopping centre’s products and they prefer to wait for the new suitcases to arrive.

*Illustration 5: Lunch in a Qingtian home, which includes fuet (left), and Spanish paella (seafood rice) at a restaurant in Qingtian (right).*



Source: Produced by the author.

On their way back to Spain, the suitcases are filled again. Products bought in the Chinese market, such as liquor, tea or snacks, share space with local specialities, which are usually gathered and prepared by the grandparents’ generation. This is the case for the dried herbs used in Chinese cuisine and medicine, which are repeatedly exposed to the sun to make sure they are completely dry and ready for storage: a process which consumes a lot of space and time.

At this point, I will reproduce an extract of a text written by a descendant of Qingtianese and Wenzhounese migrants, called Paloma Chen. While this first ethnographic chapter offers a general overview, without focusing on specific cases and first-person quotes, the following paragraphs illustrate this sort of luggage-life perfectly:

“My house is full of suitcases. I didn't become aware of this fact until I was a teenager, when I started going to my friends' houses and I saw that their living rooms were not, like mine, mostly taken up with stacks of suitcases - old, new, partially-open ones- and that there were not padlocks, keys, plastic and more suitcases storing things



everywhere. So much luggage all over the place gives visitors the feeling that my home is not really a home but to me, I suppose, it has been always like this, like being in transit. And each member of my family did the ritual every year. Taking a suitcase, emptying it, filling it, safely packing everything, weighing it. As such, my father and my mother went back to Wenzhou laden down with utensils from Spain and then they came back laden down with objects from China, always with stories about the suitcases, about the mishandling of the suitcases that were checked [by security], broken suitcases, buying new suitcases (...) In Wenzhou, they welcomed my parents: 华侨回来了! [*huaqiao huilale!* the Chinese from abroad are back!] Banal chat, more often about the luggage than about the journey.

[It's been] five long years since I last stepped foot in Wenzhou. That time I had taken the high-speed train from Shanghai, and I turned up alone with two packages which I needed my parents to carry to Spain for me, before I went back myself back, because I would have too much luggage [otherwise]" (Chen, 2018, July 14).

This continuous flow of family-imported products also results in physically-distant family members being present by proxy (Baldassar, 2008a) and these items may give a material form to various dimensions of care, such as: material care, through their physical value and practical usage; emotional care, as a reminder of being cared about; and the social dimension, as a demonstration of family care. Moreover, material care may also involve other kind of support. Beyond the various products and items, families provide financial and housing support, which also incorporate a material care dimension.

#### 6.2.1.4.2 *Financial support*

During my fieldwork I have come across many families in which the family members who remain in China do not receive regular remittances. Nevertheless, occasional economic flows take place, such as presents for Chinese New Year or special occasions, which reflect a 'caring about' attitude, in which the emotional dimension is key (De

Silva, 2018; King & Vullnetari 2009). As mentioned above, Qingtianese migration to Europe involves all social classes. As such, in some families it was the grandparents' generation who lent their adult children the money to migrate, with the flow of money going from China to Spain, and sometimes the other way around when symmetric repayment occurred. In contrast, for some families, economic remittances from Europe to China do really matter. As China lacks a social security system able to cover the entire population, some people do not have access to pensions – particularly those of a peasant background, including many of the grandparents and great-grandparents in the sample. In such cases, family support is a must – and legally sanctioned since 1979 (this support was renewed in 2013). Furthermore, during the periods in which the grandparents take care of the grandchildren, they do receive an additional flow of money. This regular or irregular financial support is interconnected with other forms of material support involving the provision of various products and items, such as food, personal-use articles, furniture, electronic appliances and/or housing.

In some families, it is not only parents who send money to pay for their children's living costs or their ageing parents' needs, but also older brothers and sisters, who use the money they save abroad to pay for their younger siblings' education and living costs. An example of this is the youngest sister in Pam family's, who attended university with the economic support of her two sisters who were working in Spain. Similarly, Dali, despite having quit her studies because she did not pass the pre-university entrance examination (高考, *gaokao*), continues to receive a flow of money from her sister, who she plans to join soon by starting her own migration project. Dali and her mother work in low-wage positions in Qingtian, nevertheless, their living standards are over the average in China. An easily visible and public demonstration of this dimension of care takes place when Dali's birthday or Chinese New Year arrives, as she proudly publishes on her WeChat wall the image of the numerous and very generous digital *hongbao*, or red envelopes, that different family members abroad send her through WeChat, particularly the one from her sister. As mentioned, while she has a low-wage job, her life-style is broadly sustained by the remittances sent by her older sister, which creates a clear distinction between her and other young people working in similar positions in Qingtian who do not receive remittances, making her part of a sort of 'remittance bourgeoisie' (Smith, 2006).

#### 6.2.1.4.3 *Housing and accommodation*

The migrants' direct family members generally have better living standards than the average in the area. Often, previous remittances or savings made while working abroad serve to buy or build big houses or flats in Qingtian (Masdeu Torruella, 2014; Beltrán Antolín, 2003), in which members of the extended family may either live – particularly the grandparents – or stay, during their visits to China. That is, they offer either housing or accommodation support. These houses are important on a symbolic level, as they are built or bought on the basis of remittances, mirroring a successful migration project and serving as a status marker (Masdeu Torruella, 2014). Moreover, beyond the link of these houses with remittances or financial support and social prestige, members of the parents' and grandparents' generations often emphasise how providing housing for their parents, or benefiting from it, is constitutive of a 'caring about' attitude, demonstrating their desire to provide the best for their family members. In contrast with other dimensions of care, housing support necessarily implies a visible and non-ephemeral condition, giving the impression that care is made tangible, and as such, that it can be measured. Their houses often include expensive details, such as marble floors, solid wood furniture and decorative mouldings on the room-s ceilings and walls, as well as spacious kitchens with a modern design and living rooms with king-size sofas and TVs.

Through the children's experiences a change in housing conditions over the last few decades can be tracked (chapter 7), in parallel with social and economic changes that are taking place in China, on the one hand; and their progress along their migratory paths, on the other. Nowadays, most of the migrant informants who migrated to Spain 10 to 30 years ago own one house or flat in the big residential developments in Qingtian city or in different towns around Qingtian county, containing all types of amenities and being targeted at members of transnational families or families with a high income. It is also common for members of some of these families to additionally own or have owned a transitional flat, in urban or semi-urban areas, generally in a 4-6 storey building, without a lift and with basic communal areas. This is the case for the Chang, Lam, and Chu families.

Based on ownership, I have categorised three types of transnational family homes in Qingtian, which shape the flow of housing and/or accommodation provision to one or

other family members (from a generational perspective, as well as through the movers-stayers duality):

a. *Grandparents' houses:* bought either using the savings created by their job in China, as in the Chang family, as the grandfather was an artisan stone sculptor; or through the savings obtained from their work abroad, as happens in Lee family, in which the grandparents were the ones who initiated the migration chain towards Spain and, after spending a couple of decades there, moved back to Qingtian. Thus, in these cases it is the grandparents who offer accommodation to their offspring during visits. Nevertheless, adult children may help to buy property, recondition it, or build or buy additional amenities.

b. *Owned by one migrant adult child.* Some of these properties are empty for most of the year and serve to accommodate the owner's nuclear family and other members of the extended family when they visit China. For example, Liwei and her family stay in the flat they bought in Sankou two years ago. As her parents and parents-in-law have already passed away, the flat remains empty for most of the year, as they are not able to travel to China often. Moreover, when they do visit, only one or two people travel together, so as not to disrupt the family business. When Pablo, a 22-year-old young adult, visits Qingtian in summertime, he stays at his uncle's house – who is also based in Spain – as his parents do not own any property in Qingtian.

In other cases, these houses are inhabited permanently by only one member of the family, generally a male of the parents' or young grandparents' generation, and more people gather there during Chinese festivals or in summer. This is the case for Dora's father and the Tang family's father, both having moved back to China after several decades abroad. Meanwhile, their wives and children – currently young adults – are still mainly based in Spain, travelling to Qingtian once or twice per year.

Finally, grandparenting in China is often linked to the provision of housing to the grandparents. That is, grandparents and grandchildren live together in the parental generation's property, while the latter live and work in Spain. Thus, when the parents' generation travel to China, they stay in their own houses, although these houses are adapted to the grandparents' and grandchildren's routines. While filial

piety prescriptions point to the oldest male child as the one who should take charge of ageing parents, co-residence being the ideal form, migration may help to reshape these practices. In the same way that both maternal and paternal grandparents take over the role of primary caregivers for their grandchildren, housing support for the grandparents in these circumstances comes from both male and female adult children. In sum, while gender and age still shape some support preferences or expectations, the pragmatic needs and available resources of the parents' generation, which are closely linked to their migratory experience, tend to determine housing support.

c. *Multi-property.* In these cases, the house or flat is built or bought through the joint effort of various family members. It also tends to be the place where the grandparents live on a daily basis. An example of this are the multilevel houses built up through remittances, in which each floor is owned by a different adult child, as described by Masdeu Torruella (2014). The Lam and Zhang families' properties follow this logic, the new house being built in connection with the old family property – either beside or on top of the old building – and located in small villages in Qingtian county. Both include an open space on the ground floor, serving to gather many people together during festivals, and a floor on which the grandparents live on a permanent basis. In both cases, movers and stayers made some contribution to the construction, but the adult children abroad do not always own their own floor. As such, when visiting, they either stay on their parents' or siblings' floor, or they in their own property, which is generally a flat in some big urban compound.

Another version of this multi-property regime is that of the Mao family, in which two of the migrant sisters jointly bought a new flat in Xiaokou, in a big new tower block only four minutes' walk from their childhood home. They both live in Spain with their husbands and small children, nevertheless, they bought that flat for their ageing parents' comfort and to have a bigger place to stay in when they visit China. Moreover, their younger sister, who works in Qingtian and has no plans to migrate, also lives there.

Within the sample, most families who run their own business and have been settled in Spain for more than 15 years also own their own flat in that country. Housing support in Spain is an essential factor for those arriving as new migrants. As such, it

was very common for my informants' accounts to mention times in which their family homes in Spain served to accommodate new movers, or their own early stages, in which the whole flat they lived in was shared by different individuals, couples or nuclear families, living out their lives in the various rooms.

#### 6.2.1.5 The broader meaning(s) of care

There are other dimensions of care that relate more to the family as a unit than to the individuals who form part of it. While the boundaries between them may be blurred, I have established the following distinctions: firstly, the links between family care and the family business; secondly, the role of worship to family ancestors and 'kin work' (Di Leonardo, 1987), and finally, I analyse the social role of care in this particular transnational context.

As mentioned earlier, some Chinese scholars suggest that the prevalence of households that serve as production units is an essential feature of Chinese society. Such researchers refute the hegemonic framework, which assumes that earlier experiences of industrialisation and modernisation in Western countries are generalisable and applicable worldwide, ignoring the specific context (Xu & Xia, 2014; Huang, 2011). Huang (2011) specifically points to the 'mom and pop shops' (p.473) as key in characterising the new semi-urban economy in China. These are family business in which the husband, wife and children work together and which are characterised by involving unskilled work and long working hours. This definition serves to describe the common circumstances in which Qingtianese migrants and their descendants in Spain find themselves, at least during the descendants' childhood and youth in recent decades. As such, work in the family business may be understood as an extension of the system of household labour in this specific context. While a Spanish family's child sweeping their living room in Spain may be understood as a way to educate children in taking on responsibilities, such a contribution in Chinese stores or restaurants in Spain is quickly denoted a synonym for a failed childhood or even child abuse by non-migrants. The child and the sweeping are the same, only the physical space is different. It results on an activity in the domestic sphere which goes beyond the household as a physically-delimited space, while remaining within its imagined boundaries. It challenges any distinction between productive and reproductive spheres as inherently-separate

domains. As such, on the one side, children's experiences of making contributions to their families must be understood within specific cultural contexts (Olwig, 1999), avoiding to automatically designate forms deviant from the hegemonic norm as deficient parental care; on the other, such a contributions must be understood as forming part of the family 'care continuum' (Bauer, 2016; Becker, 2007).

*Xiao* or filial piety, according to the Confucian code, posits that care for the family extends beyond living people and includes dead family members (Lam, 2006). Duties relating to ancestor worship in these transnational families are performed mainly through visits to temples and family tombs in the homeland, particularly during the *Qingming jie* (清明节) or the Tomb-sweeping Festival. Fieldwork in the Usera's neighbourhood Evergreen Club – which is aimed at Chinese people belonging to the grandparents' generation and above – revealed a mobility pattern, by which these people travel to China before *Qingming jie* (in early April) and stay there until September. As a result, there is a big influx of people in the first and last months of the year, but the centre becomes almost empty after Chinese New Year.

Illustration 6: Dragon boat festival celebration at the Evergreen Club in Madrid.



Source: 西班牙欧浪网(欧洲华人网站) /Spain Eulam network (Website for the Chinese in Europe)<sup>34</sup>

As the introduction to the Chang family shows, *Qingming jie* serves to gather a big number of people together who have ancestors in common. The festival calendar prescribes different activities on the days that the festival covers, nevertheless,

<sup>34</sup> Retrieved from: <https://eulam.com/2018/06/14/178605/>

according to the informants' accounts, these are not always strictly followed. On the main day, the different family members go to their ancestors' tombs together, where they sweep and clean them with additional tools, such as sickles, as the tombs are located in the mountains and, over the year, the vegetation can invade the tomb plots. A clean and worshipped tomb then becomes a synonym for family care. Afterwards, the members of the extended family eat in company, gathering together a large number of people. As ancestors' tombs are located in the countryside and mountains, the feast is hosted at the ancestors' home, if still inhabited, or in another member of kin's house in the home village. Due to work and study commitments, visiting China in spring is not always possible and families' younger generations often visit China during the summertime. Nevertheless, most of the adolescent and young adult informants are not aware of specific rituals and simply follow their relatives' example or instructions or do not perform any worship at all. Finally, worship rituals and artefacts are also managed at a distance, as Masdeu Torruella's research (2014) analysed.

The Chinese festivity calendar incorporates many special dates, on which people are expected to get in touch with kin, to express their appreciation of them, and to meet and eat with them on the most important dates. In this sense, the role of so-called kin work (Di Leonardo, 1987) is essential in maintaining family ties. Di Leonardo (1987) defines kin work as:

“(...) the conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross-household kin ties, including visits, letters, telephone calls, presents, and cards to kin; the organization of holiday gatherings; the creation and maintenance of quasi-kin relations; decisions to neglect or to intensify particular ties; the mental work of reflection about all these, activities; and the creation and communication of altering images of family and kin vis-a-vis the images of others, both folk and mass media” (Di Leonardo, 1987, pp.442-443).

As kin work is an orientation and practice through which kin ties are reinforced, in a search for continuity, it is a form of family care. While I have highlighted the role of women in creating the material pre-conditions for care and their adoption of the role of main caregiver regarding hands-on care and related dimensions – in other words,



carrying out the care work – the role of males in kin work is also salient within these families, even though it remains gender-divided, following the *nei* 內/*wai* 外 (inside/outside) division of the Chinese gender system. The fieldwork suggests that it is mainly the males who are in charge of establishing and managing contacts with kin during family meet-ups and festivals, taking on the most social element of the kin work, while women retain their domestic role. During family meet-ups, men take care of the guests, by starting up conversations and serving the drinks. Meanwhile, women are in charge of food and cleaning. While at a distance, usually each member of the couple – husband and wife – is in charge of managing and displaying kin work for their side of the family.

Finally, family care in the Chinese cultural context incorporates a social dimension, which is essential for the understanding of certain thoughts and behaviours that are present in the different generations of these families. In the social dimension of care, the concept of *mianzi* (面子) or face is key, as it refers to the notions of status and prestige, which are essential to the functioning of social relations in China. As Buckley et al. (2006) suggest, “[t]he need for *mianzi* is intrinsic to various aspects of personal and interpersonal relationship development in China. Saving *mianzi* is a shortcut by Chinese to build their network and tapping into other’s social resources” (p. 276). The social expectations regarding care of the different family members need to be fulfilled in order to avoid becoming the object of criticism (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). Specifically, Zhang (2016) points to an interplay between filial piety and *mianzi* through “individuals’ desire to satisfy the other’s expectation as well as their own, to give face” (p. 19).

Beyond tangible care practices, filial piety prescriptions indicate that individuals must show respect and obedience to their ascendants and bring honour to the family name and ancestors (Lam, 2006). The different levels of care exchanges and support occurring across borders constitute opportunities to display family care, as well as to show family success through the migration project, serving to gain *mianzi*. For the Qingtianese transnational families, the willingness to visit their relatives in China frequently, or to pay for them to visit Europe, reflects a ‘caring about’ attitude (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a), while the capability to do so demonstrates a situation of wealth (Masdeu Torruella, 2014). Additionally, the various European family-imported products and items that family members in Qingtian proudly display and point to in

their homes – such as wines or perfumes – or in the public sphere – such as Spanish tobacco or Spanish football team T-shirts – serve to reinforce the social care dimension, as belonging to a *huaqiao*<sup>35</sup> (华侨) family carries social prestige (Masdeu Torruella, 2014).

The successful trajectory of their offspring in Europe itself becomes a family status marker and a way to gain *mianzi*, and as such, an indirect way of caring about their ascendants. The grandparents in China highlight the enormous effort of their adult children abroad and how they have managed to run a successful business, often with reference to their diversification, the large size of their stores, or their affluent clients. For example, the Tang family's mother quickly refers to her daughter and son-in-law's professional careers, which involve working in a multinational company and travelling to many different countries. Similarly, the Chang family's grandfather often refers to the huge size of the storehouse owned by his son. But overall, the educational background of their offspring, especially of their grandchildren, is used as a status marker (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). In contrast with Spain, where having a university degree does not necessarily correlate with being especially bright, or with being in a particularly good economic situation, in China it can easily translated be into these terms. There are different meanings – and opportunities – that university education carries with it in each country. Often, shortly after I was introduced to someone in Qingtian who was a parent or grandparent of young people in Spain, they referred to the fact that these young people were university students or had already graduated. "She/he has graduated from "X" university"<sup>36</sup> is one of these standard sentences, which I heard repeatedly during fieldwork. Following the logic of the Chinese university system, where universities are organised into a strict hierarchy, according to quality, they highlight the name of the university from which their child or grandchild has graduated. Finally, using a foreign language has become a status marker itself (Said & Zhu, 2017). In line with Masdeu Torruella's experiences in the field (2014), some of my informants – the parents' and grandparents' generations – used to speak to me in Spanish while in Qingtian, particularly when in public areas such as restaurants or buses. In contrast, while in Spain they often switch to Chinese.

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<sup>35</sup> Chinese person who lives out of China.

<sup>36</sup> 她/他是"X"大学毕业的 / Ta shi "X" daxue biye de.

Avoiding improper or non-normative behaviour in the social sphere is also a form of care, and the failure to take on the care responsibilities associated with the different family roles is socially sanctioned. One example is the case of the Zhang family, who I met in Lishui and Barcelona through mutual friends. This family has a common pattern of care arrangements within a three-generation transnational family: the parents live in Spain, while the grandparents and the children live in China. The minors were not reunited with their parents in Spain in the first years of school, as is common in these families. The grandmother living in Lishui heard a rumour saying that her son and daughter-in-law did not care about their daughter – her granddaughter – as she was the oldest child, who was almost a legal adult but remained in China. Then, the grandmother pressed her son to take his daughter to Spain, in order to display normative ‘caring about’ behaviour and thus, to stop the rumours. Here, the role of social control through local and transnational networks is clear, and the parents are expected not only to care about their children but also to display such care in socially-accepted forms (Baldassar, 2007; Soto, 1989).

A similar example has been mentioned in the ethnographic section’s introductory fieldwork notes, the moment at which a transnational call from Manuel’s parents (in Spain) to Manuel (in Qingtian) ended up with him being prohibited from showing up with me at his paternal cousin’s wedding, in order to avoid what they considered misbehaviour. Despite the fact that he had requested permission from different members of the family and all of them had agreed, the disagreement arose when his parents discovered that the foreigner who was invited to the wedding was a female. For him, this detail did not matter as he had invited me to attend the wedding as a friend and as a researcher. But when, on the morning of that day, his parents found out that the foreign friend was me, the suspicion of a possible relationship between us became hopelessly present. Even though Manuel repeated to his parents that I was not his girlfriend and that no kind of relations that would be considered inappropriate had happened between us, nevertheless, his parents considered it inadmissible that we go together. When we talked about this situation on the day of the wedding itself and later on, he referred to his parents’ fear of losing *mianzi*. As such, he gave up on the initial plans and went alone to the wedding, as a way of caring about his parents, even though he did not share their view. In the inverse sense, his parents did what they considered best for their son, themselves and the whole family, avoiding giving people any reason to gossip.

As both samples show, transnational links acted as conduits for communicating information about situations which may cause *diu mianzi/mei mianzi* (loss of face/ not having face) to these families: situations which are presented by informants as necessitating the recovery of a proper and desirable situation. In the same vein, other circumstances, such as addictions or unsuccessful businesses which involve the loss of a lot of money, are the type of rumours that are easily spread across borders. This is true even when the loss of money results from someone cheating the people in question, as happened in one of these families who, after working very hard in Spain for some years, lost all their savings on a fake business. Similarly, divorces are understood to be undesirable situations which disrupt family functioning and thus, must be avoided. As such, the pressure to keep together is significant, as is the gossip when matrimonial ties are finally broken. Finally, the allusion to the need to save *mianzi* when talking about the possibility of using institutional care is common, as well as the reference to how doing so will badly affect the dependent person's condition (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a).

Finch and Mason (1993) suggest that exchanges among family members incorporate a moral dimension, through which individual and familial reputation are interlinked. Despite being culturally-specific, several scholars have documented different social settings in which the link between care expectations, migration and social control is present (Beazley et al. 2017; Fresnoza-Flot & Merla, 2018). In Qingtianese transnational families, such social control operates across the different transnational social fields and is based on expectations regarding socially-accepted behaviour, according to the Chinese-culture system and the premise of individual/family interdependence, in which care is key. Nevertheless, the degree or forms of control may change as time passes, and also this control may affect the various family actors differently. For example, within the young adult sample, while the expectation of maintaining *mianzi* is present, their conception of it is narrower. As such, they do not see it to be necessary to show off their success in life while in Qingtian by offering to pay for other people and instead, often opt to split the bill. Similarly, while the grandparents' generation apply a strong sanction to divorce, that seems to be diminishing for the younger generations. As such, circumstances and expectations surrounding care are not static and may be reshaped.

## 6.1 Settings of family solidarity and reciprocity

Care as a resource that circulates within families' networks – and a wider field – is not homogeneous or constant and, as Gherghel and Le Gall state: “family solidarity practices are transformed over the life course according to the norms of reciprocity and need” (2011, p.8). When looking at care from a life-course perspective, life transitions are key. In each society, normative life stages are linked to certain social expectations that are mainly related to education, work and family, which result in different needs. Within families, belonging to one or another generation brings specific care expectations with it. For example, by becoming parents, the adult children change their family role and take on new care roles and responsibilities, completely altering the previous family configuration. Besides the normative care duties associated with family roles and the family cycle in Chinese families – such as those arising from Confucian prescriptions – additional care expectations and care needs are created, based on specific care histories and circumstances, such as the migratory stage (Baldassar, 2007), or the personal or professional cycle (Kilkey & Merla, 2014). Based on the fieldwork accounts, I suggest that three different forms of time-related reciprocity can be identified within Qingtianese transnational families:

- *Practical reciprocity*: this refers to the multi-directional care exchanges among different generations or actors that occur at the same time (simultaneous practical reciprocity) or in different temporal settings (deferred practical reciprocity). These kinds of care arrangements follow a pragmatic logic which originates mainly in practical needs: you give me something, I give you something.
  - a. In *simultaneous practical reciprocity*, by their nature, exchanges may be asymmetrical. In other words, one of the actors involved in simultaneous care exchanges lacks a certain type of care resource (e.g. hands-on care) and as such, a different type of resource is used to repay the other actor (e.g. financial care or housing). For example, the Zhang family's grandparents were the children's main caregivers, while at the same time they received economic and housing support from their adult children. Going back to Pam's case, while she receives housing and financial support from her sisters living in Spain, they delegate the daily supervision and hands-on care of their parents to her.

- b. In *deferred practical reciprocity*, repayment does not occur simultaneously, and as such, it may be symmetrical or asymmetrical. For example, if the parents have lent their children X amount of money to migrate, and the adult children repay the same amount of money to their parents, the reciprocity will be symmetrical. In contrast, in an asymmetrical deferred repayment, the money is never given back to the parents, or not the full amount, and instead takes a different form. For example, through the provision of a new fully-equipped apartment in Qingtian for the parents' comfort. Nevertheless, the support which initially was conceived in financial terms may involve additional repayment dimensions for one or both sides. For example, the financial contributions to their adult children made by one set of grandparents in the sample are measured by them not only in economic terms but also incorporate the attention and emotional care given to them by their adult children and grandchildren. This results in their perception of the repayment being uneven, given that one adult child visits and get in touch less often.
- *Normative reciprocity* describes a more cultural approach to care, in the context of family values and driven by a sense of obligation or commitment. In this case, the temporal dimension is closely related to age stages and derived family roles, which people pass through over their life course. In Chinese families, normative reciprocity is exemplified through filial piety principles and by the idea of repayment through the family care cycle, whereby care exchanges are not symmetrical in terms of actors, but deferred, according to a generational logic. An example of this is the grandparents' custom of taking on the role of primary carer for the grandchildren, mainly being repaid by their adult children and not by the grandchildren. In this case, it implies a generalised reciprocity, as the repayment includes a third person, in contrast to balanced reciprocity, which links two individuals through a direct repayment (Finch & Mason, 1993). Giving continuity to the family constitutes a family duty, which can be also understood within the family-related reciprocity framework. As such, my condition as a female over 30 years of age was often interpreted by my informants in Qingtian as causing concern and discomfort within my family, as if I had failed to repay them. As they saw it, as time passes, the ability to give birth and thereby to give continuity to the family was being curtailed.

- Finally, *offset reciprocity* connects care to affection. This means that care exchanges are not based on practical needs, cultural prescriptions or duties, but on an emotional dimension instead. As such, in contrast with the previous types, offset reciprocity does not imply the idea of repayment *per se*. It refers to the exchange of care at different moments along the life path, whether this follows a regular pattern or not, on the basis of previous care histories and relational ties. For example, a young adult who was partially raised by her maternal aunt, has maintained a closer relationship with her than with other members of the extended family, the emotional dimension of care and its articulation at a distance being key. Moreover, additional dimensions of care, such as the material one (through presents or *hongbao*) reinforce this vision of their relationship and the nature of its reciprocity.

Table 2: Forms of reciprocity in Qingtianese transnational families.

Type of reciprocity	Based on	Return
<b>PRACTICAL</b>	Current practical needs	Simultaneous (asymmetric) Deferred (a/symmetric)
<b>NORMATIVE</b>	The Chinese cultural system	Intergenerational
<b>OFFSET</b>	Affection	Non-specific

Source: produced by author.

None of these suggested types of reciprocity (practical/ normative/ offset) are exclusive, and they can appear simultaneously or occur in an intermittent manner along the life course, resulting in a network of care involving multi-layered reciprocity. Through these multiple intersections, the roles of caregiver and care-receiver may be sequential, switching from one pole to another, or overlap. That is, care roles are not static, but fluid (Kilkey & Merla, 2011, 2014; Baldassar, 2007). According to this approach, reciprocity appears to be a sort of engine that enables family functioning, in which each single piece is necessary – and designed – to keep going. Nevertheless, the following sections will question the view that families are harmonious units.

## 6.2 Who cares?

### 6.2.1 Invisible generations and unbalanced care burdens

In Chinese families, age, gender and generation parameters define certain care roles and expectations within families, which are not always reworked in a transnational context. In her research about Filipino families, Parreñas (2005b) concludes that mothers “contest the myth of the male breadwinner but retain the myth of the female homemaker” impeding the “reconstitution of gender” (p.334). For Qingtianese migrant families in Spain, both may also apply: on the one hand, these mothers tend to privilege the productive sphere, therefore they challenge gender roles by becoming breadwinners, which also serves to improve their status within the family (Sáiz López, 2012). On the other, the responsibility for reproductive work is not usually extended to the husband and, if other caregivers are not available, it is the mothers who carry the double burden. Otherwise, care duties are distributed vertically: the daughters, and particularly the grandmothers – who are disadvantaged by their age and gender condition (Liu, 2016; Shen, 2011) – are the ones who take them over. Furthermore, all hired care workers in both countries are female. As a result, in these families, care work is managed through a network of women (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a; Carrasco et al. 2011; Ho, 1999).

Conversely, the transnational context creates additional spaces for women in these families to confront their normative daughter-in-law role. During the fieldwork, it was observed that often only one member of the couple travelled to China, while the other remained in Spain, attending to the family business. Once there, they tend to cohabit and interact mostly with their natal families, while the visits to the marital family are carried out primarily or solely to deliver goods brought from Spain to them. As such, on a daily basis, spatial dislocation prevents them from having to meet certain care work expectations, and during these visits, their condition of lone visitors enables them to circumvent their caregiving role as daughter-in-law (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). However, this may not always be the case and for those women who, together with their husbands, are the owners of the house in which their in-laws live – and/or who travel together with their partner – a higher level of interaction and caregiving is expected of them, particularly if the in-laws are taking care of their children. While the status of



women in Chinese families has changed during the last few decades<sup>37</sup> and, moreover, Chinese women nowadays engage in various dimensions of care for their own parents (Chapell & Funk, 2012man; Guo et al. 2011; Chen, 2009; Hsueh et al. 2008; Fong, 2002; Zhan & Montgomery, 2003), the normative caring daughter-in-law role still persists. Nevertheless, this is a role that, for the women in the sample, the transnational context helps to challenge.

According to the normative expectation arising from the Confucian model, the oldest son is designated as the one in charge of his parents as they get older, even though the ‘real debt of yang’ (Stafford, 2000, p.42), or performance of care work, falls to the daughter-in-law. In families in the sample, it is not always the case that the oldest son takes over the main support role, and in several families, the grandparents live in a flat which is not the oldest son’s property, housing support often being linked to transnational grandparenting. Moreover, care for ageing parents is shared with the daughters, who contribute to parents’ care through different dimensions of support (material, emotional, hands-on, etc.). Regarding the prevalence of the preference for the paternal line, grandparenting in families in the sample is bilateral – both maternal and paternal grandparents take care of the grandchildren – practical needs being prioritised over the Confucian prescriptions (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). Similarly, in terms of opportunities and family resources invested in the female and male children in these families, no evidence of widespread difference was found. Nevertheless, during the fieldwork, one informant reported the case of his cousin and his wife, who live in Spain and decided to send their two daughters – aged about four and six years old, respectively – to China only when a male baby was born as, the informant thought, their priority was looking after the son of the family. In a similar vein, in two families in the sample, after giving birth to two or three daughters, they kept trying for a male, while the same did not occur the other way around.

In contrast to the theory that parents or the ‘sandwich generation’<sup>38</sup> have to juggle childcare and care for ageing parents (Brunh & Rebach, 2014; Mujahid et al. 2011; Grundy & Henretta, 2006; Pierret, 2006; Miller, 1981), in these families, such situations are rare. In most cases, when the extensive care demands of frail grandparents arise,

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<sup>37</sup> A key part of this change has been the displacement of the family axis towards the husband-wife pair, in contrast to the former prevalence of the father-son pair (Fowler, Gao & Les, 2010; Chen, 2009; Sáiz López, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Particularly women.

those in the children's generation (G1) are already adolescents or young adults, in no cases in the sample were they dependent children. In contrast, care for babies or toddlers may overlap with the care demands of great-grandparents. In practical terms, this means that: firstly, three or four generation households can often be found in China, while some or all of the members of the second generation (the parents) are settled abroad. And secondly, that it is the grandparents' generation and not the parents who tend to bear the burden of performing care work for several generations; in other words, they have to fill the 'care slot' (Leinaweaver; 2010). Further, this care slot is mainly filled by the grandmothers. Nevertheless, the range of situations is broad, and the care slot may be filled through local and transnational care arrangements, incorporating overlapping or sequential caring practices (King et al. 2014). Moreover, a doubling of the care slot is also possible, meaning that two generations may simultaneously handle the care demands of their respective descendants and ascendants (including the mother's and father's lines).

Expressions such as 'sandwich generation' or 'middle generation' reflect an image of families as homogeneous units composed of three generations, in which the primary, core reference is that of the parents (2G). This focus tends to obscure the contributions of the younger and older generations, through an adult-centred view in which the so-called middle generation functions as shorthand for an adult at the height of their physical and mental development; and in contrast to the stereotypical, ageist view of the children's and grandparents' generations being inherently dependent. Moreover, the middle generation that it invokes is often unrealistic, ignoring the existence of other generations above the grandparents' one. As highlighted in the theoretical introduction to this dissertation, most of the literature on the Chinese family produced before the mid-twentieth century assumed the norm in China to be five generations living under the same roof, and later research pointed to this practice as an ideal (Chen, 2009; Chu, 1974; Freedman, 1958). Nowadays, this ideal form is absent from the contemporary literature on the Chinese family and the fourth generation seems to have disappeared along with it. This absence also applies to research on transnational families in this and other social settings (for exceptions see: King et al., 2014; Deneva, 2012; King and Vullnetari, 2009; Vullnetari & King, 2008). The period during which there are four living generations in families in the sample tends to be short (generally no more than ten years); nevertheless, these circumstances cannot be ignored. Firstly, because this is

a common situation rather than an extraordinary circumstance, and secondly, because this period often involves simultaneous, extensive care demands from the younger and older family generations, making it a special stage from the point of view of care management in families (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a).

### 6.2.2 De-harmonising families

One of the points highlighted in the theoretical introduction to this thesis is the need to question the ideal(s) of family, at its multiple levels. One such ideal relates to the image of families as harmonious, held together by reciprocity and good intentions, where power struggles and conflict are missing (DeVault, 1991; Perez Orozco, 2014). It is also necessary to call into question the view of the family as a realm of inherently trustworthy and good care (Cancian, 2000). As such, the aim of this section is to problematise these preconceptions and hold ideals up against realities. In order to do so, it will draw on examples extracted from the fieldwork; nevertheless, given their nature, these are not experiences that are easily shared with others. As illustrated through this chapter, family and care is understood as a whole that is meaningful on multiple levels. At the individual and familial levels, interdependence and reciprocity serve to cope with care needs and to maximise resources. At a social level, the family is the unit of reference in which individuals are framed, and family functioning is understood as a must. As such, harmony in families tends to be highlighted and conflicts are minimised or hidden. Nevertheless, this section serves to sketch out the hidden underside of such family functioning and care circulation within them, which up to now has been portrayed as a sort of mechanical and taken-for-granted process.

The most superficial layer of the harmonious image attached to Chinese families can be easily understood by briefly referring to the disjuncture between normative expectations and performed realities. Firstly, intra-family relations are expected to be based on a vertical hierarchy and unconditional respect from the younger to older family generations, but children's attitudes and young adults' accounts challenge this norm. Secondly, negotiated commitments<sup>39</sup> run in parallel to these normative expectations.

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<sup>39</sup> The concept of 'negotiated commitments' refers to how "people become committed to accepting certain sorts of responsibilities, to particular individuals, over time" (Finch & Mason, 1993, pp.60). This commitment is developed through negotiation with other people and there is a power dimension involved in it.

For example, having several siblings in the parents' generation (2G) implies having multiple actors with whom it is necessary to negotiate the process of taking on family responsibilities. On the one hand, this serves to share the care burden by, for example, implementing a rotative visit system or by purchasing or building a multi-property house in which the ageing parents can find convenient accommodation. On the other, suspicions about the uneven or asymmetrical distribution of care responsibilities are likely to arise. This is the case for one of these transnational Qingtianese families, in which one of the siblings (2G) is able to travel less often than the other two. While some members of the family show an understanding attitude towards this circumstance, others blame her for her work schedule and question her priorities which – in their view – result in too little interaction and support.

Having several siblings in the parents' generation (2G) may also result in significant care demands being placed on the grandparents. These can be easily met through grandparenting in China, by having the children co-reside with their cousins. However, if the grandparents travel to another country to take care of a child, this may imply that they are not available to take care of other grandchildren. This has happened in one family within the sample, in which the parents had to make a financial effort to hire a child caregiver, while the child's cousins were cared for by their grandparents. The implementation of the One Child policy in China from 1979 onwards has had repercussions on these family dynamics. It does not always affect these transnational families, as the migrant parents may have been born prior to its implementation or have been covered by the policy's exceptions.<sup>40</sup> However, the sample does include two families whose future care arrangements will be conditioned by this policy. Two young adult informants, who are both males born in Qingtian under the One Child policy, moved to Spain at the age of 12 and 13, respectively, following their parents' migratory paths. Their parents did not have more children there, so both informants remain only children. In the future, they will be the only individuals to whom the duty to care for ageing parents will fall, but their parents will also not have to deal with additional

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<sup>40</sup> The One Child policy implemented in 1979 imposed penalties on couples who had more than one child. Likewise, the restrictions meant there was some monitoring of the population in order to apply the applicability criteria at the local level (Basten and Jiang, 2014). Particularly in rural areas, people were often allowed to have a second child if the first was female, due to the absence of social programmes, which would make ageing parents dependent on their adult son in the future, as well as the smaller amount of land available (Basten & Jiang, 2014, Sáiz López, 2009). From late 2013, the Chinese government allowed two children per couple when the parents were only children and, since January 2016, this right has been extended to all couples.

grandparenting demands, as their future children will be their parents' only grandchildren. Still, despite their status as only children, the taken-for-granted nature of care support needs to be called into question.

The theory indicates that, where you have kin – if it is a Chinese family – you will find the support you need. Nevertheless, Huiyin's account contradicts this. She lives in Qingtian, while her siblings, parents and other members of the extended family are settled in Europe, mainly split between Italy and Spain. When asked about her family and migration project she refers to the active and continuous struggle of her parents, who have been working in a factory in Italy for about two decades. Their effort, she reports, has been not translated into a significant improvement of the family's socio-economic status, in contrast to most of the people around her. As such, she lives in the shared room that her employer in Qingtian offers her, as neither she nor her parents own a house. Nevertheless, her uncles and aunts have had much better fortune and are in a very well-off economic situation nowadays, reflecting the stereotypical image of a successful migrant's family in Qingtian. Far from helping her parents to improve their situation – by lending them some money to start a business, by employing them or by providing them with information or other resources that may help them move forward – Huiyin states that her relatives are happy about their lack of fortune, which seems to increase their own success. She adds that they have even purposely curtailed their parents' chances of improving their situation. In contrast, she is happy to report that her brother has made significant improvements to his situation since his arrival in Spain, by taking advantage of his own network outside the family.

In Liwei's family, the problem was not the lack of support, but the misunderstandings and suspicions arising from it. Liwei, her husband and children, who are young adults nowadays, live in Barcelona. The family's grandparents and great-grandparents passed away years ago, but this family keeps strong ties with other family members who live or spend periods of time in Qingtian, such as the parents' siblings (2G) and their children (1G). Years ago, when the parents sold their flat and bought a new one, which would only be available to move into a couple of years later, they were looking for a place to store their belongings. As one of Liwei's cousins lived nearby and had some extra storage space, they verbally agreed to keep the belongings in the cousin's space in exchange for an annual rental fee. When the new flat was ready to move into, Liwei discovered that some of their things were missing. She talked about it with her cousin,

not to blame her, but to give advice that a thief may have access to the storage space and that from that point onwards, she should take care. To her, the theft was not such a big problem and she decided to not present a formal complaint to the police. She returned to Spain, went back to her routine, and mentioned the unfortunate events to other family members and friends. The next summer, she travelled back to Qingtian. One day, when leaving her home, her cousin and her cousin's husband suddenly confronted her verbally and, using an aggressive tone, accused her of spreading the rumour that they had stolen her family's belongings; and moreover, they accused her family of being the swindlers, saying that they had never paid the storage fee. Liwei's son, who was also on holiday in Qingtian, showed up and pushed them away from his mother, as they were trying to physically intimidate her. A few minutes later, the nephews of Liwei's husband, who live in the building next door, also showed up to defend their aunt. They ended up calling the police to mediate between them, who apparently supported Liwei's version. Some days later, Liwei and her son returned to Spain to attend to their work commitments. This family confrontation is only an anecdote which provides an example of one of the many disputes and misunderstandings that may take place in any family worldwide. Nevertheless, what makes the difference is the fact that: firstly, the rumour transcended local and national borders; secondly, that the public expression of the conflict depended on transnational families' work patterns and their related mobility; and thirdly, the expression of the conflict was itself different, as clearing the cousin's family name depended on a public performance in which they presented themselves as victims of an offence against their honour, which needed to be restored, so as not to lose *mianzi* (face).

Moving on to a very different domain, the disruption of family life through divorce is something to take into account when talking about de-harmonising families. In families in the sample, the disruption of conjugal ties often led to the disruption of other relations with the in-laws, but this disruption also extended to relatives connected by blood, thereby contradicting the supposedly inviolable nature of blood bonds in the Chinese culture system. In the Song family, the parents got divorced in Spain, having three of their own children at that time. Both members of the couple ended up getting married again to new partners and having more children. The three children they had together are adolescents and young adults today, and they lack a relationship with their father and their paternal family. Moreover, the narrative of the older daughter incorporates a

strong resentment against her biological father, while emphasising the role of her by-rearing<sup>41</sup> father, who is her mother's husband and the father of her younger brother. This emphasis is associated with his active engagement in family functioning and the care and support provided to her mother, her siblings and herself, but also to her mother's parents (his in-laws). Another case is that of the Huang family, in which the father migrated to Spain, leaving behind his wife and two daughters. Once there, the father started a new relationship with another female Qingtianese migrant, with whom he remarried and had two more children. The two daughters of the first marriage and the older brother of the second are today in their twenties and the younger daughter is about to turn 18. In contrast to the previous case, the Huang family's father did not break totally with the responsibilities linked to his role as father and invited the daughters of his first marriage to join his family in Spain in their late adolescence, hoping to offer them better future prospects. Nevertheless, the lack of previous interaction and ties between the different family members created a distant atmosphere and they decided to abandon the family home. Occasionally, their younger brother meets them and gets an update about their lives, but this only happens every two or three years and they do not keep in touch on a regular basis. He regrets the fact that they have little contact, as he considers this not to be a normal relationship for siblings, but he also emphasises the lack of an earlier family life, which results in the lack of tangible family ties.

The divorce situations described above were reported by members of the youngest family generation, both of whom are young adults nowadays, and both having been raised in Spain, albeit with a very different amount of active connections with China. The rate of divorces in China has increased dramatically in the last few decades but despite this, the disruption of marriage continues to be socially sanctioned as undesirable. Avoiding starting a divorce process therefore becomes, in some ways, a means to engage in family care. As such, the degree of negotiation between the different generations regarding these circumstances tends to be very limited. In the parents' generation and above, all the informants have avoided referring to divorces in their families. The exceptions were three younger divorced mothers living in Qingtian, belonging to very different social classes and backgrounds, for whom my condition as an unmarried woman over 30 was associated with female empowerment, in that a male

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<sup>41</sup> The term 'children by rearing' (*hijo de crianza*) refers to "a child reared in the household (as opposed to a child born to a parent)" (Soto, 1989, pp.132)

figure in our lives was seen as unnecessary. Nevertheless, this discursive claim was often contradicted in the following sentence where, in one way or another, the need to cope with societal standards was present.

A new marriage for these young women – in their late twenties and early thirties – is desirable for them and their families but not easy, due to the fact that divorced individuals – especially women – are socially marked. This social marker has a particularly great impact in small cities and rural China. Although Qingtian constitutes a special phenomenon, a sort of social lab in which local and global ideas and practices merge, this social marker continues to place individuals in a lose-lose situation, particularly women who stay in Qingtian. The *ayi* working in one of the hotels in which I lived in Qingtian, who belongs to the grandparents' generation, was particularly concerned about the growing number of divorces in Qingtian, and especially about how, in her view, mothers of small children decide to break up their families for their own convenience, without seriously considering the consequences for the minors. This issue emerged in our conversations several times: she emphasised that the decreasingly sacrosanct status of families was a consequence of the incorporation of foreign ideas and ways of living which, as she said, they *mei you* (没有/have not) in China before. Similarly, this discourse was shared by other people from the grandparents' generation that I met in Qingtian.

At the other end of the generational spectrum, the life histories of Huiyin and Zhiruo offer a daunting insight. During my stay in Qingtian city, I used to meet Huiyin and go for a walk beside the river or eat something with her. She often asked me to talk to her in English, as she had learned a bit at secondary school and wanted to practice it. One day, we went out for lunch and she encountered Zhiruo, one of her middle-school classmates who was having lunch there with her two small children. We sat at the same table and they started to talk in the Qingtianhua language; I could only understand a few words and I did not get the meaning of the whole conversation. After eating, we all walked together to Huiyin's place, where she offered her bed to her friend and her children so that they could rest. She told me that Zhiruo's husband had beaten her and that she had run away with her children. She was afraid that he could find out that they were at her place and also use violence against her for helping her friend. The only solution I could think of was calling the police, but she said that things did not work that way. Huiyin's lunch break ended and she had to go back to work. The next day, I



asked her about Zhiruo and the children, and she told me that they were back at the family home with the husband. I started asking her how this was possible, why she went back, and tried to explain to her that this was not a good idea. She told me that Zhiruo had no alternative, no other place to go, while I kept referring to the possibility of finding shelter with her parents, her grandparents, her uncles, aunts or at anyone's house. Aiming to end our conversation, she said no, and using English, she added “we are alone here”. Huiyin used the plural pronoun and verbally expressed their common reality: their lack of a tangible support network in Qingtian.

Huiyin's parents migrated when she was in her late teenage years. They were unable to regularise their situation before she turned 18 years old, and when they did, it was too late to ask for family reunification. While her parents, siblings and other members of the extended family migrated, she stayed behind. She lived with her grandmother and when she passed away, Huiyin was the only one in her natal family remaining in Qingtian. Similarly, Zhiruo's only home was the one she shared with her husband and children: if she closed that door, no other would open. Years ago, Huiyin had got divorced from her husband. They had got married at a very young age and she pointed to this fact and the end of the love between them as the cause of divorce, although they keep a good relationship. On the other side of the coin, when they got divorced, custody of the children was given to the father, as is customary in rural China<sup>42</sup>. Since then, the children have lived with the paternal grandparents, more than 300 km away from her, and she sees them only a few times per year, mainly during holidays. Moreover, she avoids going to her natal town – a few kilometres from Qingtian city – because she is afraid of the rumours about her situation. Since I met her at the very beginning of my stay in Qingtian, she has often referred to her *gudan* (loneliness/ 孤单) and she says that she would like to find a new husband who could alleviate her solitude and protect her: a way to finally stop being alone.

Huiyin's caution that things work differently in China is meaningful. There is an active awareness of a reality which is anchored in a specific place, in which the facts I report are contested, although it is the social practices and meanings, the social construction

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<sup>42</sup> Since 1980 Marriage Law's reform the custody goes to the mother if child is still breast-fed, otherwise it depends on parents' agreement or the court awards the custody based on child's interest. Nevertheless “court awards of custody to women continue to suffer from problems of enforcement, especially in rural areas” (Palmer, 2007, pp.684).

of the space, and not the physicality itself which matter. Masdeu Torruella (2014) refers to a conversation which takes place during a dinner with several women in Qingtian, in which possible ways to handle a husband's abuse of one of the women are discussed. They discuss how the available options are different in China and Spain, and advise one of the women who lives in Spain to be aware that she is back in Qingtian, and that – once again – things work differently there.

These circumstances being difficult to share with others, particularly in a context in which the social sanctions are omnipresent, it is expected that most cases will remain hidden. The information travelling from China to Europe may also be filtered, to avoid worrying parents and siblings, as people think that they are too busy, with enough problems and struggles to deal with there already (Baldassar, 2007). Moreover, the success with finding alternatives depends largely on the economic resources of the families. In the case of Huiyin and Zhiruo, despite the fact that their parents migrated years ago, they are not in the expected situation. For example, Huiyin's oldest child is now 8 years of age, and his maternal grandparents (Huiyin's parents) have only met him once, as they cannot afford to travel to China often. Similarly, these women do not have the alternative of living in their parents' house in Qingtian, as none of them have been able to buy one. Other options, such as migration to Europe, are not always available, due to the restrictions of migration laws, as well as the fact that it would entail physically leaving their children behind and facing the possible restriction of communications imposed by the children's paternal families.

In summary, while in general terms, families split between Qingtian and Spain operate transnationally and can be described as multiply connected, enabling them to maximise resources and cope with migrants' and stayers' needs, this theory is called into question by the realities of these two women. Besides the physical absence of their family members, they lack protection and alternative options, making them socially vulnerable. In their disadvantaged condition, gender and social class are key. Their lives are shaped by the local and transnational contexts and their inherent asymmetries in power relationships and opportunities (Boccagni, 2015; Dreby & Adkins, 2010). While they inhabit a transnational space – a circumstance which goes beyond their individual situation and describes the reality of everyone who lives in Qingtian – their transnational family status is a matter of perspective. There is a discontinuity between the family members in Qingtian and Europe, which is only partially and/or anecdotally

overcome, as the spatial dislocation – reinforced by additional economic, cultural and institutional factors – prevents them from securing tangible support. As such, these girls’ realities situate them somewhere between forming part of a transnational family or simply having family abroad.

### **6.3 Situated transnationalism**

Different institutional and structural contexts shape – to varying degrees – the capability of the different family members to deploy and exchange care within and across borders. Kilkey and Merla (2014) created the ‘situated transnationalism’ framework, aiming to unveil the intersections between family care-giving arrangements and institutional contexts at local, national and global levels, and to understand how these may affect the “maintenance of transnational family solidarity” (p.210). This chapter will outline how these institutional regimes – which concern: migration, welfare and gender; working time; transport and means of communication (Kilkey & Merla, 2014) – condition care arrangements in Qingtianese transnational families. It will also explore to what degree the availability of different care resources, especially human capital, depends on such regimes.

#### **6.3.1 The migration regime**

For Kilkey and Merla (2014), the migration regime includes three main dimensions: firstly, the policies that regulate “exit/entry/residency rights” (p.215); secondly, the regulations that entitle migrants to access social benefits; and thirdly, the migration cultures in both sending and receiving countries. Starting with this last dimension, migration culture is described by Kilkey and Merla as the set of “norms around appropriate (family) migration strategies in sending societies” and “the overarching approach to migrants in receiving societies” (p.216). It is easy to see how migration is integrated into the daily life of Qingtian and the Qingtianese, including both movers and stayers. Moreover, the migration history of Qingtian is visible in their public spaces, which are full of references to it: European-style buildings, sculptures – such as statues of a bullfighter and Columbus – and business names (Masdeu Torruella, 2014a). As scholars suggest (Li, 1998), at some point, migration to Europe became a sort of social

imperative, with a successful migration project becoming the best way to achieve social mobility and prestige. As occurs in other *qiaoxiang*, or international migration areas, parents and other family members encouraged young people to go abroad and supported them in doing so. Migration fever encompassed families from all social classes, to become a universal phenomenon. Indeed, during my stay in Qingtian I did not find a single person who did not have relatives or close friends in Europe. When introducing myself as Spanish, the immediate reply referred to the extensive presence of Qingtianese people in Spain. Furthermore, all the people I interviewed had relatives in at least two European countries, Spain and Italy being the most common ones. A clear example is the case of Huiyin, who is the only person within her primary school group who did not migrate abroad. Similarly, Sara, who moved to Spain 12 years ago, participated in a reunion of her classmates from a middle school in Qingtian city last year, which was held in Madrid, gathering together people from different provinces in Spain, and even from other European countries, as most of her former classmates also live abroad.

As a result, all migrants in the sample had ‘licence to leave’ (Baldassar, 2007, pp.285), which nevertheless, as previous sections have shown, meant leaving physically but not giving up the duties associated with their specific family roles or care histories. That is, migration did not enable them to escape their caregiving responsibilities. Despite this widespread licence to leave and the common aim to go abroad, as time has passed, the different and changing contexts in both, the sending and receiving country, have shaped the view of migration in Qingtian. Masdeu Torruella (2014) describes the idealised image of the successful migrant which was part of the collective imaginary in Qingtian, based on pioneers’ accounts, and juxtaposed it with the more realistic approach to migrants’ life experiences and conditions abroad that exists nowadays, based on the increasing flows of communication and information across borders. My own experience in fieldwork reinforced this view. An illustrative example is offered by the account of the Chang family’s grandfather. In a conversation we had regarding how China has developed in recent decades, he reflected on migration to Europe nowadays. His perception is that, while China has developed in positive terms, Spain’s quality of life has decreased as a result of the economic crisis and the excessive and discriminatory fiscal and migratory scrutiny of the Chinese population. Thus, despite the fact that he allowed all his adult children to leave two decades ago, and even sponsored them, he

thinks that Spanish living standards no longer justify leaving the country. Nevertheless, his perception may not only depend on his objective observations, but also on the practical and emotional costs derived from his children's migration, particularly as he and his wife advance along the life course (Mas Giralt, 2018; Sun, 2017).

Similarly, while I have still encountered several young adults whose aim is to migrate to Europe, I also found others who, after spending a couple of years there, decided to move back to China because their migratory experience was not as positive as they had expected. Moreover, there seems to be a general lack of interest in international migration among the teenagers and most of the young adults. An answer I received many times during my stay in Qingtian came immediately after asking if they would like to migrate abroad. While denying their intention to do so, they highlighted their wish to visit their relatives and to travel as tourists, which is the same type of reply that Masdeu Torruella (2014) reported in her fieldwork. There is, then, a more realistic conception of migration and migrants' life abroad, resulting in a decreasing desire to migrate and to allow descendants to leave; there is also a widespread discourse which focuses upon the China's rapid social and economic development in contrast to the diminishing potential of European countries. However, despite all this, specific and positive meanings continue to be attached to Spain, as the following fieldwork notes exemplify:

a) In Spring 2017, I was teaching Spanish to three young adults (aged between 17 and 25), who were intending to migrate to Spain. In one of the classes, I explained them where I was from. To do so, I manually drew a map of Spain. I pointed to Portugal, the country whose border is very close to my home and which they all knew, as there is a significant number of Qingtianese people there. Then, I moved to the other side of the map to point to the border with France, and the same thing happened. Finally, I went down and drew the African coastline, very close to the south of Spain. They looked at each other with confused expressions, kind of questioning the veracity of what I had just said. One of them quickly said that I was mistaken, and another asked: *Feizhou ma?* (Africa?), to confirm what I had said. I took out my phone and used a translation app to show them the name in Chinese characters, to make sure that my Chinese pronunciation was not a problem. They were really surprised. I explained to them that, as well as there being a very short distance between the Spanish and Moroccan coasts, Spain has two cities that, despite being Spanish, are physically located in the African continent (the

autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla) and, as a result, Spain also has a land border with Africa. I went on to explain that these circumstances translated into a high rate of African migration to Spain, especially from Morocco. They continued to look shocked. In their imaginations, Spain belonged to a highly-developed Europe-related category; while Africa, as a whole, was an underdeveloped area that was full of poverty. As such, the borders between the two continents could not be as close as my map showed them to be.

b) On another day, I met a couple of grandparents in Shuinan district. While walking behind the high buildings on the riverfront, parallel to the tracks of the high-speed train, they highlighted the poor maintenance of the road along which we were walking and the preponderance of non-urbanised spaces and allotments beside it. One grandfather stated that in Spain we *meiyou* (do not have/没有) this. I told them that, of course, this kind of place exists, that it is not that unusual to find them on the outskirts of cities, and he also had to ask me again to confirm what I had said.

c) A similar reflection took place one day while talking to a young mother in Qingtian: I was telling her about the place where I grew up, which is a small village in the countryside with less than fifteen houses, where people's lives revolve around breeding animals and agrarian activities. She was also surprised, as she said that she did not know that abroad 'we' have *nongcun* (countryside/农村).

d) Finally, during an excursion to a small village in Lishui prefecture, organised by a teacher from the Lishui college, the teacher was surprised by the fact that I could recognise 'traditional' agrarian tools and explain what they were used for, such as the stone used to grind wheat, which looks exactly the same as that used in Spain, despite the 10,000 km of separation.

These four examples include people of a wide range of ages and socio-economic statuses who, nevertheless, share a similar image of Spain. This image is linked to its condition as a European country and contains the idea of an urban lifestyle over a rural one and the cleanliness of public spaces, as physical indicators which reflect a developed and wealthy world.

Despite all this, the reality of many Chinese migrants' hard working and living conditions prevails. The common image – and generally, the reality – is of Chinese

migrants in Spain working from early morning to night, far surpassing the standard Spanish work schedule of 40 hours per week (although this does not always apply to their descendants). The other part of this image is the repercussions this situation has on care arrangements, as in the practice of sending babies to China to be partially raised there, as parents cannot balance productive and reproductive demands in Spain. This practice was described by the informants as a *xiguan* (习惯) or custom, linked to the migratory experience and the transnational context. Migration's status as a part of the reality of Qingtian and the Qingtianese – and of China, through internal migration – serves to normalise the physical absence of family members, presenting an alternative to hegemonic family and care models.

The care and family practices of the Chinese in Spain have been the object of hearsay. During the 1990s, in particular, a rumour spread all over Spain, insinuating the existence of macabre practices among Chinese migrants regarding the death of the grandparents' generation. These rumours were supposedly justified by allusions to the infrequency with which these families' grandparents and older generations were seen on the streets, and the supposed complete lack of Chinese tombs in Spanish cemeteries. Obviously, dismantling this rumour was as easy as referring to the recent start of the migratory process, meaning that most migrants were young people. The exceptions were, in most cases, the grandparents who travelled to Spain to take care of their grandchildren who, after some years, moved back to China. Similarly, for the pioneers, the very first migrants, the pattern was to move back to China to retire. Thus, in both cases, they passed away there. Moreover, as in the case of the Song family's great-grandfather, family members who passed away in Spain were often sent to China to be buried; and buried in Spanish cemeteries less frequently. Nevertheless, this rumour can still be heard nowadays. More than once while explaining my research to Spanish people, I have been asked about where the Chinese grandparents are – because apparently, they are invisible – and how death and burial among these families is managed. This rumour is recounted by Quan Zhou, a cartoonist and descendant of Zhejianese migrants, in the following illustration.

\*For the English translation see below.





sharing her experience in an academic forum in a university,<sup>44</sup> she explicitly said that Chinese parents do not take care of their children. Having been confronted by several scholars present in the room, she nuanced her words. In the end, what such a cutting sentence really meant is that Chinese parents do not take care of their children in the same way that most Spanish parents do. However, this does not imply that they do not care, nor that the care they perform can be automatically designated bad or deficient, but only as deviant from the local norm.

Regarding regulations that affect the migration regime, in recent decades, different and changing policies in Spain – and, to a lesser extent, in Europe and China – have conditioned the migratory projects of individuals and families in the sample, as well as their ability to participate in care circulation. These policies and regulations give migrants access to exit, entry and residence rights and to social benefits (Kilkey & Merla, 2014). The arrival of the Chinese population in significant numbers in Spain coincided with the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1973. Nevertheless, some Chinese migrants moved to Spain from other European countries, where they had settled previously (Beltrán Antolín, 2003). This period in Spain was characterised by the death of the dictator (1975) and the transition to a democratic regime, consolidated by the establishment of the 1978 Constitution, and the later entrance into the European Union as a Member State (1986). The legislative path regarding foreigners and migration can be summarised as follows:

a) The first law addressing migration issues was passed in 1985 (Ley Orgánica 7/1985), having been imposed by the European Union, prior to Spain's entry as a Member State (Sánchez Alonso, 2011). It was designed to govern the rights to entry, residence, work and expulsion (Relaño Pastor, 2004), but it resulted in a large amount of irregular migration, due to weakness in border controls and complicated bureaucratic barriers (Sánchez Alonso, 2011).

b) Fifteen years later, in 2000, a new law (Ley Orgánica 4/2000) aimed to equate the rights of foreigners – who were defined as people who did not hold Spanish nationality – to those of Spanish citizens and to integrate migrants into society (Relaño Pastor, 2004) by providing them with civil and political rights (Sánchez Alonso, 2011).

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<sup>44</sup> International Symposium for Young Researchers in Translation, Interpreting, Intercultural Studies and East Asian Studies. Held at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

These rights included family regrouping, access to benefits within the welfare system and access to permanent regular status for those migrants who had been registered in a local register for at least two years (and were able to provide for themselves).

c) At the end of the same year, the aforementioned law was modified by a new one (Ley Orgánica 8/2000), which changed the orientation of the former one, conceptualising foreigners as a problem, with the aim of avoiding a pull effect (Relaño Pastor, 2004). This law stopped the automatic regularisation process and curtailed social rights and benefits for irregular migrants. Different regional governments and civil and political entities appealed against this law before the Constitutional Court which, one and a half years later, declared 13 sections of it to be invalid and called for them to be corrected.

d) The reform was realised through a new law, promulgated in 2003 (Ley Orgánica 14/2003), which was intended to get around the obstacles imposed by the Constitutional Court and to maintain the main content of the prior law. Thus, when this law entered into force, controls were reinforced, expulsion processes were facilitated, police control through local registration was implemented and chain family reunification was prohibited (Relaño Pastor, 2004).

e) In 2009, the law was reformed, pursuing this restrictive line further: it intended to persecute irregular migration and work, and to create a register for foreigners' entries and exits (Sánchez Alonso, 2011).

The question is: how did these rules affect Qingtianese transnational families? Regarding migrants' entry into Spain, as mentioned earlier, the informants arrived there – or in other European countries and later moved on – by taking advantage of other kin or friends who were already settled there. This help encompassed different dimensions of care, such as economic and practical support, as well as accommodation. A vital element of this were the mechanisms deployed by those helpers in the destination country to provide the new migrant with documents which guaranteed her/his regular status: either through a family reunification process or by providing the migrant with a job that was suitable to get a work permit. According to the most recent official statistics

published,<sup>45</sup> out of a total of 210,218 Chinese people in Spain who are in a regular situation, 22,159 hold a temporary residence permit, family reunification being the most common reason for its concession (11,625) and work the second most common one (8,042). Moreover, 2,492 people hold a non-lucrative residence visa, 1,106 have a temporary residence permit, due to ‘having established roots’ (*arraigo*) – or the foreigner having ties (economic, social, family-related, work-related or academic) with the place in which she/he lives – and 36 people due to humanitarian and other special circumstances.<sup>46</sup>

In almost all families I got in touch with during the fieldwork, at some point, a regrouping process served either to pull other family members to the country or be pushed by them. The various Spanish laws that regulate foreigners’ rights identify several types of people who can arrive in Spain through a family reunification process, namely:

a) A migrant’s spouse. The right to regroup with one’s spouse is recognised. Moreover, Organic Law 4/2000 also states that “an affective relationship analogous to the conjugal one will be equated to that of the spouse” (Article 17, p.11).<sup>47</sup> This equation was reinforced in the 2009 law, although it does not specify the specific requisites that must be fulfilled. Spouses who have been reunited will keep their respective residence permits if they get divorced.

b) Descendants. The various laws specify that, in order to be regrouped, descendants must be legally minors (under 18 years old).<sup>48</sup> This includes adopted children and children from previous marriages, if the parent carrying out the reunification process has custody.

c) Ascendants. Migrants and their spouses’ direct ascendants (parents and parents-in-law) can be regrouped with migrants if they are over 65 years old<sup>49</sup> and they can justify that they depend upon the person carrying out the reunification process.

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<sup>45</sup> Permanent Observatory on Immigration [OPI, *Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración*], online database 2018.

<sup>46</sup> These include: international protection, humanitarian reasons, collaboration with other authorities, for national security or the public interest, female victims of gender violence, collaboration with organised networks and victims of human trafficking.

<sup>47</sup> Original in Spanish: “una relación de afectividad análoga a la conyugal se equipará al cónyuge”.

<sup>48</sup> Since 1978.

<sup>49</sup> The retirement age in Spain at the time at which these laws were promulgated.

d) Additionally, they can regroup with other individuals who, regardless of their age, legally depend on the person who is applying for reunification, and who has any kind of disability or health problem that prevents them from living independently.

Nevertheless, some of the requisites for accomplishing such a process changed with the different laws. In order to be eligible to start a reunification process with their spouse and descendants, the migrant must have been a regular resident in Spain for at least one year and have had a valid residence card for at least one more year. To regroup with ascendants, the applicant must have lived in Spain for at least five years or, since the law was reformed in 2009, in any other country of the European Union. Moreover, the applicant must accredit that they have proper housing and are financially solvent, so as to be able to meet their family members' living costs. Organic Law 8/2000, which was intended to restrict migrants' rights and social benefits, stated in article 41.5 that foreigners who had obtained a residence permit through a previous family reunification process could only bring other family members over to Spain if those members hold their own residence permit (Relaño Pastor, 2004). This mechanism was reinforced in the reformed 2003 law, whose text alluded to the need to eliminate regrouping chains. Regrouping for descendants of the previously-regrouped ascendants was curtailed, as this was to depend on their own work and residence permit and economic solvency<sup>50</sup> (Relaño Pastor, 2004), while the minimum age for regrouping was 65 years old, which situated them outside of the labour market. Similarly, article 19 stated that a spouse who had undergone reunification could only get an independent residence permit by obtaining a work permit<sup>51</sup> (Relaño Pastor, 2004); this was modified in the 2009 version, through which the work permit was given automatically.

To illustrate how these reunification processes can work, the Song family's case is described in this section. In this family, the great-grandfather moved to Spain in order to be cared for by his family members, this constituting care-related mobility. This movement towards Spain was possible through a family reunification process initiated by the grandparents, as the great-grandfather was over 65 years old and he depended on them. This move involved bureaucracy, but not direct institutional barriers. In contrast, other countries such as Canada, the United States and Australia prioritise the economic

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<sup>50</sup> The exceptions were legally minor children and dependent adult children.

<sup>51</sup> The exception was female victims of gender violence who were able to obtain their own residence permit.

approach over emotional bonds or care needs, resulting in grandparents facing many difficulties entering these countries and staying there (Zhou, 2013, 2017; Baldassar, 2008b; Treas, 2008; Baldassar et al., 2007), which serves to illustrate the importance of policies in transnational families' care circulation (Amin & Ingman, 2014; Baldassar et al. 2014; Diaz Gorfinkel & Escrivá, 2012). At the other end of the spectrum, reunification with descendants also took place in the Song family. Prior to the arrival of the great-grandfather in Madrid, the family's grandparents (who were the first to migrate) had also brought over their offspring from China. This kind of reunification process, in which the daughters or sons arrive in Spain at the age of 18 or less is the most common within the sample. By being physically close, the different family members can provide and receive physically co-present care. Moreover, the act of bringing the children to Europe is understood as caring about and taking care of them, as it is meant to offer them better future opportunities.

Besides the relative institutional flexibility of the regrouping policies, this process may be very ponderous, particularly when people's ability to deal with bureaucratic issues is curtailed by a lack of information, familiarity with the institutions or language skills. Going back to Huiyin's case, when her parents were able to obtain regular status in Italy and apply for family reunification, for Italian institutions, she had become legally adult already and her dream of migrating became impossible to realise. Similarly, the Zhang family's daughter is in a tricky situation nowadays. She moved to Spain at the age of 17, but the reunification process was not finished at the beginning of 2018, when she travelled back to China to spend the Lunar New Year with her family. While there, they did not realise that her temporary residence permit had expired and now she is not able to enter back into Spain, as she has already turned 18 years old and does not hold a valid visa. The family hired a lawyer in Spain to manage the application for a new visa (a non-lucrative one), but it has been denied, due to the suspicion of a hidden family reunification process.<sup>52</sup>

The barriers to obtaining a work visa in Spain have increased in recent years. At the

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<sup>52</sup> In contrast to the difficulties that some of these families face in getting a residence permit for certain family members and the growing restrictions placed upon migrant workers in Spain, the process is being made increasingly easy for foreign investors. Since 2013, foreigners who invest over €500000 in real estate or make another kind of investment in Spain, can directly claim a permanent residence permit, despite the lack of any previous ties with Spain. Thus, it is important to note that, besides the habitual channels to gain the rights of entry and residence in Spain, economic capital has become a direct pathway. Moreover, similar regulations can be found in other European countries, such as Portugal, Italy, Greece and Ireland.

beginning of the new millennium, Organic law 8/2000 placed an annual quota on the number of work permits which could be issued and included a clause which conferred priority to Spanish citizens (Relaño Pastor, 2004). The struggles to move to Spain nowadays are exemplified by two of my Spanish language students in Qingtian. They did not fulfil the requirements for family reunification, as one of them was over 18 years old and, in both cases, it is their uncles rather than their parents who are in Spain; therefore, for the last two years, they have been trying to migrate to Spain by getting a work visa through jobs that their members of kin offered them. But they have been unable to get one. One of them, a 25-year-old male, has finally been able to move to Romania by taking advantage of a work visa he got with the help of another member of the extended family. For some months, he has been working as an employee in a budget bazaar, despite holding a university degree. Nevertheless, his current situation is seen as a first step on his migration path. The other student, a girl who has recently turned 18, whose sister and other members of her extended family are settled in Europe, tried to go to the Czech Republic after being denied a Spanish visa, and she has moved there recently. Similarly, the Zhang family's daughter, after being denied the non-lucrative visa, is now applying for a work visa with the help of her father's friend, a Spanish businessman who intends to hire her. While her parents themselves or other ethnic contacts could also employ her, the application would probably be denied. By having her apply to work with a Spanish employer, they hope to circumvent the institutional barriers.

Finally, other people – a minority within the sample – entered Spain as irregular migrants.<sup>53</sup> This is the case of a young adult informant's father. At that time – more than twenty years ago – he did not have any direct family members in Spain and decided to migrate by using the identity documentation of a friend, continuing to use this documentation nowadays. Others, like Peng, were able to get a tourist visa and, once in Spain, get a work permit. Two informants reported that this strategy was difficult to deploy nowadays, despite the fact that another of my Spanish language students used it to enter Spain last year. For all these irregular migrants, the different large-scale processes of foreigner regularisation carried out in Spain in 1986, 1991, 1996, 2000, 2001 and 2004 (Sánchez Pastor, 2011), as well as in other European countries, served

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<sup>53</sup> For more detailed information about the irregular entry of Qingtianese migrants into Spain, see: Beltrán Antolín, 2003.

as opportunities to regularise their status, as this kind of information spreads quickly through family and friends' networks, across the different nation states' borders (Li, 2005).

Besides those described above, additional strategies may be deployed. As mentioned in the fifth chapter of this thesis, a mother in Qingtian offered me money to help her youngest daughter migrate to Spain. Such an offer clearly resulted from her misconception of my capabilities in this respect. In another case, various family members suggested that I marry a Qingtianese young adult, as an advantageous arrangement for both of us. While a direct reference to this was never made, different and repeated circumstances, as well as quite explicit comments, alluded to it. Furthermore, during fieldwork I met a woman whose parents were migrants in Eastern Europe and who was raised there; she conceived a movement towards a country in Western Europe as her path to social mobility. This view was instigated by her parents, who urged her to marry a Chinese migrant who has permanent residence in Germany, in exchange for a large amount of money. They met and were willing to marry, but she finally decided to step back as, she said, he was falling in love with her. This situation made her afraid, as she was only interested in an instrumental exchange (documents for money). The same woman married a Wenzhounese businessman years later, with whom she had two children. Nowadays, they live in Wenzhou, but one of the children was born in the United States, taking advantage of her husband's temporary work there, as a deliberate strategy to maximise their future opportunities (Wang, 2017).

By having regular status, a migrant can get access to different sets of rights and social benefits, which often are not restricted to the individual but extend to or affect other family members, as well as their care arrangements and the availability of care resources. This may include the possibility of starting a new reunification process, access to the public health system or public subsidised housing. Regular status also brings the right to enter and exit the country, so opens up the possibility of visiting China and engaging in different levels of physically co-present care. For example, if the Chang family's adult children (the parents' generation) did not hold a residence permit, they could not use a rotative supervision system, as this requires at least one visit to China per year. It also facilitates the entrance into Spain of other family members, either in the short- or long-term. The right to free mobility is not restricted to moving between Spain and China, as having regular status or a valid visa in Spain

implies free mobility within the Schengen area.<sup>54</sup> As a result, stayers living in China can visit their kin in Europe and travel around different countries by holding a single tourist visa, which greatly simplifies bureaucratic formalities, as it means only processing a single visa through one embassy or consulate. The Chang family provide an example of this, the grandparents having travelled around Spain and Poland last summer. Xiao-ping has also made use of this, having worked in three different European countries in five years, through free entrance and subsequent management of the work permit in the specific country, as well as joining the informal work market on occasions; family enclaves in the different countries enabling the circulation of workers between them (Beltrán Antolín, 2003). Aware of the multiple benefits that holding legal status in Spain brings, Ruomei, who now lives back in China – where she and her husband have started a business – reports travelling to Barcelona every year to update her NIE [*Número de identidad de extranjero*: Foreigner's Identity Number] so as not to give up the rights she acquired through living and working in Spain in the last few years. This is because she does not want to rule out moving back to Spain or giving their children, who are now toddlers, the opportunity to make a life there.

The increasing difficulties with migrating to Spain, due to legislative restrictions and the complicated bureaucratic procedures that migrants must deal with at Spanish embassies and consulates prior to moving, and later on in Spain, have contributed to the flourishing of management companies and consultancy agents which help to deal with such a ponderous process. Nevertheless, they tend to cover a broad range of procedures for individuals and companies. Qingtianese migrants in Spain often do not apply for Spanish citizenship and instead keep their Chinese passports, as dual nationality is not allowed. Only in a couple of cases (in the grandparents and parents' generations), I found that one member of the couple held a Spanish passport while the other kept the Chinese one, as a strategy to be able to bring people to one side or the other in case of an emergency. After the initial years of uncertainty, they share a perception of stability regarding the rights of legal migrants in Spain, and the fear of suddenly losing their rights is not present. However, in general terms, they prioritise holding a Chinese passport, as the best way to balance benefits and rights on both sides of the borders. Nevertheless, despite the current situation, which allows free exit and

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<sup>54</sup>The Schengen Area comprises the following European countries (26): Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Slovenia, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Sweden and Switzerland.



entry into China for citizens holding a valid Chinese passport, earlier restrictions were relevant for the very first waves of migrants due to different Chinese migration policies, as the entry and exit rights to China were formerly restricted.<sup>55</sup>

As Kilkey and Merla point out, cross border mobility is “a resource essential for direct proximate care” (Kilkey and Merla, 2014, p.215). This is particularly important when crisis situations emerge, and the person needs to travel to the other country as quickly as possible. By holding a Chinese passport and a Spanish residence permit, the process of buying transport tickets and travelling will be less lengthy, while having to apply for a visa, even if urgent, will take several days and cause additional expenses, associated with visa fees and travel, if the person does not live in a city with an embassy or a consulate.

Regarding the younger generations, students often complain about the lack of access to some Spanish and European scholarships, due to their Chinese nationality. Moreover, often their completely regular situation in Spain – either due to having been born there or having undergone reunification processes – contrasts with an in-limbo situation in China. While exit and entry rights are guaranteed by their Chinese passport, they usually do not have other documentation that may be required there, such as the hukou registration certificate and the *shenfenzheng* (national ID card/ 身份证). The former indicates the locality in which the person holds their residence rights, functioning as a sort of internal passport. It used to be automatically inherited from the mother and, since 1998 – despite this being unevenly applied – individuals can choose to inherit it from the mother or the father (Huang, 2014). Nevertheless, in both cases, it is necessary to realise some formalities to obtain the registration certificate. Most of the young adults within the sample who were born and raised in Spain do not hold it. And those who spent part of their childhood in China may have it or not. It was even more common for informants to lack the national ID card. In general terms, this does not constitute a problem unless they want to make a life in China but, for example, two informants reported having had some trouble when trying to check into certain hotels, where the staff indicated that, because they were Chinese citizens, they could not use their passports to register. Another informant, who had spent part of his childhood in Qingtian, did not have hukou registration or an ID card and had some trouble registering

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<sup>55</sup> For an overview of Chinese migration policies and terminology, see: Masdeu Torruella, 2014.

as a student in a university in Hong Kong, as a result. Last year, when he arrived there to study a Master's degree and tried to complete the in-person registration – as all the previous procedures had been realised at a distance, from Spain – the university staff urged him to request his national ID card, otherwise he would not be able to register as a student. At that moment, he travelled to Qingtian to arrange the documentation, thinking that he would be able to go back to Hong Kong in one or two weeks. But things were not as easy as expected and the process took several months. As a result, he had to start the degree one semester late. Nowadays, based on the experience of earlier migrants, the new generations are reversing this trend: the parents try to get their children's ID cards before they turn 18 years old, because later it becomes a ponderous process.

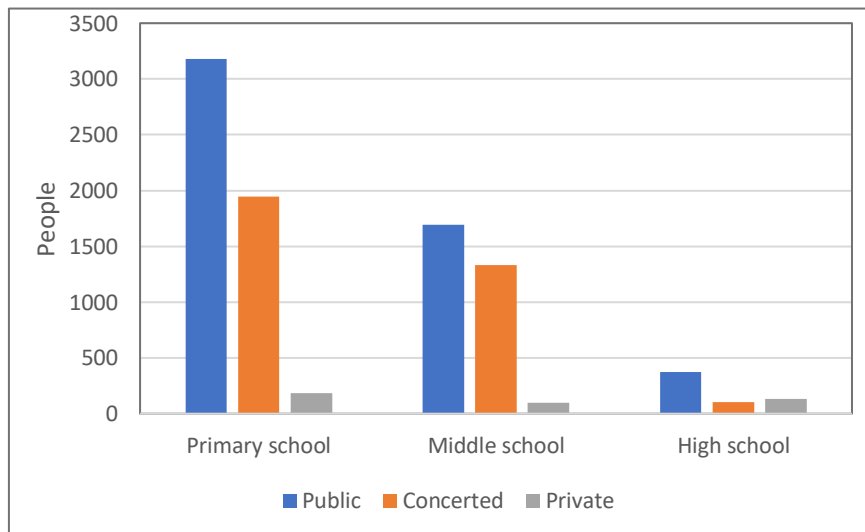
In summary, individuals and families are subject – to different degrees – to diverse Spanish, European and Chinese regulations and policies, which enable or constrain their access to different rights in the different settings. Moreover, migration cultures matter in how migration is conceptualised and valued, and they determine the social sanctioning or approval of specific transnational care arrangements.

### 6.3.2 The welfare regime

The degree of access which both regular and irregular migrants, and their family members, have had to welfare benefits in Spain has varied over the last few decades. Those benefits may include access to the health system, supplements to income, subsidised housing and education (Kilkey and Merla, 2014), which may determine the resources to which they have access and, as a result, shape care arrangements and care exchanges. The Spanish Constitution, instated in 1978, contained generic information about the rights of foreigners in Spain, but it was in 2000 when the specific rights of migrants were addressed. As mentioned earlier, the 4/2000 law (*Ley Orgánica 4/2000*) focused upon their social integration and intended to equate the rights of foreigners to those of nationals (Relaño Pastor, 2004). Through this law, foreigners – including those in an irregular situation – had the right to legal assistance, free access to the Spanish health system and to the education system for all minors, among others.

Regarding education, article 9 of this law established the right and duty of all people under 16 years old, regardless of their administrative status, to access free schooling, extending the right to the post-obligatory stage (up to 18 years old). It also guaranteed access to the public scholarship and grants system, under the same conditions as nationals. In Organic Law 8/2000, the role of public institutions is established in providing an education system which promotes not only better social integration but also respect and recognition of their cultural identity. While a public schooling system allows families to devote their economic capital to other spheres, several families in the sample opted for private schools and universities. These circumstances reflect the importance of educational capital in Chinese families, in China and abroad, as key in the intergenerational family project, which looks to secure social mobility (Waters, 2005; Fong, 2002, 2004; Ong, 1999). While national-level statistics for primary and secondary education which focus on public/private school choice tend to refer to foreigners and nationals, rather than specific nationalities or countries of birth, some local and regional administrations do provide this information. Such is the case for the region of Catalonia<sup>56</sup>, where the data reflect this trend towards the use of private schooling by Chinese families (Fig.5).

*Figure 5: Use of public/private schools for Chinese-origin children in Catalonia.*



Source: Produced by the author, based on data from *Departament d'Educació, Generalitat de Catalunya, online database.*

<sup>56</sup> In Catalonia region live 59.380 out of the total 215,748 Chinese people in Spain (INE, 2018).

Article 13 of the 4/2000 law refers to housing and makes foreigners' rights subject to additional laws and administrative bodies, often depending on city councils and regional government institutions and, as such, making access geographically uneven. Nevertheless, foreigners with long-term residence (over five years) have the right to subsidies under the same conditions as nationals. In any case, national statistics lack specific information about Chinese-origin people's access to housing subsidies.

Article 14 of the same law established that foreigners had the right to access services and social benefits under the same conditions as nationals. Moreover, it established that basic services and benefits had to be provided, regardless of the individual's administrative situation; this provision would later be amended by further laws. Previously, in 1989, access to the public health system for all people who lacked economic resources was recognised (Real Decreto 1088/1989),<sup>57</sup> and in practice, this included foreigners who were not included in the social security system through their work activity (Martin Delgado, 2002). One decade later, Organic Law 4/2000 established the universality of the Spanish public health system and indicated that, in order to have total access to it, foreigners – irrespective of their regular or irregular status – had to be registered in the local register (*padrón*). Otherwise, they could only access emergency care and follow up until the moment they were discharged from the hospital (*alta médica*), with the exception of minors, whose rights were equated to those of Spanish nationals, and pregnant women, for whom it included care during pregnancy, birth and postpartum. In the aforementioned Organic Law 14/2003, police control of the local register was implemented, meaning that foreigners in irregular administrative situations tended to avoid registering and, as a result, lost their right to free access to the public health system (Relaño Pastor, 2004). Later on, in 2012, the universality of the Spanish public health system was suspended (Real Decreto-Ley 16/2012), lasting for six years, until 27<sup>th</sup> July 2018, when a new decree was promulgated to restore it (Real Decreto-Ley 7/2018).

The relative flexibility of Spanish regulations on reunification for ascendants, as well as the universal public health system, are essential for the functioning of some of these transnational families. Going back to the Song family, at some point, the frail health of the great-grandfather necessitated regular health check-ups and several periods of

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<sup>57</sup> Complementing the 1986 General Healthcare Law (*Ley 14/1986, General de Sanidad*).

hospitalisation. At that time, the Spanish universal public health system provided high-quality medical assistance for free. If they had had to pay for this care, it would have translated into very expensive bills, which this family would not be able to afford. If this situation had happened, they would have had to look for other alternatives, such as moving him back to China together with another member of the family; or hiring a care worker and restricting physically co-present care to visits. In both cases, the normal family functioning and configuration would have been affected. Moreover, China's public health system does not cover the entire population and all circumstances, and people mainly depend on private insurance. For example, years ago, Dora's paternal grandmother, who lived in Qingtian, became very ill and she ended up being hospitalised for several years, which resulted in huge expenses and altered the family's usual activities and their transnational mobility.

Members of the Qingtianese transnational families in the sample often take advantage of their trips to China to double-check diagnoses with Chinese specialists or to receive healing treatments based on Chinese medicine, which includes not only the treatment of a health problem but the path by which to prevent it. Similarly, trips serve to bring Chinese medicine to Spain. Nevertheless, Chinese-medicine pharmacies can also be found in big cities in Spain nowadays. Similarly, hospitals offering services in Spanish, Mandarin and *Qingtianhua* (the language of Qingtian), as well as Chinese and Western medicine, and mediation with Chinese hospitals in China, are available (III.8).

Illustration 8: Huaqiao Hospital (华侨医院) card in Usera neighbourhood, Madrid.



Source: 马德里华侨医院网站/ Madrid Huaqiao Hospital website  
(<https://clinicachinaenespana.webnode.es/contacto/>)

Within the families I interviewed during fieldwork, only one person explicitly travelled to China to receive surgery. The patient was a young adult (from the third generation, living in Spain) who had previously received ear surgery in Spain. Motivated by his parents' perception of the unsatisfactory results, they decided that he would have the follow-up procedure in China. To do so, they travelled several times to Hangzhou<sup>58</sup> to prepare for and later undertake the surgery. Such a process encompassed transnational care arrangements and accommodation within the family network.

### 6.3.3 The working time regime

The entrepreneurial project is the objective of Qingtianese migrants in Spain (Beltrán Antolín, 2006). Nevertheless, all migrants in the sample started their period of migration work as employees in a member of kin's or close friend's business, either in Spain or another European country, and later on, they opened their own businesses (Beltrán Antolín, 2006). The 'mom and pop' business model (Huang, 2011, p.473) in which husband, wife and children work together and which is characterised by unskilled work and long working hours, describes the circumstances of the Qingtianese migrants in Spain and their descendants, at least during these descendants' childhood and youth. As part of their situation, having a first child tends to occur in parallel with an initial stage of the migration project, meaning they have greater difficulty in balancing productive and reproductive spheres. Thus, it was common among the young adult's parents to send the first child to Qingtian, while the following ones remained in Spain or spent less time in China. Regarding the working-time regime in China, an early age of retirement (55 to 60 years old for men and 50 to 55 years old for women) allows the grandparents' generation to get involved in childcare, while it also reinforces women's role as carers (Giles et al., 2015).

Beltrán Antolín (2003) refers to the extreme working conditions of new migrants in Spain upon arrival, in order to pay off the debts resulting from their migration process. It is not difficult to find this type of account among the parents' generation, who have to work hard for years to repay their debts before starting to save money and becoming the *laoban* (老板/ boss) themselves: a situation which, nevertheless, also implies unending work schedules. For the younger migrant generation – the young adults who

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<sup>58</sup> Hangzhou is the capital of Zhejiang province, 330 km away from Qingtian city.

have migrated from Qingtian in the last decade – the situation differs slightly. While the narrative of extensive work schedules needed to repay debts is still predominant, there is a larger number of people who return to China after spending some years in Spain or another country and repaying their debt. For those who stay in Spain, their situation progressively improves, meaning that, even if they are not always able to start their own entrepreneurial projects, they can get access to better-paid jobs in which they work for co-ethnics and are able to take more time off, especially holidays which allow them to visit China. An example of this is Zan, who regularly takes advantage of his job's holiday entitlement to return to Lishui. Nevertheless, sometimes, the preference for saving money prevails. This is the case for Cong, a young man from Qingtian who works in a Japanese restaurant run by a Hong Kongese businessman, who owns several restaurants in Barcelona. His boss offered him and his workmates two options: either he provides them with 'free' accommodation in a flat shared by the restaurant's various workers, or they have access to one month paid holiday leave. Most of them choose the first option.

The image of the businessman outlined above does not match the profile of most migrants in the sample who, in most cases, run small or medium family businesses in Spain, sometimes having another business or investments in China. Nevertheless, this is not always the case for Qingtianese migrants in Spain, who may have several businesses there. Nowadays, businesses run by Qingtianese people are present all over Spain, people settling on the basis of their entrepreneurial activity. They have extended their presence into small cities and towns, now that the markets in the big cities have reached saturation point (Beltrán Antolín, 2006). Self-employment provides relative autonomy and some margin to make decisions. It allows for more flexible working hours to fit in communicating with their kin back in China, without depending on asking permission from a boss or having to wait to finish their work shift to call their family.<sup>59</sup> This latter constraint could otherwise lead to a unidirectional flow of communication, as has been reported in other research on transnational families (Hoang et al. 2015; Parreñas, 2005). Moreover, this flexibility can be translated into tailored leave when their economic situation allows for it. As Spanish and Chinese festivities do not happen at the same time, in most cases, they can ensure that the benefits of any time off

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<sup>59</sup> This is particularly important, as the time difference between Spain and China is six or seven hours, depending on the season.

outweigh the losses, and balance work and family commitments. As previously mentioned, often only one member of the couple travels to China, while the other remains in Spain, attending to the family business. Sometimes couples can delegate to paid workers or extended-family members who they trust. Such is the case for the Zhang family, in which the husband and wife travel together to Qingtian to spend the Lunar New Year on an annual basis. Similarly, after having spent 12 years without going back to Qingtian, because their economic situation did not allow for it, Sara and her husband decided to travel there together last summer with their two toddlers and the grandmother, who had previously moved to Spain to take care of the children. As closing the family business (a budget bazaar in a small town) was not an option, they requested the help of an uncle who has been living in another city in Spain for many years. As such, for the four weeks that the trip lasted, the uncle lived in their house, which is right above the store, and served the customers. They had requested permission from their local school in Spain for their children to leave one and a half weeks before the end of the school year, at the beginning of June. After four weeks of visiting kin in Qingtian and travelling around Zhejiang and Fujian provinces, they managed to get back to Spain by the beginning of July, when the visitors and tourists started to arrive in the town where they have the family business, and they were ready to serve their customers during the month of August, which is the busiest time for the store, due to a local festivity.

The family-based nature of the migration-entrepreneur project also involves the concept of reproduction, reproductive work being the activity that ensures the replenishment of the work force (Duffy, 2011). Despite the fact that running their own business is migrants' preferred outcome, this is not to say that their descendants share their same goal. On the one hand, the young adults in the sample share a discourse in which they express a lack of interest in taking over the family business, after having worked there for many years. On the other, there is a general desire to enter into a professional activity related to their educational background, which often implies working as waged professionals. And on the whole, there is a desire to have a different life from their parents, including standard work schedules. In between these two opinions, there is a growing number of cases of young adults taking over the family business and changing or adapting it (Masdeu Torruella, 2014), as well as investing family-business capital in starting a completely new project. These family businesses or reinvestment of capital



are ways of caring for and providing support to their grown-up children but also for themselves, by ensuring the continuity of the family-business project.

Finally, regarding intersections between the work and gender regimes, while, unlike in the reproductive sphere, there is no strict sexual division of labour in the productive sphere, gendered patterns can nevertheless be found. In most cases, excluding the migrants' descendants, women work directly at the counter or the public-facing side of the family business, while men tend to occupy positions that do not involve interaction. This division is explained by informants either through alluding to gendered professions, such as that of being a chef, which is mainly carried out by men in China; or by highlighting women's supposed greater ability to deal with customers, linked to their better language skills. On the one hand, in China, there is a widespread idea that women are better than men at languages: something that I heard many times during the fieldwork. On the other, the interviews and questionnaires carried out with adolescents and young adults reveal that, in general terms, their mother's language skills are better than those of their fathers. And this is particularly true when both members of the couple have migrated together. As such, there are certain activities which, based on cultural ideals, are considered more suitable for one or the other sex, and each sex's presence in those activities is reproduced as a result.

#### 6.3.4 The gender regime

Kilkey and Merla (2011) acknowledge the capacity of the concept of 'welfare regimes' to capture the links between the state and the market, while pointing out that it underestimates the role of other actors in care-giving arrangements. The feminist concept of 'care regimes' fills this gap, by focusing on who care responsibilities fall to, the kind of state support provided and the "dominant national and local discourses on what constitutes appropriate care" (p.10). Elsewhere, Kilkey (2010a in Kilkey & Merla, 2011) suggested the concept of 'gendered care regimes' to pull together both perspectives: that is, the family-market-state link. This means that the different regimes (the welfare, working-time and gender regimes) are indeed interlinked and interdependent, taking part in 'the gendered care regime', but not being limited to it.

As the previous section demonstrated, the gender dimension is present in the work and family spheres, and similarly, it extends to most domains of life. Regarding the

migration move itself, in contrast to the case of the Fujianese migrants who moved to New York, described by Wang (2009), in which families showed a preference for daughters to migrate, in this research, gender did not automatically determine the member of the family who should migrate or who should stay (Sáiz López, 2005). Nevertheless, the gender dimension is salient when it comes to the subsequent situation of the Qingtianese families in Spain. Although a certain adherence to gendered roles is present in the Chinese-culture system, Spain is not an equal society in gender terms either; as such, in certain circumstances, instead of those gendered roles being challenged or evidenced, it is a place where they can easily be camouflaged or even reinforced. An example can be found in the prevalence of the link between women and care. For Chinese women in Spain, this socially-constructed link is sharpened by their widespread self-employed condition, which in practical terms is translated into their adherence to care-related duties, and lack of care-related rights, such as paid maternal (and also paternal) leave.

In Spain, familism and the scarce support from the state shapes care arrangements and resources. Gregorio-Gil (2017) coined the term “*estrategias de apaño*” (fixing strategies) to bring visibility to the struggles of families in Spain with reconciling the two spheres: that of work outside the home and the family sphere, which are constructed as antagonists. Moreover, the presumption is that the former is the most important and productive sphere, without engaging in further analysis. The lack of alternatives resulting from the state’s limited care support, together with the prevalence of gendered care cultures in China and Spain, results in use of the aforementioned “*estrategias de apaño*”. These often place a heavy burden upon mothers, grandmothers and daughters, involving not only physical effort but also the associated mental work of organising care when resources, such as human or economic capital, are scarce.

In contrast, a growing – but still insufficient and intermittent – effort by Spanish institutions and civil society can be identified to break away from the patriarchal system which is present at all levels of society. These efforts are brought to fruition in laws seeking gender equality and protection of women and the increased presence of related themes in the media and institutional campaigns. This debate about gender and women has been particularly present in the daily lives of people in Spain since 2017, in parallel with global processes, although it often remains on a discursive level and lacks tangible results and specific efforts. While there are gender inequalities and a gendered care

culture prevails in both China and Spain, the circumstances of women suffering gender violence within the family realm differ. As the accounts of Zhiruo illustrated, women in China suffer from different types of social pressures that urge them to keep the family united, no matter what happens behind the family home's door. Besides the social pressure, at a legislative level, laws lack specific procedures about how to prevent and to solve this kind of situation. As a result, the differences between the 'here' and the 'there' – between China and Spain – are present in the accounts of these women who inhabit the transnational field.

This is the case, despite the fact that gender violence is still a salient problem in Spain. Firstly, because resources (related to financing, security, etc) continue to be insufficient, and women continue to be beaten and murdered. And secondly, because the male chauvinist (*machista*) gaze continues to be omnipresent, particularly when dealing with family, partner and sexual issues; and efforts made to implement gender education remain anecdotal. As such, it is not only the older generations who have these attitudes: young people in Spain are not completely free from such influences. Some of the informants' accounts reflect this: they are not free from having these thoughts, nor from being victims of them. Nevertheless, there is also a growing awareness about this kind of mentality and the fight for equal rights, at both an individual and collective level. Sometimes, this involves intersectional advocacy, which links people's gender and ethnic condition, as occurs through *Catàrsia*, a collective of Asian-origin descendants who articulate a feminist and anti-racist discourse,<sup>60</sup> in relation to Spanish society. Although different in their nature, the associations of Chinese entrepreneur women in Spain are an antecedent of this, in the sense that they were organised around their gender dimension and their role as entrepreneurs, which in itself challenged male dominance, through their active role in their families and the Chinese community (Sáiz López, 2012).

### 6.3.5 Transportation and communication across borders

Finally, other factors determine the capability of different family members to participate in families' care circulation. These are related to transportation and at-a-distance communication, both having developed significantly over the last few decades. During

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<sup>60</sup> For further information, see: Annex 1, page 373.

the first decades of Qingtianese migration (the 1980s and 1990s), in the era of phone landlines, Spain and China had an unequal level of infrastructural development. In contrast, in the age of mobile phones, China has caught up. In many cases, families in the sample had never had a landline phone at home and directly switched from public phones to mobile phones. Public phones were also scarce and situated in urban or semi-urban spaces, so often implying specific displacement for that purpose. The informants' accounts refer to international calls made from and/or received on public phones by one or both sides, meaning that, despite landline infrastructure being developed early in Spain, access was not universal, as it involved high costs for maintenance, especially for international calls. Using prepaid cards, initially for public phones (such as the Panda phone cards<sup>61</sup>) and for mobile phones later, was a more suitable and manageable option. However, despite the discounted prices that customers could get using this kind of service, the costs were still high. In most cases, calls were limited to one to four per month, depending on families' available economic resources. Nowadays, mobile phones and wireless coverage are widespread in both countries. The cost of prepaid or post-paid calls and Internet data packs for mobile phones is affordable for most of the population in both countries. Moreover, as WeChat is a free app, it enables users to make unlimited voice or video calls and voice messages, and send unlimited photos, videos and *hongbao*, etc. This means that, more than being based on economic resources, the degree of interaction across borders nowadays depends on other factors, such as available time or willingness. In general terms, this means a popularisation of access to communication across borders, which has a direct repercussion on the management and exchange of different dimensions of care at a distance. Moreover, as King-O'Riain (2015) suggests, through the idea of 'emotional streaming', the new communication options serve to break down time-space distance and normalise transnational communication that was previously performed only in extraordinary circumstances.

While the WeChat app, followed by the QQ app, are those which are most used among these families, the migrants' descendants who have been totally or partially raised in Spain also use other communications apps and social media to interact with family members and friends. These include WhatsApp, Skype, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, whose use is forbidden and blocked in China, together with the Google

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<sup>61</sup> Popular prepaid phone cards brand to call to China.

search engine, Gmail and other websites. In some cases, when they travel to China, they channel their communications through WeChat, but not all their contacts may be available, as this app is generally unknown among Spanish people. Most of them install a virtual private network (VPN) on their mobile phones prior to their trip, which serves to unlock these apps while in China. Nevertheless, the performance of free VPNs tends to be irregular and the alternative implies paying a monthly fee, which could reach up to €12 per month in 2018.

In parallel to the increasing accessibility of long-distance communication tools and resources, the last few decades have seen the increasing affordability and a growing number of choices when it comes to long-distance transportation. In a similar way to the development in communications, this has had an impact on these families' transnational care exchanges. This shift can be easily tracked, by attending to the accounts of the families in the sample regarding transnational childcare arrangements. The young adults who spent part of their childhood in China received one or two visits from one of their parents at a maximum, and for some of them, their parents never visited them in China. In contrast, for the adolescents staying in China nowadays, their parents visit them at least once per year. Nevertheless, while travel costs have decreased, the fact that families' economic situation still matters cannot be ignored, and not all families can visit China every year. The degree to which different family members can afford international trips depends much more on economic resources than does international at-a-distance communication. Nowadays, buying a flight ticket, while much more affordable than before, still represents a significant expense for a common working family. Similarly, for those with fewer economic resources, taking time off from work must not always be an option.

When travelling to China is possible, the informants' preferred flights are those which land in Hangzhou. Nevertheless, a broad range of choices are available, with several airlines offering trips between China and Spain, two of them with direct flights between Madrid or Barcelona and Shanghai; and many others offer combinations with the neighbouring city of Hangzhou and other stopovers. From Hangzhou's and Shanghai's airport – the second being a bit further away from Qingtian than the first – direct buses targeted mainly at *Huaqiao*, or Chinese living abroad, can be found going to Qingtian bus station, as well as Lishui and Wenzhou. Nowadays, the highspeed train also offers direct connections from Shanghai and Hangzhou to these cities, taking between two

and a half and three hours to Qingtian and running during the whole day. In contrast, the route by bus takes approximately eight hours. Nevertheless, most of the informants prefer this option as it allows for direct transportation from the airport terminal to the local bus station. In contrast, the former involves at least one change, which is very inconvenient for visitors, as they have to move around carrying their heavy luggage, which is full of self-imported items.

The arrival of the highspeed train to Qingtian in 2015 has greatly affected visitors and, especially, stayers, giving them a fast and direct connection to big cities in China, but also to neighbouring ones, such as Lishui (a 19-minute trip) or Wenzhou (an 18-minute trip). Similarly, the bus station offers routes between Qingtian and big cities and airports. From those transportation hubs, visitors arriving in Qingtian can easily find cheap public buses going to Qingtian city and different towns within Qingtian county. Similarly, they can take a private or shared taxi. Upon a bus or train arriving at these stations, taxi drivers scream the destination they are going to (such as Wenxi or Sankou) and users can approach them to arrange their destination, if it is on the route. Within Qingtian city and the river front, all journeys cost 10 yuan, which is less than €1 (in 2018), taxis being a very popular and generally affordable means of transportation in China. As such, visitors tend to travel by taxi upon arrival, avoiding the crowded public buses. The number of visitors that are picked up by family members who own a car is also significant, these being medium- to high-class cars. In parallel with the aforementioned infrastructure improvements, the construction and repair of roads around Qingtian county, as well as the construction of many tunnels, have served to improve the connections between the different towns and villages, and to enable much faster access to certain areas, which were only reachable on foot two decades ago, implying long walking journeys. Thus, while these improvements are key for those who live in China, they also have a big effect on visitors, the time they spend there and the choices they make.

# CHAPTER

## 7

### 7 CHILDREN'S LIFE PATHS IN QINGTIANESE TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

While children are key to family migration projects and transnational care arrangements, the academic research often treats them as objects, by assuming their complete lack of agency and total dependency on adults (Dobson, 2009; Thorne, 2001, Orellana 2001). Moreover, their experiences tend to be presented from the perspectives of their parents or other caregivers, their own voices being missing. As a result, very little is known about how those who have grown up in a transnational context narrate their own experiences. Moreover, the existing research tends to focus on specific life stages or transitions. This results in the lack of a more general perspective that can provide a coherent and interrelated narrative about how they experience the different and changing circumstances – including their family and social positioning – as they advance along their life courses. What this chapter provides is an insight into the lives of the children of Qingtianese transnational families, from their experiences in early childhood through to adulthood.

To do so, the focus is upon the first-person accounts of today's young adults who have grown up in such circumstances. Through their retrospective accounts, and in connection with their view of the present and their expectations for the future, this research sketches out a sort of life care-line. This care-line runs in parallel to their life paths, aiming to unveil the importance of care and family within these life courses. To a lesser extent, through the present experiences of today's minors (12-18 years old), it explores the transnational care arrangements taking place nowadays and tracks the most

salient changes and persistent patterns in both groups (young adults and adolescents). The different sections of this chapter serve as a progressive transition: from the general description of the contexts and circumstances surrounding the informants which characterised the previous chapter, to a more individual approach, in which first-person accounts will become more and more present.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, secondary sources<sup>63</sup> are presented, such as the public profiles and cultural creations<sup>64</sup> of the descendants of migrants. The aim is to draw on these as much as possible through this chapter, as a way to triangulate and complement the information obtained through interviews and participant observation, by offering alternative accounts and forms.

## **7.1 The early years**

The migration project encompasses changes in family configuration and care arrangements. Work outside the home and childcare demands are compelling responsibilities, which are intensified by the lack of a support network in the destination country. Upon the arrival of a new born into the family, these care demands become inescapably extensive. As such, as the previous chapter suggested, migrant families have to seek alternative solutions, which include a diverse range of care arrangements within or across borders. In the first part of this chapter, there will be a dual structure, aiming to mirror the basic division regarding childcare arrangements in these transnational families, which are shaped by the spatial factor. That is, on the one hand, the childcare arrangements in China, and on the other, the arrangements in Spain. Nevertheless, this basic division is not to say that there is not a high degree of heterogeneity in the care arrangements in both settings.

This first life-stage corresponds to the period from their birth until they reached the age of starting school in Spain – between 4 and 7 years old – with the exception of two informants who moved at the age of 12 and 13, respectively. The main aim of this

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<sup>62</sup> Particularly, first-person quotations from the interviews with my key informants (Manuel, Eva, Dora Dandan and Xingfu) serve to give continuity to their narratives through the different sections, while these are reinforced and complemented by other informants' accounts (see Annex 2).

<sup>63</sup> The information about secondary sources is expanded in Annex 1.

<sup>64</sup> All the additional sources are public creations – such as profiles or websites, cultural products or associations – with the exception of a private Facebook group. As such, generic references to this group will be made, but its posts will be not reproduced, nor will its members be mentioned.



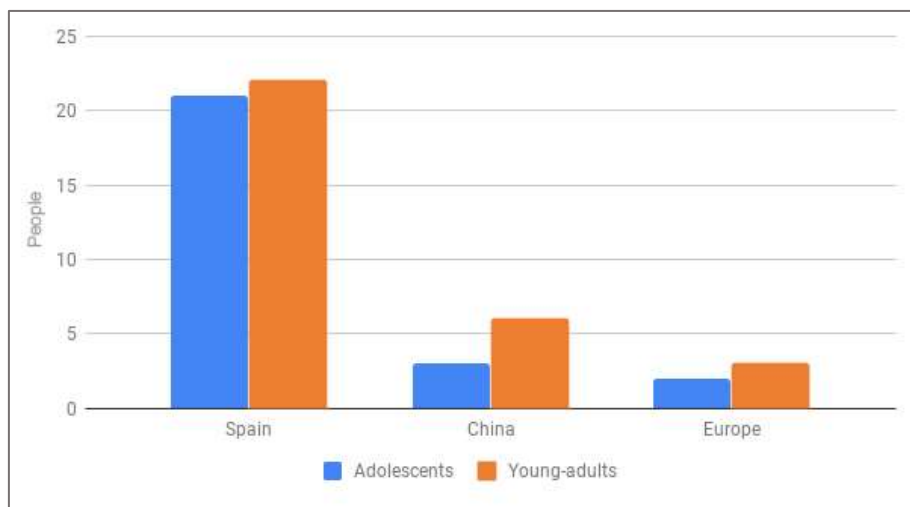
section is to provide an initial overview of the informants' childhoods, this being sketched out by referring to their memories.

### 7.1.1 Childhood(s) in China

#### 7.1.1.1 Care arrangements

Regarding childhood experiences and childcare arrangements in China, again, spatial references are meaningful, resulting in two different mobility paths for children born within Qingtianese transnational families. On the one hand, some of them were born in Europe, sent to China and later reunited again with their parents in Spain, constituting a back and forth movement. On the other, some children were born in China and remained there while their parents migrated.

Figure 6: Birth country of the informants.



Source: Produced by the author based on questionnaires surveys.

In the first case, and in line with the literature on the so-called ‘satellite babies’ phenomenon – babies born into Chinese migrant families, who are sent to China to be partially raised there – the age at which their movement to China took place was very young (Wong, 2015; Bohr & Whitfield, 2011; Bohr & Tse, 2009; Wang, 2009), this generally occurring before babies were one year old. In only one case was the informant sent later: she was born in Portugal, spent her first years there and was sent to China

when she was around four years old, spending less than one year there. Regarding the second category – children who were born in China and later moved to Spain, this constituting a single movement – in most cases, both parents migrated together, or with a small time difference, when the children were still babies, so these informants do not remember living with their parents in China. In just two cases, the father migrated first and the mother stayed with the child for some years. One of these informants moved to Spain at the age of five, together with her mother, and the other stayed in China until the age of twelve, her mother having moved a couple of years earlier.

All cases share several basic features which define these transnational arrangements: firstly, the parent-child relationship is characterised by the lack of physical co-presence on a daily basis, at least with one of the parents; and secondly, childcare responsibilities are shared with other extended family members. As Leinaweaver (2014) argues, “children are more likely to benefit from informal kinship-based fostering in cultural contexts where fostering expands the pool of relatives rather than substituting one parent for another” (p.131). While the grandparents and the grandchildren were the centre of these households in China, they often incorporated other generations. That was the case for two young adults and one adolescent informant, who also cohabited with the great-grandfather. Children's single aunts and, to a lesser extent, uncles, also had a salient role in children's early lives. For example, Manuel and WenDi, who spent five and six years in Qingtian city and a village in Qingtian county, respectively, reported that their aunt was one of their main caregivers and that, at that time, they had even thought that she was their mother. Moreover, informants described cases of networking households, in which various members of the extended family lived nearby and diverse types of exchanges and support between different households happened on a regular basis. For example, Huahua's aunt and cousins took part in her daily life, as they lived in the neighbouring building and spent a lot of time together.

These childcare arrangements in China often incorporated several children whose parents were also abroad, such arrangements being highly flexible and including non-blood ties or very extended family bonds. In one family, two children were raised together as if they were cousins, despite the lack of close kin ties between them. Nowadays, they also refer to each other as cousins, and, moreover, the one who was informally relocated to that household (Jingshen) refers to the couple he lived with as his grandparents. While his relationship with them is now limited to visits to China, he

still has warm memories about his childhood with them. In another family, a child lived with her maternal grandparents and one of her paternal cousins, meaning that the latter did not live with his own blood grandparents, but with those of his cousin. In both cases, children circulated within the very extended family network and beyond, in order to better accommodate the children's needs to the families' resources. These flexible arrangements took place around twenty years ago and, during the fieldwork, no similar circumstance was documented as taking place nowadays. Moreover, the adolescents' present-day accounts reflect a decreasing tendency to cohabit with cousins and a growing trend of a single child or siblings living with the grandparents, without additional children.

Through the accounts of both sets of informants (young adults and adolescents), an improvement in living conditions during their early years in China can be identified, although this is quite predictable, if we bear in mind the socio-economic changes taking place in China in recent decades. It is important to remember that, while the oldest of the young adult informants lived in Qingtian for a period extending between 31 and 25 years ago, the youngest one in the adolescent sample lived there between 12 and 6 years ago, making differences in their living conditions inevitable. In any case, housing conditions are presented in their narratives as a determining factor in their lives. In most cases, I specifically asked about this and their memories lacked details, referring mostly to their spatial location. On the whole, three different sets of housing conditions, linked to different time periods, were identified, summed up as follows:

- *Basic, rural houses* – for most informants who are nowadays aged approximately 24 and over, their childhood accounts refer mainly to houses in the countryside or in the mountains. These are described as very old, with basic resources and equipment, where they had a very simple life style, mainly related to a peasant background.
- *Mixed* – in the accounts of those who are nowadays between 18 and 24 years old (approximately), the reported housing conditions are highly irregular: while there is an increasing trend towards urban or semi-urban settlements, there are still people who spent their early years in the countryside. For example, Huahua lived with her grandparents in the mountains until she was three years old and,

later on, they moved to Qingtian city. Likewise, the house's conditions do not follow a regular pattern.

- *Urban background and well-equipped flats* – those who are now adolescents and some of the younger informants within the young adults sample mostly provide accounts which refer to urban or semi-urban backgrounds (either in Qingtian city or other towns in Qingtian county). Within this group, the following types of housing are particularly salient: partially-equipped transitional flats, generally in 5-6 floor buildings without lifts; and big tower blocks in housing developments, which characterise the housing arrangements of those adolescents who nowadays remain in China while their parents have been settled in Spain for at least one decade.

In summary, while several features have maintained their importance in defining this type of care arrangement, additional factors have changed the material and environmental conditions in which they take place in the last few decades.

#### 7.1.1.2 *Childhood memories*

In general, the informants' memories about their early years in China are scarce. This is reasonable if we take into account that they were quite small – generally less than seven years old – when they lived there; as such, they retain very few memories of that time. Nevertheless, there are two shared elements in their narratives. Firstly, the presence of specific memories related to the companionship of their grandparents or other members of the extended family in their daily routines:

Dora: about my childhood...about China, I remember very little, um, I remember [being] with my grandparents, in the old house that was where the biggest bank is now – near there, but the house isn't there anymore, because they knocked it down, from what I remember and what my grandparents tell me as well. And what I remember most is [being] on my grandma's moped [*laughs*] [...] my grandma still has her moped, she goes flat out, that's what I really have strong memories of.

Wendi: I was always in the shop with my granddad because I didn't go to school or anything, and the thing is that I knew how to total up and give the money to the customers. But I really didn't know how to count – they taught me later, here [in Spain] – but I don't know why I remember that I did know how, that my granddad taught me and I used to do it.

Moreover, some specific memories refer to the care they received from their grandparents, and their 'caring about' attitudes:

Dandan: I remember going to the fairground that was there on that mountain [opposite Qingtian] and the butterflies in my stomach when I took a photo of my grandma and me [*smiles*].

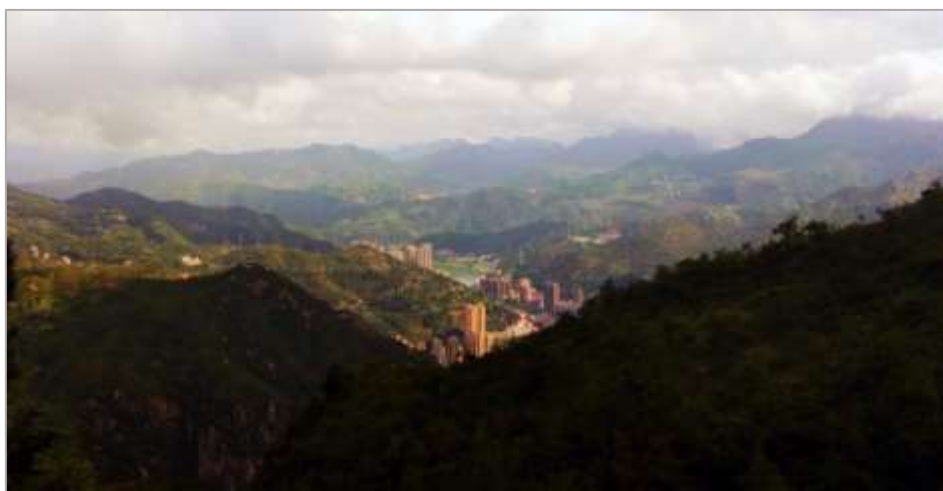
Me: It sounds like a good memory...

Dandan: The thing is that they treated us really well [*nods*].

Manuel: We went around with my grandparents, they fed us, they cared for us, they showered us and if my uncle and aunt were there [...], as my uncle worked in transporting things, well maybe I'd go to the mountains with them for a bit and do what I always did – I'd go to the mountains and I'd mess around [*laughs*].

Manuel's account leads us to the second element that is present in their narratives – regardless of whether they are from a rural, semi-urban or urban background – which is that of the natural environment. Despite the big differences between the urban and rural landscapes within Qingtian county, urbanity itself is quite limited. Even nowadays, after years of urbanisation, the urban areas are still quite small. And a quick glance at the surroundings – despite having to look around the occasional skyscraper – will lead the viewer to a green landscape, with the omnipresent mountains in the background (Ill.9).

*Illustration 9: View of Qingtian city from Hongluo (红罗山) Mountain in 2018.*



Source: Produced by the author.

Despite all this, in their accounts, the informants often refer to how the towns where they lived during their childhood have changed over the years, particularly Qingtian city:

Jing-sheng: The thing is that I was very little, I don't remember much. But the main thing is that there were no cars, it was all countryside [laughs], there were no tall buildings and these streets were full of little food stalls, people selling their things – now there's hardly any of them, they've taken them away.

The urban and semi-urban spaces in Qingtian county are characterised by the towns being structured around the course of a river. A normal scene in Qingtian is that of children and adults playing and resting in the multiple rivers and their surroundings, doing exercise, drying herbs and even, on some occasions, washing clothes. Moreover, the rivers' recreational role is reflected in the multiple and diverse tourist spots in Qingtian around the rivers, lakes and waterfalls, water being a key and omnipresent element in Chinese culture. Specific memories of playtime around the river are present in many of the informants' accounts:

Xing-fu: So I remember going to a river that was close to my town to swim, which didn't cover us. And yeah, I remember being there in the river, [where we were] swimming with my granddad.

Manuel: Well, as I was little, I don't... they don't take you to school so, I used to play, go to have lunch, I went for a wander around with one of the friends I had, though there weren't many [...] For example, with my cousin, that's it, with my cousin, because I was with my aunt as well and [...] we used to go to the riverbank, which is the same river that's here. It's a town called Bei'an and it's a little further up, it's ten minutes away. You get there with the normal bus. And there, we used to go to the riverbank, we went to look for fish...

With the exception of the two people who were reunited with their parents in Spain aged 12 and 13 years old, respectively, most of the young adult informants did not attend school in China, and a couple of them did so only for a few months. As such, school routines and responsibilities are absent from their accounts. While family is omnipresent in their narratives, these refer to those family members who were physically close. To find clues about their parents, in most cases it was necessary to specifically ask about them, the lack of memories being widespread. Nevertheless, their parents' presence in their narratives would be prompted by their own movement to Spain, where they would be reunited with them. In general, their memories of this first life-stage are marked by three common elements: nature, (extended-)family and leisure reflecting an image of happy childhoods (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b). This feeling is reinforced through their body language –relaxed and smiling – while they talk about it.

### 7.1.1.3 *Transnational awareness and movement to Spain*

Along with the increasing infrastructural development and the improvement and growing affordability of communication and transportation across borders, there has been a parallel increase in transnational exchanges and interaction within these split families. Indeed, this relatively symmetrical path is visible when comparing the accounts of the young adult and adolescent informants. This marks the beginning of a dual logic, a liminal division, based upon the arrival and eventual ubiquity of mobile phones with an internet connection in both countries, although there was also a transitional stage. This transitional stage was characterised by the arrival of mobile

phones and home-based internet connections in China, although these are mainly absent from the informants' accounts. Instead, the great leap forward was based upon the arrival of mobile phones with internet data. As such, the thirty years that have elapsed from when families in the sample first made transnational childcare arrangements in China to those in place nowadays, are reflected in the significant differences in the degree of interaction at a distance (from one or several calls per month to daily communication), but also in the face-to-face interaction through visits. Within the sample, there are several informants whose parents were not able to visit them in China even once while they lived there and, as such, when they were reunited in Spain, it was the very first time that the child saw their parents. For the two informants who were born in China and whose parents (one or both) migrated when they were toddlers, rather than babies, their accounts incorporate references to their parents' absence:

Eva: Yes [I remember], because I was a bit older and I had a hard time. I remember that he used to come and when he went, I did realise that he was going, but my mother said something like – no, your father's going to buy something, OK? And then nothing [...] when I was young, I didn't remember, but when I was older and he came to visit again, I did.

When I asked her whether they communicated across borders, she replied:

Eva: Yes, but he talked to my mother, I don't remember, but I think there was already a telephone in my house, I think so. My father always sent photos, printed photos and my mother also used to [send photos] back to him, because there was nothing to send photos with, of course [*laughs*].

Similarly, Biming states:

I don't remember talking to them, but I do [remember] that there were no telephones in the town, that you had to go to a phone box.

When they were reunited with their parents in Spain, most of the young adult informants were aged between four and seven, and only two of them moved later, at the ages of 12



and 13, respectively. For the adolescent sample, the age at reunification tends to be a bit lower, at around four years old. In both cases, their move to Spain coincided with the first years of schooling there, resulting in less intensive childcare demands. This was firstly because children spent a significant part of the day at school; and secondly, because being aged four or above, the minors were increasingly independent and decreasingly dependent on adults' supervision. Most of the informants report having spent part of their days at the family business, where they played and did homework while their parents worked.

In most cases in the young adult sample, and in line with the broader literature on children and migration (Beazley et al. 2017; Hoang et al. 2015; Dreby, 2007; Michael, 2009), they were not aware of their parents' reunification plans and their trip to Spain abruptly disrupted their lives, without prior warning:

Manuel: No, I didn't want to go; my aunt and my granddad took me and I didn't want to go. They tricked me a little, [saying] that they were going to buy me a panda bear, as I liked panda bears a lot, and, like that, they put me on the plane [...] well, my granddad took me.

Jiaolong: My father came to get me and I spent the 12 hours on the plane crying.

Dora: I think that my mother came back to pick me up, let's say, it wasn't my [...] no, was it my mother or my father? One of the two. I think it was my father who came to pick me up. At that moment, I cried a lot and [...] when I got to Spain [...] when I got to Spain too. The first thing my father did was take me to Plaza de España, in Madrid, to a place to eat Chinese food. He took me to eat in a Chinese restaurant, in a restaurant that's very old. That one's the very oldest one, let's say. So, he took us to a place to have Chinese food and I calmed down.

Dora does not remember who picked her up in China, whether it was her mother or her father, but she clearly remembers going to a Chinese restaurant upon their arrival in Madrid and how she stopped crying when she ate Chinese food, as it symbolically

meant their return to China. In any case, in Manuel and Dora's narratives – as well as others within the sample – there are memories of crying and suffering upon an unexpected and undesired departure. In contrast, for Eva, who lived in China with her mother prior to the moment of moving to Spain, this experience was not unpleasant. When asked if she wanted to move to Spain, she replied with the following:

Eva: Perhaps I did, because I don't, I don't remember, I mean, [it being] bad when I went to Spain; I remember the day that I went and it was like [...] I was happy [*laughs*] [...] I guess I thought of it as the place where my father was, I mean dad [*laughs*]. Spain meant dad.

Similarly, she does not recount any harsh memories of her first days in Spain. Conversely, other informants report having suffered at first:

Xingfu: I just know that I didn't want to be here [in Spain], that I wanted to go to China with my granddad. There, I was always with my granddad and I didn't want to be here.

Dora: I have to be separated from my grandparents, eh? That's why I cried a lot: I had to be separated from my grandparents.

In the quotes above, the distress resulting from being separated from their grandparents, who were their day-to-day caregivers, is commonly present. Similarly, they refer to the lack of familiarity and tension with their parents, due the lack of interaction when they finally joined them in Spain. Moreover, their parents' intended presence by proxy through 'transnational objects' (Baldassar, 2008) they sent or gave to them, like pictures or other objects such as teddies that children had at that time in China, did not always fulfil the desired goal. When asked if they could recognise their parents upon reunification, some of the replies were:

Jingsheng: But at first it's true that I didn't know that my mother was my mother, I didn't recognise her. Well, I adapted pretty quickly, but I think that I'd never seen a photo, that's the thing, I don't remember much but I do [remember] that I didn't want to be with them.

Xingfu: I guess that I must have seen a photo of them, but I didn't know them at all. You tell me what a photo means to a five-year-old child!

What does a photo mean to a five-year-old? The question formulated by Xingfu touches upon what constitutes a line of criticism in the informants' narratives regarding parenting practices, as further sections will address. In their accounts of the moment of reunification with their parents in Europe, there is a general unwillingness, caused by their lack of familiarity with their parents – which also resulted in their inability to recognise them. The other factor that is present is a feeling of estrangement (Bonizzoni, 2015; Menjivar 2006), on the one hand, and their strong attachment to their grandparents, on the other. Scholars suggest that this process, through which children are detached from their caregivers, is negative for them (Suárez-Orozco, 2010). Nevertheless, in one case within the young adult sample, the child and the grandparents were able to maintain regular weekly communication across borders and the child visited China every summer, resulting in a very good relationship which extends into the present. Her narrative about the separation, while described as not having been desired, does not incorporate any distress. This situation is shared by other people in similar circumstances within the adolescent group. While some authors suggest that there are gender-specific reactions to parental separation and migration (Hoang et al. 2015), in this research, no difference was identified in relation to gender. The differences depend instead on the informants' capability – based on their family's economic resources – to access communication across borders: a means to achieve a certain continuity in interaction with their caregivers in China, reflected in a more nuanced narrative about this stage.

## 7.1.2 Childhoods(s) in Spain

### 7.1.2.1 *Care arrangements*

For those informants who were born in Spain and remained there throughout their childhood, the care arrangements in which they participated were diverse. For two informants in the young adult sample, the parents were the main childcare-givers throughout this whole stage in Spain. Within the adolescent sample, half had their

parents as main caregivers, and for the other half, this role was shared with other people: either members of the extended family or hired care workers. For some of them, the grandparents played a significant role as childcare-givers, it being common for the grandmothers to be the main domestic and hands-on caregivers. The extent of involvement of the grandparents in each family is uneven, and the care provided by the grandparents may be continuous or intermittent. As such, some of these grandparents moved from China to Spain to help the parents (their daughter / son and the in-laws) with a newborn, and/or at later stages. In two cases, the grandparents' generation had already settled in Spain and, thus, grandparenting implied moving to a new city in Spain, or simply moving across the street from their own flat to that of their adult children and grandchildren.

The presence of other kin as caregivers – even if not necessarily cohabiting – is quite common, most of these being aunts, which often also resulted in a high degree of interaction with cousins. This kind of care arrangement does not normally involve care-related mobility, but an optimisation of resources between different households with children. When care arrangements within the family realm were not available, the outsourcing of care became essential for family functioning. Within the sample, four different kinds of proxy childcare arrangements were identified:

- Care in the family's home by a Spanish *baomu*
- Care in the family's home by a Chinese *baomu*
- Childcare networks within the local Chinese community
- Informal circulation of the child, who relocates to a Spanish family

In the two first groups, the family home retains the childcare – at least physically – within the family realm. Nevertheless, the degree of involvement and the daily / monthly number of hours that the care worker takes on vary, from several hours per week – particularly during the weekends – to daily presence and even overnight stays, this being linked mainly to the child's age. As such, greater involvement is expected during the child's first years, with this diminishing as the child advances along their life course and become less dependent.

In the young adult sample, the *baomu*, or hired childcare-giver, tended to be Spanish, while within the adolescent group, there was a greater presence of ethnically Chinese *baomu*, this strategy being used by only one of the families of the young adults and by four of the families of today's adolescents. The family of the young adult in question were at that time settled in Portugal and would later move to Spain, when the informant – the oldest child – was around five years old. She recounts her experience as follows:

Dora: I was born in a town close to Lisbon, but my parents worked in, let's say, the capital. But I was raised, the truth is that I was raised by someone else. For a time, for a few years, it was one of my aunts [not related by blood], who was from Hong Kong. The woman who raised me, one of her parents was from Portugal and the other from Hong Kong. Let's say that it was like she raised me. That's why I have a name, my brother and I have a name in Portuguese, more or less. She gave them to us because, at that time in Portugal, they didn't let you have a foreign name, and so she gave me the name and not my parents.

In this case, the involvement of the hired caregiver was extensive and the informant and her brother spent the whole day with her. Moreover, her previous links with the children's parents are reflected in her help choosing their Portuguese names. In other cases, occasional or partial care arrangements were set up between several Chinese families. Such arrangements included one person picking up several children from school or taking care of them afterwards in their home or family business: this person could be a member of the parents' generation or the older sister of one of those families, who took care of younger siblings and friends. As such, the children were able to play together while several families optimised their resources. A similar strategy was reported by Stack (1974) in New York, where migrant parents seek help with childcare within the African American community network.

Within the adolescent group, there is a case of extensive involvement by a Spanish caregiver, this individual being someone from the grandparents' generation whose continued presence in and contributions to a Qingtianese family in Spain over the years

has prompted a process of 'kinning'<sup>65</sup> (Howell, 2003) through relatedness<sup>66</sup> between them. As a result, this woman from the grandparents' generation became Marta's grandmother. The first time I saw her was in Qingtian city, while she was walking along the river with Marta's mother. At that point, I knew nothing about their story and I was simply wondering why a woman of the grandparents' generation who looked and spoke Spanish was there, as she did not look like a business visitor, as the few foreigners that can be found on the streets in Qingtian do. At that time, I did not have the chance to approach them. Some weeks later, I met Marta, a 12-year-old girl, who explained to me that she was visiting Qingtian with her mother and her grandmother. Having to choose an option from a questionnaire that I had prepared and distributed among the attendees of a summer camp in which she was taking part, she was confused, as none of the available options reflected her situation. That was when she explained to me that, despite the fact that her mother and her father are 100% ethnically Chinese, one of her grandmothers is Spanish.

While, in Marta's family, it was one person (the hired caregiver) who was incorporated into the Qingtianese family, the fourth proxy-care strategy consisted of the relocation of the child into a Spanish family's household, which occurred in two families from the young adult sample and none of the adolescents' families. In both cases, and supporting cases of child circulation documented in other settings (Leinaweaver 2007, 2010), the arrangement was considered non-permanent, the intention being that, at some point, the children would go back to the natal household. The degree of involvement and interaction between the child and the natal family, and between the natal and the by-rearing<sup>67</sup> family, was uneven, resulting in different degrees of attachment between them. Similarly, the circumstances and features of these three care arrangements differ.

At the end of the 1990s, the Chiu family was settled in a small town in Spain. There were few Chinese people living in the region, and they were the only ones living in that town and for many kilometres around it at that time. Lacking any type of local or

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<sup>65</sup> In her study of transnational adoption in Norway, Howell defines 'kinning' as "the process by which a foetus or newborn child is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people, and the connection is expressed in a conventional kin idiom" (2006, p.8). She highlights the importance of social ties and de-emphasises biological ones.

<sup>66</sup> Carsten (2000) proposed studying kinship through 'relatedness' in specific contexts, by focusing on local meanings and moving "away from the pre-given analytic opposition between the biological and the social on which much anthropological study of kinship has rested" (p.4), by emphasising the small, everyday actions that create ties among people.

<sup>67</sup> The term 'children by rearing' (*hijo de crianza*) refers to "a child reared in the household (as opposed to a child born to a parent)" (Soto, 1989, pp.132)

transnational family care arrangement, the couple decided that, in order to secure their youngest child the level of attention that his age necessitated, he could join a neighbouring Spanish family in the town, in which the grandmother was the main caregiver for her own grandchildren. He joined their household and his daily life revolved around his Spanish family. As time passed and he grew up, he considered them – the by-rearing grandparents and their grandchildren – to be his family and, nowadays, his relationship with his natal parents is almost non-existent. Similarly, the relationship between the natal family and the by-rearing one is not an integral part of their daily lives.

The case of Daquan is very different, as his informal transfer as a child to a Spanish household took place at a very early age, and the length of stay was relatively short. A few months after his birth, Daquan moved from his natal home in Madrid to that of a Spanish family, staying there for around one year, after which he went back to his parents and his mother became his main caregiver. Nowadays, he does not keep in touch with them, as he says that he was too small when he lived with them to develop emotional ties. Nor do his parents have an inter-familial relationship with them, this care arrangement having remained at the outsourcing level, for both the child and his natal parents. Nevertheless, in this case, what is meaningful is the discursive approach that this young adult takes to talking about these outsourcing practices (page 278).

Two further cases of informal relocation were reported by the informants, although they did not take part in them: the following accounts refer to people that the informants knew. In the first family, the young couple did not have a support network through which to share childcare demands and, since their daughter was a baby, she was informally transferred to a Spanish family household. The result is a dual family for her, in that her by-rearing family is more important in her daily life than the natal one, with whom she has moved in recently (as an adolescent). In a similar way to the case of Chiu's family, she can barely speak a few words in Chinese and totally lacks transnational experience. The second case also involves a girl who has lived with a Spanish family from an early age. She cannot speak Chinese either, which makes it difficult for her to communicate with her natal parents, with whom she has moved in recently, as their Spanish language skills are limited. Finally, a case in which a child was relocated to a Spanish household through informal child circulation is described in

a blog written by a descendant of Qingtianese migrants in Spain, in which she relates her own experiences:

“(…) here is where our Spanish family appears, with whom we lived from early childhood until we reached a certain age. During this period, we visited our biological family a couple of times per week, until the moment when we could manage by ourselves and we moved in with them” (*Acerca del pingfeng*, n/d [‘On the other side of the folding screen’ blog]).<sup>68</sup>

### 7.1.3 Child circulation

While the circumstances and experiences of the informants are highly heterogeneous in this first stage, certain similarities can be tracked. In both settings – China and Spain – practices of informal child circulation have been documented, although these practices are not the norm. ‘Child circulation’ is defined as “the relocation of a child or young person into a new household for locally meaningful reasons” (Fonseca, 1986, in Leinaweaver, 2007, p. 164). Such a relocation may take place within or outside of the kin network, and in China or Spain, constituting an extension of local child fostering practices, based on the concept of childrearing as a collective responsibility (Poeze et al. 2017; Ho, 1999).

As Leinaweaver suggests (2007, 2010), child circulation serves to strengthen ties through a process of relatedness, which goes beyond and/or in parallel to kin ties. As such, some informants label people who are not related to them by blood their cousins or their grandparents. While the pool of cousins that one person may have is broad, it is generally assumed that there are only four grandparents (the father’s parents and the mother’s parents). Nevertheless, to Jingshen, the category of ‘grandparent’ incorporates six people, including the two people who took care of him in China during his childhood. Similarly, one of Marta's grandmothers is a Spanish person, despite both of her parents being ethnically Chinese. Thus, childcare arrangements outside the family, which are understood as an outsourcing strategy, can mutate towards other forms, in which family is expanded in different ways through relatedness (Casrten, 2000;

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<sup>68</sup> Information about the blog can be found in Annex 1, page 367.



Leinaweaver, 2007; Soto, 1989). Nevertheless, the nature of such an expansion is very different in the reported cases. Chiu's parents and his by-rearing family are reported to remain outsiders to each other, between whom contact is initiated on the basis of their child's needs, without further development of personal ties. In contrast, Chiu has two families, the by-rearing one being that which had a real presence on his daily life and greater importance on an emotional level. In Marta's case, for her and for her own mother, her Spanish grandmother has become part of her family, taking part in their lives and sharing meaningful in-family moments such as the three generations coming together in Qingtian and meeting their other extended-family members. While child circulation within and beyond kin networks appears to be more salient – within this sample – in the first life stage, in some cases it lasts longer, extending into adolescence.

## **7.2 Growing bodies and growing responsibilities**

The dual structure which characterised the previous section converges (mainly) into a single path: that of the migrants' descendants in Spain at school age (4 to 16/18 years old), with two exceptions: an introduction addressing the reunification process in Spain for those who were partially raised in China; and a reference to those adolescents who are still living in China nowadays. The circumstances surrounding the informants are highly heterogeneous, so while this chapter will seek to find common patterns and shared experiences, it will also make allusions to their condition of having been partially or completely raised in Spain, the migratory generation, the different nature and degree of their links with China and the age in which they moved to Spain.

### **7.2.1 Reunification in Spain**

Leinaweaver (2007) highlights the importance of the verb 'get used to' (*acostumbrarse*) in the child circulation practices in Ayacucho, in her own words:

“Little by little the transferred child ‘becomes accustomed’ and, in the process —by quietly comparing what she could not do before to what she now feels comfortable doing— family is formed and reinforced. The concept of ‘acostumbrarse’ is a productive way of thinking about the transformation in

behaviour, treatment, comfort, and sentiment that ultimately results in family” (Leinaweaver, 2007, p.169).

This ‘becoming family’, Leineawen argues, is linked to the relationship with both people and places over time. In the types of practices described by Leinaweaver, the early presence of the children in their natal homes is key, as it prompts a comparison and a reported preference for the former. Regarding children in Qingtianese transnational families, while in most cases the relocation takes place within the family realm, it involves the child’s movement from their home in China to Spain. This move implies a physical and emotional experience, in a new space and with new people. They face the challenge of getting used to an alternative home – the parental one – which also prompts comparisons and preferences. Those who spent their early years in China and were later reunited with their parents in Spain report feeling lost and lonely during the first months or even the first year, but, in general, they have the feeling that it did not last that long:

Manuel: Well, I don’t know, it’s the same old thing, isn’t it? Adaptation, change [...] it was hard work for me; above all, the language was a bit more difficult and, I don’t know, I don’t, I don’t remember being in a bad way [...] also because I was little, you know? And when you’re little, you don’t [...] you forget a lot of things, don’t you? I don’t know if it’s a really serious thing; the normal stuff – some bad kid can pick on you or maybe some kind of comment that young kids make, some racist comment or something, things like that.

Eva: A bit difficult, I didn’t understand anything, it was like [...] they were [...], I remember that they picked on me as well. I really didn’t understand anything, but I knew that it was something bad. The thing is that I didn’t really know, it seemed like I didn’t belong there [in Spain] but I didn’t know why.

Dandan: At first, yes. Yes, because I didn’t understand anything [*laughs*], but suddenly, I learnt Spanish, then everything [was] fine.

Nevertheless, for one of the young adult informants, the memories remain anchored in the negative feelings he experienced at that time, which extend into the present:

Xingfu: I didn't want to come and I've always wanted to go back; the thing is that I couldn't and then my granddad died and now it's too late. I've spent my life putting up with it all; I didn't fit in at all here.

In his case, his memories of Qingtian remained constant, as did his wish to go back to be with his grandfather. Nevertheless, he reported that while the first moments with his parents were difficult, he quickly got used to it. In contrast, he often refers to the fact that all his life has been marked by being treated as different or inferior due to his ethnicity; as such, he thought of his return to China as the path back to a happy life. While he got used to his parents, especially to his mother, who was the main caregiver, he never got used to his new context in Spain and he refers to a lonely childhood and adolescence. He lived in Barcelona, while the other two people for whom this stage appears to have been painful – but less so – were raised in Madrid, both arriving as adolescents. In contrast, this stage is perceived as having been particularly easy for the three informants who lived in small cities or towns. The rest of the informants' accounts are quite ambivalent. This pattern of an easier childhood –especially in terms of there being less racist behaviour towards them – in relation to living in a smaller city or town, has also been reported in some social media posts by descendants of Chinese migrants in Spain and in informal talks. Similarly, this discourse was shared by Sara, who arrived in Madrid in her late adolescence and, when her children were born, she decided to move with them and her husband to a small town, to offer them a better environment in which to grow up. She emphasises this choice as having been the best one, despite the fact that the economic benefits from their store are limited and could have more potential in other settings.

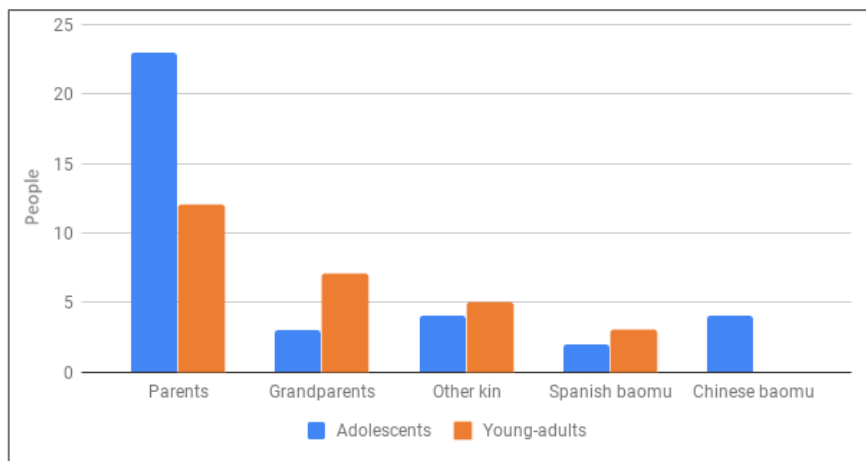
According to migration research, adaptation problems upon reunification in the destination country are expected, particularly when one of the parents has a new partner or if they meet other siblings who have been raised there for the very first time (Bauer, 2016; Menjivar, 2006; Phoenix & Bauer, 2012). On the one hand, regarding the latter situation, the informants did not mention any problems with their siblings or differences in the treatment between them, and when I specifically asked about this issue, they did not report it. Their siblings were perceived as companions. In all but two cases, the

minors moved to Spain aged seven or less, which may have helped them adapt better to the family realm. The other two, who moved to be with their parents at the age of 12 and 13, respectively, were both only children who had stayed in China while their parents moved abroad. As their parents did not have any more children while in Spain, they did not have any siblings to meet. On the other hand, within the sample (young adults and adolescents), none of the informants met a parent's new partner upon her/his reunification in Spain. Nevertheless, a case in which two sisters joined their father and his new wife and children in Spain has been reported by one of my informants. In that case, the siblings were also regarded more as a source of support or companions than as rivals (at least from the brother's point of view), but nevertheless, their lack of familiarity with each other and their difficulties adapting to the new context, especially due to the language, prompted one of them to move back to Qingtian and the other to move to another city in Spain.

### 7.2.2 Care arrangements and daily routines

Regarding care arrangements, the children already having started school, a lot of their day was spent at school. They often spent the afternoons and weekends at the family business – either a restaurant or a store – playing and doing school homework, the mothers becoming the main caregivers in most cases. When a member of the extended family (such as a grandparent or older sibling) or *baomu* was – permanently or occasionally – available, the realm of the family home was more present in their accounts of their daily routines (see Fig. 7).

Figure 7: Caregivers of the informants in Spain at school age.



Source: Produced by the author based on questionnaires surveys.

In many of these Qingtianese transnational families, different strategies within and outside the family realm overlapped in multiple ways and occurred sequentially. That is, employing a certain childcare strategy within the family realm during early childhood (e.g. grandparenting in China) did not prevent families from using another one later (e.g. grandparenting in Spain). For example, in the Chang family, the paternal grandmother took care of one grandchild in China and, years later, travelled to Spain to take care of him and his sister (the grandchildren) in Madrid, and moreover, she took care of both children in her own home back in China over several summers. Similarly, Jingshen was cared for by his by-rearing grandparents, while his blood grandparents remained active in the labour market. Dandan also spent five years with her maternal grandparents in Qingtian and, later on, they moved to Spain to take care of her there. Employing childcare arrangements within the family did not prevent families from incorporating childcare outsourcing practices, nor combining them or alternating between them through the child's different life-stages for different siblings, depending on the specific needs and available resources at that moment. For example, one of the informants, who is the oldest sibling, was cared for by his grandparents in China, the middle sibling was informally relocated to a Spanish family and finally, the younger sister has her mother as her main caregiver.

Flexible housing and living arrangements within and outside the family realm were reported. There are cases, such as that of Dora, who cohabited with her parents during part of her childhood but also lived with her uncle and cousins, which allowed the parents' generation to manage childcare easily. Moreover, their living arrangements incorporated other people for periods of time of different lengths:

Dora: [...] there was also a rented house and instead of renting to other people, like, with a lot of families. So, my uncle lived with us. Then there was a period when there was the odd friend [or] acquaintance of my parents who also lived in the same house – my family, my uncle and others.

Moreover, two of the young adults who were reunited in Spain at school age describe how their initial living arrangements in Spain consisted of a shared flat with other individuals or Chinese families<sup>69</sup>:

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<sup>69</sup> For further information regarding the evolution of residential patterns for Chinese migrants in Spain, see Zhong

Mario: My parents had some problems and they had to start again, we lived in a house with other people, there were other bedrooms that weren't ours, but [where] other Chinese people were living as well.

Eva: [*sigh*] We were [...] at first, we were renting in the house of my father's friends; the house wasn't big and there were something like three families there. And I remember that basically, right at the beginning, the thing was that my parents were always working and I was with my [younger] brother at home. And after that, as they earned more money, because they saved, I don't know how, we went to another house that was more for us, for the family, [it was] also rented and [...] then my granddad came from China. And, I don't know, my parents were working and my grandma looked after us [...]

These types of living arrangements characterise the early migration stages for Qingtianese couples in Spain. Sharing one flat with other Chinese migrants forms part of their strategy of saving as much money as possible, in order to pay off any migration-related debts and start their own business. In most cases, reunification with children took place at a later migration stage, when the families could afford to pay for their own flat. Nevertheless, this is not always the case and some informants' parents made choices that prioritised family reunification and getting children into school in Spain early over material or living conditions. However, informants did not give the impression that living under such circumstances was a problem for them, but rather was merely something that happened.

### 7.2.3 Growing differences

The concept of difference is recurrently present in the informants' accounts regarding the school stage, and particularly during the adolescence. Nevertheless, this 'difference' takes multiple forms, in which the Spanish/Chinese duality serves as the main background. In the social sphere, the difference is linked to their physical appearance. In the family sphere, it is articulated through their subjective perception of what forming

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(2018).

part of a Chinese family means in their lives, on the one hand; and through their parents' aim of raising a not-too-Spanish child, on the other.

Regarding the social dimension, for all the informants, their phenotypic features have led to them being perceived by others as different. This difference was sometimes perceived by themselves and other people as positive or neutral, particularly as they advanced along their life courses. But often, the difference has served as an excuse for racist or xenophobic attitudes to them. Such attitudes have been reported by all in the young adult sample, without exception, with reference to this stage. Nevertheless, the intensity or degree to which these affected them is highly uneven. For those who are adolescents today, this perception does not seem to be widespread and most of them report never having suffered from racist attitudes towards them or this having happened very few times, but four of them report it happening often and one of them on a daily basis. In most cases, the place in which this difference appears to make its presence felt for the very first time is at school. This is particularly true for those who were partially raised in China, as the complete lack of a common language to communicate with their peers in the first months or first year accentuates the extent to which others perceive them as different. A common pattern among the informants who were born and raised in Spain is not being able to understand why people saw them as different, because they felt that they were the same as their classmates.

The word *chino* (Chinese person) or *chinito/a* (little Chinese person) was repeatedly used to refer to them, instead of calling them by their names, as was the case for other children. Again, those who were raised in towns or small cities report much less use of such terms and other forms of bullying in their lives. In contrast, for some informants living in Madrid and Barcelona, this was common and they had to face other confrontational attitudes and aggressive behaviour on a regular basis:

Wendi: On the street they called me 'the Chinese girl' [and] all sorts, I think that they don't now, I used to walk along the street and they would insult me.

Dora: When I was little they did bully me, quite a lot. Insults and more, ripping my T-shirt, breaking my desk [...] in primary school, eh? In primary school. The teachers, at most, said not to worry, to hold on. It's just as well that I'm a very upbeat person because if not,

I'd be more traumatised than, I don't know. Look, they tore jackets of mine, like, in break-times, the usual thing in break – we had hooks and that; I put mine [on] this one and it was the only jacket, or whatever, that was ripped, drawn on and etc. And then, they also tore up exams of mine, I don't know, exams torn up, crossed out [...] they even carved insults on my desk and things like that, you know? I mean, this is all done in secret. And then more of the usual thing of: hey, Chinese girl, I don't know, insults right there in your face.

Eva: The thing for me was that they used to chase me home, and I had a really hard time but I didn't tell anyone until, one day, a teacher called me and she said "come in, we have to talk to you". And then we had an in-depth chat there, and she said "tell me what's happening to you" and then she helped me. She helped me, she called the parents and all that.

Several informants have reported that when racist comments or even physical aggression took place in the classroom or playground, teachers often encouraged them to ignore the bullies instead of arguing with them and the teachers' applying corrective punishments. As a result, their defensive mechanism consisted of trying to go unnoticed to avoid being bullied. Some of them have described how this is the same mechanism that their parents and other Chinese people use in Spain. In the Facebook and WeChat groups, the topic of the need to change this behaviour and start fighting for their rights has come up several times.

As mentioned above, the school is the arena where the all the informants experience this (constructed) difference for the first time. In a round table, organised in Barcelona in March 2018, with the title 'How much longer will we be migrants?'<sup>70</sup> (*Fins quan serem immigrants?*), in which the speakers were young people of Asian origin (with connections to Bangladesh, Pakistan, China and the Philippines), they reflected on their experiences of growing up in Spain. A descendant of Chinese migrants (Zhang)<sup>71</sup> shared several of her school experiences, which have shaped her life course. She recalled a

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<sup>70</sup> Organised by Casa Asia and the Grup de Treball sobre Periodisme Solidari del Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya (Working Group on Solidarity-Focused Journalism of the School of Journalism of Catalonia).

<sup>71</sup> For further information about this author, see Annex 1, page. 370 ('Mandarina de la terra' blog).



rhyme that her primary school teacher composed about her: “Cristina comes from China and eats a mandarin” (“*La Cristina ve de la Xina i es menja una mandarina*”), and how it prompted her very first identity conflict, as she was born and raised in Spain and did not come from China, as her teacher suggested. Additionally, in secondary school, her teacher asked the students to interview their ascendants, prompting a conversation with them about her family’s migration history. As such, she emphasises the need to promote a school system in which migrants’ descendants can find spaces to reflect on their own families’ histories and circumstances, without positioning them as ‘others’.

While, during this school stage, the experiences of the informants who spent part of their childhood in China and those who remained in Spain are quite similar (after the period of family and social adaptation upon arrival), the exception consists of the only two informants who moved to Spain as adolescents (when 12 and 13 years old, respectively). For them, this adaptation stage is reported to have lasted longer and to have been more difficult, highlighting the importance of the language in this. Although their Spanish language skills are very good nowadays, their accent is not completely Spanish, which reinforces their condition as foreigners and they report having been bullied on this basis. Within the young adult sample, there are only two people – both males – who did not finish secondary education and they share common elements in their discourse. Firstly, they talk of feeling out of place in secondary school, linked to their ethnicity and their perception of being different; secondly, they emphasise their good academic performance; and thirdly, they both wish to drop out of secondary school and start working. Nevertheless, one of them arrived in Spain as an adolescent and the other at the age of five. A similar perception was also shared by one informant, who linked dropping out of school to bullying:

Huahua: I’ve also heard about cases of Chinese people, friends and all that, um, they stop studying because they’re not happy. And, I mean, their parents put pressure on them because they don’t know what’s happening and the kid, well, they don’t say anything and that’s happening to them at school, so they prefer to give up their studies. Without knowing the reason, they put pressure on them and in the end...

Moreover, within the sample, there is a general awareness of other people being in the

same circumstances. This constructed ‘otherness’, based on their ethnic background, often resulted in a desire, during adolescence, to erase their Chineseness as a difference marker. That is, the problems or difficulties they experienced were connected to their ethnicity – or more specifically, to how other people reacted to it – and as such, erasing their markers of ethnicity was perceived as a solution:

Dandan: I [...] in my teenage [years], it was like I rejected my Chinese part, actually, I remember that I wanted to have an operation on my eyes and, what’s more, I actually had a very Spanish character.

This idea is also common in their accounts, in group chats (Facebook/ WeChat), interviews in the media and on other platforms. In a blog<sup>72</sup> written by a descendant of Chinese migrants who is a psychologist, one of her posts is entitled ‘I am ashamed of being Chinese’ (*Me avergüenzo de ser chino*). This thought resulted from the general association of undesirable experiences with her ethnicity: an association which, she suggested, needed to be changed. She narrated her own experience as follows:

“When I was about 14 years old, I used to go with some [female] friends to a Cybercafé to chat and meet boys. I remember that when it came to describing myself, I used to talk to them about my general physical features: ‘I’m tall, black hair and brown eyes’. But I never referred to my Oriental features, I never told the boys that I was Chinese and I never dared to meet any of them because I felt ashamed. I thought that they wouldn’t like me just because I was Chinese.” (Lin, 2016, January 19).

To a much lesser extent, Chineseness as a perceived burden is present within the adolescent sample, but the interviews with them were not as in-depth as those carried out with the young adult sample. Several times, in informal conversations with the young adults and older generations, a perceived decrease in the discriminatory attitudes towards today’s adolescents in contrast to previous decades is framed in the context of a change of China’s position in the global arena. This shift would lead non-Chinese people to think about Chinese people differently, as not coming from a poor or under-

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<sup>72</sup> Information about the blog can be found in: Annex 1, Page 369.

developed country, but from a global power.

In the case of today's young adults, their rejection of their Chineseness tended to evolve towards a progressive acceptance of and pride in their condition, as they advanced along their life course. Some of them point to an increasing interaction with other descendants of Chinese migrants as being key in this process. Particularly salient as a turning point was their participation in the *huaqiao*<sup>73</sup> summer camps in China during their adolescence and their move to big cities as young adults, for those who grew up in small cities or towns, leading them to meet other co-ethnics.

The perception of being different was reinforced in the family sphere in multiple and complementary ways. Sometimes, this difference was explicitly highlighted by their parents and/or other family members; at other times, it appeared as a result of comparing practices, attitudes and behaviour with their non-Chinese partner's family. From their children's perspective, the differences were made manifest in the customs, rights and duties they had within their families, which had repercussions in their social lives. A common example is the families' reported incomprehension regarding children's expectations about, for example, celebrating Christmas, going on holiday during summertime or sleeping over at friends' homes. That is, there was a mismatch between children's expectations of having a life which formally resembled that of their classmates and the actions of their parents, resulting in generational conflict. This included, for example, the lack of freedom to go out, in contrast to their non-Chinese friends:

Eva: My situation was really extreme, really, my situation didn't seem normal to me. Now [things are] really good between me and my parents, but in my teenage years, the thing is, I'd meet my friends at 4 and my parents always said to be home at 5. How's that going to be possible? I always tell them that it's not possible. Yes, it is, yes, it is, there's enough time. And me: no, there isn't. Yes, there is.

Manuel: Now I don't know if it's because they go out more or [if] we went out less before, but my sister goes out a lot more. And yes, they are stricter. If my sister wants to sleep over with [female] friends, they

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<sup>73</sup> Person of Chinese ethnicity living abroad.

can act a lot stricter [...] and they don't want her to stay out. For example, she tells me that her [female] friends are allowed to. My parents are stricter with that.

Wendi: It's like, always less than the rest of the people in class, but it was worse for me than for my brother, they let him stay out a bit later.

As these quotes suggest, restrictions on going out are more salient for the sisters than for their brothers. Similarly, gendered discipline and conflicts have been reported in other transnational families (Gardner & Mand, 2012; Foner & Dreby, 2011; Dreby 2010). Their parents' restrictions resulted in a perceived lack of freedom compared with their non-Chinese friends. Moreover, the lack of leisure time was reinforced by their early participation in the family business, particularly on the weekends. Most of them have reported collaborating in the family business since they were approximately 12 years old. As such, and in contrast to their non-Chinese friends, their different schedules often depended on the timetables of the family business:

Eva: I remember that they said to me: so we'll meet at whenever. No, I can't tell you what time I can [meet], I have to say whether I can on the day itself, because instead of arranging to meet like the rest, I had to go to work in the shop.

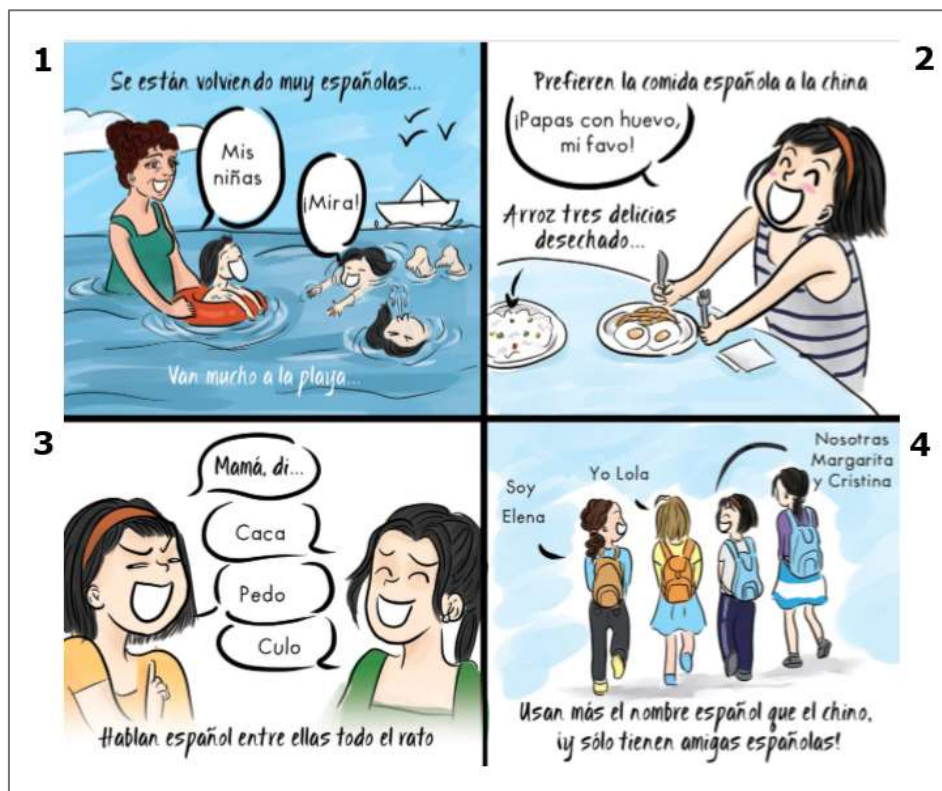
As well as their self-perceived difference, based on their belonging to a Chinese family, their parents also tended to highlight this. Their emphasis of difference reflected a protective attitude, which sought to arm their children with the right tools to deal with emerging difficulties as they progressed along their life course. Parents would point to their condition of being different in the Spanish society, and thus, to the need to fight to overcome what they perceived –based on their own experience – to be a disadvantage:

Daquan: My father always insisted that I had to be more and better in everything. That I had to be better than the rest, because I was starting with the disadvantage of being different and therefore, there was nothing else for it but for me to be the best.

Their parents' and other family members' complaints about their being “too Spanish” are often mentioned. For example, siblings talking in Spanish together is perceived in this way, as using the Chinese language is considered a must: a way to maintain their cultural heritage (Said & Zhou, 2017). As mentioned above, the children who grow up in Spain are perceived by their kin in China as spoiled children, lacking in respect and discipline. A couple of informants have also referred to their parents' concern about whether they will take care of them or not in their later life stage, as they are perceived as lacking in Chinese values. In other families, the perceived need to fight children's Spanishness with an additional dose of Chineseness is present. The following illustrations are taken from the first book of Quan Zhou<sup>74</sup> – a descendant of Chinese migrants and an illustrator (Zhou, 2017, 2015), which is based on her own experiences of growing up in a transnational Qingtianese family in Spain.

\*For the English translation see below.

Illustration 10: Comic strip from ‘Gaspacho Agridulce: Una autobiografía chino-andaluza’ [‘Sweet-and-sour Gaspacho: An Andalusian-Chinese Autobiography’].



Source: Zhou, 2015, p.27.

<sup>74</sup> Information about the author can be found in: Annex 1, page 357.

Above the illustration can be read: “That much time with the Spanish nanny cannot be good”, and this is complemented by the following sentences:

1. They are becoming too Spanish (they go to the beach a lot).
2. They prefer Spanish food to Chinese food.
3. They talk in Spanish together all the time.
4. They use their Spanish name more than their Chinese one, and they only have Spanish friends!

Throughout the book, her mother's complaints about her daughters' 'Spanishness' is posited to be an undesirable consequence of the large amount of time they have spent with their Spanish *baomu*. Her family used the care outsourcing strategy (hiring a Spanish childcare-giver) and later replaced it with a transnational arrangement, through care-related mobility, moving the maternal aunt from China to Spain to become the main caregiver for the children. The arrival of the aunt from China is intended to cope with both parents' needs and concerns: providing domestic care and supervision to their children, on the one hand, and 'Chineseness' on the other. Nevertheless, despite the fact that parents' complaints about their children's excessive 'Spanishness' or their lack of 'Chineseness' are often present in the informants' accounts, these types of late, corrective transnational arrangements are not widespread. Similarly, Chinese parents do not send their children to China as adolescents, as happens in other transnational families (Foner, 2009; Orellana et al. 2001; Thorne et al., 2001; Soto, 1989). Instead, parents think of children's direct experiences in China, through visits and the *huaqiao* summer camps, as the best way to cultivate their Chineseness. Similarly, weekend Chinese schools in Spain seek to provide children not only with Chinese language skills but also a broader Chinese environment. Also, many informants reported that, from an early age, their parents provided them with Chinese movies and, especially, TV series, in order to familiarise them with Mandarin (as the language spoken at home was often *Qingtianhua*) and Chinese history and culture:

Xingfu: In my era there was something called VCD. Here it was still VHS and my father brought a player for that from a trip to China, basically [it was] like a DVD but I think it must have been another patent, I don't know. Physically they were the same but when you put

one in, VCD always appeared. So, imagine, they brought a load of series and movies at the time, besides the fact that all Chinese people used to lend each other series, etc.

In recent years, universal access to the internet has replaced the circulation of VCDs and DVDs, but still, some are used and/or stored in these families' homes. Nevertheless, while those movies and series were a tool used by their parents to bring their children closer to Chinese culture and China, they were not perceived by the informants as an imposition but as entertainment.

Research on children of migrant families tends to highlight this stage as being characterised by the challenge to parental authority and problematic behaviour (Artico, 2003; Menjívar, 2006), particularly for those who are reunited in the destination country at an older age, as they are:

“confronting the triple trauma of simultaneously entering adolescence – with its own psychological upheavals; a new society – often in an inner-city environment – that requires learning to navigate a new language, place and culture; and they are also entering families that do not look like the ones they knew before” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila, 1997, p. 568).

Spoonley (2008) suggests that migrants' descendants are caught between different social and cultural dynamics, and are making the transition between childhood and adulthood. Nevertheless, parent-child dissonance or confrontation during the so-called adolescence stage is the norm, more than the exception. Although most of the informants report having been quite dutiful and adhering to parents' rules most of the time, there were specific areas of parental confrontation, particularly regarding the timings for going out:

Eva: Before, they were strict and I was very rebellious. ‘Be at home by 5’; ‘well no, by 8’. I did it on purpose, a bit, so that they knew that it’s not normal, I didn’t consider it normal. I thought, we’re here in Spain, try to adapt because it’s not the same. Because here in China, it’s already night-time at 5 and [you’re] having dinner and all that.

And then, little by little, they get used to it, I get used to it, and that awkward teenage phase passes and then I calm down and they calm down.

Kun: I, at 17 or so, was very rebellious; they used to tell me to get back at a certain time and I showed up when I liked, then they'd tell me off, I shut my mouth and I said yes to everything they said and all that. They didn't want [that], but I did my own thing.

Their confrontation with paternal authority was often exerted in an indirect way, by arriving later than the established time – but not too late – which resulted in a rebuke. This behaviour was generally, but not always, more common for boys. Their accounts do not reveal a particularly high degree of confrontation, this always remaining at a dialectical level, and none of them report having become engaged in problematic behaviour such as violence or addictions. Instead, they did their best at the school and all of them helped on a regular basis in the family business. Despite all this, some informants perceive their parents to have an apparently unending capacity to ask for more – and better – but little capacity to reward. Similarly, such a perception has come up several times in group chats during the fieldwork. Asking for ‘more and better’ entailed a high level of pressure, as they needed to perform well in all facets of social life, and particularly at school. This circumstance is common within China, but also in Chinese migrant families (Zhou, 2009):

Dandan: They always held up my [female] cousin as an example to copy: her mother died and even so, she always got the top grade, she was also... there was a point when there was pressure because I was never a good student until I started uni[versity] [...]

Eva: Not anymore, but when I was young it was, “look at the daughter of whoever”, “look at whichever cousin”. I always said “but don't compare me [to them]!” Because what I did was, because “look, they let her whatever until 12, don't compare me [to others]”. And when they said that to me, I used to say: “And why are you comparing me [to them]?”



Dora: They always speak well of me, but hey, that's also pressure because if you do anything bad then [...] they come down on you as well, eh? [...] But then there's also pressure, pressure from too much praise that gets to a point where, if you do something bad, then you start to think "will they say something bad about me?" Seriously, for a time that happened to me, but then [...] look [*laughs*].

A common idea which arises from the informants' accounts is their perception of the adolescent stage as being characterised by growing responsibilities and their parents exerting more control. Moreover, they complain about their parents' double standards and apparently contradictory behaviour: they do not spend time with them and are always working, but they want to retain control over their lives. Their accounts are very similar to those described by Tse and Water's (2013) informants, despite the fact that – in contrast to that study – in this research, parent-child co-residence is a circumstance shared by all informants at this stage. While this section points to parent-child generational dissonance, this coexists with "caring and cooperation" (Foner & Dreby, 2011, p.548), as the next section exemplifies.

#### 7.2.4 Agency and care roles

The supposed natural condition of children as dependents is challenged by their taking an active caregiving role. Most of them incorporate a range of other housework and care tasks into their daily routines from early adolescence onwards, such as cleaning their own rooms, washing dishes, or taking care of younger siblings. While these tasks are performed by both boys and girls, and the older siblings tend to have more responsibilities, when there is little age difference between them, it is the girls who take on the care work (Lee & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2011). As highlighted in the theoretical introduction, research on migrant families has pointed to children being active family contributors through their role as 'cultural brokers' (Bauer, 2016; Menjívar, 2006). Most of the informants have performed the role of translator and interpreter in different circumstances since early adolescence, which puts them in the position of tutors, advocates and 'surrogate parents' (Valenzuela, 1999). Regarding the latter role, most of them – or their older siblings – were in charge of going to school parents' meetings

and one-to-one meetings with tutors, either relating to their younger siblings or themselves:

Dora: And also if we're talking meetings with tutors and the like, my mother didn't go, I went. The meeting with my tutor: I go. The meeting with my brother's tutor: I go [*laughs*].

Question: How did you feel?

Dora: At first, I [*felt*] bad, because your parents, whether you like it or not [...], man, you see all the parents and I'm going, you know? Bad, because they weren't there, but then good because my grades got better, my grades were really good. And it's not as if the teachers had a lot to say to my parents, you know? At most, always all that of: "yes, your daughter is doing very well" and that [...] as the teachers knew about the situation, they didn't need to oblige them to go.

Eva: My parents never went to the meetings, unless they said "you have to come, one way or the other". So, I used to tell my parents that there's a meeting but then, I'd think, ahh, the thing is then I have to interpret and all that: I'll go alone and that's that. Everyone's like: "oh, your parents, where are they?"

Similarly, the parents also asked them to sign school-related documents in their names. And, in general, despite insisting on the importance of studying and having good grades, they were absent from the educational context. While, at that time they may have felt uncomfortable with it, they often refer to their parents' lack of skill as resulting from a feeling of being out of place that they could understand:

Manuel: For them there's also pressure, because [*they*] don't understand. I guess, well it seems [...] I understand it.

This was not only the case regarding school-related issues, but any other circumstances which required native language skills, such as going to the bank or institutional spaces, or contracting specific services. In fulfilling these duties, Valenzuela (1999) describes such young people as taking on the role of the family's advocates. In most cases, their

role consisted only of directly interpreting what they said, or translating what was written on the papers. For example, at the age of around 15, Mario became the omnipresent agent of his parents, after some people cheated them, resulting in their losing a large amount of money and feeling vulnerable and lacking in confidence. Since then, he has read all their documents and has been present for all formalities. Besides his parents, other people, such as neighbours or family friends, occasionally take advantage of his skills:

Mario: A woman who is a friend of my mother told her [my mother] that she had a doctor's appointment because of a pain, and when [we] went, she wanted me to ask the doctor about contraceptive pills, the injection and things like that...

While this episode was quite uncomfortable for the informant, who was not aware of the woman's real reason for visiting the doctor, he still remembers it as a funny or curious anecdote. Nevertheless, in other circumstances, this may be not the case:

Mario: Once, it was some neighbours who had a cousin in hospital, it was something simple but when I went, I found that the guy had fallen off some scaffolding, [when] working without papers. More than [going] to the hospital, I went straight to the funeral directors to make the preparations, because they wanted to wait for the relatives from China to come to the funeral, but they told me that it was impossible to have the body for such a long time. And then it was whether they wanted the make-up service because the man had half his face disfigured...

In this case, he had to perform his interpreting role in very difficult circumstances, having to deal with situations he was not familiar with and which placed a significant emotional burden on him, a boy of 15-16 years old at that time. It meant dealing with the death of a man and the responsibility of further management, as he acted as the only intermediary between the hospital, the funeral directors and the dead man's family. He states that this was one of the reasons he decided to stop performing this interpreter role for people outside the family.

Finally, this interpreter role also occurred through the informants' early and widespread presence in the family business, where they contributed occasional language support or translation, these contributions not being based on gender but with the eldest child generally being more involved (Valenzuela, 1999). In all cases, the image of their parents working and their early link with the family business would retain a particular importance in their narratives. These workplaces play an important role as physical spaces in which care arrangements take place: combining work in the productive sphere and reproductive work, through different dimensions, such as supervision or feeding. As time passed, changing dynamics in care roles would be evident in such workplaces, the minors becoming active caregivers. The young adult informants – with one exception – collaborated in the family business from early adolescence onwards:

Huahua: Until this year, I've always had to fit my studies in with this, with the shop. At first, I felt obliged, yes, I always felt obliged. But then, when I was older, I felt that it was, like, what I should do, because if not, I felt a bit bad. Like, man, they've given everything for me, I've got to help a little too. It's what I should do.

In contrast, for those aged between 12 and 18 nowadays, their help in the family business is common, but not universal: approximately half of them report helping there at the weekend, and five of them do so on a more regular basis. The only person within the young adult sample who did not help her parents in the family business, made the following reflection:

Dora: I didn't have to go to any business, or anywhere. That's why I think, instead, that [...] how boring. I'd help, but, you know, they're just very different situations. I don't have any pressure, but if we say that, I know that it's very difficult to work abroad, I've always known, since [I was] very little, where the money comes from. That it's very difficult to get, that it's an effort by my parents and I was very aware of that, that's why I say, that when I see that you [all] have to help in the shop, I say, for me: if they had a shop, I'd help, I'd go.

At that time, most informants felt it was unfair that they had to have more responsibilities than most children of their age living in Spain, through tasks that are considered adult duties (Becker, 2007; Menjívar, 2006) or that resulted in embarrassing circumstances and a decrease in their leisure time. However, as young adults nowadays, most of them have given a positive appraisal of these experiences, which they think served them to learn about the value of effort, resulting in a sense of pride and family connection (Fuligni, 2006). As Olwig (1999) suggests, children's experiences of their contributions must be understood within specific contexts. A widespread thought is that taking on these responsibilities leads to a large degree of autonomy and maturity, particularly when compared to their Spanish peers who “only think about having fun” (*“solo piensan en pasarselo bien”*). In many informants’ interviews, as well as in different post and comments on social media, this shared perception is evoked:

Dandan: We [my cousins and I] had a lot of autonomy, more than Spanish kids, I think, because they don’t do anything, they take everything for granted. Their parents take care of registering them [at school etc.] and that kind of thing and we had to do it ourselves.

Jiaolong: I have been in the restaurant since I was very little and then when older, whereas some people spent their time in the street and drinking, I had to work, and in my degree [it was] the same, they didn’t pay me and that’s it, I paid for it myself. I’ve always known where money comes from and what things cost.

In sum, the active role of minors (understood in this context as aged 18 or less) as caregivers in these families is salient at multiple levels. They perform family care through their hands-on contribution to the family business, through their role of translators and interpreters in the management of family-related issues and through the performance of home tasks and sibling care. The care they provide may be intergenerational and/or intra-generational, flowing horizontally and vertically, forming part of the family ‘care continuum’ (Bauer, 2016; Becker, 2007), in which different family members and generations take part. In line with Fuligni’s (2006) research, the notion of commitment is present in informants’ accounts and, similarly to Bauer’s (2016) research on descendants of migrants in the United Kingdom and the kinship care

they perform through their role as ‘language brokers’, this study’s informants often use words such as ‘obligation’ or ‘duty’ to refer to their tasks, due to their parents’ lack of Spanish skills or familiarity with certain social and institutional Spanish contexts. They take care of their parents and their families, but they also take care of themselves, having a high level of autonomy from early adolescence onwards: a circumstance which challenges the image of minors as dependents. Nevertheless, while being active caregivers they also retain their role of care receivers in multiple care dimensions, as these roles are neither opposites nor exclusive.

In contrast to the total lack of agency of children in the previous stage, as the accounts of the informants who were partially raised in China reveal – given that most were not even aware that they would move to Spain – some of parents' subsequent mobility plans for their children were altered or cancelled upon their intervention. This is because agency is not static (Pantea, 2011; Thorne et al. 2001) and children “exercise agency in the process; they see themselves, sometimes ambivalently, as ‘growing older’ and they may variously cooperate with, negotiate, or resist adult efforts to guide and control” (Thorne et al. 2011; p.244). In several cases in the sample, short-term movements to China, such as holidays, were postponed or changed, based on children’s own leisure plans. Moreover, there are two cases in which parents’ long-term mobility plans were reshaped, based on their children’s agency, as the following paragraphs explain.

When Wendi was aged 12, her parents decided that sending her back to China would serve to meet her growing care needs, as well to provide her with better Chinese skills, as her Spanish skills were already secured, having been schooled in Spain for more than five years. Nevertheless, these plans did not fit with Wendi’s expectations. She did not want to leave her friends behind and to start again in China, despite the fact that she had very warm memories about her early years there. As such, she managed to convince her parents to let her stay, by actively complaining and refusing to move back, as well as through reinforcing her contributions to the family through her performance at school and her caregiver role, through the supervision of her younger brother and her performance of home tasks.

Similarly, Yat-sen managed to stay in China longer by challenging his mother's wish for him to join his mother, father and younger brother in Spain. He was born in Spain but moved to China as toddler and, at 14 years old, he remains there with his grandparents. As time passed in Qingtian, he forgot the Spanish language and only

remembers a few words. For a couple of years, his parents having been urging him to go back to Spain. Her mother is worried about the growing difficulties he will face once he goes to school back in Spain. Her worry contrasts with her son's enthusiasm, who is not willing to leave his life in Qingtian. His younger brother agreed to go back to Spain last year, but he keeps managing to stay a bit longer by pleading, complaining and confronting his mother with a passive aggressive attitude. Moreover, his grandfather is on his side. In the end, he has managed to agree the conditions upon which he will return, which include going back to Qingtian for holidays and an open return to China once he gets his residence permit upon reunification in Spain, if he feels he doesn't fit in there.

As Hoang et al. (2015) suggest, with reference to the children of migrants who remain in their home countries (Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam), these children are aware of the consequences of their actions for their own lives and they are able to manage their agency to their own benefit. In both reported cases, the minors managed to change or at least to postpone and negotiate their parents' decisions through their active agency (Bonizzoni, 2005; Pantea, 2011). Nevertheless, this is not always the case. As I will describe later, one adolescent who remains in China nowadays has been trying to move to Spain with her parents for years, but she has not managed to do so. On the whole, parents' mobility plans for children during the school stage are limited; that is, with the exception of these three cases, children agree with their parents' plans so do not confront them, meaning that their agency is not tested.

#### 7.2.5 Transnational life

The young adult informants had an uneven number of transnational links during the schooling stage. While some of them have never visited China as minors or have not been back to China after being reunited with their parents in Spain; others have travelled to China every two to three years in summertime and one has done so on a yearly basis since early adolescence. Again, the number of visits is higher for the younger ones, which is in line with improvements and increasing affordability of transportation between the two countries. Similarly, most of the older informants did not have any kind of direct communication on a regular basis with extended family members who were settled in Qingtian. In the cases in which an informal relocation of a child to a

Spanish family's household took place, this resulted in a total lack of transnational ties and interaction across borders. Nevertheless, in recent years, the WeChat 'moments' wall has served to give some of them a minimum peripheral awareness about their lives, through ambient co-presence (Madianou, 2016), while not always implying direct interaction.

In most cases, when they visited China, they stayed at their grandparents' homes (either their maternal or paternal ones) at that time, and some of their parents bought a property later; a minority were also accompanied by one of the parents during their stay in China: which also occurs among today's adolescents in similar circumstances. Around a third of the young adults interviewed have taken part in the summer camps for children of Chinese-origin families living abroad which are organised in Qingtian or other cities around China. These camps seek to connect children with China, as reflected in their names, most of which incorporate the expression 'Roots-seeking Journey' (寻根之旅 *Xungen zhi lü*) and are focused on giving children an idea of China and Chinese culture, some of them including a trip through different cities and provinces in China.

Based on the questionnaires and short interviews with adolescents (12-18 years old) participating in one summer camp in Lishui in 2018 (Ill.11), and comparing them with the young adults' accounts, a changing pattern in transnational interaction has been identified. Out of the 85 children participating in the summer camp, 25 lived in Spain; 21 of these had spent three or more summer holidays in China, two of them two summers, and for only two of them was this year the first time they had visited China, irrespective of whether they had taken part in a camp or not. This adds up to a much higher frequency of visits to Qingtian than today's young adults engaged in when they were the same age. Regarding at-a-distance communication with their parents, this is reported to take place on a daily basis or at least several times per week, including voice calls or messages, video calls and written text messages, all of these being channelled through the WeChat app. Nevertheless, communication with mothers, particularly through voice calls or video calls, is more common than with fathers. Similarly, the adolescents report keeping in touch and interacting with their friends in Spain on a daily basis. As such, while in Qingtian, co-presence is not erased but takes on a virtual form. This option was simply not available one or two decades ago, when the young adult informants spent their summer times in Qingtian.



*Illustration 11: Roots-seeking Journey' summer camp in Lishui, 2018.*



Source: 2018 Roots-seeking Journey' summer camp in Lishui, WeChat's account.

Similarly, keeping in touch with friends they met in Qingtian is not a problem for the younger generations, as they directly exchange their WeChat contacts. Regarding contacts made through the summer camps, the young people tend to create one or several WeChat groups for each camp, making it easier to stay connected. These ties are not only translated into China-Spain flows, but also Spain-Spain exchanges, and flows between Spain and other countries, as the summer camps bring together descendants of Chinese migrants from all around the world, albeit most are from European countries. One of the young adult informants also described having joined a summer camp for Chinese children in Spain (Madrid), which was organised by the Chinese Christian church in Spain. Similarly, in Quan Zhou's aforementioned first book, she refers to her and her sisters having taken part in one of these summer camps, and her mother's desire for them to – finally – make Chinese friends through it. The experience of the informant who took part in this camp is expressed in similar terms to those who did so in China: it was a time for learning and having fun, and above all, meeting other children from Chinese families settled outside China, with whom they could share their experiences. In a similar vein, the weekend Mandarin language courses, held all year round, served to expand their networks. For example, Dora and Eva met through a Mandarin course in Madrid in their late adolescence and, since then, they have scheduled their trips to Qingtian, so that they can spend their time there together. Once there, they also expand both of their networks by introducing each other to their Qingtianese friends or relatives.

This kind of group trip is also common among the younger generations. The adolescents visiting Qingtian stay at their own family's homes, but they plan the trip together, in

order to travel on the same flight or on similar dates, if they are travelling together with other kin. While in Qingtian, they meet on a daily basis, going out together. While their social networks expand in both countries – China and Spain – there is a certain core group which travels together across borders, taking advantage of the growing affordability of cross-borders transport links, as well as families' upward mobility through migration. For example, in the summer of 2017, I met a group of 8-12 people, composed mainly of older male adolescents and young adults living in Spain, who meet in the summertime in Qingtian every one or two years, and most of them meet regularly in the area of Barcelona where they live. This kind of transnational group life is not present in the accounts of the young adults during their adolescence, with the exception of a few of the younger ones, whose late adolescence was only two or three years ago. Still, for the older ones, a similar pattern can be identified, regarding the trips of several cousins or close family friends travelling together to China. These kinds of travel arrangements served to maximise resources, with fewer adult caregivers travelling together with the minors. Nevertheless, the role of parents in the management of minors was key when the young adults were adolescents, while for today's adolescents, their agency and their ability to communicate at a distance and check for flights on the internet leave adults with the role of co-managers, or simply intermediaries or providers of payment.

#### 7.2.6 A changing pattern: Adolescents who stay in China

In contrast to the general pattern of family reunification within these families, taking place when the children are seven years old or less, this research has documented several cases of children who were aged between 12 and 16 at the time of the fieldwork and did not move to Spain with their parents. These circumstances constitute a new phenomenon. Within the young adult group, only two people remained in China when they were seven or older, both being only children. They were reunited with their parents in Spain at the ages of 12 and 13, respectively, these later reunification processes having been described above. In all cases, family reunification is expected to happen before they are legal adults (18 years old), in order to give them the chance to make a life in Spain and, especially, to take advantage of the educational system. While

institutional barriers are not the reason the adolescents in the sample stay in China, nevertheless, there may be children who are in this situation.

Parents' productive demands are mentioned as one of the reasons that lead to these care arrangements extending into adolescence, but they also stated that another reason is the family's desire to raise children in China, which is considered a better and safer environment<sup>75</sup>. Moreover, through socialisation in China, they intend to avoid their children turning Spanish. While the importance of balancing productive and reproductive needs is clear in the other samples (young adults and adolescents who are already reunited in Spain), for today's adolescents who have stayed in China, it is not. When considering the factors cited by the parents in the other sample groups as motivating them to initiate reunification, the presence of a stable settlement in Spain (with their own flat and business), some years after migration, which tends to result in an improvement in the family's economic conditions, is present. Indeed, many families in the young adult sample prompted family reunification in Spain when their economic circumstances were much more difficult than those of the informants who are adolescents today and living in China. Nevertheless, that is not to say that parents in Spain are not fully engaged in the productive sphere, lacking the time to attend to their children.

While it appears to be a minority who are in this situation – adolescents of transnational families who are now staying in China – most Chinese families in Spain tending to decrease their usage of long-term transnational care arrangements in China and increasingly use shorter ones, this phenomenon still needs to be taken into account, as it offers an alternative and reflects a growing trend. This section will provide a brief, general idea of the lives of these minors and how they experience these transnational care arrangements. To do so, it draws on the accounts (six questionnaires and subsequent, unrecorded interviews, plus participant observation in two households) of adolescents aged between 12 and 16 years old who are experiencing these circumstances.

In line with other accounts, the grandparents take on the role of physically co-present caregivers, while the parents in Spain provide multiple dimensions of care at a distance.

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<sup>75</sup> Parents' perception of the so-called home country as proper and safe environment is common in migration literature (Foner, 2009; Thorne et al., 2001; Soto, 1989).

These care arrangements are characterised by being a two-generation household; in other words, the grandparents and grandchildren live together. Other members of the second generation, such as uncles and aunts, are not present. There are two explanations for this. Firstly, as the younger generation (the children) are already adolescents, it is expected that the adult children (the parents' generation) will already be married and have moved in with their own nuclear family. Secondly, in four of these six cases, childcare arrangements involved the grandparents moving into the parents' house (2G) in order to take care of the minors; as such, co-residence with other family members is not expected. Similarly, within this small group, none of the informants co-reside with any cousin but, in contrast to care arrangement patterns described above, the siblings are together in China.

In line with the pattern described above and in previous sections, their living conditions in China are characterised by living in new fully-equipped flats in big residential developments, where the grandparents and grandchildren live together, either from when the children were babies or they had a transitional flat before. While, among the six, five are originally from Qingtian county, four of them moved to the neighbouring city of Lishui. Moreover, four of the six study at boarding schools, where they live from Monday to Friday, switching to the family home on weekends and school holidays. This kind of school is present in both places, Qingtian city and Lishui, offering high-quality private education.

According to research on migrant families, such minors are described as 'left-behind' – quasi-abandoned – children. Nevertheless, the accounts of the informants do not support this perspective. Instead, they seem to be quite satisfied with their living circumstances. Only one of them complained about her situation, as she would like to move to be with her parents. In contrast, in the questionnaire they filled in, where they had to choose between different living arrangements, their preferred option was their own current situation, followed by living in China with their parents and then joining their parents in Spain. Moreover, most of them perceive their living conditions to be better than average for the city they live in, and they think of China as the place where they want to live now and in the future. Although it has not happened yet, at some point, it is expected that they will join their parents. Being aware of the reunification plans, three of them show ambivalence about them and two do not want this to happen. Indeed, one of them has managed to stay longer than his parents had planned. These informants

are not willing to leave their friends and they describe how they like their lives in Qingtian/Lishui and feeling that they cannot be bothered with moving to a new place and learning a new language. The remaining case is the girl mentioned above, who wishes to move to be with her parents but remains in China: her unhappiness is reinforced by the fact that her parents promised her some time ago that she would soon move to be with them, but time goes by and she remains in Lishui. In this case, her accounts support those which emphasise the feeling of abandonment that these children may experience (Dreby, 2007). Moreover, she considers her parents' economic contribution to be insufficient.

Another expectation regarding the children who remain in the family's country of origin while their parents migrate and settle abroad, is that of a failed parent-child relationship, with the children's emotional needs being unfulfilled. While the informants report that they often argue with their parents and do not share their views about schooling commitments or goals, or the balance between study and leisure time, they view their relationship with their parents as being good or very good. These relationships are described in very similar terms to those of today's adolescents who live in Spain with their parents, and they convey a much better image than those given in the young adults' retrospective accounts. Most of them communicate or interact in different ways on a daily basis and their parents visit them at least once or twice per year, staying there for several weeks or even months. They consider this to be frequent enough, with the exception of the aforementioned girl. Moreover, one of them states that it is too much and would like to have more freedom, particularly as they emphasised that the conversations often consisted of the parents checking whether children had carried out all their activities and asking about their school performance (Hoang et al., 2015).

Within this group, co-residing with their parents is not the priority, nor is moving to Europe the ultimate dream. Based on the data collected and my participant observation during the fieldwork in Qingtian and Lishui, there are several circumstances that may shape their preferences:

1. Firstly, their lack of interest in moving to Europe may be framed by the context of a changing view of migration in the area (page. 186).
2. Secondly, based on the responses in questionnaires and interviews, they perceive their socio-economic status as above the average for the area. A clear

sign of this is the fact that they all are students in private schools whose annual fees are very high. With one exception, they link such a status to their parents' migration; as such, they may not perceive it as a negative thing, or at least not completely negative (Olwig, 1999). They live in new, spacious, fully-equipped flats which, in some cases contrast with the living conditions of their parents in Spain, who live in much smaller, older and outdated houses. Supporting Dreby's (2010) research on Mexican migration to the United States, there is a difference between the living conditions of parents and children; moreover, the children's living conditions progressively improve as their parents advance in their migratory projects. As a result, their parents having migrated when they were babies or toddlers, the family's socio-economic status has improved and the material living conditions of today's adolescents who have stayed in China are very good. There has also often been a physical and symbolic movement from Qingtian to Lishui, from a still predominantly rural background to an urban one.

3. Thirdly, their lives in China are organised from a child-centred perspective. On the one hand, their parents' efforts are focused on offering them the best possible education and living conditions. On the other, their grandparents' lives are committed to them. Comparing the tasks performed by minors of the same age who are living in Spain and those living in China is illustrative of this difference. While those who live in Spain take on a broad range of tasks – such as washing dishes, taking care of younger siblings and helping in the family business – those who remain in China are highly inactive at home and when it comes to tasks related to family care, their only duties being those related to school performance. A similar circumstance is described by Pribilsky (2001) regarding migrants' children that stay in Ecuador, who are not expected to contribute to housework, instead the focus is upon their schooling. Pribilsky suggests that such children become class markers, along with the construction of large houses, in which children have their own space, these circumstances also applying to those who stayed in Qingtian. Moreover, while their leisure time may be restricted, they also enjoy the advantage of having pocket money to give them access to fashion and leisure, and expensive imported presents that their parents bring them.

4. The fourth factor is that, despite their parents not being physically co-present on a daily basis, their family life is not disrupted and presence takes additional and complementary forms, through daily virtual interaction and regular face-to-face visits. Moreover, in the households in China, there is cohabitation with siblings, from whom these informants can find intra-generational support.
5. The fifth factor, according to their accounts is that – with one exception – there is an idea of stand-by agency, as they state that, if they so wished, they would live in Europe (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b). This means that they are aware of their transnational family condition, which provides them with a sort of potential power to move abroad, an expected end – that of reunification with their parents – that a proactive willingness on their part could prompt at some specific point.

In summary, this initial overview of the circumstances surrounding the adolescents living in China nowadays provides an insight into their lives and experiences, in which the social mobility resulting from their parents' migration project is key. Furthermore, the path to social reproduction is articulated by investing the available – and growing – resources in the next generation. While this project is built around developing economic and educational capital, social capital<sup>76</sup> – embodied in the caregiving grandparents – is the engine which enables it, by lessening the expenditure on social reproduction (Haller & Landolt, 2005).

### 7.2.7 The children who were not left behind

The adolescents who stay for a longer period in China are not the focus of this dissertation – the sample is small and additional information should be collected – nevertheless, a quick review of their accounts and circumstances has served to at least call into question the validity of certain assumptions, almost dogmas, regarding the lives of so-called left-behind children, who are often described as quasi-abandoned children (Pantea, 2011). When the children who were later reunited with their families in Spain

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<sup>76</sup> Bourdieu (1993) describes social capital as the network of social relations that an individual can mobilise in order to get access to resources of various kinds. He emphasises the modes through which one type of capital is transformed into another.

look back to earlier times, when they lived in China, the resulting picture differs, particularly regarding material conditions and the degree of interaction with parents across borders. Nevertheless, the presumption that children in these circumstances are unfortunate is also questioned. The informants' memories of those times are scarce and their accounts tend to focus on later stages, which is not surprising, as they were quite small when they lived in China. But their memories have common elements – nature, play time and care from extended family members – which build up the image of happy, perhaps idealised, childhoods (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b). In contrast, the subsequent stage, once in Spain, is characterised by facing up to emerging difficulties – feeling their difference – and the perception of unmet needs, such as the lack of family time and parent-child dissonance; in most cases, this coincided with their progressive entrance into a new stage of so-called adolescence and their wide-ranging changes and upheavals. Despite all this, apart from their initial difficulties upon arrival in Spain, which – with three exceptions, two of these being the minors who moved at the ages of 12 and 13, respectively – they described overcoming quickly; the other emerging difficulties and needs are also present in the accounts of the young adults who were raised in Spain. This means that, at least in their retrospective narratives, the specific negative impact of the so-called left-behind experiences is rather limited and can be linked mainly to a later age of reunification. Moreover, these transnational care arrangements did not cause the additional problems commonly related to the so-called left-behind children, such as health issues, psychological problems or learning difficulties (Antman, 2012; Guang et al. 2017; Lei et al. 2017; Perreira & Ornelas, 2011; Suarez & Orozco et al. 2011; Tienda & Haskins, 2011; Tymczuk, 2011). Nevertheless, as will be addressed further, this experience still weighs heavily on their narratives about care and family as young adults.

The intention is not to suggest that the lives of these children of Qingtianese transnational families who stay in China while their parents live in Spain do not involve any hardships. Two people – one adolescent and one young adult – report having persistent negative feelings resulting from their parents' migratory paths and related processes, and they wish to change their situation: one of them wants to move to Europe, and the other one regrets not having stayed in China. The aim here is not insinuate that these care arrangements and further reunification in Spain is a happy, colourful and non-troubling process. On the contrary, it may entail children, parents



and other caregivers facing painful situations. Nevertheless, it is necessary to analyse these situations in context and to take in account not only the negative but also the positive outcomes. Moreover, it is crucial to consider such circumstances in isolation from ideal and normative ideas, which lead people's situations to be automatically positioned on the good/bad scale without further reflection about how families' capabilities and choices are shaped by structural and institutional constraints.

### **7.3 The grown-ups**

In line with previous sections, present and past care is the thread which – either directly or indirectly – drives the analysis of the informants' life courses and experiences; in this section, their expectations about the future are now incorporated, from their current position as young adults. To do so, this section is structured as follows: firstly, it analyses the care arrangements which characterise this stage and the intergenerational relations of this group of young adults and their families. Secondly, the concept of family care through family reproduction is developed. Thirdly, the younger generations taking over generational succession and the expectations of these grown-up children as future parents become the focus. Finally, it refers to the multiple positioning of these young adults as individuals and as members of a Qingtianese transnational family.

#### **7.3.1 Family configuration and intergenerational relationships**

Most of the young adult informants (18-31 years old) are still living at their parents' home in Spain nowadays, these generally being two generation households composed of their parents, their siblings and themselves. For Qingtianese families in Spain, three-generation households include babies or small children. As such, the normal pattern is that of an adult daughter/son moving permanently out of their parents' home once they get married. Later on, upon the arrival of one or several children, their new home can mutate to a three-generation household for some months or years if the grandparents cohabit with them for a time, the structure being flexible. Within the sample, despite not having children, two of the informants have been married for a couple of years, and as result, they have moved to live alone. Nevertheless, one of them moved back in with his parents after being divorced. Co-residence between grown-up children and parents

until the marriage of the former is common for Chinese families. Some of the informants mentioned this pattern of co-residence, to save a lot for future needs, in contrast with the thought of enjoyment in the present that they believe governs Spanish society. Moreover, while non-married couples cohabiting is the norm in Spain, pre-marital co-residence in China is seen to be questionable and may prompt gossip and they parents prefer they don't move out. In contrast with other European countries, Spanish young people tend to move out of their parents' home at a late age, particularly as the youth unemployment rate is very high. As such, the cohabitation pattern which characterises Chinese families does not seem strange in the Spanish context.

Besides marriage, the other circumstances which prompted the disruption of parent-child co-residence were informants' educational and/or professional paths. In line with research on Chinese families, informants' parents prefer their children to study degrees in 'practical' and 'safe' fields (Louie, 2004), considered to be those related to economics, law or engineering, in contrast to humanities or arts. Some informants have reported pressure to follow their parents' preferences. Nevertheless, most of them have made their own choices, including degrees such as graphic design, Asian studies and teaching. Within the sample, three of them moved from their cities (in south and northwest Spain) to Madrid to study. In one case, the informant stayed in an extended-family member's household and returned to the parents' home once he graduated. The other two lived in shared students' flats and, later on, one of them pursued his professional career in Madrid. Often, they combine studies and a waged job<sup>77</sup> or working in the family business on a regular basis, the latter being less common than in the previous stage. While Spain retains its importance as a settlement place, many of the informants have undergone international mobility for educational purposes. Four of them moved to big cities in China (Hangzhou/Shanghai/Beijing) to study Chinese for a period of six months to two years. Moreover, four of them have completed one or two year stays in other European or Asian countries, as degree exchange students or Master's students. For those whose international experience is over, upon their return to Spain, they moved back into their parents' home, although this is not always the case. As the two-generation household in Spain is the norm for today's young adults, they

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<sup>77</sup> Most of the informants living in big cities work as part-time shop assistants in designer outlet shopping areas, where there is a high demand for Chinese-speaking staff, especially in 'La Roca Village' near Barcelona and 'Las Rozas Village' near Madrid.

and their grandparents or great-grandparents do not cohabit. Firstly, the great-grandparents' generation is completely absent from the young adult informants' lives at this stage, as they have all already passed away. The informants being between 18 and 31 years old nowadays, if their great-grandparents were still alive, they would have had exceptionally long lives. While, in most cases, at least one of them was alive during their childhood, this is not the case in the present stage. Secondly, the most common pattern for early migrants and also for the grandparents who experienced childcare-related mobility is moving back to China. Thirdly, three or more generations living in Spain is not synonymous with cohabiting. The clearest example is the Song family in which, at some point, four family generations ended up living in Spain, but split into two different households and displaying a family network model in which interaction among different generations happened on a daily basis.

In the sample, around a quarter of informants do not have any grandparent alive. For the others, their links with their grandparents are very uneven, nevertheless, the earlier involvement of grandparents as childcare-givers results in a higher level of interaction with them. Such is the case of Manuel, Sonia and Wendi, who regularly communicate with their grandparents. Moreover, interaction through the WeChat wall is a plus, in which the exchanges of likes is present, demonstrating a 'caring about' attitude. In this case, the few grandparents who did not learn to use the WeChat app appear to be disadvantaged, as a much lower level of interaction across borders is reported. For a few of them, this is limited to face-to-face interaction when they visit China and calls for festivals or on special occasions. With the exception of one girl, who reports that her relationship with her grandmother is much closer than the one she has with her grandfather and another one for whom the preference is inverted, other informants do not express a preference for one or another grandparent.

Those informants who had their grandparents as caregivers during their childhood still have positive, warm memories of them, as the grandparents are reported to have had a strong physical, emotional and social presence during their childhoods, being the primary figure in their lives:

Sonia: My grandma is like a mother to me. I was brought up with them.

Dora: I do sometimes say to my mother: I love grandma more than

you [*laughs*]. No, I tell my mother more things, but I feel more affectionate towards my grandma.

This strong physical and emotional presence contrasts sharply with the emptiness and missing qualities which often characterise their relationship with their parents, which seems to be a more complicated one. While some informants describe being very unsatisfied with it, most of them reported that it could be better. Only two of them refer to their relationship with their parents as very good. In both cases, the mother played a key role in their childcare routines and both had daily interaction with their parents. In general terms, mothers are depicted as more understanding and open-minded than fathers, who are often linked to adjectives such as authoritarian or traditional:

Manuel: Well, my current relationship with my parents [...] with my mother, it's quite close, my mother more or less knows, it's a lot closer, she knows what I like, what I want to do [...] with my father, it's a lot colder, also because of his personality. We've never been about getting along well, my father has a very strong personality.

Feifei: Mothers are usually more open and they [the fathers] are more traditional.

In the informants' accounts, references to the 'traditional' are linked to China. A couple of them referred to their mother's better Spanish language skills – a widespread phenomenon, based on adolescents' questionnaire responses – which, from their point of view, enable them to have more interaction with non-ethnic Chinese people and to be more receptive to influences from Spanish society, in contrast with fathers' reluctance to do so. This thought fits with the aforementioned preference pattern, by which females of the parents' and grandparents' generation stay in Spain, in contrast to their husbands, who prefer to move back to China.

Most of them use the Qingtianhua language and, to a lesser extent, Mandarin to communicate with their parents<sup>78</sup>, while Spanish is the language used to interact among

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<sup>78</sup> For the group of today's adolescents, the proportions are inverted, as most of them speak Mandarin with their parents. Moreover, albeit only in a minority, the Spanish language is also reported to be used in occasional parent-child – mainly mother-child – communication. The percentage of families in which the grandparents initiated the

siblings. Despite informants' use of Qingtianhua or Mandarin in the family home, some of the informants report lacking the vocabulary and, less often, the fluency to express themselves in those languages. In contrast, the level of Spanish of their parents is often not enough to maintain a normal conversation, which must result in occasional misunderstandings; nevertheless, this is not the norm and communication problems between the parents' and children's generations are not attributed to differential language skills but to their socialisation in China or Spain, respectively.

While their general perception is that their parents are very demanding and inflexible, four of the informants have perceived a growing flexibility in their parents' attitudes in recent years, these being more willing to understand their point of view and choices and less strict. They are perceived to be more relaxed in their relationship with them, but also about their business-related commitments, enabling them to go to China more often. Similar reflections have been shared in the Facebook group analysed in this research. While this is not a universal perception among the informants, this progressive flexibility can be framed within the context of their – interlinked – migratory, family and life cycles. As they have been settled in Spain for many years, they tend to have a stable economic situation and fewer difficulties. Moreover, the task that is perceived as most important for the parents – providing their children with the tools and resources they need to have good future prospects – is done. As such, they can re-balance their priorities in a new life stage, with more leisure and less duties and responsibilities, at least until they take on their expected role as grandparents (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b). In the case of the increasingly-relaxed attitudes towards productive commitments, the informants' perception results from objective facts: before their parents did not close the business or go on holiday and now, they do (although those facts must be understood in the context of their migration and life courses). Nevertheless, regarding their perception of their parents as being more understanding and less strict, this shift may also be related to their own life course (that of the young adults). As time goes by, they mature, get older and face up to new life circumstances, which may help them to empathise with their parents.

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migration is higher for the adolescent group than for the young adult one, meaning that the generation corresponding to the adolescents' parents has spent more years in Spain, on occasions being partially socialised there, and as a result, they are fluent in Spanish.

### 7.3.2 The coming generations:

#### 7.3.2.1 *Family reproduction*

Family and its functioning through nets of solidarity and reciprocity is key in the lives of the various individuals belonging to Qingtianese transnational families. Family care is understood as a must and family reproduction takes part in the family care cycle and in this idea of proper family functioning. As such, marriage and having children are understood more as a family matter than as an individual's or couple's project, at least for the parents and older generations. All the informants have referred to their parents' preferences and pressure – to different degrees – regarding family continuity. Some of them refer to their families' preferences linked to those present in Chinese society. Firstly, the social and economic status of the young adult's future partner becomes an asset, or sometimes an issue. Secondly, there is a general preference for ethnically Chinese partners, as they are perceived as being culturally compatible, emphasising the importance of marrying a co-ethnic (Foner & Dreby, 2011; Kibria, 1997). The language and the ability to communicate with family members is particularly important:

Manuel: No [...] my father would perhaps take it badly, I think. They always want [...] for example, my mother wouldn't mind, but she'd like, she'd prefer that it was a Chinese girl. I've talked about that with my mother and she's told me that it would always be better for me, that it's different.

Dora: My father said no, eh? No! But my mother: you [go with] what comes up for you. You know? More [...] but also because of the language. He says, he says: ahh, the thing is that then you'll both be speaking and I'll seem like an idiot! And I say: dad, it really doesn't matter if I look for a Spanish guy or a foreigner, the most important thing [is] that he's going to speak Chinese. He's going to speak perfect Chinese!

The proactivity of their parents in finding the right partner for them is uneven. Nevertheless, all the informants mentioned being offered help from their parents to meet boys or girls who they consider appropriate for a relationship with them. Moreover, the matchmaking role extends beyond the parents to incorporate other

members of the parents' generations or older people (mainly women) and, to a lesser extent and generally with the young person in question's agreement, also siblings and cousins. Once again, the role of the WeChat app is salient, with contact cards circulating across borders. Such a circulation of possible future partners' WeChat contacts is expected to take place not only within Spain or China, but other countries as well. More important than the spatial setting are the different family members or friends who act as matchmakers, by recommending possible partners. For example, it may be that a brother in Qingtian recommends the son of his friend in Italy to his sister in Spain, as a possible partner.

Some parents prefer other young adults raised in Spain or Europe, who are seen as better suited to their grown-up offspring, while others prefer '*chinos-chinos*' (Chinese-Chinese) partners. The latter is a common expression used by the informants to refer to those people who have been raised and socialised in China:

Manuel: They'd prefer her to be a Chinese girl who has been brought up in Spain as well or in Europe. My father [...] would prefer that as well. For her to be *chiñola*<sup>79</sup>, I should say.

Eva: They said to me 'Chinese, eh? Chinese'. I think I also prefer [a] Chinese guy. If it happens, it happens, but yes, Chinese. First option, Chinese. [A] Chinese guy like me. Not [so far as] a Chinese-Chinese guy, [I want] us to have a little in common.

The willingness to accept or to consider parental support in finding a partner is similarly uneven. One of the informants is highly receptive of their parent's help, having met several men that her mother suggested for her. Some of them have sometimes accepted getting in touch with people or meeting them face-to-face, but without the specific intention of finding a partner: combining fulfilling their parents' wishes and the opportunity to meet peers in similar circumstances.

Manuel: Bah, for example, even in Madrid, my mother would say: I have a friend who is studying, a friend's daughter who is studying in

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<sup>79</sup> *Chiñol/Chiñola* refers to a (male/female) descendant of Chinese migrants who has been socialised in Spain. For further information about this term, see: Annex 1, page 362.

Madrid, so hey, you help her, you get to know her and if you like her, you have a relationship and if not, it's okay, like a friend.

Other informants only accept carrying out the expected formalities, and they rely on their shared lack of interest in taking it further and meeting. But, in most cases, they report avoiding taking up their parent's suggestions, declining to meet people and ignoring WeChat contact cards that their parents send them in order to prevent them from continuing with this. During the fieldwork, some parents or other family members suggested a person to me as a possible partner several times, once they even prepared me a surprise blind date. Despite my status as a foreigner and a woman over 30 years old, it seemed that I was suitable as a girlfriend or wife in certain circumstances, such as for men in their late 30s or 40s who were still single or divorced. But once a father visiting Qingtian, who I met while having breakfast in my hotel, insisted on giving his son my WeChat contact so that he – who was aged twenty-something and was studying Chinese in Hangzhou at that time – could contact me. Even though I repeatedly insisted that I was not interested in finding a partner, he repeatedly insisted that I should meet his son, who would soon contact me. Anyway, I never received a message or WeChat contact from his grown-up son, despite his father's enthusiasm. Some young adult reported that their visits to China served their parents to introduce them to people who they considered suitable to form part of the family. In Qingtian, their ability to escape from these meetings is considerably reduced. While mothers are the ones in charge of the at-a-distance management of partner finding, the fathers are usually the ones who set up face-to-face encounters in China.

All informants refer to their parents' concern about their future partners and the mothers/fathers of their grandchildren, and how this is translated into different – more or less invasive – strategies and behaviour. Nevertheless, they also acknowledge that if they lived in China instead of Spain, the pressure would be greater, as is the case for their cousins living in Qingtian, which is something that has been highlighted by several informants. Moreover, a couple of them refer to themselves as being lucky, as they perceive their parents to be understanding and open-minded, their happiness being their parents' main aim and, as such, the ethnicity or socio-economic status of their future partners is secondary. The emphasis in their accounts of their perceived luckiness is



important, as they suggest that they are exceptions among their Chinese friends, in this respect.

Despite all the complaints and misunderstandings, these parents' search for their grown-up offspring's perfect partner is a way of taking care of the various family members, including their children, grandchildren and themselves. Overall, it is a kind of family care, which aims to secure what they perceive to be the best conditions for family continuity and social approval. This is despite the fact that this often clashes with young adults' less pragmatic conceptions of marriage and it challenges these families' intergenerational functioning. Some informants frame and rationalise their parents' behaviour within a broader context, in which parents themselves are under pressure to live up to social and cultural standards.

Manuel: [his cousin] is really fed up with this, but the thing is that he is under pressure, his father and his mother are also under pressure, because they're in the town and everyone [is] asking, 'when is your daughter going to get married?' The thing is that [...] it's a bit bad for the parents.

The informants' own preferences are highly heterogeneous but, in interviews, informal talks and social media chats they often refer to someone like them ("*que sea como yo*"), meaning other descendants of Chinese migrants, who have been socialised in Spain or another European country, as being the most easily suitable partner. They posit a clear identity boundary: people who are like me, and people who are not. Nevertheless, all of them think about the person, and not her/his ethnic condition, as key:

Zan: I like all [girls], what's important is that there is love.

Wendi: It's not that I close myself off to one thing or the other. I was with a Spanish guy, and now I'm with a Chinese one.

In contrast, most of them agree that there is a high degree of incompatibility between them and a Chinese-Chinese person, or someone who has been socialised in China. Nevertheless, a common, but not universal pattern is thinking that ethnically Chinese people are more willing to accept family responsibilities than the Spanish, who are often described as being more immature. This immaturity is particularly highlighted by the

two informants who moved to Spain as adolescents. Nevertheless, all of them have had at least one romantic relationship with a Spanish person, and two, both of whom are males, have never had an ethnically Chinese partner.

Mothers, again, are described as more understanding, and thus willing to accept a non-Chinese partner. In contrast, fathers have been reported even to have avoided talking to their son or daughter's partner and/or to completely ignore them. Others, as time passed by, partially gave into their adult children's choices. Nevertheless, within the sample, such relationships took place mainly at a younger age and as such were perceived as temporary, not linked to marriage or reproduction. The three informants – all male – who got married (two) or who are engaged (one) each present a different kind of choice of partner. The first one married a Spanish girl, the second one married a girl born in Qingtian and partially raised in Spain, and the last one – one of the informants who arrived in Spain as an adolescent – is going to marry a girl who was born and socialised in Qingtian and who moved to Spain as a grown-up. While the first one continued with his plans despite his family's opposition, the other two partners satisfy their parents' expectations. Parental approval is described as important by all informants but, for most of them, it is not seen as an unavoidable barrier for pursuing their relationship projects, as the first of these cases exemplifies.

In line with trends in China, informants' families would like their adult children to get married at a young age<sup>80</sup>:

Dandan: I've now been with a Chinese guy for three years and his parents always, always ask us when we're going to get married and, on my family's side, it's mainly my grandparents who want me to get married soon and they're there, [bringing up] the topic.

The insistence on asking about when they will have a partner, when they will marry or when they will have children, is recurrent. Nevertheless, in most cases, the parents prioritise their grown-up offspring's studies:

Miguel: A bit, ah, it's not that I'm under pressure, I mean, the thing is that my parents also think: you're studying. They understand that

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<sup>80</sup> That is, a young age compared to the average in Spain. In 2017, the average age for marriage in Spain was 35 for women and 37.8 for men (The Spanish Statistical Office [INE, *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*], 2018)

when you're studying, people usually get married afterwards; if I weren't studying and I were working, maybe they'd be thinking that I should start looking for a girlfriend or [...] for me to get married at around 30, there is a bit more pressure, yes, but well, being in Spain, there's not so much pressure.

In contrast, the pursuit of a professional career after graduating is not always perceived as the priority, resulting in more pressure for girls, based on the preference for giving birth at an early age.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, there is pressure when pursuing further studies extends over many years and, as a result, comes into conflict with reproductive demands. While parents I talked to understand that timescales in Spain are different and that delaying the first birth a bit in order to pursue educational goals or a career is positive for their grown-up offspring, the social barrier of the 30s for women is significant. Having their first child is expected to occur before this period, otherwise leading to a lot of pressure and worries, within and across borders. This mismatch between parents' expectations and grown-up offspring's choices, and the compromises in between, is also present regarding pregnancy and parenting styles. As young adults, the informants in this sample did not have children yet, but the experience of becoming parents is a theme which has been recurrently present on the Facebook group studied. The posts are mainly written and commented on by women, who share their experiences as mothers, often referring to generational mismatches in expectations, which are particularly salient in the case of the confinement period after birth and these women's ambivalence towards Chinese pregnancy customs.

### 7.3.2.2 *Generational succession*

Their status as adults puts them in the position of future parents, as having children and continuing the family line is considered a must in the Chinese culture-system. Indeed, all the informants in the sample plan to have children. With respect to alternative paths, the post of a young adult descendant of migrants<sup>82</sup> serves as an example:

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<sup>81</sup> An early age compared to the average in Spain. In 2017, the average age for women's first birth in Spain (for all nationalities) was 30.9 years old, being 31.4 for Spanish women and 27.7 for foreign women. (INE, 2018)

<sup>82</sup> For further information on this website, see: Annex 1, page.369.

“小姨夫 [*Xiao yifu*], the husband of my mother’s younger sister, enthusiastic about my return and, above all, about my surprising fluency in the language, was curious about me, about this experiment with a Wenzhounese girl brought up on the other side of the ocean, and he asked me how I imagined the family dinner table in 30 years’ time. ‘It will be a shame if I can’t communicate with your children’. My automatic thought was that there’s a fundamental error: maybe I won’t have children.” (Chen, 2018, July 14).

Paloma Chen’s post transmits the essence of her positioning as a migrants' descendant and family member raised outside of China. On the one hand, as an individual and as a person who has been socialised in Spain, she posits not having children as a possible option and, moreover, as her own choice. On the other, as member of a Chinese family, that possibility is not even contemplated by her uncle, and instead he thinks of her presumed motherhood as a fact.<sup>83</sup>

Regarding informants’ accounts about their future role as parents, they recall their own early experiences as children, with the following themes emerging as essential:

- Their parents’ balance of the productive/reproductive spheres
- Their parents’ role as main childcare-givers
- The quality of the parent-child relationship
- And, to a lesser extent, cultivating children’s Chinese language skills

#### 7.3.2.2.1 Family-work balance

The prioritising of productive demands over reproductive ones is present in all informants’ accounts. Parents focusing their life upon productive work is perceived as a starting point for an unsatisfactory parent-child relationship, as it prevents them from having family time together. As such, expressions such as “I could barely see my

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<sup>83</sup> While women choosing not to have children in China is not socially conceived of as an option, for Chinese women in Singapore, where 75% of the population is ethnically Chinese, voluntary childlessness is a growing trend, driving the Singaporean government to implement incentives to give birth (Li & Kwok-bun 2013).

parents” (*apenas veía a mis padres*), or “they only thought about work” (*sólo pensaban en el trabajo*) are frequently used by the informants to illustrate their childhoods. There are cases such as that of Feifei, who remembers that, during her childhood, she did not have interaction with her parents on a daily basis. Her grandparents performed the main caregiver roles and the three family generations lived under the same roof, but it was too late when her parents came back home from the restaurant to see them. For Jiaolong, his parents retained the main caregiver role and physical co-presence took place on a daily basis, but similarly, they did not have family time together. He spent a lot of time at the family restaurant where he played and did homework, nevertheless, his parents were too busy and the interaction between them was scarce. The same perception about work monopolising her parents’ lives is shared in the blog of a Qingtianese migrants’ descendant who writes:

“Coming from different parts of China, Madrid was the city in which my parents' paths converged. A few years later, my brother was born and later on, so was I. Like most Chinese people who migrate, work takes up most of the hours in their day: since my parents created their own business 26 years ago, they have closed it on about 10 days up to now, what’s more, with quite long opening hours” (*Acerca del pingfeng*, n/d [‘On the other side of the folding screen’ blog].<sup>84</sup>

The apparently homogeneous and perennial condition of their parents as being very busy results in specific linked thoughts. For example, Jiaolong reports that, as his parents were always working, he did not even know that the Chinese New Year existed until he grew up, as they did not have time to celebrate it. Often, the informants present their parents’ extensive work commitments as the result of prioritising the wrong things, with their parents privileging the material over the emotional:

Jiaolong: It’s like they only think about earning money and for us to be able to study and get ahead and they forgot that that isn’t everything.

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<sup>84</sup> Information about the blog can be found in Annex 1, page 367.

Feifei: In my early childhood my parents were always busy and they weren't very involved with me.

In the below image (Ill.12), created by a Chinese migrants' descendant in Spain,<sup>85</sup> the author draws the family's business (top) in which a baby is present and next, she describes 'Deivid' (below), a Spanish friend of the family who says: "how can it be that you don't like the bazaar, if you have been raised behind the counter!" None of the informants want to take over the family business and they express being tired of spending time and working there, having different work expectations compared to their parents' lives. That is, having a family and a social life when the working schedule ends. They all express their preference for waged work related to their educational background or for developing their own entrepreneurial projects. Even the two informants who do not have a university degree, for whom more attachment to the family business might be expected, express such expectations. One runs his own business, albeit based on his parents' financial capital; and the other works in a restaurant owned by Chinese people who do not belong to his family.

Illustration 12: Comic strip of 'Crónicas Euroorientales' [Eurooriental chronicles] (2015).



Source: Crónicas Euroorientales (2015, October 3) Facebook page.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup> For further information, see: Annex 1, page 366.

<sup>86</sup> Retrieved from:

<https://www.facebook.com/cronicas.euroorientales/photos/a.936059066472732/942240312521274/?type=3&theater>

As the previous chapter illustrates, the work regime is key in shaping childcare arrangements within Qingtianese transnational families, the parents' self-employed status being a determining factor:

Iago: What I'm sure about is that I don't want to have my parents' life. To have a 40-hours job like everyone, without weekends, without holidays, I mean, having holidays, is what I'm saying, and for my child to see their father every day like in any other family.

Yuyan: Look, how it was before, not anymore, when I have a child I'll take [maternity] leave and I'll look after it myself, even if [just] the first months and then I'll have to cope with it with my partner.

The informants often highlight the importance of having family time and the role of parents as the children's main caregivers, in what they consider to be a 'normal family'. As such, in their accounts they incorporate the idea of maternity leave, non-working weekends and other benefits or circumstances which are associated with professional waged work, and believe that the difficulties come with the work schedules of their parents' generation. The greatest adjustments are expected to occur on the mother's side as, within the sample, there is a general shared idea of the mother's presence being irreplaceable, in contrast to a more flexible role for fathers, particularly during the child's first years. Several informants – both male and female – expressed their wish for a mother to be able to leave her work, through unpaid leave or simply leaving her position, in order to be side-by-side and co-present in their child's life every day until school age. The construction of motherhood in their narratives mirrors the bourgeois ideal, based on the cult of domesticity (Fisher & Tronto, 1990), in which the private realm of the home is posited as the place for women to fulfil their caring nature, mothering implying physical co-presence. This is an ideal which sanctions the model of their own mothers as dysfunctional, as it does many other women who lack the resources to fulfil “the white, middle-class standard of feminine caring about” (Fisher & Tronto, 1990, p.42), and/or those who have a different conceptualisation of motherhood.

Nevertheless, all women within the sample plan to return to their professional activity after some months or years. Only one male suggested the possibility of the mother

staying out of the paid labour market for longer. Nevertheless, the shared idea is that both members of the couple take on the daily caregiving responsibilities to the same degree, with the exception of a more salient role for the mother when the child is still a baby. If expectations match the future reality, the role of men as care workers will help to rebalance the gendered care burdens shouldered by women in these families.

#### 7.3.2.2.2 Parents as children's caregivers

The young adults in the sample highlight the importance of parents' physical presence on a daily basis, by asserting their role as children's main caregivers and rejecting childcare arrangements which imply a long-term spatial separation of the parents and the children, such that of transnational grandparenting in China or informal child circulation in Spain. They state that either themselves, their partner or both will take on the role of their children's main caregiver. Their view of the main caregivers being parents' essential and natural role is highlighted by Xingfu, a 27-year-old male who was raised by his grandparents in China between one and six years old, who stated:

Xingfu: man, as I'm having them, I'll care for them myself!

Moreover, this idea is present in other informants' accounts when they talk about different strategies that their parents used to cope with their childcare needs during their childhood:

Daquan: Well [...] the thing is that it's a bit strange, in my first year my parents didn't look after me, a Spanish couple looked after me because they couldn't.

Manuel: Look, it's a bit strange because my cousin wasn't brought up with my aunt and uncle. When she was little, a Spanish family looked after her and then she almost stayed there. And it's a shame, she doesn't speak Chinese or anything.

Mario: I don't know if you know this, but in Chinese families we have the custom of sending the children to China, because the parents can't look after them here.



In the above quotes, the childcare arrangements – either in Spain or China, within or outside the family realm – which involve physical separation between the parents and the children are presented as strange or out of the ordinary, and the tone they used expressed a certain discomfort and a need to justify their families' choices. In their accounts, the idea of a normative childhood being linked to physical co-presence and to childcare as a parental responsibility, related to the nuclear family form, is present. Moreover, in the first and third quote, the informants state that the reason for choosing such care arrangements is that parents were not able to take care of the children, without any reference to at-a-distance care. As such, care is equated to hands-on care, or the type of care which requires physical co-presence.

As the previous section suggested, the informants seek to assert their future role as parents and children's main caregivers through adjusting the balance between productive and reproductive demands, prioritising the latter. Nevertheless, most think that, in the children's first years, they may need additional help to cope with childcare. This might include help with picking the children up from the school or accompanying them to extracurricular activities if their work ends later, or preparing meals. Flexible work arrangements in Spain are still insufficient, and schedules are often fixed, and as such impossible to adapt to family care responsibilities. Moreover, institutional support is scarce and care for different family members often remains a family responsibility. As such, incorporating additional caregivers is something that some of them consider likely to be unavoidable. In the sample, only two state that they prefer to rely on professional caregivers, while the others think of their parents or parents-in-law as an alternative, albeit without cohabiting. Nevertheless, all of them also consider early or late enrolment in nursery school as positive for a child's socialisation. Having been socialised in Spain, their willingness to use formal childcare services is greater than that of their parents. Moreover, they have more awareness about the available options and more capacity to deal with them, in contrast to their parents, whose lack of language skills and familiarity with how such institutions work curtailed their access. Nevertheless, two informants also referred to the difficulties in getting a place in a public nursery school in some areas and the high fees for the private ones, making grandparenting not only an alternative, but maybe the only one.

Trust and family are two words that were continually repeated by the informants when asked about their reasons for choosing their parents or parents-in-law as childcare-

givers: the same reasons given by the parents' generation. Moreover, the fee-free services that they provide are seen as convenient – sometimes necessary – for family functioning. Nevertheless, they believe that the role of the grandparents should not invade the territory of what they consider parents' duties and responsibilities. The childcare model of which informants think is quite similar to that termed 'intergenerational parental coalition' by Goh and Kuzinsky<sup>87</sup> (Goh, 2013; Goh & Kuczynski, 2014, 2010). Such a coalition implies the involvement of both generations, parents and grandparents, in the day-to-day care of children. Nevertheless, the parents are posited as the managers of the child-raising project, while the grandparents take on the domestic work and hands-on care. Furthermore, not all informants take the future grandparents' help for granted or want to ask for it; in both cases, the need to rest after a life of hard work is expressed:

Manuel: I'd like to bring them up myself. Myself. Me, my wife or with my girlfriend [...] The truth is I don't, I prefer that [...] I don't want to bother them, if they really want to come and help, fine, but it depends on whether they really want to lend a hand. It's fine for them to come, but I, I wanted them to have their life and for me [to have] my life. [I want] them to enjoy, I guess, their retirement and if they want to come and help me, okay, if they want to, but I prefer, I'd prefer not to bother them.

Dandan: I wouldn't do it because I think my parents did that because they had no other choice, but I don't think they want to do that either, I think what they want is to enjoy their retirement at last.

From the above quotes, several points can be made. Firstly, the informants refer to their wish to incorporate the grandparents (their parents or parents-in-law) as caregivers only

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<sup>87</sup> This perspective "considers grandparents and parents as integral partners in raising children" (Goh & Kuczynski, 2014, p.281), while highlighting children's agency (Goh, 2013; Goh & Kuczynski, 2010). Xiao (2016) focuses on the intergenerational parenting coalition and highlights the role of mothers as "powerful 'managers of the child rearing project'" (Xiao, 2016, p.1), being in charge of planning children's education, activities, and their intellectual and social development. In contrast, the role of grandparents is that of housekeepers who lack authority and power within the family. This challenges the former pattern of 'mothers feed, fathers teach' (Xiao 2016) in which mothers were relegated to biophysical care and fathers were in charge of sociocultural reproduction (Xiao, 2016). In other words, grandparents are taking over the tasks that were previously performed by mothers, and the mothers hold an increased status by taking on the prior role of fathers, who in this coalition retain the role of breadwinner and are involved in relevant decision-making but not in children's daily lives, shifting from an authoritarian to a friend-like style of parenting. However, Xiao (2016) argues that this situation cannot be taken for granted and instead results from intra-family power bargains.

if they desire to do so, without considering that maybe they will have no alternative but to rely on them to meet childcare demands. Secondly, their accounts may hide additional preferences, such as not wanting their parents to interfere in their children's daily care, as it may be a means to control them. While the only two informants who prefer professional caregivers to the grandparents describe their preference for managing on their own, this preference could be shared by other informants who nevertheless do not express it openly, as it entails breaking the family care cycle which is key in the Chinese-culture system. In any case, the idea of parents finally being freed from work burdens, including care work, and resting is present. Nevertheless, the degree of involvement – regular or occasional – may vary greatly among families. Multigenerational in-situ care arrangements, which do not necessarily imply cohabitation, were the minority in previous decades, as Chinese migration to Spain is quite recent. Nevertheless, it is not unusual nowadays. The families in which the grown-up offspring who have been socialised in Spain and have recently become parents reflect this trend.

Finally, based on their present-day accounts, they do not consider childcare a shared responsibility; instead, parents are described as having the sole and final responsibility for their children, additional caregivers being conceptualised as helpers. As such, and in contrast with the perspective followed in this dissertation – based on local conceptions of family and childcare in Qingtian – the informants think about long-term care arrangements within and outside the extended family in which children are not physically co-present with parents as a form of delegating care. Thus, there is an ongoing change, not only in these families' care arrangements patterns – resulting in different forms or spatial configurations – but also in what family means for these young adult descendants of migrants, in comparison to their ascendant kin. The former articulate their discourses about parenthood and parenting based on the hegemonic notions of family and childhood which are normative in Spain.

### 7.3.2.2.3 The quality of parent-child relationships

Parents' busy condition and the various care arrangements in which parents do not take on the main caregiver role, are posited by the informants as being some of the causes of an unsatisfactory parent-child relationship, as both result in a general absence of family time together. For example, Jiaolong has not had much of a relationship with his father and they only communicate for practical or instrumental reasons:

Jiaolong: The relationship with my father isn't good and with my mother it is, more or less. With my father, when I talk to him, it's because I need to ask him for something.

He considers the childcare arrangements and strategies chosen by his parents to be the cause of their bad relationship. During his early childhood he lived in Qingtian with his grandparents and upon his return to Spain, his grandmother took on the main caregiver role, combining it with extensive working hours in the family business. As a result, he has not had much interaction with his father. Moreover, nor is his relationship with his mother reported to be satisfactory. As the adolescence-focused section posited, these young adults consider their generational differences also to be based on their differential socialisation. That is, on the prevalence of Chinese values and ways of acting and thinking in their parents, in contrast to their own Spanish orientation:

Wendi: For example, I go to hug my mother and she thinks that it's strange! Like, she pushes me [away], but it's because I'm very demonstrative and they aren't like that; she always tells me that I'm a real pain, that I don't stop.

Regarding the future role of these young adults as parents, they highlight the need to build a closer and more understanding relationship with their children, with less vertical hierarchies and more friendship. The mix between past experiences and future expectations is again common in their accounts:

Manuel: [My father] was very strict. He's got a very bad temper, he gets angry about everything, he tells me off a lot and, I don't know, I haven't liked the relationship with my father. And I, for example, I

would try to improve it [with] my children, my future sons and daughters. He has a very bad character and everyone says it, it's something that [...] and closeness [...] when I was little, the Spanish family does have more closeness, more affection, more hugs, more kisses. My parents [...] but it's different. [When it comes to] loving me, my parents love me a lot, but I guess they didn't show it, they didn't show it with affection and kisses.

Zan: With my children? What I want is for them to be happy, for them not to have that pressure. Although some pressure is good, but [I want them] to be able to make mistakes and carry on and everything's okay, not to be scared of mistaking mistakes or [have] that pressure.

While they miss having a closer and more horizontal relationship with their parents, some of them relativize their attitudes and behaviour by framing them within the Chinese social and cultural context. As such, family is perceived as a hierarchical institution and parents as part of a chain which enables the continuity of those attitudes and behaviour through their reproduction, in which parents are “unable to give what they didn't receive” (*incapaces de dar lo que no recibieron*). In most cases, they say that, despite not agreeing with their parents' parenting strategies and/or choices, they are aware of the huge effort their parents made and their struggles to give them the best life and future prospects they could. That is, they do not disagree with the content, but the form. This idea is recurrently present in public profiles and cultural expressions of Chinese migrants' descendants in Spain and also in my informants' accounts:

Eva: And then I don't share anything either, nor do they tell me anything, [it's] all very cold. I don't know why now we're [...] I think that because when you get [more] mature, then you know what they feel for you, so you know why they did it.

This progressive awareness and the resulting change of perspective was the focus of several posts of the blog<sup>88</sup> run by Wai Zhou Lin, a psychologist and Chinese migrants' descendant. In the first one, entitled “Understanding our parents, a step towards our

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<sup>88</sup> For further information about this blog, see: Annex 1, page 369.

wellbeing” (“*Comprender a nuestros padres, un paso hacia nuestro bienestar*”), the following reflections can be found:

“It took me time to understand that my parents do love me, they did it in their own way, how they knew and were able to. By using what life had taught and provided them. But it took me time to realise, I couldn't see it until we were separated, due to my studies. Nevertheless, when I was finally able to see it, a part of me found peace with them, and overall with myself” (Lin, 2015, December 1).

In the second post, entitled “Does my father love me?” (“*¿Mi padre me quiere?*”) she wrote the following:

“I always thought that my father didn't care about my presents or cheap little gifts, due to how he reacted to them each year I tried this. I understood that the reason was that people who come from where he comes from value things in a different way. That's why one year I stopped calling him to say happy Father's Day. But one day I visited him, my father commented to me, in a nice way, that I didn't call him on Father's Day anymore. It was his own way of expressing to me that he valued those calls. In that moment I realised how much he valued receiving a simple call from his daughter on such a special day.” (Lin, 2016, March 19).

In her later reflections she adds:

“It is understandable that you don't feel very loved because of their behaviour. Nevertheless, there is not one, standard way of showing love.” (Lin, 2016, March 19).

A similar reasoning was made in a Facebook group post, linked to an article, entitled ‘Why Chinese parents don't say I love you’ (Chung, 2014). The article focused on different ways Chinese parents show their love to their children, which do not involve direct verbalisation or bodily contact. As mentioned earlier, emotions and – or at least – their expressions are also cultural constructions (Gardner, 2012).

#### 7.3.2.2.4 Cultivating children's language skills

While less emphasis is placed on it than the issues described above, a theme that arises in most – but not all – of these young adults' accounts when talking about their future role as parents, is that of providing their children with good Chinese language skills. Again, their own past experiences and their expectations converge in their discourse. That is, they share a common regret about not being able to talk, read and write properly in Mandarin, and they seek to repair this failure in the next generation. Despite their parents' aims for them to be native Chinese speakers, this wish is far from having been made reality. The parents of almost all the informants provided them with Chinese language courses in Spain, and for those who did not join these courses, it was because the cities/towns where they lived were too small and this option was not available in previous decades. For most of those who did not study Chinese in Spain, their parents paid for a Mandarin course in China for them when they were adults. In all cases, the parents' intention was there, but Chinese language learning requires extensive and continued dedication. As a result, the language skills of those who were partially raised in China are better than those who were raised in Spain. The only two who moved to Spain as adolescents are the ones who have a native level. Regarding the young adults' wish to raise children who are able to speak proper Chinese, they justify this with reference to their desire to preserve their culture, to link their offspring to their roots and the practical benefits of learning a language which is growing in importance worldwide:

Mario: I'd like them to learn Chinese well, for them to do what I haven't been able to do.

Zan: Mandarin, I'd teach [my child] Mandarin. [It's] practical because I see it as essential, also a little to not lose [touch with] their roots.

Wendi: I'd like my husband to speak *putonghua*<sup>89</sup> well, that way he'd teach them. Because if we speak Spanish, it'll be lost in the end, and as I don't speak it very well. Actually, I'd like to get the HSK [Chinese Proficiency Test] too, but I think now it's going to be difficult.

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<sup>89</sup> Standard Mandarin.

Thus, they share the idea of learning Mandarin, while their wish to teach them Qingtianhua is only present for three of them, two of those being the two males who arrived in Spain as adolescents.

#### 7.3.2.2.0 Summing up: The rectifiable future

Their narratives about their future motherhood and fatherhood are built upon their own past experiences, as children of Qingtianese transnational families. The constant presence of this past/future dichotomy is easily visible in the previous sections, which point to different ways of being, doing and thinking, in comparison to their parents, their socialisation – in China or Spain, respectively – being key. Moreover, this opposition is structured around a critical dimension, which is based on a moral-temporal dichotomy: the thoughts, attitudes and practices of their parents are erroneous and obsolete; while their own relate to a corrective or rectifiable future (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b). Nevertheless, as they continue to advance along their life courses and within the family cycle; that is, progressing from their role of children to that of parents, their relationship with their parents may change (Foner & Dreby, 2011), as may their ideas, plans and points of view about care and family. Dreby (2010) suggests that progressively taking on new family and social roles – such as their positioning as adults through work in the labour market or maternity/paternity – may cause people to reconsider previous experiences and understand decisions in a specific context. Similarly, Phoenix and Seu (2013) offered an insight into how becoming mothers served their informants – in their fifties at the time of the interview – to partially repair their relationship with their natal mothers (pp.313). Following these examples, by becoming mothers/fathers, the informants may have a closer experience to that of their own parents, which could prompt a growing understanding about their own parents' decisions and circumstances. Nevertheless, it is also possible that their moral sanctioning will become even stronger.

Finally, despite the generational opposition between the young adults and their parents, and the resulting differences between them, both generations share a common aim: the best possible care and future prospects for their children, it being the circumstances rather than the aims which are different (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b). On the one hand, their parents arrived in Spain and faced the challenge of starting a life in a completely new social context, working very hard for decades to achieve economic



stability and social mobility. During this period, productive demands entered into conflict with reproductive ones, and they had to make the best childcare choice – as understood now and inter-generationally – in the present and for the future. This is the choice which has been often translated in the informants' accounts as a misguided prioritisation of their material needs over the emotional ones. Despite all this, due to their parents' efforts, these young adults have a very different lifestyle. Firstly, in all cases, the informants' families have improved their socio-economic status, based on their migration project. Secondly, the informants have been socialised in Spain and, despite the fact that they face difficulties related to their ethnic background, such as xenophobic attitudes towards them, in their daily lives they do not face such a big challenge as their parents did when they arrived in Spain. Most of them are also familiar with the Chinese context and language, which offer them additional opportunities and resources. The informants' experiences of mobility as adults are prompted by educational or high-quality professional opportunities, these being closer to those open to a highly mobile elite than their parents' experiences. Moreover, their social and family positioning gives them a good degree of potential to achieve childcare demands and ideals, through in-situ care arrangements in which daily physical interaction between parents and child prevails. Firstly, their awareness of and ability to deal with the formal childcare sector is a plus. And secondly, being the second family generation settled in Spain, thinking about grandparents as in-situ helpers there is feasible.

Regarding their expectations about a better balance between the productive and reproductive spheres, which is key in their articulation of past and future parenthood, they think about shorter work schedules, holidays and parental leave. In contrast to their parents, who worked as unqualified workers in Chinese ethnic niches (mainly restaurants and budget bazaars) and followed one path – working for kin or friends for some years to pay off their migration-related debts and, later on, opening their own business (Beltrán Antolín, 2006) – the young adults' labour conditions are very different. Firstly, due to their educational background (all informants but two have university studies), those who have already graduated have a distinct level of potential for insertion into the labour market than their parents, in different and diverse sectors and as highly-qualified workers<sup>90</sup>. Secondly, in most cases they are waged workers,

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<sup>90</sup> Within the sample, excepting those who are still students, most informants work as qualified waged workers (lawyers, an engineer, a graphic designer, etc) with three exceptions: one university graduate, who created his own

which makes it easier to think about standard work schedules and rights. Thirdly, for those who run their own business, whether connected to their educational background or not, their parents' economic support helps minimise the risks and struggles attached to the early phases of their entrepreneurial project. These factors create advantageous conditions which may make informants' expectations about productive and reproductive conciliation achievable (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b). Nevertheless, whether they fulfil these expectations or not is, for now, unknown and time will tell if expectations are matched by reality. But on the whole, the circumstances surrounding the young adult informants are extremely different to those of their parents at the same life stage, the propitious conditions of the former depending to a great degree on the struggles of the latter; as such, strategies and decisions need to be understood in context (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b).

This section ends by reproducing a poem by Muna Abdulahi. This poem was read out in a podcast (Chen, 2018, September, 30<sup>th</sup>) by the 'Wild banana blog'<sup>91</sup>, whose author is a descendant of Chinese migrants in Spain. In it, the Somali-American poet (as she defines herself in her Twitter account), imagines her migrants parents' feelings and tries to write in their voice:

### **The Unwritten Letter from my Immigrant Parent**

My daughter

When you came up to me at five years old  
and told me you wanted to be just like me when you grew up

Parents are usually filled with joy

But me

My heart dropped to the floor because I wasn't my daughter  
I couldn't bear to tell you at five years old I wasn't you

Are too young and too spoiled to understand

**My daughter I pray to god everyday you don't understand  
what it's like to be me**

**How it feels to work endless hours day in and day out  
and still have time to spend endless nights trying to know a  
language**

that doesn't even know how to pronounce you correctly

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tourism company targeted at Chinese tourists; and the two informants who dropped out of the secondary school, one of whom runs his own mobile phone store, and the other works as a waitress in a Japanese restaurant.

<sup>91</sup> For further information about this blog, see: Annex 1, page 371.

That tells you to go back to a country many die to escape from  
**My daughter I did not bring you here to be anything like me**  
**You see the reason I push you to be a lawyer or a doctor**  
**isn't because of the money**  
**it was never about the money**  
**It is because we live in a system that expects nothing but**  
**less from you**  
**so in this household I expect everything but less from you**  
My daughter  
**You are called first generation for a reason**  
**It is because the American dream was never meant for me**  
**It was always, always meant for you**  
So my daughter take my culture and our native tongue  
and speak, learn, jump, fail, fall, speak, learn, jump, fail, fall,  
and get back up, my daughter  
**The best of me lives in you**  
**So speak**

Muna Abdulahi, 2017 in Chen, 2018 (September 30<sup>th</sup>)

\*(Bold font emphasis added by me)

### 7.3.3 Positioning themselves

In this section, the focus shifts away slightly from the main care thread, to centre mainly on the different social positioning which results from the informants' condition as children that have grown up in a Qingtianese transnational family. Despite their international experiences, Spain is imagined as the settlement place<sup>92</sup>. Nevertheless, their self-positioning there is highly heterogeneous. Some of the informants identify themselves as Chinese people living in Spain, others as Chinese-Spanish or Spanish-Chinese – even to different degrees or with a different emphasis – and others as Spanish or mainly Spanish. As mentioned earlier, expressions such as: '*alguien como yo*' [someone like me] or '*chino como yo*' [a Chinese person like me] are recurrent, suggesting an identity boundary in which their Chinese ethnic condition and their socialisation outside of China are key. For some of the informants, a multiplicity of

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<sup>92</sup> There is a girl who also thinks that she may end up settling in China. She was born in Europe and sent to Qingtian as a baby, remaining there for some years. After reunification with her parents in Spain she has continued to visit China on a one/two yearly basis.

identities is present; for others, hybridity or in-betweenness is key and this either flows naturally or is reported to be problematic. Moreover, some of them consider this dual frame (Chinese/Spanish) to be too narrow or inadequate, and regional or local identities gain presence, for example, referring to themselves through terms such as *andaluchina*<sup>93</sup>, or the sentence “we are Chinese people from Meira”.<sup>94</sup> Finally, others do not identify themselves with static categories or decide to expand them with the recurrent sentence of “I am a citizen of the world”.

In short, the identity issue is highly complex and heterogeneous; as such, a whole thesis is needed to cover it, meaning that only a brief introduction may be given here.<sup>95</sup> As previously suggested, there seems to be a shared tendency to increasingly identify as Chinese as they advance along their life course. As such, in this stage, and in contrast to their accounts during adolescence, their Chineseness is asserted. In parallel, the impossibility of feeling completely Spanish, linked to their physiognomy, remains constant, meaning that their physical features determine their presupposed condition of being a foreigner in Spanish society. Despite having being born and/or socialised in Spain, they are still perceived as migrants:

Manuel: To tell you the truth, in terms of my mind, mentality, I feel Spanish; I think that I have a Spanish mentality, but the thing is that, then you're living in Spain, you can be as Spanish as you like, but in appearance, you're always going to be Chinese.

Several of my informants referred to how tiring it is to constantly have to answer the question ‘where are you from?’ and to have to repeat their answer several times, as it is not the expected answer of ‘I am from China’, or any other Asian country. They also emphasise how people continue to be surprised about their Spanish language skills, which would be impressive if Spanish was not their first language. Both of these

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<sup>93</sup> Composed of the word *andaluza* (a native of Andalucía, region in the South of Spain), plus the word *china* (Chinese woman/girl). This term was coined by Quan Zhou, an illustrator and Chinese migrants' descendant (see Annex 1, page 366).

<sup>94</sup> This expression was used by a Qingtianese migrants' descendant (nowadays a toddler) living in a small town named Meira, in the north of Spain.

<sup>95</sup> At the time of finishing writing this dissertation, there are two academic research projects in progress which focus upon the construction of identity among Chinese migrants' descendants in Spain. One of them is Paloma Robles's PhD dissertation, whose preliminary analysis can be found in one of her published papers (Robles-Llana, 2018). And the other is that of Cristina Zhang Yu, a Chinese migrants' descendant (Annex 1, page. 362) who is also doing her PhD research in the form of an auto-ethnography. Similarly, initial findings from her work on identity construction can be found in a co-authored paper (Zhang-Yu & Lazuela, 2017).

situations were mentioned by several of my informants and are also recurrent in documentaries, media interviews and talks. If their condition as non-foreigners in Spain seems impossible to accept, or at least to understand, by part of Spanish society, other types of identity issues, or civil or political participation, directly result in a complete lack of comprehension. For example, during the screening of a documentary made by a young adult of Chinese origin in an event held in Madrid in 2018,<sup>96</sup> when a Chinese migrants' descendant who identified himself as Catalan and supported the social and political movement for Catalonia's independence from Spain appeared on the screen, loud laughter was heard from a significant section of the audience.

While this 'foreignisation' alludes to their physiognomy without further questioning it, thereby including all individuals and circumstances – regardless of their place of birth and socialisation, their age, gender or other specific conditions, such as being international students, migrants' descendants or adopted children – there are specific gendered perceptions which separate their experiences. The stereotypical view of Asian women as exotic and submissive prevails. Some of the female informants reported that they are treated differently, and generally understood to be better, than their male peers. One of them referred to being lucky because of this difference, as Chinese women were not subject to hostile attitudes, as often happened to their male friends. Instead of being faced with insults or affronts, she received compliments or propositions, often preceded or followed by the word *chinita* (little Chinese girl/ woman). The female informants and their peers having to deal with intrusive comments and even some touching of their body from unknown people is not unusual. While she described such behaviour as not being hostile in comparison with those faced by their male friends, the hostility prevails, being articulated in a way in which the link between her ethnicity and her gender is key. Although the young adults in the sample do not specifically refer to this link between gender and ethnicity, this is key in the intersectional perspective taken by the Catàrsia<sup>97</sup>, a recently-emerged collective which seeks to fight stereotyping and discrimination, by articulating a feminist and anti-racist discourse.

Differential, gendered treatment is also perceived by some of the male informants. Xingfu reports that men are more often the object of physical violence, with a deeper

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<sup>96</sup> The event took place at 'La Casa Encendida', a cultural centre in Madrid, on November 21<sup>st</sup> 2018. The documentary screened is entitled 'El hilo rojo' (Spiro, 2017); for further information about it, see: Annex 1, page 370.

<sup>97</sup> For further information, see: Annex 1, page 373.

focus on their supposed inferior condition due to being Chinese. Again, the diminutive *chinito* (little Chinese boy/man) is frequently used to address them, alongside other insults like *chino de mierda* (fucking Chinese person) or any reference to the budget bazaars and restaurants, based on the stereotype of the Chinese people living in Spain and used in pejorative terms. Moreover, in contrast to the sexualisation of their female peers, who are conceptualised as objects of desire, some informants state that they are perceived as a kind of second-class man. For example, Mario goes out to night clubs every weekend, as is common in Spain, where people talk, dance, drink and it is not unusual for that interaction to lead to kissing and/or spending the night together. He reports that, over many years, he and his friends have often been verbally confronted by non-Chinese males who believe that a boy of Chinese appearance cannot flirt with non-Asian looking girls, as presumably they are a target that is out of their league. They even sometimes receive allusions to their lack of suitability as sexual partners. He says that, even though he may be kissing his Spanish girlfriend on the dance floor, other non-Chinese males often approach her to talk or dance. He suggests that such behaviour would be completely out of the norm if he was Spanish but, because of his phenotypical features, his Spanish girlfriend is not conceptualised as his girlfriend. Similarly, another informant has referred to how couples consisting of a Spanish man and Chinese woman are seen as normal, but vice versa – a Spanish woman and Chinese man – is perceived as strange, causing them to receive a lot of glances on the streets.

Within the sample, despite the adversities they face within Spanish society and the diversity in their identities constructed and asserted by them, all the informants – including those who moved to Spain as adolescents – state that they fit better into Spanish society today than the Chinese one, as they are used to the Spanish lifestyle. The case of Xingfu is particularly interesting, as he reports always having been treated as a second-level citizen in Spain, being in a permanent struggle, having to deal with racist attitudes towards him, and he wishes he had stayed in China rather than moving to Spain. Nevertheless, while he says that he would like to live in China, he thinks that he could not survive there as, firstly, his Chinese language skills are limited, and secondly, he thinks he is “too Spanish” to adapt to Chinese customs and the way of life there. Moreover, he and all the other informants but one report feeling different and/or being perceived as different by others in China. This is particularly the case while they are in Qingtian, where they can be easily identified as non Chinese-Chinese people,

based on their accent and language skills, as well as their manners and clothes, putting them in the position of being seen as simultaneously Chinese and foreign:

Eva: It's happened to me that I've been walking along the street and heard 'guowai' [国外/ foreign] and they think: she must come from abroad, surely. You can tell the difference a lot, so much, above all [in the] way [we] dress, behave, talk, they notice it.

Dora: And then when you're going along the street, people look [...] at first glance, they say 'you're not from here, you're a foreigner'. You obviously have, I mean, the way of dressing, also physically, actually also physically. They recognise you at first glance and I say uh! I also have that problem. Where am I from? I still have that question in my head.

This perception of difference is also shared by those who are settled in Qingtian (Masdeu Torruella, 2014). During fieldwork, people often told me how easy is for them to distinguish those who go to there on holiday and those who live there. Nevertheless, this is not a unique feature of the Qingtianese, and has been reported in other transnational contexts (Zontini, 2015; Sigad & Eisikovits, 2010, Ganga, 2006). While I was not able to notice the differences in the accents, I also had the feeling that young adults visiting their families in Qingtian looked different from those who stayed there. It was mostly a matter of behaviour and gestures, the way they move, their dressing style but also their appearance itself. For example, it was quite easy to identify potential visitors during fieldwork, based on the amount and type of tattoos that they had. Tattoos are not well regarded in Chinese society, so few people have them and, in general, they are smaller and somewhat different. Two informants had tattoos covering one of their arms and another visible part of the body, prompting them to receive many looks, indeed, many more than I did, despite my condition as a foreigner. On one occasion, I encountered one of my Qingtianese friends when I was talking to one of these informants, and my friend looked surprised. We exchanged some words and then she left. Afterwards, she sent me a message asking about him; when I reminded her about my dissertation and the need to interview people, she confessed that she had thought that he could be a murderer or someone from the mafia, due to his tattoos. This idea fits

with his own perception of how people see him in China, as he thinks everybody is afraid of him.

Another point which seems to be different from the points of view of the visitors and the stayers concerns behaviour. The most obvious example is that of visitors saying 'thank you' as a response to everything, while in China, its usage is not that widespread. This difference also serves to provide a quick categorisation of people in other transnational settings, such as Israel in contrast to North America (Sigad & Eisikovits, 2010). Moreover, politeness and proper behaviour may take different forms:

Dora: But even when I'm here, the same thing happens to me. I feel different. Perhaps not physically but I do feel different both mentally and [in terms of] character and all that, because when I was little [...], always [when I] have something to throw away, I don't think of throwing it away on the street. My grandma: throw it away, throw it away. Me: no, no, I can't [do it].

Other obvious markers are queueing, nose-blowing or avoiding making slurping sounds when eating, which are common among people in Spain, but about which there are different expectations in China. Similarly, regarding expectations about paying for others or sharing bills when going out, the young adult informants are used to splitting the bill, while this is not customary in China:

Eva: My grandparents are always [saying] to me: go out less, because then you have to spend a lot, and me? ...then you have to offer to pay for others and I [say]: no, no. I explain it to them, but they always forget and say: don't go out too much, because of the money and all that. My grandparents are very much from here: Chinese people.

Dandan: In the group we split the bill, when it comes to that we're very Spanish, but my father does spend his day paying for other people.



While these differences in behaviour and ways of acting are significant between those who have been socialised in China and those who were brought up in Spain, spending a later life stage in Europe may also prompt ignorance about certain aspects of how Chinese society works. For example, on one occasion, I accompanied an informant shopping in Qingtian, she being 35 years old today and having spent around 14 years in Spain. When she was about to pay, she realised that the bill was much higher than she had expected. She had misread the sales signs in the store, applying a Spanish logic, while in China, it works differently. She had thought that some garments had a 60% discount, when actually, it worked the other way around and the discount was 40%, the customer having to pay 60% of the price. She was surprised and she felt somewhat embarrassed when the shop employee told her. Nevertheless, she explained to the saleswoman that she had misunderstood how things work due to her long settlement in Spain, and her condition of *huaqiao* gave her a way to compensate for this.

In summary, there is a general perception that the difference is real and can be easily identified through diverse dimensions: awareness about social expectations and functioning; language (the language used, expressions and accents); behaviour, gestures and appearance. Going back to Paloma Chen's text, in which she – a migrants' descendant who was socialised in Spain – relates her trip to Wenzhou as an adult, this perception is also present. She narrates the moment when she met several members of her extended family, as follows:

“The open interrogation of my own identity had just begun: **"I do not know how I should treat you, as a foreigner, as a Chinese person, as a Wenzhounese."** His daughter, my cousin, intervened: **"Dad, there's a word, it's 华裔"<sup>98</sup> *Huayi***, a concept difficult to understand even within the Chinese collective imaginary, for all those who have not crossed the border. "I insist, **I do not know whether to treat you as a Chinese person or a foreigner,"** he continued to reflect aloud. 三姨夫 [*San yifu*], the husband of my mother's third oldest sister, said: "I know. We must treat her as family. "

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<sup>98</sup> *Huayi* / 华裔: person of Chinese origin living abroad.

My oldest maternal cousin did not come to the family dinner that night. He compensated by inviting me to eat *huoguo*<sup>99</sup> the next day. As soon as he saw me, he said "很有 外国人的 感觉" [*Hen you waiguoren de ganjue* / **she really has the essence of a foreigner**]. His wife replied: "**It's normal, she has always lived abroad.**" A fact more than an assessment (...)." (Chen, 2018, July 14).<sup>100</sup>

The anecdote shared by Paloma Chen illustrates how she is perceived as different by her kin. Such a difference is attributed to her socialisation outside of China, seen to have even created a different physical appearance. Moreover, the informants' accounts often refer to the differences in their characters and the predominance of a Spanish and not Chinese way of acting, through expressions such as: "I don't seem Chinese" ("*no parezco china*"); "I am no longer Chinese" ("*yo ya no soy china*"); "I have grown up here [in Spain], it is different" ("*he crecido aquí [en España], es diferente*") or "they [my parents] know that I am very Spanish" ("*ellos [mis padres] saben que yo soy muy español*"). They are members of a Chinese family, but different. These young adults are not the same as they would be if they were still members of their own families but without their transnational condition, their socialisation in Spain serving as a difference marker between themselves and their ascendant kin (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b). In informants' accounts, this difference with their families mainly takes the form of a generational opposition between their parents (as the first and closest reference) and themselves, which converge in a sort of generational identification and confrontation expressed in the dichotomy they/we. This generational opposition is present even in the accounts of the two informants who moved to Spain as adolescents and whose positioning or point of view about various themes sometimes contrasts with the rest of the sample.

Their articulation of a generational opposition, their transnational condition and their socially-constructed status as migrants by others in Spain – regardless of where they were born or socialised – may mean that there may be a significant degree of sameness between them and other Asian migrants' descendants in Spain, with whom they share

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<sup>99</sup> *Huoguo* / 火锅: Translated in English as 'hot pot', it consists of a boiling broth to which various raw ingredients (meat, fish, vegetables, etc.) are added and cooked directly by the diners.

<sup>100</sup> Bold emphasis added by myself.

similar experiences and feelings. Nevertheless, while this sameness may be shared, their sense of otherness is not. This research points to young adult descendants of Qingtianese migrants attributing a specific otherness to their parents' generation and their own, based on specific care-related practices addressed earlier, linked to a past/future discourse in which the idea and ideals of family and care are key.

#### 7.3.4 Transnational links

In contrast to their parents' lives – at least at an early life stage – leisure and tourism related-mobility is common for the young adults. Their trips to China do not always have their family hometown as the main destination. Instead, trips are often organised around big cities and the main tourist spots. This is particularly true when they travel with their friends. When travelling with other family members, the hometown is a mandatory stop and the main base. Nevertheless, most of the older young adult informants (24-31 years approximately) either depend on their mothers or fathers' plans or they wander around the streets of Qingtian alone. This is the case for Mario and Iago, who travelled there in the summer of 2017 and who both spent many of their days shopping, eating or walking around alone, defining their trips to China as boring. Like them, most of the young adult informants who spent part of their childhood in Qingtian ended up losing their contacts, as they were children when they moved to Spain and their ability to interact further across borders was curtailed.<sup>101</sup> For those who were raised in Spain, their awareness of their extended families was very limited and some of them only travelled to Qingtian as adults. As Haikkola (2011) points out, visits to the family's town of origin are key for migrants' descendants, in order to transform their family ties into “meaningful social relationships” (p.1213) and expand their networks. This is the case for Manuel who, after spending some years without visiting China, travelled to Qingtian with his mother last winter and once there, often went out with his cousins who are living in Qingtian and their group of friends. Moreover, he also used a Facebook group to set up a meeting with other migrants' descendants staying in the area at the same time.

For the younger informants within the young adults' group (18-23 years approximately), the disruption between their early lives in China and further stages

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<sup>101</sup> This being greatly affected by the time – and related technology and infrastructure – the family's migration stage and families' different economic statuses.

tends to be less pronounced, meaning that some of them were able to keep some ties active, or reactivate them through their summertime trips, which took place every two to four years. Similarly, those who were raised in Spain also report a higher frequency of trips to Qingtian on average, compared to the older informants, which resulted in a greater degree of transnational interaction and awareness. Moreover, they tend to follow the pattern of arranging group trips<sup>102</sup> to Qingtian, describing their experiences there as enriching, having time to have fun with friends, meet new people and travel:

Dora: If we return here, we return in a crowd. If not, we get really bored!

In the summer of 2018, while waiting for the train to Qingtian at Wenzhou's station, I heard a big group (of over 30 people), almost all of whom were speaking Spanish. At first, I thought they were probably taking part in some summer camp; later, some of them explained me about a WeChat group they have created, which served to organise their trip from Spain to Qingtian – flying on the same flight or choosing close dates – and further meetings and excursions there. The group was expanded by adding new members (siblings, cousins and friends), who also invited other people to join them. Moreover, once in Qingtian, other interactions were arranged, with people settled there or other Chinese migrants' descendants who were visiting, expanding their transnational network. For example, the language in which Dora and Eva talk to each other when in Qingtian switches, depending on the group's composition at any given time, being composed mainly of their friends from Spain, but also including her cousin, who is a Qingtianese migrants' descendant in Italy. As such, when only the Spanish group is present, they speak in Spanish and when the Italian contingent joins, they switch to Mandarin.

In contrast to the older members of the young adults' group – who ended up losing their early ties or never created them<sup>103</sup> – the younger informants took advantage of the convenience of physical and/or virtual communication, particularly since the arrival of smartphones, which for them took place at an early life stage, enabling them to keep the contacts created during their late adolescence and, particularly, during the summer

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<sup>102</sup> The size of the group being highly variable. During the fieldwork, groups from two people to more than thirty people were documented.

<sup>103</sup> This does not prevent them from having other types of transnational ties, such as those resulting from their long-term language courses in China.

camps. Regarding visits to Qingtian, along with the increasing affordability of flights from Spain to China, their widespread student status – in contrast to older ones’ position as full-time workers – allow them greater flexibility regarding holiday schedules (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). In short, for the older members of the sample, the idea of disruption between China and Spain is present and more significant; in contrast, for the younger members, there is a relative continuity based on relational ties: a trend which is reinforced when comparing the sample of today’s adolescents and the young adults’ one. Thus, data collected in this research suggests that there is a trend towards the growing importance of Qingtian and its related transnational ties in the lives of the migrants’ descendants.

As Levitt (2009) suggests, it is important to avoid “dismissing the power of being raised in a transnational social field” (p. 1225). She argues that this is not to say that migrants’ descendants will engage in transnational activity to the same degree as their parents’ generation, but often “the lines between the home and the host country and between the first and the second generation blur, making them one interconnected social experience” (p.1296). Transnational engagement by migrants’ descendants may not only be different to that of their parents in degree, but also take a different form (Fresnoza-Flot & Shinozaki, 2017; Haikkola, 2011; Haller & Landolt, 2005). Indeed, while the younger informants show an increasing degree of transnational activity, the nature of their transnational ties differs from those of their parents. For the latter, these ties were based on multi-layered networks of kin, neighbours and friends. Their interaction across borders and their visits to Qingtian incorporated the idea of care circulation, particularly when small children, ageing parents or grandparents remained in China. Buying or building a house was a common aim and returning to China a possible and even desired path. Moreover, the need to cope with societal standards and to show the success of the migratory project was present. In contrast, for the migrants’ descendants, their family links in Qingtian are much weaker and many of them have only a vague knowledge of their very extended family. They rely mainly on friendship ties, often including cousins in this category. In most cases, those friends are not settled in Qingtian but in other countries (including Spain), with whom they keep in touch through different communication apps (WeChat, WhatsApp and, to much lesser extent, QQ) and social networks (Instagram, Facebook and Twitter). They are not concerned about buying a house, as nearly all of them have their parents' houses, nor do they consider moving

there. Finally, for them, showing success or *mianzi*-related issues are something that does not fit with their generation. As Gardner (2012) suggests, regarding the experiences of Bangladeshi migrants' descendants while visiting Bangladesh, their experiences in the so-called home town and home country are close to those in a tourist site in which leisure prevails, in contrast to the more emotional and nostalgic approach of their parents.



# CONCLUSIONS

Care as a social construct “represents a complex set of material and symbolic practices that cannot be separated from cultural beliefs, structural constraints and the rituals of everyday life” (Coltrane & Galt, 2000, p.34); as such, specific references to context(s) have been made throughout this research. Nevertheless, in order to operationalise the concept of care, we have drawn on Fisher and Tronto (1990), Glenn (1991, 1992) and Pérez Orozco’s (2014) contributions to care theory, which together served to construct the following definition. Care is an orientation and a practice which permeates lives and is essential for their maintenance and continuity, both in the present and inter-generationally; it seeks to provide and/or to restore wellbeing, through a varied range of tasks, including work that is domestic, bodily-focused, emotionally-focused and/or mental work, and encompassing dimensions related to agency and power. This definition is tightly linked to the concept of social reproduction, which connects biological and social processes through the work of producing and reproducing human beings (Koffman, 2016). The articulation of the various migratory circuits – work in the labour market, family and education – and the circumstances which circumscribe them, shape the forms and directions by which care is organised and deployed. This, in turn, alters how care affects people, families and communities – including movers and stayers – through social reproduction (Koffman, 2016), by increasing the ‘risks and opportunities’ that emerge from the migration context (Kilkey et al. 2018, p. 2).

The migration context in this research is that of Chinese migration to Spain, which became quantitatively significant from the 1980s onwards, most of the migrants originating in Qingtian county and the neighbouring city of Wenzhou (in Zhejiang province). In most cases, these migrants’ descendants have only recently become legal adults (over 18 years old). They are the first generation in their families to have been socialised in Spain, and the first for whom their family’s transnational condition has extended over the course of their lives, this having had a great impact on the family’s childcare arrangements during their childhood, as well as on their own experiences, ideals and expectations in relation to family and care. Based on qualitative data, this research has offered insights into care in these families through two different but interconnected and interdependent phenomena which had not been addressed by



previous research: care circulation in Qingtianese transnational families and the life paths taken by these families' children. The exploration of the first of these phenomena served as the foundation for examining the second, with care, in its multiple dimensions and timescales – past, present and future – as the unifying thread.

By drawing on Baldassar and Merla's (2014) 'care circulation' framework, which defines the circulation of care as the "reciprocal, multi-directional and asymmetrical exchange of care that fluctuates over the life course within transnational family networks subject to the political, economic, cultural and social contexts of both sending and receiving societies" (p. 25), the first ethnographic chapter offered an overview of how care circulates in these families. Some meaningful conclusions can be extracted by looking at the first part of the thesis as a whole:

1. The fieldwork reveals that the **hegemonic nuclear family model, tailored as it is to the Global North, is inadequate for describing the realities of these families.**

The families in the sample were extended, in both a horizontal and a vertical sense. The number of four-generation families is also important. The widespread presence of great-grandparents points to their presumable existence in other social settings, despite their broad absence from the literature on transnational families (for exceptions, see: King et al. 2014).

2. These families engage in **care-related mobility** on various occasions, in order **to offer or receive physically co-present care**, resulting in the intersection of care strategies with new and old migratory processes. **Transnational grandparenting**, either with the grandparents moving to Spain or the grandchildren moving to China, is a **key** component of this mobility. Care-related mobility is also instigated by situations such as: illness (long-term or intermittent mobility), deaths, festivals and family events (short-term mobility) (Lamas Abaira, forthcoming a). Furthermore, care in its multiple dimensions (domestic, hands-on care and supervision, emotional and moral care, practical care, material care and family-social care)<sup>104</sup> can be exchanged at a distance

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<sup>104</sup> Based on Finch and Mason's (1993) care categories (hands-on care, emotional and moral care, practical care, financial and housing support), which were re-deployed by Baldassar and Merla (2014) in the care circulation framework. In this research, they have been reorganised and complemented with additional dimensions, based on fieldwork accounts.

or through proxy-caring practices (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Kilkey & Merla, 2013; Baldassar, 2008).

3. **Proxy-caring practices**, in which physically co-present care is delegated to another person, is widely used **for the ageing or frail family members living in Qingtian**, where *ayis* (阿姨), or **hired female caregivers** are common. While the original link between care and *xiao* (孝), or filial piety – a Confucian code which prescribes the normative intra-family relationships and duties – centres on physically co-present care, **the subcontracting of care** in this way is **socially accepted** and perceived as **constitutive of a filial attitude** (Lan, 2002). In contrast, **institutional care continues to be equated with abandonment**, and families in the sample practically and discursively refuse this kind of care arrangement. The ongoing construction of a huge nursing home in Qingtian city may challenge this view, and time will tell if reality corresponds to such ideals, or whether care for ageing family members will become a commodity (De Silva, 2018; Coe, 2017).

4. The **meaning of care extends beyond its ideal form, which is linked to proximity** (Baldassar & Merla, 2014a). In this ethnography, new media – and particularly the WeChat app – have been key for enabling families to function through care monitoring and management at a distance, as well as by facilitating multiple forms of interaction across borders. The action of giving a ‘like’ to other family members’ posts is perceived as a ‘caring about’ attitude, which connects different generations and forms part of new intergenerational spaces in which to deploy emotional care (Lamas-Abaira, forthcoming a). The fieldwork has also revealed a **broader meaning of care** through its **social dimension**. In the transnational space in which these families participate, displaying care becomes a sort of social imperative that prevents individuals and their kin from engaging in gossip and criticism, which may result in a lowering of status or losing face<sup>105</sup> (Lamas-Abaira, forthcoming a). Similarly, avoiding behaviour that is considered improper, non-normative or undesirable in the family and/or social sphere – such as divorce or addictions – also becomes a form of care, by following the filial piety prescription to honour the family’s name (Lam, 2006). Failure to take on the

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<sup>105</sup> In Chinese, *mianzi* /面子 (face) refers to notions of status and prestige and is essential for the functioning of social relations in China: “Saving *mianzi* is a shortcut by Chinese to build their network and tapping into other’s social resources” (Buckley et al., 2006, p. 276).

care responsibilities associated with families, such as appearing not to make an effort to achieve reunification with children in Spain or considering institutional care for ageing family members, receives particularly serious social sanctions, suggesting that there is a relational dynamic between filial piety prescription –normative intergenerational support – and maintaining face (Zhang, 2016). It is important not only to care, but also to display care in socially-accepted forms (Baldassar, 2007; Soto, 1989). **Social control** operates **transnationally**, according to expectations **based on the Chinese-culture system** and the premise of individual/family interdependence. Nevertheless, the degree and forms of control change over time and this control also affects the diverse family actors differently, weighing much less heavily on the younger family members who have been socialised in Spain.

5. Research has generally expected support to flow from the so-called destination countries to the family's countries of origin, and from the migrants to the stayers (Boccagini, 2015; Zhou, 2013), this view having been strongly influenced by the earlier literature's emphasis on economic remittances and the ethnocentric and paternalist approach often taken in migration research. Nevertheless, in this ethnography, **care** – in its multiple dimensions – **is documented to flow from Spain to China** and from **China to Spain**; as well as from **Spain to Spain, China to China, and to and from third countries**. Overall, the **conjoint articulation of the various flows of care** – and its different dimensions – **are essential for securing families' social reproduction**, with the extended family playing a key role in this process (Zhou, 2013).

6. According to informants' accounts, care exchanges within these families are anchored in three different types of reciprocity. **Practical reciprocity** emanates from specific care needs, which are met through the support provided by another person, according to a pragmatic logic and carrying a virtual expectation of repayment, whether this is symmetrical or asymmetrical. In other words: you gave me something, I give you something. **Normative reciprocity** is derived from filial piety prescriptions, associated with Chinese families' care cycle, which link certain family roles to care duties, incorporating a deferred and intergenerational repayment mechanism. Finally, **offset reciprocity** is based not on practical needs or cultural prescriptions but on personal ties and the idea of caring about someone, not as a duty or repayment but due to a desire or a natural impulse. None of these types of reciprocity are exclusive, meaning that they

may **overlap or** appear **intermittently** along the **life course**. In a similar vein, through these multiple intersections, the **roles of caregiver and care-receiver are also fluid** (Kilkey & Merla, 2014; Gherghel & LeGall, 2010) and individuals may switch from one to another of these poles or take on both roles simultaneously.

7. The hierarchies of age, generation and gender inherited from Confucian tradition have become more flexible, but continue to have a significant influence upon care expectations and duties in these families. This is particularly true when it comes to gender. However, it is also important to underline that there are ongoing changes taking place, in line with current trends in urban China as a whole, which are challenging normative care roles based on patriarchal principles and prioritisation of the paternal line. Such developments include bilateral grandparenting and giving an equal amount of opportunities and family resources to the female and male children of these families (Sáiz López, 2009; Fong, 2002, 2004), despite the fact that the birth of a male child continues to be seen as a must. Moreover, the transnational context provides additional **spaces in which women of the mothers' generation (2G) may challenge their gendered care roles**. On a daily basis, spatial dislocation prevents them from having to meet certain care work expectations. Moreover, due to their demanding work schedules, often, only one member of the couple travels to China while the other remains in charge of the business in Spain; as such, during their trips to China, it is easier for these women to get out of or minimise their normative role as caring daughters-in-law, focusing instead on their own parents' care (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). Moreover, through their entrepreneurial activity in Spain, these women are partially freed from the work associated with their reproductive role, while such activity also serves to increase their status within their families (Sáiz López, 2012).

Despite all this, reproductive **care burdens** are not distributed horizontally, but **displaced to other female relatives**, including adolescent daughters and, most frequently, grandmothers (Liu, 2016; Shen, 2011). That care work<sup>106</sup> is constructed in a gendered way; reinforced by the fact that all the care workers hired by the families in this ethnography, in China and Spain, are female. As a result, **care work is articulated**

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<sup>106</sup> In this thesis, 'care work' refers to the set of care activities that, besides additional demands such as mental planning, involves a large degree of physical effort and extensive and regular dedication, such as hands-on care (feeding, washing bodies, dressing, etc.) and domestic tasks.

**through a network of women** (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a; Carrasco et al. 2011, Ho, 1999), while **men** retain the role of **helpers and take on the social dimension of care, which is linked to family prestige.**

8. Moreover, **gender** is a **key explanatory factor when it comes to disadvantaged social positions**, particularly when **linked** to other factors such as **age or social class**. While further research is needed on this issue, there were two particularly inequitable sets of circumstances that emerged in this ethnography:

a) Firstly, the grandmothers are disadvantaged on the basis of their gender and generation; they are the ones who shoulder most of the care burden, of which there is generally an uneven inter- and intra-generational distribution. In addition to grandchildren, grandmothers are often the main caregivers for their husbands, and their parents or parents-in law if they are alive. Moreover, when their caregiving role involves care-related mobility, they also have to deal with social disconnection (Kassaye, 2015; King et al., 2014; Thomas, 2003; Xie & Xia, 2011; Zhou, 2013), particularly when they travel alone, while their husbands remain in China.

b) Secondly, the young women in Qingtian are disadvantaged by their gender and their social class. As the only family members to have stayed in Qingtian when the rest of the family has migrated abroad, they lack a local support network and receive remittances only rarely or not at all. They are trapped in low-wage jobs, do not own properties or receive housing support and are dependent upon on their husbands' families after marrying at a young age, even when physical abuse is present. Divorce means losing their only tangible local support network, probably losing custody of children and facing social sanctions, as disruption of matrimonial ties is considered undesirable, particularly for females. Additionally, joining their families in Europe may not be possible, as getting a visa becomes more difficult over the age of 18 and because their parents' economic situation makes sponsoring their move unviable. While they inhabit a transnational space – a circumstance which goes beyond their individual situation and describes the reality of everyone who lives in Qingtian – their transnational family status is a matter of perspective. There is a discontinuity between the family members in Qingtian and Europe, which is only partially and/or anecdotally overcome, as the spatial dislocation –

reinforced by additional economic, cultural and institutional factors – prevents them from securing tangible support. As such, these girls’ realities situate them somewhere between forming part of a transnational family or simply having family abroad.

These circumstances serve to **question an idealised view of care circulation** in these families, in which **care as a fluid resource** is always available to be drawn on, however limiting the circumstances, in order to achieve the desired end of family functioning. Within the sample, this end **is often but not always achieved**. As such, this taken-for-granted, quasi-mechanical functioning, in which, at an individual, familial and social level, interdependence and reciprocity serve to maximise resources and cope with all family members’ care needs, does not always reflect reality and such a model obscures the adverse situations created for certain family members.

9. The **active and extensive caregiving role of the grandparents’** generation – and even that of the great-grandparents, through their supervision of children – **challenges the age-related stereotypes** that hold these generations to be inactive, dependant or a burden. It demonstrates that presuming a **direct correlation between age and a care-receiving role is problematic** and moreover, that stigmatising labels such as ‘the elderly’ serve to homogenise a large, heterogeneous group of people and thereby to make them invisible (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). The assumption that care automatically flows from the younger to the older generations (Baldassar, 2007) is proved unfounded in these families. Instead, care flows in multiple directions and across generations.

10. Similarly, **no evidence is found to uphold the common assumption that support flows from the State to the so-called ‘elderly’** (Baldassar, 2007). In most cases, the grandparents and great-grandparents in the sample receive no or little pension, as the Chinese welfare system is limited – particularly in rural areas such as Qingtian – and, in Spain, they have not worked in the primary labour market so have accrued so benefits. In spite of this, their extensive engagement as caregivers – particularly grandmothers taking care of their grandchildren and/or their own parents or in-laws (the great-grandparents) – serves to alleviate the pressure on both the Chinese and Spanish state welfare systems, through care responsibilities being displaced onto

families and the unfair distribution of such responsibilities within these families. Therefore, **their care work** makes a meaningful **contribution to families and wider society** (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a). Despite all this, grandparents and great-grandparents **are still** extremely lacking in **visibility** within societies and migration research<sup>107</sup> as they **do not form part of the capitalist circuit** (Zhou, 2013). The work they perform remains conceptually – although not in practice – linked to the private sphere, and as a result continues to be undervalued and **considered to be non-work** (England 2005; Cancian, 2000; Glenn, 2000; Clement, 1996), despite its essential role in social reproduction (Abel, 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000).

11. To varying degrees, different individual and family preferences serve to sketch out their “desired geographies of family life” (Bonizzoni, 2015, p. 168), and through their agency, they are able to shape care arrangements and how care circulates, to a certain extent. Nevertheless, the different institutional contexts in Spain and China shape this circulation, particularly affecting the ability of transnational families’ different members to participate in it. By applying Kilkey & Merla’s (2014) ‘situated transnationalism’ framework<sup>108</sup> to this research, **migratory and working-time regimes** have been found to be particularly **important** for the families in this ethnography:

- a) The migratory regime is related to a **strong migration culture** in **Qingtian**, as a *qiaoxiang* (侨乡) or area of international emigration. In most cases, extended families in the sample are settled in at least two different European countries. As such, transnational mobility and transnational care arrangements are integrated into Qingtian’s routines and their everyday social life, forming part of their *xiguan* (习惯), or customs, and resulting in meaningful social remittances (Coe, 2017; Masdeu Torruella, 2014; Levitt, 2001, 1998). In contrast to the growing restrictions on migrants’ rights in Spain nowadays, in previous decades, measures to expedite family reunification and obtaining a work visa, as well as the multiple large-scale regularisation processes for unauthorised migrants carried out in Spain and neighbouring countries, facilitated Qingtianese migration and settlement there.

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<sup>107</sup> For exceptions see: King et al., 2014; Deneva, 2012; King & Vullnetari, 2009; Vullnetari & King, 2008.

<sup>108</sup> Which includes the following institutional regimes: Migratory, welfare, work, gender and transport and means of communication (Kilkey & Merla, 2014).

b) The work regime is essential in Qingtianese transnational families, as the **productive sphere is the core around which other dimensions of family life are organised** and, moreover, **family and business form part of a continuum**. Qingtianese families are geographically spread all over Spain, settling on the basis of the opportunities arising from their entrepreneurial activity (Beltrán Antolín, 2006). Their life in Spain and visits to China depend on the productive sphere – their work schedules and periods of high and low activity – which is related to the fact that **most migrants are self-employed**: a status which does not always apply to their descendants. While they have greater freedom to give at least one worker time off, due to their ability to create their own schedules – particularly as Spanish and Chinese festivals do not overlap – they have to bear a greater work burden, with unending working hours and a contribution expected from all family members. Growing flexibility regarding the productive sphere is reported in later migratory stages. For example, a common pattern is that of sending the first child to be partially raised in China and taking care of the younger siblings in Spain, or those siblings staying for shorter periods in China, in parallel with the improvement of their economic situation and lessening work demands. Regarding working life in China, an early age of retirement (55-60 years old for men and 50-55 years old for women) allows the grandparents' generation to get involved in childcare, while it also reinforces women's role as carers (Giles et al., 2015).

In summary, in Qingtianese transnational families, care – in its multiple forms – circulates within the extended-family network and beyond (through proxy-caring practices and care's social dimension), and “over time as well as distance” (Baldassar & Merla, 2013b, p.7), including mainly – but not only – China and Spain. While such care circulation, in which support flows in multiple directions, serves to optimise family resources and minimise the costs associated with social reproduction (Haller & Landolt, 2005), not all individuals benefit from it to the same degree, nor are all of them allocated the same burdens. How care circulates locally and transnationally is shaped by: the family's socio-economic status, linked mainly to the migration project; the Chinese culture system, determining care roles, duties and social control; and the various Spanish and Chinese institutional regimes. All of these factors also determine the extent to which different individuals benefit or are disadvantaged by this circulation of care, these contexts and circumstances being differentially permeable and susceptible to



change (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming a).

Building upon this background of care circulation, the second ethnographic chapter explored the experiences of these families' children, with children understood as the family's youngest generation, from their early years to the stage at which they are adults without descendants. To do so, this research drew upon extensive participant observation and the present-day and retrospective first-person accounts of today's young adults (18-31 years old) and, to a lesser extent, today's adolescents (12-18 years old). From their accounts, several points can be made:

1. Their **early life experiences** can be divided into a **dual** structure, according to their physical presence in a specific spatial setting. Some of them were **born and raised in Spain**, while others were **partially raised in Qingtian**: these children were either born in Europe and therefore experienced early care-related mobility, or were born in China and stayed there; either way, the children generally did not stay in China beyond 7 years old. In both countries, a salient feature was the role of grandparents as the main caregivers. When care arrangements within the family were not available, the young migrant couples in Spain often contracted care so as to be able to cope with productive and reproductive demands (Sáiz López, 2012). Within the sample, care was delegated to different degrees: from occasional help to daily care or a child's relocation to a Spanish family household. **Childcare arrangements** inside and/or outside the family realm occur simultaneously or sequentially, **depending on** specific care needs and available resources, particularly **social and economic capital**.

2. In both **Qingtian and Spain**, **cases of informal child circulation** or "the relocation of a child or young person into a new household for locally meaningful reasons" (Fonseca in Leinaweaver, 2007, p. 164) were documented, implying an **extension of local practices to the transnational context**. The relocation took place within and outside the kin network, in both cases serving to strength ties through a process of relatedness<sup>109</sup> (Leinaweaver, 2007, 2010; Carsten, 2000). As such, some

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<sup>109</sup> Carsten (2000) proposed studying kinship through 'relatedness' in specific contexts, by focusing on local meanings and moving "away from the pre-given analytic opposition between the biological and the social on which much anthropological study of kinship has rested" (p.4), by emphasising the small, everyday actions that create ties among people.

informants and their families have experienced a process of ‘kinning’<sup>110</sup> (Howell, 2003, p.8) with the by-rearing<sup>111</sup> families. Nevertheless, the nature and degree of this process varies in each case.

3. Those informants who were **partially raised in China** generally experienced family **reunification in Spain** when they were between 4 and 7 years old. Once there, they had to start a new life in a new context, meet their parents – who were usually unfamiliar to them – make new friends and learn a new language. All but one informant reported that the bad times did not last too long and that they quickly started to enjoy their new life. The **difficulties were more salient for the only two informants who moved to Spain as adolescents** (at 12 and 13 years old, respectively). There were **fewer difficulties** for those informants who had the opportunity, due to their family’s economic resources, to have a **large amount of interaction with their family members across borders**; this enabled them to get to know their parents and learn about their migrant status earlier, and to maintain a certain degree of interaction with their caregivers in China once they moved to Spain, resulting in a more nuanced account of this stage. The latter phenomenon has become more common among **the informants who are adolescents today**, whose life in China took place in the last decade, when they were able to take advantage of the significant development and increasing affordability of communications across borders. In short, for those informants who were under 8 at the time of reunification in Spain (being older brought additional difficulties in adapting to the new social context), the period in which the child lived in China and the family’s economic status – both of which affected their ability to interact across borders – were key in shaping children’s perceptions of these transnational experiences.

4. While still representing a minority, an **emerging pattern of minors staying in China as adolescents** has been documented. **Their** present-day accounts and **preferences**, together with their **lifestyle and living conditions**, **challenge the left-behind discourse** (Pantea, 2011), which assumes that the children living in this kind of

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<sup>110</sup> Howell defines ‘kinning’ as “the process by which a foetus or newborn child is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people, and the connection is expressed in a conventional kin idiom” (2006, p.8). She emphasises the importance of social ties over biological ones.

<sup>111</sup> The term ‘children by rearing’ (*hijo de crianza*) refers to “a child reared in the household (as opposed to a child born to a parent)” (Soto, 1989, pp.132)

transnational arrangement are automatically disadvantaged. Within a child-centred family model, they are **positioned not as abandoned** children **but** rather, as a kind of **aristocracy** among transnational families, while their families' socio-economic condition also grants them a privileged status within the local social context. Furthermore, the memories of those who spent their early years in China and were later reunited with their parents in Spain convey an image of happy – perhaps idealised – childhoods there, in which nature, leisure and family time took centre stage. In contrast, the subsequent stage in Spain is characterised by having to face emerging difficulties, although these are also present in the accounts of those who were totally raised in Spain, with the exception of the initial – albeit, short-lived – difficulties upon their arrival to Spain. While not seeking to generalise, nor to diminish or underestimate the emotional struggles which may result from some of these experiences, this research posits the **need** to situate and **analyse care practices and arrangements in context**, including the structural and institutional constraints which shape families' capabilities and choices. It is vital to avoid privileging hegemonic models of childhood and family, taking into account not only the negative but also the positive outcomes of specific care arrangements.

5. Based on informants' accounts, their **adolescence** in Spain is characterised by a **triple articulation of difference**:

a. On a **social level**, all informants have been marked as different by others, due to **their phenotypic features**. They reported frequently experiencing racist attitudes from an early age, these being more prevalent in the big cities than in towns or small villages, and also more common for those who moved to Spain as adolescents, these informants being marked out more strongly as foreigners by their accent.

b. The perception of being different was reinforced within the **family sphere**. On the one hand, their parents' emphasis upon difference reflects a protective attitude, as they seek to fight and overcome what the parents perceive as a disadvantaged position in Spanish society, on the basis of their own experience. On the other hand, their parents and other kin often **complain about them being 'too Spanish'**.

c. There is also a **self-perceived difference** that arises at a result of **comparing their own way of acting and that of their parents**; and their own **families'** practices, attitudes and behaviour **with those of their non-Chinese** peers. For example, informants describe a perceived lack of leisure time and freedom to go out, in comparison to their Spanish friends.

The problems they experienced were connected to their ethnicity and, more specifically, how other people reacted to it. As such, erasing their ethnic markers was perceived as a solution, resulting in a **rejection of their Chineseness during this stage**.

6. **Minor's supposed naturally-dependent condition is contradicted** by the informant's retrospective accounts, which suggest that they have been **active agents** who have engaged in an important, **multidimensional role as family caregivers since early adolescence**. The care they provided was intergenerational and/or intra-generational, flowing horizontally and vertically, and forming part of the family 'care continuum' (Bauer, 2016; Becker, 2007), in which various family members and family generations participated. As 'cultural brokers' (Bauer, 2016; Menjívar, 2006) they took on interpreting and translation tasks from early childhood onwards; furthermore, as adolescents they became responsible for managing various formalities for the family, taking on the role of tutors, advocates, or surrogate parents in different circumstances (Valenzuela, 1999). Moreover, the young adult informants and, to a much lesser extent, today's adolescents, refer to helping regularly in the family business since early adolescence and/or taking on housework and care of younger siblings, the latter being a more common role for girls. Additionally, during **adolescence**, their accounts show that the informants' **agency regarding mobility decisions was activated**, as agency is not static and may evolve along their life paths (Pantea, 2011; Thorne et al., 2001). Informants used their agency to achieve goals related to their care-arrangement preferences, either managing to stay in a certain site or to move, in opposition to their parent's initial wishes.

7. The informants who had to **take on tasks that are considered adult duties** when they were minors (Becker, 2007; Menjívar, 2006) reflected **positively on these experiences** as young adults. They think that such experiences have served them to

learn about the value of autonomy, cooperation and effort, and, generally, to become mature at an early age – particularly in comparison with their non-Chinese peers – resulting in a sense of pride and connection to their family (Fuligni, 2006). Their first-person accounts challenged the automatic assumption that such tasks are harmful to children, which again highlights the need to consider potential positive outcomes as well as negative ones. Moreover, it calls into question the strict division between adult and non-adult tasks. As Olwig (1999) suggests, children's experiences of making contributions to their families must be understood within specific contexts. In Qingtianese families, it is difficult to draw a clear line between the family and the business spheres, as these spheres are interrelated and interdependent. This often leads such family and children's roles to be cast as non-normative, in contrast with the models that are hegemonic in Spain, which we must nevertheless remember are – like any other such models – a social construct.

8. Their **relationship** with their **parents** during **adolescence** was marked by their perceived **contradictory attitudes**. On the one hand, due to their parents' busy schedules, they **did not spend much time together** and informants were very autonomous from an early age; on the other hand, **pressure** from their parents and **control** over certain aspects of their lives were omnipresent (Tse & Waters, 2013). Most of them have been quite dutiful and have generally followed parents' rules, engaging in confrontation only in specific spaces. None of them have been involved in problematic behaviour, such as violence or addictions, as has been reported among adolescents in other migrant families (Artico, 2003; Menjívar, 2006). During their **young adulthood** (18-31 years old), most of them have been able to relativize their parents' attitudes and behaviour, while the **general perception** is that **the parent-child relationship could be improved**, and it is often seen as unsatisfactory. Similarly, informants also refer to pressure from their parents during this stage, related to areas such as studies, finding a partner and giving birth at an early age. When it comes to relationships which were very prominent in previous life-stages, such as with the grandparents, the intensity with which they are continued at this stage is extremely variable.

9. Regarding **generational succession**, all the informants plan to have children, and certain care-related issues are key to their **expectations about being future mothers**

**and fathers.** These are **linked to their own experiences as minors** growing up in a Qingtianese family in Spain (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b):

a. They refer to expecting an **improved balance between the productive and reproductive spheres.** The fact that their parents focused their lives upon productive work is perceived as the starting point of an unsatisfactory relationship between them, as it prevented them from having family time together. Their accounts incorporate the idea of having maternity leave, non-working weekends and other benefits or circumstances associated with professional wage work, all of which would not fit easily with the work schedules of their parents' generation. They expect mothers to make the most significant adjustments to having children as, within the sample, there is an idea that the mother's presence in the child's first years is indispensable; the model of motherhood displayed by their own mothers is criticised as inadequate, the bourgeois ideal being favoured (Fisher & Tronto, 1990). Nevertheless, the shared idea is that both members of the couple would take on the same share of daily caregiving responsibilities after this period.

b. **The parents' irreplaceable role as main caregivers.** They highlight the importance of parents' physical presence on a daily basis, rejecting childcare arrangements which involve the long-term separation of parents and children, such as transnational grandparenting in China or informal child circulation in Spain. Informants underline their perception that the parents' role as main caregivers is essential and natural, and alternative care arrangements are described as strange or out of the ordinary. Moreover, in some accounts, they equate care with physically co-present care, without any reference to at-a-distance care. In most cases, they think that they will need additional help to cope with reproductive demands during the child's first years, with the grandparents often posited as adequate caregivers, for reasons of trust and economic limitations. Nevertheless, they, the future parents, are put forward as the managers of the childrearing project, while the grandparents are expected only to be the helpers (Xiao, 2016; Goh, 2013; Goch & Kuczynski, 2014, 2010).

c. The need to **build a close and understanding relationship** with their future children is emphasised. How busy their parents were, and the various care

arrangements in which parents did not take on the main caregiver role, are suggested to have prevented them from having a close relationship. Moreover, their parents' predominantly Chinese values and way of thinking, in contrast to their own Spanish socialisation, is mentioned as having led to generational differences and misunderstandings. Particularly, the informants often suggest that their parents privileged the material over the emotional, saying that they missed receiving love from them, although some of them are aware that emotions and – or at least – their expressions are cultural constructions (Gardner, 2012) and the difference between them was probably not one of content, but of form.

d. To a much lesser extent, they refer to the need to **cultivate children's Chinese language skills**. They share a widespread regret about not being able to properly talk, read and write in Mandarin and they aim to make amends in the next generation for what they perceive to have been a failure.

In short, their **discourse about themselves as future parents** incorporates an element of **generational opposition** and a harsh critical dimension, based on a moral-temporal dichotomy: the thoughts, **attitudes and care practices of their parents as erroneous**, obsolete or improvable and located in the **past**; and **their own, as corresponding to a corrective or amendable future** (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b).

10. Despite the generational disjunctures, **both generations share a common aim: the best possible care and future prospects for their children**, it being the **circumstances**, not the aims which **are different** (Lamas-Abraira, forthcoming b). Firstly, in contrast to the difficulties their parents faced in adapting to a new context when they arrived in Spain, the informants have been socialised there and are also familiar with the Chinese language and context, giving them additional opportunities. Secondly, the social mobility resulting from their parents' struggles has served, on the one hand, to give the informants the opportunity to get university-level education and to experience international mobility, enabling them to enter the labour market at a different level, generally as qualified employees; on the other hand, this social mobility has provided them with more favourable conditions for starting their own entrepreneurial project. As such, thinking about standard work schedules and having more time off to be with the family is feasible for them. Moreover, their greater

familiarity and ability to deal with Spanish institutions, together with the presence of their parents – and probably their parents-in-law – in Spain, make it more viable to consider in-situ childcare arrangements in which parents retain the main caregiver role. In general, the living conditions, care resources and options available to the two generations at the same life stage are very different; as **such, care strategies and choices must be understood in context** (Lamas Abraira, forthcoming b).

11. Given that this thesis reflects local conceptions of childcare in Qingtian, care arrangements in which grandparents and grandchildren co-reside together while the parents' generation is physically absent are not considered a proxy-caring practice in this research. Rather than being delegated, care is shared among different family members, as occurs in other contexts in which childcare is conceived as a collective responsibility (Poeze et al., 2017; Leinaweaver, 2014; Ho, 1999). Nevertheless, based on young adults' present-day accounts, they do not share this conception. As a result, there is an **ongoing change**, not only in these families' care arrangement patterns – resulting in different forms or spatial configurations of care – but also **in what family means for young adult descendants of migrants, in contrast to their ascendants**, with the young adults' notions corresponding to the family model that is normative in Spanish society.

12. The identities constructed and asserted by informants are highly heterogeneous, but they often refer to someone like them (“*que sea como yo*”), referring to descendants of Chinese migrants who have been socialised in Spain, establishing a clear identity boundary: people who are like me, and people who are not. As young adults, they state that they fit better in Spanish society than in China nowadays. Nevertheless, due to their **status as children who grew up in a transnational family**, they are subject to a **double process of ‘foreignisation’**. While in Spain, they often have to deal with racist attitudes, they are not perceived as natives and they are ascribed a never-ending – and usually unreal – migrant status. While in Qingtian, their language skills, accent, style and appearance, gestures and behaviour become clear markers that they are not ‘Chinese-Chinese’ people – in their words – that is, they stand out as Chinese people who were socialised abroad and are somewhat lacking in hegemonic ‘Chineseness’.



13. **Families' social mobility and** the ongoing development and affordability of **transportation and communication technologies promote** an increasing degree of **transnationalism** and the existence of **new dynamics in the social transnational space**. This idea is evidenced in the accounts of the migrant parents' and grandparents' generation,<sup>112</sup> as well as by the adolescents' and young adults' experiences. Most of the younger informants (between 12 and 22 years old, approximately) have been able to maintain their transnational contacts or reactivate them over the years (particularly those created in summer holidays and camps), by taking advantage of the growing number of physical and virtual communication technologies – particularly since the arrival of smart phones – a development which took place at an early life-stage for them, when they were still adolescents. Conversely, trips were rare for the older informants (from 23 to 31 years old, approximately) – with the exception of one girl whose family's economic status allowed her to travel every one or two years from early childhood – moreover, the technological revolution arrived too late for this age group, meaning that they lost the few contacts they may have had, as transnational catch-ups were unfeasible. As such, the fieldwork data points to the **growing importance of Qingtian and its related transnational ties for the younger informants** (today's adolescents and the younger informants within the young adult sample). Nevertheless, the nature of their transnational ties differs from that of their parents and other ascendant kin (Gardner, 2012; Levitt, 2009): their links with kin in Qingtian are generally much weaker, most of their ties being friends spread across various countries which have Qingtian as a common leisure and holiday destination, generating new dynamics, such as group trips.

The second ethnographic chapter has taken a life course perspective that looks beyond specific roles, transitions or life stages to explore informants' past, present and future accounts. By doing so, it has been possible to provide a non-fragmented and coherent narrative about how informants have experienced a range of changing care arrangements, and family and social positions, as they have advanced along their life

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<sup>112</sup> An example is the increasing regularity of their visits to Qingtian, in comparison with previous years and migratory stages (which involved greater work burdens), as many of them did not visit China even once during their first decade in Spain. Similarly, the fieldwork has documented a pattern consisting of retired migrant parents or young grandparents having two family households - one in Spain and another in China - with a lot of physical mobility and virtual interaction between them, allowing them to accommodate both wives' and husbands' preferences for living in Spain and China, respectively.

paths. Taken as a whole, this thesis takes an alternative, novel and meaningful approach to integrated research on transnational families and children's life paths, in which care is the unifying thread. Care is the core concept, as it permeates people's lives (Fisher & Tronto, 1990) and traverses society generationally. Within the whole and through its parts, care is simultaneously a resource which circulates, enabling social reproduction, and a moral and coercive background "of the good and of duty" (Durkheim, 1982, p.47), which informs various family and individual dynamics. Whether as a social fact (Durkheim, 1982) or as a shared consciousness of "beliefs, tendencies and practices" (p.54) which differ from their individual forms, there is a need to look beyond the specific manifestations of care, to the broader context of which they form a part and which sustains them. As a result, exploring care – as a part – has served to describe how the wider Qingtian-Spain transnational social space functions – as the whole. This is a space in which social class, along with other factors, such as gender and the place of socialisation, have shown themselves to be essential categories for understanding most of the phenomena addressed in this thesis: including the meanings of family and care, social prestige and identity, as well as the nature and degree of transnational ties. Finally, this whole is neither static nor isolated; instead, the changes taking place at different scales, from the local upwards – such as China's changing position in the global order – serve to continually reshape it.

While this research has served as an initial exploration of care in Qingtianese transnational families, it has further implications. Implications which surpass the Spain-Qingtian transnational social space. This dissertation has posited the need to give a voice and visibility to other actors, moving beyond the adult-centred perspective that dominates migration research (Ni Laoire et al. 2010; Dobson 2009), and to situate practices and meanings in context. Firstly, it has served to question hegemonic models of family, childhood and care, from their most pragmatic realities (such as the inadequacy of the nuclear family model), to their dominant influences on local models and understandings (such as young adults' positive insights regarding their childhood experiences of taking on tasks commonly associated with adults). It has done so by emphasising the fact that beyond ideal representations there are realities, which often mask structural constraints – resulting in uneven opportunities and resources – and that notions of good or bad are themselves socially constructed. Secondly, it has challenged prejudiced assumptions – based on the ageist stereotypes, ethnocentric conceptions and

financially-focused models prevalent in migration research – regarding the direction of flows of care (typically portrayed as either: unidirectional, or controlled by the parents’ generation or the state and flowing to the grandparents’ and great-grandparents’ generations; from the so-called destination to origin countries; or from movers to stayers). Thirdly, it has revealed the active care role of minor children and grandparents, challenging the stereotype – tailored to predominant conceptualisations in the Global North – of both generations as being passive and dependent, by highlighting their agency and heterogeneity, and calling for the recognition of their contributions to families and societies, which remain invisible due to operating outside of the capitalist work market (Zhou, 2013; Becker, 2007). And finally, it questions the assumption that the descendants of migrants engage in a decreasing degree of transnational interaction and ties with the family’s origin country, pointing to a reversal in this trend and the need for further research.

# FURTHER RESEARCH

As the previous section suggested, this thesis has served as an initial exploration of many interlinked themes, which have been sketched out in these pages. The remarks here should not be understood as an end, but as a beginning. Some of these issues could be the starting point of a whole PhD thesis by themselves, but it is impossible to cover them all fully. The need identified at the beginning of this project was to analyse the care context of these transnational families and that is what has been done, with the aim that this thesis may serve to anchor further research, which could take some of the following lines:

1. *Informal relocation of minors from Qingtianese transnational families in Spanish families' households.* In this thesis, several cases of informal relocation have been documented, but these practices deserve further and more in-depth attention. It would be helpful to identify more families in which these practices take place, interview all members involved – in both the natal and the by-rearing families – and explore how these practices are conceptualised in the different contexts. The initial exploration carried out here indicates that there is a widespread social sanction of such practices among Qingtianese families, as informants in the parents' and older generations state that by relocating a Chinese child in a Spanish household, he or she will become a non-Chinese child. And the young adult informants reject this kind of care arrangement as it does not involve parent-child physical cohabitation. A longitudinal research project would serve to discover how relations with both the natal and by-rearing family develop along the life course. It could explore, for example, the provision of care to both sets of ageing parents (Soto, 1989), particularly given that family-based care is also the norm in Spain, due to insufficient state support.

2. *A new trend in childcare: adolescents staying in Qingtian.* This research has documented an emerging trend which, nevertheless, still only applies to a minority, consisting of the children of transnational Qingtianese families that are settled in Europe staying longer in China, resulting in family reunification occurring later. The development of this trend should be tracked. Within the sample, five of the six informants living in these circumstances indicate that they have agency which has been placed on standby, suggesting that their proactive desire to move to Spain would cause

this to happen. Further research should help to elucidate if this standby agency is imagined or real, and whether the experience of the only girl who would like to join her parents and cannot do so is the exception which proves the rule.

3. *Changing childcare arrangements.* There are several factors which point towards a possible decrease in the care arrangements characterised by daily physical separation between the parents and the children, such as long-term transnational childcare arrangements in China and child circulation in Spain. Firstly, the comparison between the young adult and adolescent samples confirms this trend. Similarly, in this ethnography, this trend is also evident in the childcare arrangements for the children of the young people who were socialised in Spain and have recently become parents. Secondly, the young adults' moral critique and discursive rejection of these practices is expected to be put into practice by their avoiding them at the practical level. And thirdly, there is a growing number of factors which may facilitate in-situ childcare arrangements and so help propitiate this shift, such as: grandparents living in Spain, socio-economic status and parents' economic support, the familiarity and ability to deal with formal institutions and young people's improved positioning in the labour market. Nevertheless, only a longitudinal study will reveal how care arrangements and practices change from generation to generation. For example, while still a minority, the emerging phenomenon of adolescents staying in China challenges this trend.

4. *The role of schools.* The informants' accounts about the schooling stage reveals that there is much work to do, as nearly all of their narratives incorporate experiences of bullying, which were often normalised by the teachers, who asked them to ignore and cope with the experiences. Within this sample, two informants – the only ones who did not finish secondary school – linked dropping out of school to the feeling of being out of place, as a result of their ethnicity and how the other students reacted to it (in both cases, they highlighted the fact that they had very good academic performance). Other informants have mentioned that similar circumstances are common knowledge. This suggests that there is a clear need to focus on this domain and implement specific mechanisms to prevent children experiencing any type of discrimination at school.

5. *Qingtianese grandparents arriving in Spain.* Upon arrival, these grandparents lack a social network and knowledge about the Spanish language and customs. In several families in the sample, the grandparents returned to China prior to the expected

date, or as soon as their help was not strictly necessary, as they felt out of place. In this dissertation, I have suggested that, beyond the difficulties posed by the language, the spatial design of cities in Spain and how people experience public spaces is an apparent problem. Exercising and interacting outdoors forms part of the daily routines of these grandparents – and other generations – in Qingtian. Cities in China have public spaces where people congregate on a daily basis. This can occur in big parks, squares or on river paths, but it is also easy to find small groups of people on any corner. Spanish cities and towns lack spaces which are really public, as the public use of space is mostly restricted to passing through that space. Even in those places in which Chinese grandparents in Spain can find many other co-ethnics, the social and spatial design of the city often drives them either to interact indoors, or in very specific places, turning it into an isolated activity. While this subject is far from the focus of this thesis, it would be worth conducting further research and implementing actions to create spaces which might help these mobile caregivers to feel more at home. Such spaces, moreover, would serve to improve the quality of life of all the grandparents and older generations living in Spain.

6. *Increasingly heterogeneous families.* This thesis focuses on qualitative over quantitative data and does not represent the full range of diversity characterising such a heterogeneous group of people. As such, relationships and family types that are understood as non-normative and minority forms in this context, such as single mothers or homosexual couples, are not present in the sample. Further research should seek to explore how these circumstances are articulated and handled by these transnational families. For example, how homosexual marriage, which is legal in Spain, intersects with Chinese family life. In the same vein, deciding to not have children is an option for some young adults living in Spain, despite the challenge it poses to the Chinese culture system. Finally, mixed marriages constitute another unexplored area of research. In contrast to the prevalence of marriages with co-ethnics among Chinese migrants in Spain, there is expected to be a growing trend towards mixed couples for their descendants and this, in fact, is taking place. As such, it may not only be the spatial reference to third countries that is meaningful for the forthcoming generations of these Qingtianese transnational families, but also the interaction with other culture systems. The question to answer then will be, how long will they continue to be Qingtianese?

7. *Young adults' parenthood model.* The fieldwork has shown that the young adult informants build their discourse about their future parenthood around an opposition to that of their parents' generation. As informants continue to advance along the life-course and through the family and life cycles, their present-day ideas, plans and points of view may change, as they take on new social and family roles (Phoenix & Seu, 2013; Foner & Dreby, 2011; Dreby, 2010). As such, a longitudinal research project would serve to document whether they adhere to their expected parenthood model or not, and how this is enabled or constrained.

8. *Development of the opposition between young adults and parents.* This research has pointed to a generational opposition in which Chinese versus Spanish socialisation is a key marker of difference. Nevertheless, as relationships are not static, it is worth following up on this point, in order to document how it evolves.

a) Firstly, in families in the sample, the young adult informants are the first generation to have been socialised in Spain. Once the informants and their peers become parents, the number of generations socialised in Spain will equal or surpass those that were socialised in China. At that moment, it may be that the generational parent-child opposition will disappear; alternatively, it might move in parallel to the family cycle, the grandparents' generation being constituted the 'others' rather than the parents' generation; or it could mutate towards other forms.

b) Secondly, the Spanish and Chinese societies continue to change. As such, what is today presented as a clear dichotomy in informants' accounts, between China and Spain, may or may not end up being perceived as a much smaller difference by both sides. For example, households in which grandparents and grandchildren cohabited while the parents' generation was physically absent on a daily basis was a common and socially accepted situation in Spain only a few decades ago, this most often being linked to parents' work-related mobility. These arrangements are still very common nowadays in China, linked to similar circumstances. Nevertheless, as occurred in Spain, new ideas – and ideals – about childhood and family are gaining ground. As such, the still-prevalent care arrangements in China are beginning to be perceived as increasingly undesirable and the government and mass media are bombarding the public with hegemonic images of childhoods (Binah-Pollak, 2014; Naftali, 2010). Thus, both countries are on the

path to globalisation, resulting in growing similarities which may cause the China-Spain dichotomy to seem unrealistic in the future, at least in certain domains of life.

9. *Changes in transnational ties.* While there is a trend within the sample groups for the younger informants to have a growing number of transnational ties – despite the fact that some of the informants in the adolescent sample are the second generation to have been totally or partially socialised in Spain, while the young adults belong to the first one – only longitudinal research may determine if these ties will remain consistent as they advance through life, as transnational relationships tend to fluctuate along the life course (Gherghel & Le Gall, 2011; Levitt & Waters, 2006). It would be particularly interesting to explore the place that Qingtian will occupy in their lives: whether not only its emotional importance is retained or intensified but also its physical presence as a meeting point, or whether they will become progressively more detached from it; and how this intersects with other family generations' transnational engagement.









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# **ANNEXES**



# Annex 1: Public profiles, expressions and creations of young people of Chinese origin in Spain

This annex briefly introduces the public profiles, expressions and creations of young people of Chinese origin in Spain. Referring to ‘young Chinese people’ is a succinct way to include a broad set of people who have their Chinese ethnicity in common, irrespective of other factors such as nationality or country of birth. As such, it encompasses adopted children, migrants’ descendants and the migrants themselves. Their circumstances, paths and lives, and how these are presented and represented by themselves and by others, are highly heterogeneous. I make use only of the previous references to research subjects I have made in the thesis, meaning that those chosen are really significant to the subjects I have addressed. This means that there has been a certain process of selection, and as a result, some material has not been highlighted. Not all those who matter are here, but all those who are here matter.

## 1. The reference network: the ‘Chiñoles’ Facebook group

The complete name of this Facebook group is “*Chinos de Segunda Generación en España (Chiñoles)*” (2014)– in other words: “second-generation Chinese people in Spain (*chiñoles*)”. The word *chiñol* is composed of the word ‘*chino*’ (Chinese person in Spanish) plus *-ñol*, the three final letters of ‘*español*’ (Spaniard). It was coined by Sao Liu, who also created the Facebook group in February 2014. The word *chiñol/chiñola* has been used by many of the informants to refer to themselves, as they think that it can serve as a quick reference to their situation. Conversely, the usage of such a term is controversial in other forums. There has been similar, repeated debate about the widespread usage of the concept ‘second-generation’ in the name of the group and in many of their posts, due to its lack of specificity about what second-generation is and the meanings attached to such a concept.

Several informants talked to me about this group as a site in which they can find support and shared experiences, and some of them invited me to join it as a good way to get a closer idea of their reality. As such, I have been a member of this group since early 2016, the administrator being aware of my condition as a researcher. Nevertheless, I

have not reproduced any specific content or posts in this thesis, as it is a private group. Instead, I have relied on it to keep up-to-date about events and news and it has also served to prompt new questions about my research and to triangulate some other information I have collected through interviews and participant observation.

*Illustration 13: 'Chiñoles' Facebook group's background picture.*



*Source: Facebook page (closed group). Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/681280131923167/>*

The Spanish language is that which is normally used, with very few exceptions in which comments of certain members are written in Chinese characters or in *pinyin*<sup>113</sup> which mirrors their common – but not exclusive – condition as migrants' descendants, despite their diverse origins. This group has become the best arena for migrants' descendants and other ethnically Chinese people to share their experiences and to find a support network. In general terms, this group has five main functions:

- A **practical network**. It is very common to see posts offering work positions or opportunities in Spain and China. Also, people also frequently ask about the visas or other documents which are required in order to travel to other countries, or similar questions linked to bureaucratic procedures. The replies are based mainly on other users' own experiences, but also come from users who are professionals in different fields, such as lawyers.
- This group serves to **fight the stereotypes linked to Chinese** people in Spain and beyond. Many posts are linked to news or articles in the Spanish media

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<sup>113</sup> Romanized spelling for Chinese language.

which reproduce such stereotypes without questioning them further. Similarly, other racist attitudes in arenas other than the mass media, such as in small businesses or institutions, are reported in this group. These types of posts receive a large number of comments and often result in a joint strategy to confront them: for example, by sending a text requesting the author or person responsible to rectify the situation.

- **Chinese and Spanish news and curiosities** – news of a varied nature, regarding life in China or Spain.
- **Sharing experiences** - this group also serves to share experiences in the first person and to generate a space for dialogue and reflection on questions that affect them. Often members seek to find related experiences, by asking if something similar has happened to any of the others, or if they had the same feelings. Family and social life in relation to their Chinese ethnicity tend to be the subject most of these posts.
- **Meeting people** – this group may serve to expand individuals' networks, not only on a virtual level, but also on a face-to-face one. Firstly, one or several group meetings are organised over the course of the year. Secondly, when members of this group travel around China or Spain, they very often write a post indicating where they will travel and asking if someone in the group will be around there to meet up. It was through a couple of these posts that I met two of my informants in Qingtian.

In the description of this Facebook group, the administrator refers to the aim of sharing experiences and enhancing the image of the Chinese community in Spain, pointing to 'second-generation' Chinese people in Spain as the perfect actors to do this. The Facebook group page is linked to an external website (Chinos de segunda generación, 2015) where the name of the Facebook group appears at the top of the homepage, followed by the phrase "breaking stereotypes" ("*rompiendo estereotipos*"). Its launch was announced in the group as aiming to share meaningful experiences of young people

of Chinese origin in Spain. The website did not continue to be updated and still contains the initial three sections<sup>114</sup>, each of which has a “*chiñol*” as its protagonist.

The first one, published on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015, focuses on Sao Liu's experience, under the title “proud of being *Chiñol*” (Liu, 2015). In it, he narrates his arrival in Spain during his childhood, his following experiences and how his identity shifted from an early identification as Spanish to a growing interest in what he refers to as “my roots and my past”. He ends by highlighting his pride in being *chiñol* and in “being able to share two cultures, two languages, two ways of seeing and living life, because this has enriched my life both personally and professionally”. I interviewed him at the very beginning of this research and this pride and the emphasis placed on the double-sided condition he attributes himself runs through his discourse. Moreover, he is a habitual face in newspaper and magazine articles, as well as in documentaries about Chinese people in Spain, in his search to share experiences and to enhance the image of the Chinese community there, from his position as a descendant of Chinese migrants who has been socialised in Spain.

The second story corresponds to Natalia Zhu Zhang (2015, November 19). After a brief introduction focused on her professional path as a scientist currently working in China, the post acquires the form of a short interview. In contrast with previous life-stages, in which she denied her Chineseness, she is proud of it nowadays. While she is enjoying her stay in China, she thinks about it as a temporary situation and she considers Spain the place to settle and to start a family. Finally, the third post is by Rou-Monica Zheng (2015, December, 5). She is a young woman of 18 years of age, who is co-founder and public representative of the NGO, Books Up. By introducing this and another social project, the short interview focuses on her proactive and collaborative spirit. When asked about the differences between her parents' generation and her own, she highlights socialisation in Spain as key, with the multicultural context as a mind-opener.

## 2. Sharing their own experiences

In what follows, I will refer to several blogs, comic strips and documentaries whose common feature is sharing the experiences of young people of Chinese origin in Spain.

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<sup>114</sup> As of May 2019, when this thesis was finalized.

a) *Quan Zhou / Gazpacho agridulce*

The work of Quan Zhou is another common reference made by the informants, as a window onto their realities. She has published vignettes in multiple magazines and newspapers and she collaborated on a Spanish TV show. In recent years, she has also published two books. In the first one, entitled '*Gazpacho Agridulce*' (Zhou, 2015), she posits a constant and persistent generational difference between the practices and expectations relating to family and social life of her and her sisters on the one hand, and their parents on the other. Moreover, the title has itself become very meaningful, as it is made up, firstly, of the word *gazpacho*, which refers to one of the most famous dishes in Andalusian<sup>115</sup> cuisine, and secondly, it uses the word *agridulce*, or 'sweet and sour', with reference to Chinese cuisine.

In an interview published in a Spanish magazine she defined this first book, in which she narrates the experience of growing up in a Chinese family in Spain, as a way to achieve conciliation. She states: "now I have understood who my parents are, where they come from, everything they have done and why; now I accept it and I try to extract the best of my two cultures, the Chinese and the Spanish" (Corazón Rural, 2015). Recently, she published a second book entitled '*Andaluchinas por el mundo*' (Zhou, 2017) in which she relates their – her and her sisters' – later experiences, in which their professional paths and related mobility are key. Once again, the title is very meaningful: the term '*Andaluchinas*' is composed of the word *andaluza* (a native of Andalucía, a region in the South of Spain), plus the word *chinas* (Chinese girls or women), mirroring her primary – and continually vindicated – identification as Andalusian, but also her Chinese side.

b) *Crónicas Eurorientales* ('European oriental chronicles')

Under the name of '*Crónicas Eurorientales*', another descendant of Chinese migrants narrates her experiences in the first person by using comic strips which, in this case, are drawn by her husband. The scripts are based on the circumstances surrounding her work place: a budget bazaar. She focuses primarily on the mismatches between customers' expectations and reality, and her interactions with them. Nevertheless, on certain

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<sup>115</sup> From the Andalusian region, in southern Spain.



occasions, she makes reference to her family life and/or life outside the work place, some of which I have referred to in this dissertation. On her Facebook page, where she publishes the comic strips, she writes: “I am one of those second-generation Chinese people who understands both cultures (Chinese and Spanish) and this brought me a lot of problems, but a lot of anecdotes” (Crónicas Europeas, 2015). Recently, she has created a WeChat account and her comic strips have been translated into the Chinese language.

c) *Al otro lado del pingfeng (On the other side of the folding screen)*

In this blog (Al otro lado del pingfeng, nd), the author shares her point of view and experiences as a descendant of Chinese migrants, who has been socialised in Spain and who arrives in China as an adult to study the Chinese language. She uses the metaphor of the folding screen to refer to her main aim of showing “(...) what today’s China and its people are like, based on the point of view and experiences of someone who has grown up under the influence of the two cultures, most aspects of which are different but which also have some close similarities” (Al otro lado del pingfeng, n/d).

In her first post, entitled: “About the two sides of the *pingfeng*” (Acerca de las dos caras del pingfeng, nd), she introduces her parents' migratory paths and childhood experiences; this text has been partially reproduced in this dissertation. This introductory post refers to several themes addressed in this research in just a few sentences: such as the informal circulation of children during an early life stage, and the importance of family businesses in their lives. Moreover, at the end of the post, she focuses on the concept of difference and how its meaning has evolved over the course of her life path: “As the years passed by, this situation made me experience a lot of feelings: from how society can push you to reject your own nature, to learning to value differences as something positive”.

In her second post, entitled: “The origin of the ‘Chinese banana’” (*El origen de los ‘chinos banana’, nd.*)<sup>116</sup>, she relates her experience visiting Qingtian and Wenzhou, the latter being her paternal family’s hometown and the former the maternal one. When describing Qingtian city, she refers to the European influence visible in such details as

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<sup>116</sup> *Banana* is used as a metaphor (yellow on the outside, white on the inside) to refer to Asian-origin persons socialized in a Western country ”.

sculptures of a bullfighter and Napoleon on its streets, which she interprets as a public demonstration of affection for their migratory countries. Regarding her mother's hometown, her first visit there was prompted by the need to provide family care. This visit coincided with that of some of her mother's classmates, who had also migrated abroad. She asked them if they would move back there and she reports a common negative response from them because, she writes, despite their early struggles and differences with the society in which they live, they feel grateful to have raised their children there and to have prospered. She suggests that this is the reason why 'second-generation' Chinese people in their migration destination countries are under what she refers to as a deep Western influence. Nevertheless, she states: "(...) depending on each family, one or the other culture is predominant, but of course, without forgetting where we come from. These people are popularly known as 'Chinese bananas': 'yellow on the outside and white in the inside'"

*Illustration 14: "Al otro lado del pingfeng" [On the other side of the folding screen] blog's homepage.*



Source: "Al otro lado del pingfeng" blog. Retrieved from:  
<https://alotroladodelpingfeng.wordpress.com/2017/06/04/primera-entrada-de-blog/>

Her further posts focus mainly on her experiences in China, such as surviving the traffic, paying for everything online or without the need to carry cash – through apps such as WeChat and Alipay, and her perceptions of China through the 'tradition vs modernity' duality, which is the name of one of her posts. The aim and perspective of this blog is extremely interesting, although sadly it only has six posts (from June to December 2017) without having been continued after that date.

d) *Entre dos mundos (In-between two worlds)*

'*Entre dos mundos*' (Lin, 2015) is a blog written by Wai Zhou Lin, within the framework of her psychology practice website. The initial post was published in October 2015 and the last one in March 2016. She used to share the link to the aforementioned Facebook group, providing an additional space for sharing experiences and reflections on them. In her blog, she introduces herself and her initiative using the following words:

“Today I want to start by talking a bit about myself. I was born in Spain to Chinese parents and this profession taught me and helped me a lot with tackling many of the difficulties which people like me can face (...)

This space will be aimed at those people who do not know very well where to locate themselves, do not know how to deal with what is happening to them and who feel alone. But it is also for those people who are interested in knowing about how these people live. Will you join me? I hope I can help you”.

Lin, 2015 (October, 24<sup>th</sup>).

In this introduction, she suggests that her own lived experiences are common or similar to many other people of Chinese origin who have been raised in Spain. And she offers the tools and resources that she has acquired through her training as a psychologist and over the course of her life, teaching others who may need such resources.

In her second post, entitled “being different does not remove barriers” (“*Ser diferente no levanta barreras*”) (Lin, 2015 October 24) she focuses on the widespread desire to be what she refers to as ‘normal’, particularly during adolescence. This involves reflection on how people of Chinese origin’s phenotypical appearance and the pace of life and customs of their families differ to those of their classmates. Moreover, she refers to such people’s common association between their problems and their status as Chinese descendants, emphasising the need to accept oneself as the path to acceptance from others, as being different and being unaccepted are not synonyms. This idea is reinforced in a later post, entitled “I am ashamed of being Chinese” (“*Me avergüenzo*

*de ser chino*”) (Lin, 2016 January 16) to which I have referred in previous chapters. Another recurrent theme in her posts is that of people of Chinese origin’s relationship with their parents. She suggests that her readers should start emphasising their parents’ positive behaviours or attitudes, and taking the focus off what they consider to be the negative ones and, in general, understand such behaviour and attitudes from their parents’ point of view.

e) *El hilo rojo (The red thread)*

‘*El hilo rojo*’ (Spiro, 2017) is the name of Xiaomei Spiro’s first documentary, which focuses on the sense of identity and belonging of four young adults of Chinese origin in Spain. While three of them are descendants of migrants, the fourth is the filmmaker herself, who was born into a Chinese family in China and later adopted by a Spanish family. Questions such as self-identification, intergenerational family relations and stereotypes are present. While its short length prevents it from offering a deeper level of analysis, it offers an interesting initial approach to its subjects. Moreover, its author is working on a second project, which is intended to develop it further, this time from the point of view of minors and their families.

### 3. Critical and combative spaces

There are several blogs written by descendants of Chinese migrants in Spain which, beyond sharing their experiences, incorporate a critical and activist perspective.

a) *Mandarina de la tierra* (‘Tangerine from the soil’)

On its homepage (Zhang, n/d), this blog is defined as a “space to show other realities which coexist with the most dominant and established ones in our society” (*Mandarina de la tierra*, . The subsequent lines present the blog’s aims and introduce the writer as “a Catalan voice of Chinese origin”, describing her as the initial contributor but not the only one, as the blog is understood to be a collaborative space. It is a place for collaborative writing, open to all who seek to “deconstruct reality’s bubbles, to question capitalism, to overturn machismo and to confront racism”. Moreover, they intend to

“promote (self) reflection and the personal growth of young people of Chinese origin, born and/or raised in Catalonia, either with a Chinese family or with a Catalan one”.

The initial “Catalan voice of Chinese origin” is that of Cristina Zhang Yu. In the last couple of years, she has presented this blog and other projects, and shared her own experiences and life path in multiple interviews in the Catalan and Spanish media. Her family's trajectory differs from that which is predominant in this research: her father migrated to Spain from Taiwan in the 1980s and her mother migrated from China some years later. Nevertheless, there are many experiences they may share, such as the fact of being descendants of migrants or being confronted with racist attitudes and an apparently never-ending migrant status. She defines herself as “*catalanoxinesa*” (Catalan-Chinese), reflecting an articulation of identities which goes beyond the duality between China and Spain. Moreover, she is very critical of other words and concepts which aim to serve as an umbrella to draw together a large and heterogeneous group of people, such as ‘second generation’, ‘1.5 generation’, ‘*chiñoles*’ and, particularly, ‘bananas’.

The information in the blog is in Spanish, Catalan and Mandarin. As of November 2018<sup>117</sup>, it contains four sections, related to discrimination in the workplace, feminism, identity/ies and interculturality. *Mandarina de la terra* also has its own profile pages on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

#### b) *Wildbanana*

Also taking a critical perspective, the ‘Wildbanana’<sup>118</sup> blog questions certain stereotypes about Asian migrants and their descendants. The person behind this project is Paloma Chen. She posits the risks inherent to the act of categorising everything and how difference and heterogeneity get lost in between. As such, she understands the concept ‘banana’ as a limiting one and she proposes conquering the term, transgressing it:

“(…) of course, bananas have a lot in common. But also, differences. If we still hate categories, let's also hate and venerate

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<sup>117</sup> As May 2019 blog has been remodeled. Some of these contents are not longer available.

<sup>118</sup> <https://wildbananablog.wordpress.com/>

the concept of banana. I will not fulfil the expectations of being a banana: speaking badly of my parent's language, not shopping in Chinatown (or worse still, shopping only where the *laowai*<sup>119</sup> shop) are not desirable attributes for me (...) Let's be provocative, let's be transgressors, let's get past the 'banana' concept (...)"

Chen, 2016 (August 24th)

In the blog, the categories are as follows: 'China', 'feminism' and 'racism', but there are also others, which stem from her profession as a blogger (journalist) – such as human rights in other countries, cultural appropriation, events and literature.

*Illustration 15: The 'Wild Banana' blog's banner.*



Source: 'Wild banana' blog. Retrieved from: <https://wildbananablog.wordpress.com/>

Paloma Chen also participates in a collaborative project, named '*Tusanaje* / 秘从中来'. On its website (Tusanaje, n/d), it is described as a platform with four lines of work: a virtual library (regarding research on Chinese migration in Latin America); dissemination of the work of Chinese-origin artists; sharing the experiences of migrants and descendants, and a site to articulate an interconnected global community.

Besides the articles published on the website (some of which I have referred to in this dissertation), they organise events inside and outside China to promote their project and other related ones. For example, in May 2018, the talk entitled '*Más allá de los 华裔: tusanes y chiñoles*' ('Beyond *tusanes* and *chiñoles*'), was offered by Paloma Chen and Rodrigo. P. Chen to students of Spanish in the Shanghai International Studies University. Later on, they organised the projection of the documentary "*El hilo rojo*"

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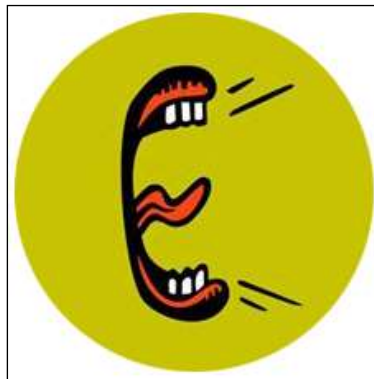
<sup>119</sup> Foreigner (non-Chinese person)

and the talk, “Second-generation Chinese people in Spain”, held in the Miguel de Cervantes Library in Shanghai.

c) *Catàrsia Colective*

Catàrsia is a collective of Asian-origin descendants in Catalonia, created in 2018, which uses a feminist and anti-racist discourse with the aim of making them visible and breaking away from the stereotypes which surround them. To do so, they are very active in spreading their message on social media and they also promote spaces for activism, reflection, dialogue and experience-sharing in Catalonia, as well as in other cities, such as Madrid and Valencia, through their collaboration with other collectives and entities.

*Illustration 16: The ‘Catàrsia Colective’ logo.*



Source: Catàrsia Facebook page. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.facebook.com/catarsiabcn/>

## Annex 2: Table of young adult informants

Name	Age	Sex	Country of birth	Partially raised in China
Wendi	19	Female	Spain	Yes
Sonia	21	Female	Spain	No
Jiaolong	31	Male	Spain	Yes
Mario	27	Male	Italy	Yes
Dandan	21	Female	Spain	Yes
Daquan	29	Male	Spain	No
Manuel	25	Male	Spain	Yes
Kun	22	Male	China	Yes
Biming	24	Male	China	Yes
Wenbo	23	Female	Spain	Yes
Pablo	22	Male	China	Yes
Dora	22	Female	Portugal	Yes
Eva	21	Female	China	Yes
Ze	22	Male	Spain	Yes
Feifei	27	Female	China	Yes
Huahua	18	Female	Spain	Yes
Zan	22	Male	Spain	No
Iago	26	Male	Spain	No
Xingfu	27	Male	Spain	Yes
Jingsheng	26	Male	China	Yes
Xiaofan	18	Female	Spain	No