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BY ZIHAN WANG

A photograph of two men in black suits embracing each other in a public square. The man on the right is smiling and has his arms around the man on the left. The man on the left has a red flower pinned to his lapel. In the background, there are traditional Chinese buildings with green roofs and a crowd of people. The scene is set outdoors under a clear sky.

# CONFLICT OF IDENTITIES:

THE INTERSECTION OF SEXUALITY, CULTURE AND MIGRATION  
AMONG CHINESE GAY MEN IN SPAIN





Universitat Autònoma  
de Barcelona

Doctoral Dissertation

Doctoral Programme in Social and Cultural Anthropology

**Conflict of Identities:  
The Intersection of Sexuality, Culture and Migration among  
Chinese Gay Men in Spain**

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This quote, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts", is a constant reminder throughout the demanding four years of my PhD journey, encapsulating the essence of my experience. The challenges were relentless, often making the road to completion appear insurmountable. Since the inception of my candidature, I envisioned the moment when the last word of this thesis would be written.

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study delves into the intricate intersections of ethnicity, sexuality, and masculinity experienced by Chinese gay men navigating Spain's cultural landscape. Through an intersectional lens, the research explores how these men negotiate their identities amidst societal expectations and migration dynamics. Drawing on in-depth interviews with a diverse group of participants, the study illuminates the multifaceted strategies employed by individuals to construct and negotiate their identities within diverse sociocultural contexts. Anticipating the results, the research examines themes such as the negotiation of ethnic, sexual, and masculine identities, shedding light on how participants navigate challenges in familial and professional settings.

Additionally, the study explores the resilience exhibited by participants and the strategies and skills they employ to cope with adversities. The findings reveal instances where participants seamlessly integrate their ethnic, sexual, and masculine identities, particularly in environments that foster acknowledgment and appreciation. Despite facing societal expectations and threats to their masculinity, participants demonstrate resilience, transforming obstacles into opportunities for personal growth. Highlighting the agency of Chinese gay men in Spain, this research showcases the dynamic ways in which they actively shape their identities within the rich tapestry of cultural diversity and societal expectations. In the end, this study sheds light on the interplay of identities, enriching our understanding of the experiences of Chinese gay men and contributing to a nuanced exploration of the complexities inherent in their journey.

**Keywords:** Chinese immigration; Queer study; Intersectionality; Identity negotiation, Spain

## Resumen

Este estudio cualitativo profundiza en las intrincadas intersecciones de etnicidad, sexualidad y masculinidad experimentadas por los hombres gays chinos que navegan el panorama cultural español. A través de un enfoque interseccional, la investigación explora cómo estos hombres negocian sus identidades a través de las expectativas sociales y las dinámicas migratorias. Basándose en una metodología de entrevistas en profundidad con un grupo diverso de participantes, el estudio arroja luz sobre las diversas estrategias empleadas por los hombres gays chinos para construir y negociar sus identidades dentro de diversos contextos socioculturales. Entre los resultados encontrados, la investigación examina temas como la negociación de identidades étnicas, sexuales así como con respecto a su masculinidad, mostrando cómo los participantes se enfrentan a los desafíos que surgen en los entornos familiares y profesionales.

Además, el estudio explora la resiliencia que tienen los participantes, así como las estrategias y habilidades para hacer frente a las adversidades que se encuentran. Los hallazgos revelan realidades en las que los participantes integran sin problemas sus identidades étnicas, sexuales y su masculinidad, especialmente en entornos que fomentan su reconocimiento y valía. A pesar de enfrentarse a expectativas sociales y desafíos con respecto a su masculinidad, los participantes muestran resiliencia, transformando obstáculos en oportunidades para el crecimiento personal. Destacando la agencia de los hombres gays chinos en España, esta investigación muestra las formas dinámicas en que moldean activamente sus identidades dentro del rico tapiz de diversidad cultural y expectativas sociales. En última instancia, el estudio ofrece conocimientos valiosos sobre la

interseccionalidad de sus identidades, enriqueciendo nuestra comprensión de las experiencias vividas de los hombres gays chinos y contribuyendo a una exploración matizada de las complejidades inherentes que se encuentran en su camino.

**Palabras clave:** Inmigración china; Estudio queer; Interseccionalidad; Negociación de identidad, España

## 摘要

这项定性研究深入地探讨了生活在西班牙的中国男同性恋在异国文化环境中所经历的有关于种族、性取向和男子气概的复杂交织。通过交叉视角，该研究探讨了这些男性如何在社会期望和移民动态中探索自己的身份认同。通过对参与者进行的深入访谈，研究揭示了其在不同社会文化背景下构建和探索身份的多层次策略。预期的结果包括对种族、性取向和性别的尝试探索，阐明参与者如何在家庭和职业环境中应对挑战。

此外，研究还探讨了参与者展现的韧性以及他们应对逆境的策略和技能。结果显示，参与者在一些鼓励认可和欣赏的环境中，能够无缝地将其种族、性取向和男性身份进行整合。尽管他们面临着社会各界的期望和对男性气质的威胁，仍然能展示出其韧性，将障碍转化为个人成长的机会。通过展示生活在西班牙的中国男同性恋的主体性，这项研究展示了他们在丰富的文化多样性和社会期望中积极塑造自己身份的动态方式。最后，该研究为身份交叉研究提供了宝贵的见解，丰富了对中国男同性恋者生活经验的理解，并为探索他们旅程中固有复杂性的细微探索做出了贡献。

**关键词：**中国移民；酷儿研究；交叉性；身份认同；西班牙

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The ever-expanding field of intersectionality has brought to light the intricate layers of identities such as race, sexuality, and class and their collective influence on individual life experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval- Davis, 2006). The well-established detrimental effects of heterosexism and homophobia on the LGBTQ+ community, contributing significantly to mental health disparities within this demographic, stand as a testament to the urgency of understanding the intersection of race/ethnicity and sexuality (Meyer, 2003; Platero, 2012). While existing research has made strides in diversifying narratives by focusing on Black and Latino gay communities, there remains a conspicuous void in studies involving Asian gay men, particularly within the Chinese community (Chan, 1989; Chung & Szymanski, 2006; Hart et al., 2021).

The predominant focus on white, middle-class populations in academic research concerning gay men (Cass, 1984; Rosario et al., 2006; Troiden, 1989) has left the experiences of Asian gay men, especially those within the Chinese diaspora, largely unexplored. This study seeks to fill this research gap by employing an intersectional framework and constructivist grounded theory to delve into the lived experiences of self-identified Chinese gay men in Spain. It aims to shed light on their primary concerns, comprehend their responses to these experiences, and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of the complex interplay between migration, race, and sexuality.

In the early 21st century, Spain emerged as a global magnet for immigrants, witnessing an exponential influx (Arango, 2012). However, academic attention towards queer



migrants has primarily been bestowed upon Moroccans and Latinos, leaving a significant gap in comprehending the Chinese queer diaspora's experiences, despite this group being one of the largest immigrant communities in Spain (Badanta et al., 2021). The Chinese community remains largely invisible, a phenomenon exacerbated by the taboo surrounding homosexuality in Chinese traditional culture.

The unique status of Chinese gay men as individuals occupying a dual minority status – both ethnic and sexual – makes them a compelling subject for scholarly inquiry. This study endeavors to unravel their lived experiences, exploring their primary concerns, responses, and the challenges they face in navigating the intersections of race, sexuality, and migration. As we embark on this intellectual journey, the narratives of Spain-based Chinese gay men beckon us to engage with empathy, curiosity, and a commitment to fostering an inclusive society.

## **1.1 Background**

Motivated by a commitment to uncover the untold stories within the mosaic of migration experiences, this research is driven by a profound interest in exploring the intersectionality of race, sexuality, and migration. The choice to examine the lives of Chinese gay men in Spain stems from recognizing the specific challenges they face—challenges that are often sidelined in wider migration research.

The choice to concentrate on this particular demographic arises from a conscious endeavor to enhance the representation of individuals situated at the intersection of minority identities. In the backdrop of Spain's evolving multicultural landscape, the experiences of the

Chinese queer diaspora represent an underexplored narrative, compelling in its complexity. The invisibility of this community within both Spanish and Chinese societal spheres raises critical questions about visibility, acceptance, and the intricate dynamics of belonging.

My journey into researching the lives of Chinese gay men in Spain is deeply rooted in personal experiences that unfolded during my time in the country in 2016. Being a gay Chinese man involves grappling with unique and multifaceted challenges in navigating societal acceptance due to intersecting identities. The realization that my cultural background became a perceived obstacle emerged starkly after my arrival in Spain. Interactions with others reinforced my status as a racial minority, highlighting the complexities faced by LGBTQ+ individuals from ethnic backgrounds who must navigate both racism and ethnic prejudices simultaneously.

The enduring awareness of feeling different lingers vividly in my memory. An incident on a Barcelona metro in 2017 epitomized the challenges. Engaged in conversation with a friend, we unwittingly became the target of verbal abuse from a stranger who hurled anti-gay insults at us. Though we chose to ignore him, the discomfort persisted, culminating in a final act of spitting before he disappeared. My assumption of Spain as a nation where individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds coexisted harmoniously crumbled. This incident, unsettling as it was, fueled my motivation to delve into questions of ethnic and sexual identity.

Being both Asian and gay positioned me in a nexus of identity conflict and threat. The richness of Chinese culture holds significant value in my life, and the family, a cornerstone of collectivist culture, plays a pivotal role. However, the traditional values of Chinese culture

vehemently reject homosexuality, creating a tension between my cultural and sexual identities. Revealing my homosexual identity conflicted with the collectivist perspective that emphasizes group affiliation, frequently minimizing individual distinctions.

The journey to 'coming out' took years of internal struggle, as I grappled with the fear that identifying as homosexual might lead to a dual life or strain relationships with my family and the wider homosexual community. Alongside societal and familial expectations, internal struggles accompanied the journey of reconciling both gay and Asian identities. Experiences of marginalization within the broader gay community surfaced, as ethnic minorities often encounter stereotypes that downplay their sexual desirability, with mainstream gay media frequently overlooking or excluding these voices. This personal journey serves as the foundation of my dedication to highlighting the stories of Chinese gay individuals in Spain, revealing the complexities of identity negotiation and the quest for acceptance within a multifaceted sociocultural environment.

Moreover, the broader academic context has underscored the scarcity of research dedicated to this specific demographic. The absence of comprehensive narratives addressing the challenges and triumphs of Chinese gay men in Spain signals an imperative to fill this void. This study is a testament to the belief that understanding these narratives contributes not only to the academic dialogue on migration but also fosters a more inclusive and nuanced comprehension of the diverse human experiences within the broader tapestry of global migration.

## **1.2 Goals of this PhD Dissertation**

In the current era of heightened cross-border mobility and increased cultural exchanges, the global LGBTQ+ rights movement has fostered an environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds can explore and express their sexual identities. This holds particular significance for underrepresented populations such as Chinese immigrant young gay men, who navigate complex intersections of culture, migration, and sexuality. As society becomes more interconnected, understanding the experience of gay immigrants emerges as a critical research area with profound implications for both academic scholarship and social policy.

This study aims to carve out a distinctive space by amplifying the narratives of Chinese immigrant gay men, offering insights into their identities and lived experiences. Existing theories and research on gay diasporas, rooted in Euro-centric values, may fall short in addressing the nuanced needs of individuals from minority backgrounds. Moreover, these theories were crafted in times when cross-border movements were less prevalent, underscoring the urgency of exploring the contemporary challenges and opportunities faced by Chinese gay men in Spain.

As a PhD dissertation, this research also contributes substantially to the empirical examination of intersectionality, challenging monolithic perspectives on oppression by addressing the complexity of social marginalization. This research endeavors to unravel the intricate dynamics of intersecting identities among Chinese immigrant gay men. In this pursuit, the study draws inspiration from scholars such as Crenshaw (1991) and Yuval-Davis

(2006), who pioneered intersectionality theory to understand the multifaceted nature of identity and oppression.

By delving into the intersecting identities of Chinese immigrant gay men, this research significantly advances the academic discourse and bears practical implications for future immigration studies. The findings are poised to inform more inclusive and responsive approaches in immigration research, fostering a nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences within marginalized communities. This study contributes a crucial perspective to ongoing dialogues within the field of immigration research, aligning with the evolving landscape of scholarly investigations into the multifaceted nature of identity, migration, and social marginalization (Robbins et al., 2012).

### **1.3 Discussion of Terms**

#### ***Chinese***

The term “Chinese” presents a complex challenge in its definition, influenced by a myriad of cultural, historical, and political factors. The complexities surrounding this issue are particularly significant in research concerning Chinese migration and any studies that reference 'China.' In Chinese, the phrase for "Chinese people" can be expressed as Zhongguoren (中国人), which literally translates to "people from China." This term emphasizes the connection to the nation and its geographic identity, highlighting different perspectives on China as a nation or cultural entity (Wong, 2019). In the context of this thesis, the objective is not to delve into the political definition of “Chinese.” The focus turns to the experiences of men in Spain who identify as "Chinese." This group encompasses

migrants from China and other areas, as well as those born in Spain with Chinese ancestry who see themselves as part of the Chinese community. The choice of this term is deliberate, highlighting the influences associated with the concept of "China," regardless of its diverse interpretations. This investigation also explores how these influences shape the informants' understandings of their identities as "Chinese" and "Spanish."

### ***LGBTQ+***

The term "LGBTQ+" encompasses a wide range of sexual orientations and gender identities, reflecting a complex and multifaceted definition shaped by various social, historical, and cultural influences. Within the LGBTQ+ umbrella, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and other identities coexist, reflecting an ongoing evolution in understanding and inclusivity (Choudhuri & Curley, 2019). In this thesis, the attention is directed towards the lived experiences of men in Spain who identify under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. This encompasses those with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, irrespective of the specific labels within the acronym. The intention is to acknowledge the richness and complexity of individual experiences within this broader spectrum. The use of "LGBTQ+" intentionally embraces the diversity within this community, emphasizing the social and cultural dimensions that influence the informants' identities and experiences in the Spanish context (Williams et al., 2019). By employing this inclusive term, the research aims to delve into how societal perceptions and cultural influences shape the narratives of individuals identifying as LGBTQ+, contributing to a nuanced understanding of their experiences in the Spanish cultural milieu.

## *Gay and Homosexual*

Although "gay" and "homosexual" are commonly treated as synonyms in everyday language, their historical origins reveal important distinctions. A significant global trend has emerged, with many same-sex attracted men opting to identify as "gay" (Altman, 2002). In contrast, "homosexual" was introduced in the late 1800s as a scientific and seemingly neutral term for male same-sex relationships. However, this label has been widely rejected by individuals who identify as gay, primarily due to its associations with twentieth-century medical discourse (Norton, 2016).

To achieve the goals of this research, individuals who identify as same-sex attracted are referred to as "gay." This term, although encompassing a diverse range of experiences related to gender, sexuality, and sexual practices, is chosen for its contemporary resonance and acceptance among the participants. Tom Boellstorff's (2007) examination of the politics surrounding terminology in cross-cultural sexuality research resonates with the challenges faced in this study. Participants often lacked a singular term for self-description, and when terms were used, meanings were not universally stable. The use of "gay men" in the thesis title reflects the majority preference among participants for this self-description. Despite the acknowledgment of varying self-understandings and the fluidity of terminology, "gay" is employed as a pragmatic and recognizable descriptor, acknowledging the complexity within participants' lives.

In discussions about Chinese gay men, researchers have aimed to clarify the distinctions among the terms "gay," "homosexual," and "tongzhi" as they are employed by these individuals (Chou, 2008; Garber, 2003; Rofel, 2007). However, the interchangeability

of these terms among participants underscores the need to avoid overemphasizing specificity. The diverse ways in which these terms are used reflect the intricate and ambiguous nature of individuals' self-identifications. This complexity is acknowledged and embraced in this study, rather than being oversimplified for ease of understanding and readability.

### ***Migrants and Immigrants***

The distinctions between 'migrants' and "immigrants" carry subtle nuances, and the usage of these terms remains a topic of scholarly debate. Sarah Willen (2012) suggests that "migration" often conveys implications of more transient movements, while "immigration" tends to suggest unidirectionality and a greater sense of permanence. However, consensus on the precise conditions under which each term should be applied is still lacking. Scholars differ in their approaches, with some adopting precise distinctions, while others rely on the terms that are more frequently employed within the context of their country of study (Willen, 2012).

Among the scholars who advocate for the term "im/migrants" to encompass a broader range of experiences are Heide Castañeda (2010), Willen, Mulligan, and Castañeda (2011), as well as Sarah J. Mahler (1995) and Aihwa Ong (1999). This terminology acknowledges the complex and dynamic relationships between individuals currently engaged in the migration process and those who have already established themselves as immigrants. By employing this more inclusive language, these scholars aim to capture the realities faced by both groups, recognizing that their experiences are often intertwined and influenced by similar social, economic, and cultural contexts. This perspective emphasizes the fluidity of migration experiences and challenges the binary classifications that can overlook the nuances of identity



and belonging in a globalized world. This study primarily concentrates on immigrants and their descendants in Spain; however, the nuanced relationships between migration and immigration, along with the absence of a uniform terminology, necessitate the use of the term 'migration' as a comprehensive descriptor. This choice aims to encompass the diverse experiences of both groups and acknowledges the complexities involved in their journeys, thereby fostering a more inclusive understanding of the topic at hand. This term is employed throughout the thesis to encompass movements that are both temporary and permanent, aligning with a broader understanding of migration experiences (Acevedo-Garcia & Almeida, 2012).

### ***Ethnic Minority***

The term “Ethnic Minority” assumes a distinctive connotation within the Spanish context. While this term may not align seamlessly with the linguistic and sociocultural nuances in Spain, it becomes a pertinent descriptor for individuals of Chinese origin who, by virtue of not being Spaniards, can be considered as forming part of an ethnic minority (Maya-Jariego et al., 2009).

Within this research, individuals of Chinese descent in Spain are regarded as constituting an “Ethnic Minority.” This label is chosen to emphasize their distinct cultural and ethnic identity, acknowledging the potential disparities in experiences that arise from being outside the dominant cultural group (Wang, 2021). The use of this term aims to capture the diversity within the broader Spanish society and illuminate the unique challenges and perspectives faced by individuals with a Chinese background in Spain. It's essential to recognize the complexities and fluidity associated with identity labels, and the term “Ethnic

Minority” is employed here with an awareness of its limitations, striving to foster an inclusive understanding of the diverse backgrounds and experiences within the Chinese community in Spain.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

This study is structured into five chapters, each offering unique insights into the lived experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain. Chapter One acts as an introduction, providing a comprehensive overview of the research's context, including the historical and sociocultural background that informs the study. It discusses the motivations behind the research, emphasizing the importance of examining the intersecting identities of Chinese gay men in Spain. This chapter lays the groundwork for the following sections by clearly outlining the research questions and defining the scope of the study, thereby setting the stage for a deeper exploration of the complexities surrounding this marginalized community.

In Chapter Two, the study delves into a comprehensive exploration of relevant literature. It unfolds with the history of homosexuality in China, providing a historical context. Moving forward, we explore the diasporic identity of Chinese in Spain, followed by the next section discussing the Chinese queer diaspora in Western societies. The chapter concludes with a specific focus on Chinese gay males in Spain, creating a robust foundation for the study's contextualization.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology used to explore the lived experiences of Chinese gay individuals in Spain. It begins with an exploration of qualitative research approaches, subsequently detailing the application of the Constructivist Grounded

Theory Approach. The chapter also addresses participant selection, data collection methods, and the intricacies of data analysis using the constructivist grounded theory.

Chapter Four presents the empirical findings derived from the intersection of sexuality and migration, the intersection of race and migration, and the intersection of race and sexuality. It further elucidates the challenges and resilience encountered by Chinese gay men in Spain, mapping their odyssey in a foreign land.

Chapter Five delves into a robust discussion of the research findings, emphasizing their significance and broader implications. It offers an in-depth analysis of the study's strengths and limitations, presenting nuanced insights that extend beyond a mere summary. Through critical assessment, the chapter highlights key findings while prioritizing the most significant aspects discovered. Additionally, it provides original insights and perspectives, elevating the discussion to offer novel contributions to the field. Ultimately, the chapter serves as a culmination of the study's exploration, offering a rich and insightful reflection on the complexities uncovered.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The intersection of sexuality, cultural identity, and migration unfolds as a complex tapestry within the existing literature. This review embarks on a multifaceted exploration, delving into the intricacies of living experiences and same-sex desire among men in China, the experiences of Chinese individuals residing in Spain, and the evolving concept of Diasporic Chinese Identity. As we navigate through these diverse realms, a particular focus is placed on the unique challenges and nuances faced by those who identify as both “Chinese” and “Gay” in Spain.

Homosexuality and same-sex desire among men in China, while existing within a rich historical and cultural context, have witnessed a transformative journey shaped by societal attitudes, governmental policies, and individual narratives. Concurrently, the experiences of the Chinese diaspora in Spain unfold against the backdrop of migration, providing insights into the ways cultural identity adapts and evolves in new environments. Within this diasporic framework, the question of what it means to be “Chinese” becomes a dynamic exploration of cultural preservation, adaptation, and negotiation.

Moreover, the intersectionality of being both “Chinese” and “Gay” introduces a unique set of challenges and opportunities, particularly in Western countries where cultural norms and LGBTQ+ rights intersect. This literature review seeks to weave together these strands, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of identity, migration, and sexual orientation within the context of the Chinese diaspora. As we embark on this intellectual journey, the goal is to unravel the complexities, nuances, and shared narratives that shape the lived experiences of individuals navigating the intersection of these identities.

## **2.1 The History of Homosexuality in China**

In exploring the multifaceted landscape of Homosexuality in China, this chapter serves as a gateway to unravel the historical dimensions that have shaped the experiences of individuals who identify within the LGBTQ+ spectrum. The rich tapestry of Chinese history carries within its folds a narrative of complexity, diversity, and evolution, and the history of homosexuality is a vital thread within this larger story. To embark on this historical voyage is to traverse a landscape marked by both continuity and change. Homosexuality in China has been entwined with the ebb and flow of cultural, social, and political currents, creating a mosaic that reflects the nuances of acceptance, resistance, and transformation. From the poetic expressions of ancient Chinese literature to the challenges posed by various dynastic eras, the history of homosexuality unfolds as a dynamic narrative that extends far beyond societal norms and governmental policies.

By excavating the historical layers, we aim to illuminate not only the milestones and setbacks but also the resilient narratives of individuals who, throughout history, have navigated the intricate intersections of their sexual identities with the broader socio-cultural context. As we delve into the annals of time, the objective is to paint a comprehensive portrait, acknowledging the struggles, achievements, and the cultural nuances that have shaped the diverse expressions of homosexuality in China.

Through this historical lens, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the roots that anchor contemporary experiences, fostering a dialogue that transcends temporal boundaries and enriches our comprehension of the diverse and vibrant spectrum of human sexuality.

### *The Ancient Time: Acceptance of Homosexuality*

Historical research shows that while homosexuality and same-sex desire among men were prevalent and acknowledged in ancient China, they were not entirely accepted (Hinsch, 1990; Samshasha, 1997; Wu, 2003). Certain scholars have suggested that homosexuality might have been a prevalent aspect of Chinese life in prehistoric times. The earliest historical records of China include mentions of male homosexuality and same-sex experiences among men (Hinsch, 1990; Ruan, 1991). There were various terms for homosexuality came from allegorical tales; for example, "Duan Xiu" is a tale about a Han Dynasty emperor (Han Ai-ti) and his male lover; the emperor chose to cut the sleeve so as not to disturb his lover (Hinsch, 1990).

Chinese people only considered same-sex encounters as behavior to express their homosexual desires, not part of the identity of the person (Mao et al., 2002), the concept of "gay" or "lesbian" identity did not exist (Wah-Shan, 2001). Sex between men might be tolerated once the man fulfilled the obligation to get married and have legitimate offspring to continue his family lineage (Hinsch, 1990; Wu, 2003).

In traditional China, people were profoundly aware of social disparities. Unequal social standing made class-structured homosexuality possible (Hinsch, 1990; Wah-Shan, 2001). The cultural tolerance occurred only when the social hierarchy remained unchallenged. The upper-class male with superior wealth, age, employment or education could sexually dominate not only his wives, but also other social inferiors such as younger male servants (Wah-Shan, 2001).

Despite certain historical contexts where homosexuality was tolerated, it was never fully embraced in ancient China. Samshasha (1997) documented several isolated occurrences of anti-homosexual sentiments throughout Chinese history, highlighting the complexities of societal attitudes towards same-sex relationships during that time: Men labeled as homosexual were prohibited to take official-select examinations to improve their social status; Revelation of same-sex romantic relationship could result in punishment or abolishment of a position; Discussion of same-sex behaviors could lead to social prejudice, contempt, and even verbal insult. Nonetheless, unlike homosexual actions were treated as sinful in medieval Europe, the ancient Chinese culture was more open and tolerant of homosexuality (Wu, 2003).

### **The Era Of Modernization: East Meets West**

China's journey towards modernization took shape during the decline of the Qing dynasty, particularly following its defeat in the Opium War against the United Kingdom in 1840. This pivotal moment marked the first occasion in which China was compelled to confront Western imperialism. Amidst this upheaval, reformers and intellectuals sought to integrate Western knowledge and technology while striving to retain Chinese cultural values and educational traditions. Concurrently, Western psychiatric concepts and theories began to find their way into China, contributing to the broader landscape of modernization (Woo, 1991).

It is only since the 1920s that Chinese scholars began to consider homosexuality a mental disorder, criticizing it as a bad habit that is abnormal, filthy, and inhuman.

Consequently, Chinese people's historical acceptance and tolerance towards homosexuality decreased (Dubel & Hielkema, 2008; Wah-Shan, 2001; Wu, 2003).

Western influence was also reflected in the terminology for male same-sex relations in China, Kang (2009) exposed how Chinese thinking interacted with imported Ideas by exploring the relationship between the meanings of the Chinese terms and the Western sexological concept of homosexuality. For example, the Chinese term for "homosexuality" (同性恋) was translated from a Western term in the early 20th century, which consists of three characters: tong-same, xing-sex, sexual, lian-attachment, and romantic love.

Substantially, the importation of Western psychiatry contributed to the increasing awareness of human sexuality in Chinese society (Chiang, 2011).

### ***Post-Liberation China: Stigmatization, Criminalization, and Transition***

Some scholars (Li, 1998; Wu, 2003) described the period between 1949 and the late seventies as "the dark ages" for Chinese gay men. Following 1949, advancements in gay rights that were taking place globally during the 1950s to the 1970s received little coverage in China. The lack of media attention meant that many of these significant changes went unnoticed by the Chinese populace. On the few occasions that gay lives were reported from the outside world, they were used mainly to spread the "decline and evil of Western society" (Ruan & Tsai, 1988). During this period, China was heavily impacted by Soviet ideology until the Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s. The country embraced Soviet theories, leading to the dismissal and condemnation of Western philosophies (Gao, 1985). This ideological alignment limited exposure to alternative views on topics such as sexuality and contributed to



the restrictive environment for discussions on homosexuality. In response to the criminalization of homosexuality in the Soviet Union, China also became permeated with homophobia.

While homosexuality itself was never criminalized in post-revolutionary China (Bakken, 1993; Guo, 2007; Worth et al., 2019; Wu, 2003), gay men faced significant stigma and active persecution. Same-sex relationships were often labeled as immoral and degenerate, with such behaviors condemned as a form of physical and psychological "deviance" (Worth et al., 2019). This pervasive negative perception created an environment where LGBTQ+ individuals struggled for acceptance and visibility within society. Conversely, while lesbian women also encountered societal challenges, they were often more tolerated compared to gay men within certain contexts. However, their experiences still reflected broader societal attitudes toward non-heteronormative identities (Wong, 2011). Starting in the 1950s, the term "hooliganism" emerged as a broad label encompassing a range of anti-social behaviors, including disorderly conduct, public disturbances, and acts of verbal aggression. This term also extended to encompass sexual offenses, such as extramarital and premarital relationships, sexual harassment, and sodomy, among others (Dikötter, 1997; Wu, 2003). Throughout the period known as the Cultural Revolution, spanning from 1966 to 1976 (Pan, 2006), a time characterized by severe sexual repression, where discussions of romantic relationships or sexuality were deemed socially inappropriate and discouraged (Dubel & Hielkema, 2008; Honig, 2003). During that period, homosexual men and those men who had sex with other men who were exposed could receive harsh treatments ranging from education through labor (*laojiao*) to incarceration for years (Ruan & Tsai, 1988; Wong, 2015; Worth et

al., 2019; Wu, 2003). In some extreme cases, it was reported that someone was beaten to death or killed himself after being denounced (Li, 1998; Worth et al., 2019).

After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the Chinese government adopted the “Open Door” policy. Some writers argue that since the political, economic, and social situations in China increasingly began to improve, Chinese perspectives on relationships and sex changed, and same-sex love could be expressed more openly (Dubel & Hielkema, 2008; Jeffreys, 2007; Rofel, 2007). Others challenged the idea that the first post-Mao decade (1976-1986) was a positive period for gay men in China, they explained that the end of the Cultural Revolution did not lead to the sexual freedom and social acceptance of homosexuality (Pan et al., 1996; Wong, 2015; Xie & Peng, 2018). The ten years of the Cultural Revolution had an unexpected and far-reaching impact on the homophobia of Chinese society (Li, 1998). Until 1997, homosexual intercourse in China was classified as a criminal offense under the label of "hooliganism" in Criminal Law. This classification remained in place until the Chinese government repealed its Hooligan Law (Bakken, 1993; Wong, 2015; Worth et al., 2019; Xie & Peng, 2018).

On the other hand, with the policy of opening up, information from outside China flooded the recent understanding of homosexuality and the influence of the gay and lesbian rights movement in Western society was introduced to China (Cao & Lu, 2014; Wu, 2003; Xie & Peng, 2018). The term *tongzhi*, which also means comrade, was used to address everyone in the Communist sense, but then was adopted as an appellation for Chinese gay communities that contributed to self-identification (Cao & Lu, 2014; Wong, 2015). While a homosexual subculture emerged discreetly on the Chinese mainland, awareness and

acceptance of homosexuality have largely been confined to specific segments of the population. This includes individuals in urban areas, particularly within academic circles and among younger generations (Li & Zheng, 2013; Wu, 2003).

In general, the 1980s to the late 1990s was a transformative period full of difficulty and hope for the Chinese sexual minority community. Prior to 2001, homosexuality was classified by the field of psychiatry as a sexual disorder, and reparative therapy was carried out on some sexual minorities (Wong, 2015). Opinions were diverse among Chinese psychiatrists and social scientists. Some strongly opposed any tolerance of homosexuality and same-sex relationships, and supported some harsh punishments against this abnormal behavior. On the other hand, many experts also expressed their respect and sympathy for gay people, yet they still believed the pathologisation of homosexuality (Wong, 2015; Wu, 2003).

The declassification of homosexuality by the American Psychiatric Association and World Health Organization in 1973 and 1990, respectively, fomented the discussion within the mental health professional community in China (Wong, 2015). In 2001, a landmark development occurred when the China Psychiatric Association made a pivotal move to advance LGBT rights in mainland China by removing homosexuality from the list of mental disorders in the Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders (Wu, 2003).

### ***21<sup>st</sup> Century: Homosexuality at the crossroads of moderation and tradition***

Since the 2000s, with the advent of new information and communications technology, especially the internet, the visibility of LGBTQ+ representation has drastically increased (Guo, 2007; Jeffreys, 2007; Rofel, 2007; Wu, 2003; Zhou & Hu, 2020), and hundreds of gay

and lesbian websites, discussion forums and chat rooms have emerged in China (Dubel & Hielkema, 2008; Wong, 2011). The remarkable expansion of internet usage serves to empower the LGBTQ+ community. Within digital spaces dedicated to the queer community, individuals find a sense of belonging, enabling them to access information, express themselves, and connect with like-minded peers in a secure online environment. Following this digital revolution, due to a significant increase in smartphone users, evolving modes of internet communication, particularly through social media, have played a vital role in influencing the self-identity of sexual minorities in China. Concurrently, they have played a role in elevating the visibility of homosexuality within mainstream society (Cao & Lu, 2014; Ho, 2008). Coupled with the unprecedented growth of the gay online community, the gay community in the offline world also ushered in development, gay and lesbian meet at bars, clubs, saunas, and other types of pink venues in large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai (Altman, 2002; Dubel & Hielkema, 2008; Wu, 2003).

Another significant factor is the advancement of communication technology. The widespread adoption of the internet has facilitated the growth of cybercommunities for the LGBTQ+ population, evolving from niche groups to mainstream networks over time (Robinson & Martin, 2009). However, the impact of internet media exposure on attitudes towards the LGTBIQ+ community can be ambivalent. While it provides opportunities for individuals to find like-minded peers, explore their identities, and learn about themselves (Tortajada et al., 2021), it also exposes them to risks such as hate crimes and online harassment. This nuanced relationship underscores the need for further research into the

complex dynamics of digital trans activism and its implications for LGTBIQ+ individuals in online spaces.

Despite the growing visibility of LGBTQ+ representation, it wasn't until 1994 that China became connected to the Internet. Subsequently, in 1998, the first websites catering to gays and lesbians were launched, examples being gztz.org and gaychinese.net (Jiang, 2005). Discussion forums and chat rooms gained immense popularity, allowing gay and lesbian individuals to connect anonymously, whether from an Internet café or the comfort of their own homes. For countless members of the LGBTQ+ community, this digital landscape opened doors to new social interactions. Given the isolation that many faced in their daily lives, the swift growth of online gay networks is hardly surprising. Today, a multitude of websites caters to various interests within the community, ranging from informational resources to dating platforms (Jiang, 2005). In China, the rise of the Internet has led to the creation of numerous lesbian and gay websites. Within these virtual spaces, sexual minorities often find a sense of belonging and empowerment, experiencing a shift where they feel like part of a majority in the queer community. The Chinese online environment has become a vital platform for sexual minorities to express their identities and cultivate their communities (Wong, 2011).

This pattern corresponds with the extensive incorporation of contemporary information and communication technologies, with a notable emphasis on the Internet. These advancements have been instrumental in cultivating self-identification among individuals in the LGBTQ+ community, broadening the available public spaces for this community, and

intensifying the online representation of diverse sexual orientations within mainstream society.

The rise of online platforms, such as blogs, forums, microblogs, and social networks, has transformed communication for gay individuals, fostering connections and expanding their social networks. This digital environment has not only facilitated interactions but has also become a nurturing ground for the development of a vibrant gay subculture. The increasing presence of LGBTQ+ topics in online news, personal blogs, Weibo (the Chinese equivalent of Twitter), and video-sharing websites signals a significant shift in societal attitudes, with discussions of homosexuality becoming more prominent and less taboo in mainstream conversations. Since the early 2000s, there has been a marked rise in LGBTQ+ visibility within Chinese cyberspace, reflecting a broader movement toward acceptance and recognition of diverse sexual identities (Chua & Timothy 2014; Jeffreys 2006; Kong 2016; Rofel 2007;).

Nevertheless, caught up in the political control and censorship in mainland China, Chinese LGBTQ+ are finding themselves erased from the country's mainstream media. As the Chinese government views that homosexuality will impair traditional Confucianism and socialist moralism, contents with a theme related to gays or any depiction thereof are often prohibited or strictly censored (Cao & Lu, 2014; Chiang, 2011; Dubel & Hielkema, 2008; Huang, 2016; Zhou & Hu, 2020). Compared with the strictly censored content in traditional media, the Internet provides a more open social platform for Chinese gays and lesbians to ease their sense of isolation. In 2013, gay online dating apps were allowed to operate under surveillance, which has brought prodigious connection and visibility for gay communities in

China (Axelsdóttir, 2016). And in 2020, Chinese tech company Alibaba launched a commercial about a gay couple celebrating Chinese New Year. The video has been widely discussed and praised for positive queer representation on social media. However, the Chinese government takes an ambiguous and fluid attitude towards LGBTQ+ issues. Commencing in 2016, the official censorship apparatus in China, overseen by The State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT), instituted a code for online-media censorship, expressing dissatisfaction with content portraying "non-conventional sexual relations," encompassing relationships within the same-sex (Wang et al., 2020; Zhao, 2020). In April 2018, a new policy was introduced by Weibo, the largest social media platform in mainland China, which banned content associated with homosexuality. The decision quickly received intense criticism from Chinese netizens, and it prompted a surge of online protests. Days later, China's official newspaper, People's Daily, took to its social media platform to express support for all sexual orientations. This declaration coincided with Weibo's announcement the next day, revealing that the platform would lift its ban on homosexuality-related content (Bao, 2018; Zhou & Hu, 2020). Along with the growing visibility of homosexuals, several different but related discourses emerged simultaneously.

The first was the rising trend of HIV infection among at-risk populations in China, especially among men who have sex with other men (MSM) (Feng et al., 2010; Koo et al., 2014; Z. Wu et al., 2013). The social fear of the epidemic led to the stigmatization of homosexuality. Many MSM were discriminated against as they were seen to be responsible for the transmission of HIV (Cao & Lu, 2014; Hu & Li, 2019). Meanwhile, the spread of AIDS unexpectedly contributed to the increasing visibility of homosexuals in mainstream

media, owing to the urgent need to establish HIV prevention strategies, the Chinese government started to seek help from activists and nongovernmental organizations. The academic study of homosexuality has undergone significant transitions, with a notable shift from a pathological perspective to a framework centered on national public health. This change has facilitated public discussions, investigations, and research into homosexuality, particularly framed around the imperative of AIDS prevention (Kong, 2016). The change has helped the gay community receive government funding and support from activists and academics (Cao & Lu, 2014; Wong, 2015).

## **2.2 Bilateral relations between China and Spain**

The diplomatic and cultural relations between China and Spain form an essential backdrop for understanding the migration patterns and social dynamics that shape the experiences of Chinese immigrants in Spain. These relations, which have steadily evolved since the formal establishment of diplomatic ties in 1973 (Tremml-Werner, 2015), reflect the growing economic interdependence and cultural exchange between the two nations. In recent decades, the strengthening of trade agreements, educational exchanges, and bilateral investments has contributed to increased mobility between the countries, with significant implications for Chinese nationals seeking new opportunities in Spain (Pareja-Alcaraz, 2017).

This section explores the multidimensional relations between China and Spain, focusing on the economic, cultural, and political ties that shape the context of migration. By understanding these broader relations, we can better appreciate how Chinese immigrants, including LGBTQ+ individuals, find themselves at the intersection of two distinct national



identities, facing both opportunities and challenges as they reconcile their cultural heritage with their personal and sexual identities in Spain.

### ***Historical Overview of China-Spain Relations***

The formal diplomatic relationship between China and Spain began in 1973, during a transformative period for both nations (Möller, 2002; Bregolat, 2023). However, the connections between the two countries predate this moment, with historical interactions rooted in trade, cultural exchange, and indirect influence through other European nations. Over time, these early exchanges paved the way for the modern bilateral relations that would develop in the latter half of the 20th century (Bañuelos, 2013).

The earliest documented contact occurred in the 12th century when the Spanish traveler Benjamin of Tudela visited China, indicating an initial cultural interflow (Shulevitz, 2005). However, significant interactions began in the 16th century, propelled by the Age of Exploration. The arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas in 1492 and subsequent voyages, including Magellan's circumnavigation, facilitated increased contact between East and West (Iaccarino, 2008).

The most significant historical connection between China and Spain took place during the era of the Manila Galleon Trade (Flynn & Giraldez, 1994), a vital maritime trade route between the Spanish Empire's colonies in the Americas and Asia. Chinese goods such as silk, porcelain, and spices were transported from China to Spanish colonies, particularly via Manila in the Philippines, which was under Spanish colonization. In return, silver from Spanish America was traded with Chinese merchants. This trade established an early indirect

economic link between China and Spain, even though it primarily took place through the Spanish colony in Manila (Barker, 2006; García-Abásolo, 2013).

During the Qing Dynasty, Spain's interest in China intensified, leading to increased diplomatic and commercial exchanges (Ai, 2013; Ruiz & Niu, 2023). However, relations were often complicated by Spain's colonial ambitions in the Philippines, and the broader geopolitical dynamics of the region. The Opium Wars and subsequent treaties with Western powers shifted the balance of power in Asia, impacting Spain's position and its interactions with China (Gentzler, 1977).

Following the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, relations remained cordial, with the signing of the Sino-Spanish Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1929 (Wang, 2005). In the 20th century, the relationship experienced significant fluctuations, primarily due to the domestic upheavals both nations experienced. From the 1910s to the 1940s, both China and Spain faced internal conflicts that limited their focus on foreign relations (Esteban & Armanini, 2023). China was experiencing political fragmentation, civil war, and eventually Japanese occupation, while Spain underwent its own civil war (1936–1939), leading to the establishment of Francisco Franco's dictatorship (Ingenschay, 2000).

After World War II, Spain's international isolation during the early Franco years and China's shift toward communism under Mao Zedong meant that there was little official engagement between the two nations (López, 2014; de Carlos Izquierdo, 2017). Spain, still under Franco's dictatorship, was politically and ideologically distant from the newly established People's Republic of China in 1949. However, as Spain began to re-integrate into

the international community during the 1950s and 1960s, the stage was set for eventual diplomatic engagement (De la Torre, 2011; Palomera, 2015).

Diplomatic ties were officially established in 1973, marking a new chapter in bilateral relations (Esteban, 2016). The normalization of relations was driven in part by broader global shifts, such as China's efforts to open up to the world after Mao's Cultural Revolution and Spain's gradual integration into the Western diplomatic community (Bellabona & Spigarelli, 2007; Lai et al., 2020; Gillespie & Youngs, 2000). Since then, both countries have sought to strengthen their economic, cultural, and political ties, particularly in the context of globalization and China's rising influence on the world stage (Esteban, 2016; Herrera Feligreras, 2014).

During this period, Spain saw an influx of Chinese migrants, many of whom were drawn to Spain's growing economy and its increasing openness to foreign workers. The migration of Chinese nationals to Spain became a defining feature of the bilateral relationship, with many Chinese immigrants establishing businesses in the retail and restaurant sectors (Nieto, 2003; Sáiz López, 2005).

The early 21st century brought a new era of strategic partnership between China and Spain, focusing on deeper economic ties, political collaboration, and cultural exchange. In 2005, China and Spain upgraded their diplomatic relationship to a strategic partnership, signifying the growing importance of their bilateral ties (Esteban, 2013; Strüver, 2017). This partnership focused on expanding cooperation in key areas such as trade, infrastructure, renewable energy, and education. Both countries have continued to benefit from each other's markets, with Spain exporting agricultural products and high-tech goods to China, and

Chinese investments in Spain increasing, particularly in sectors such as real estate and tourism (Fanjul, 2003).

In recent years, the relationship has deepened further, with Spain recognizing China as a key player in global affairs. Economic collaborations, particularly in trade and investment, have flourished, while cultural initiatives have promoted greater awareness of each other's heritage. As both countries navigate the complexities of the 21st century, their historical ties continue to serve as a foundation for future cooperation and partnership (Ríos, 2013).

### ***Economic Ties: Trade and Investment***

As Spain's primary commercial and economically in Asia, China stands out as the leading destination for Spanish exports in the region. Moreover, China ranks as Spain's largest trading partner beyond the European Union, while Spain occupies the role of China's sixth most important trading partner within the EU (European Commission, 2024).

In 1971, Spain's exports to China reached just 39 million pesetas, while imports were considerably higher at 137 million, establishing a persistent trade deficit that has expanded over the years (Bañuelos, 2013; Ríos, 2019). By 2017, this deficit had grown to over 19 billion euros, with total bilateral trade soaring from 12 million dollars in 1971 to 30.94 billion dollars by 2017 (Pérez, 2018). Scholars like García-Herrero (2019) have analyzed this imbalance, emphasizing the structural differences in both economies, where China's industrial strength outpaces Spain's export capacity.

Spain's initial trade relationship with China lagged behind other nations that quickly capitalized on China's economic reforms and market liberalization aimed at attracting foreign

investment. This slow start placed Spain at a disadvantage. However, over time, there have been signs of steady progress, albeit marked by fluctuations in trade activity (Bañuelos, 2013).

The engagement of Spanish businesses with China has undergone significant transformation over the decades, marked by two prominent phases (Fanjul, 2013). The initial phase began in the early 1980s, when the Spanish government played a crucial role in leading companies into the unfamiliar and challenging Chinese market. This period was marked by significant governmental support, particularly through financial mechanisms such as FAD credits (Los créditos del Fondo de Ayuda al Desarrollo), which were instrumental in facilitating entry and operations in China (Ríos, 2019).

The subsequent phase, emerging in the 21st century, saw a shift towards a more diverse and sophisticated presence of Spanish businesses in China. This evolution was largely a reflection of the economic transformations experienced by both countries over the preceding decades. During this time, the direct influence of government support diminished as businesses adapted to new market conditions (Pareja-Alcaraz, 2017).

However, after 1995, Spanish exports to China experienced a significant decline, taking until 2002 to recover to previous levels. This downturn was influenced by changes in OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) regulations regarding FAD credits, the impact of the Southeast Asian financial crisis, and adjustments in Chinese policies on government project financing (Ríos, 2019).

Between 2000 and 2009, the economic relationship between Spain and China strengthened significantly, positioning China as a pivotal trading partner for Spain. Scholars

like Sánchez (2011) have noted that the growth in bilateral trade was particularly rapid from 2004 onwards, driven by China's burgeoning economy and increasing demand for European goods. However, this upward trajectory faced a temporary setback during the global financial crisis in 2009, which caused a 27.3% decline in trade volumes compared to the previous year. Despite this downturn, experts such as Pérez (2018) emphasize that the overall trade volume still saw impressive growth over the decade, expanding from 6.2 billion euros in 2000 to 23.7 billion euros by 2008. This period underscored China's emergence as an indispensable market for Spanish exports, with many analysts highlighting the resilience of this trade relationship even in the face of global economic challenges.

The trade relationship between Spain and China has historically been imbalanced, with imports from China consistently exceeding Spanish exports, resulting in a significant trade deficit. According to Ríos (2016), this deficit was 3.9 billion euros in 2000 and ballooned to 18.2 billion euros by 2008, before narrowing to 12.2 billion euros in 2009 due to the economic downturn. By 2017, the total trade volume had increased to around 20 billion euros. Scholars like Beltrán (2013) have pointed out that although trade growth was steady, it wasn't until 2014 that the bilateral trade figures finally surpassed those seen before the crisis. Throughout this period, imports made up the majority of the trade, accounting for approximately 80% of the total, highlighting the persistent imbalance in the trading relationship.

By 2017, the bilateral trade volume between Spain and China had reached 30 billion dollars. This growth was marked by a significant 30.9% increase in Spanish exports to China compared to 2016, suggesting progress toward achieving a more balanced trade relationship.

This uptick in exports reflects not only economic factors but also the strengthening of cultural and educational ties between the two countries. These exchanges, along with a rise in tourism, have played a crucial role in solidifying the foundation of the Spain-China relationship, fostering greater mutual understanding and cooperation beyond mere economic transactions (García, 2019).

In 2017, Spain became the seventh-largest EU exporter to China, experiencing a remarkable growth rate of 28.3% over the previous year. This surge outpaced the export growth rates of other European countries and was largely driven by key sectors such as meat, metals, automobiles, and agri-food products. These industries effectively leveraged China's economic transition towards increased consumption and innovation. Additionally, Spanish products like wine and olive oil gained significant traction in the Chinese market, reflecting the growing demand for quality imports (Fernández, 2018).

Currently, Spanish exports to China predominantly consist of high-value industrial products and advanced technology, including electronic and IT equipment (Fan, 2021). This shift represents a significant change from earlier patterns, where exports were largely composed of lower-value goods. Approximately 15,000 Spanish companies are actively exporting to China, with around 600 having established a physical presence there. These companies span various sectors such as energy, automotive, financial services, and consumer goods (Perea Muñoz, 2013).

Chinese imports into Spain are heavily influenced by the outsourcing of essential products like mobile phones, computers, and clothing (Donoso et al., 2015). This is occurring even as China strategically repositions itself away from its traditional role as the world's

manufacturing hub (Zhang, 2015). Despite this shift, China continues to export a diverse range of goods to Spain. The volume of Chinese exports to Spain has fluctuated over the years, reflecting broader economic shifts and trade dynamics (de Mazarredo, 2022).

The transformation in the scale and nature of bilateral trade between Spain and China can be attributed to several key factors (Bian, 2017). One major influence has been the emergence of a robust Chinese middle class, alongside the government's initiatives to boost incomes and create a "well-off society" by 2020 (Badanta et al., 2020; Sicular, 2021). This economic shift has ushered in a new era characterized by innovation, increased consumption, and a focus on services. Additionally, the rapid expansion of China's private sector has seen Chinese companies become prominent players in global investment (Long et al. 2022; Perea Muñoz, 2013).

Despite facing significant economic challenges in recent years, Spain has witnessed a gradual increase in its share of global exports since 2012, largely driven by its imports from China (Eppinger et al., 2018). Meanwhile, China has continued its policies of reform and opening-up, solidifying its position as a global economic leader. However, the trade relationship remains imbalanced, with Chinese imports consistently surpassing Spanish exports (Gil Pareja, 2016; Sanz et al., 2018; Uriarte Hombrados, 2024).

A significant development in Spain-China relations is the notable increase in Chinese tourism to Spain, with annual growth rates approaching 30% (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2021; Medina-Munoz et al., 2013). Over the past two decades, Chinese tourism has expanded significantly, making China the world's leading source of tourists since 2013 (Smed & Bislev, 2016). Despite this, only about 0.5% of Chinese tourists currently choose Spain as their



destination, indicating substantial potential for growth (Lojo Blesa, 2020). Recent initiatives, such as Spain's unique marketing strategies to attract Chinese tourists, are expected to enhance this growth further (UNWTO, 2024).

Moreover, Spain's tourism sector is experiencing a record-breaking year in 2024, with expectations of continued growth as international travel recovers. This trend indicates a promising future for Chinese tourism in Spain, contributing to the broader economic and cultural ties between the two countries (CaixaBank Research, 2024).

In terms of investment, the arrival of major Chinese companies in Spain is a relatively recent phenomenon but has been growing rapidly. Despite this, Spain is not yet a primary destination for Chinese investment globally (Esteban & Otero-Iglesias, 2017; Ramón & García, 2017). Currently, around 100 Chinese companies operate in Spain, including prominent groups like China Construction Bank, Dalian Wanda Group, and Huawei. Chinese investors are particularly interested in technological knowledge in energy-related sectors and expertise in real estate, hospitality, and infrastructure (Carcar, 2024).

Spanish investment in China has faced challenges, particularly in accurately capturing investment figures due to limitations in external investment registries. Over recent years, the recorded investment has shown a declining trend. A significant hurdle for Spanish investors remains the limited access to the services sector, which awaits regulatory reforms to unlock further opportunities (Perea Muñoz, 2013).

Since the 1980s, Spain has attempted to leverage its strong connections with Latin America to overcome business development and cultural integration challenges in the Asia-Pacific region (Sanz et al., 2018). Some initiatives have involved China as a financial partner

for the Spanish economy, such as collaborations in the energy sector. However, the effectiveness of this triangulation strategy has been limited, as both China and Latin American countries often prefer direct engagement (Martín Merchán, 2023; Shixue, 2011).

Looking forward, despite global trade tensions and restrictions on overseas activities, China's growth is expected to continue (Dieppe et al., 2018). For Spain, China represents a vital opportunity to enhance and balance trade relations, contingent on sustaining competitiveness and boosting innovation capabilities. In 2020, while the world grappled with the effects of COVID-19, Spain's exports to China saw notable growth, increasing by 20.1% to reach €8.169 billion. This rise was marked by a shift towards agri-food goods, which became the leading export category, highlighting Spain's commitment to supplying essential commodities during the pandemic (Dezcallar, 2022).

Bilateral investments also thrived, with significant operations continuing despite the global crisis. Investment outflows from China to Spain soared to €439.4 million in the third quarter of 2020, while Spanish investments in China reached €1.811 billion, primarily in the pharmaceutical sector. This resilience in trade and investment illustrates the deepening economic ties between Spain and China, underpinned by mutual trust and cooperation during challenging times (de Mazarredo, 2022).

While the potential for Spanish investments in China is substantial, challenges remain. Regulatory barriers, market competition, and cultural differences can hinder the ease of doing business (Esteban, 2016). However, the increasing demand for foreign expertise and products in China presents ongoing opportunities for Spanish firms to strengthen their foothold in the Chinese market (Dezcallar, 2022).

Chinese investments in Spain have surged in recent years, reflecting the increasing importance of Spain as a gateway to Europe and its strategic location within the European Union (Pareja-Alcaraz, 2017; Sáez, 2010). This trend has been fueled by China's broader goals of expanding its global economic influence through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

One of the most visible aspects of Chinese investment in Spain has been in the real estate sector (Zhenyu & Taltavull, 2020). Chinese investors have purchased commercial and residential properties in major cities like Madrid and Barcelona, contributing to the revitalization of urban areas and creating job opportunities in construction and property management (Carril-Caccia & Baleix, 2020). Chinese companies have also focused on renewable energy projects, particularly in wind and solar energy (Carril-Caccia & Pavlova, 2018). Companies like China Three Gorges Corporation have invested in renewable energy projects in Spain, aligning with the country's commitment to sustainable energy development (Pareja-Alcaraz, 2017).

The technology sector has witnessed increased interest from Chinese firms, particularly in telecommunications and digital innovation (Iglesias & Muñoz, 2020). Companies like Huawei have established research and development centers in Spain, emphasizing collaboration in cutting-edge technologies and contributing to Spain's technological advancement (Esteban, 2017).

Chinese investments have had a significant impact on Spain's economy, helping to create jobs and boost local businesses (Pareja-Alcaraz, 2017). Additionally, the presence of Chinese companies has fostered cultural exchange and collaboration, enriching Spain's

multicultural landscape. However, these investments have also raised concerns regarding market competition, economic sovereignty, and potential cultural clashes (Esteban, 2016).

Despite the opportunities presented by Chinese investments, challenges such as regulatory hurdles, local resistance, and geopolitical tensions can pose obstacles to successful collaboration. There is a growing recognition among Spanish policymakers of the necessity to find a balance between drawing foreign investment and safeguarding national interests (de Mazarredo, 2022).

### ***One Belt One Road" Initiative and Sino-Spanish Relations***

Launched by China in 2013, the "One Belt One Road" (OBOR) initiative seeks to boost global trade and spur economic growth throughout Asia and beyond by establishing trade routes that echo the ancient Silk Road (Higuera, 2015). This ambitious endeavor holds considerable importance for the cultural and economic interactions between China and Spain, creating new avenues for collaboration, while also introducing various challenges (Markus, 2016).

Historically, the Silk Road has undergone numerous transformations, and its revival through OBOR signifies a modern approach to strengthening ties between China and the European Union (Girado, 2021). The initiative emphasizes not only the enhancement of trade routes but also the importance of cultural exchange, technological collaboration, and mutual understanding (Pechlaner et al., 2020). In Spain, the establishment of the Silk Road Commission in 1990 reflects a long-standing commitment to promoting cultural itineraries that connect Spain with this historical trade network. Cities such as Zaragoza, Valencia, and

others have emerged as key players in this cultural dialogue, serving as hubs for economic, artistic, and technological exchanges (Ríos, 2019).

A pivotal development in this context is the introduction of a cargo train service connecting Yiwu, a major wholesale market in China, with Madrid. Launched in 2014, this service marked a significant milestone in Sino-Spanish relations, establishing a direct link over a distance of more than 13,000 kilometers (Ríos, 2019). This initiative, celebrated as a breakthrough in commercial relations, underscores Spain's strategic position within the broader framework of OBOR. However, challenges remain regarding the economic viability (Higuera, 2015).

Beyond trade, the OBOR initiative has opened avenues for tourism collaboration. Spain's inclusion as the 32nd member of the Silk Road Program of the World Tourism Organization in 2015 represents a strategic move to position Valencia as a key destination along these historic routes (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2015). This initiative aims to enhance Spain's appeal to tourists from China, thereby fostering cultural exchanges and economic benefits. The integration of smart technologies in tourism development could further bolster Spain's role as a vital link between East and West, promoting greater connectivity and understanding (Ríos, 2018).

Moreover, the potential for infrastructure investments under OBOR presents significant opportunities for Spanish companies (Ríos, 2018). The development of deep-water ports and high-speed rail systems, essential for enhancing connectivity, could see Spanish firms participating in lucrative contracts. This involvement not only strengthens economic

ties but also facilitates the exchange of expertise and resources, particularly in sectors such as construction and telecommunications (Ríos, 2019).

Additionally, the cooperation in productive capacity outlined in OBOR offers Spain a chance to engage in industrial development across various geopolitical regions, including Central Asia and Latin America. This aspect of the initiative aligns with Spain's strategic interests, particularly as it seeks to bolster its influence in Latin America, a region historically linked to Spain (Sun, 2023).

In conclusion, the "One Belt One Road" initiative represents a transformative opportunity for enhancing cultural and economic relations between China and Spain. While challenges related to logistics and economic viability persist, the potential for increased collaboration in tourism, infrastructure, and industrial development heralds a new era of engagement. By leveraging historical connections and modern initiatives, both nations can work towards a more integrated and mutually beneficial partnership in the years to come (Ríos, 2019).

### ***Spanish Immigration Policy and its Application to Chinese Immigrants***

Spanish immigration policy has a complex and evolving history that spans several decades. Prior to the 1980s, Spain was a country of emigration, with many Spaniards migrating to other European countries in search of work (Calavita, 1998). However, with the country's transition to democracy in the late 1970s and its subsequent economic growth, Spain began to attract immigrants from other countries (Aja, 1999).

In the 1980s, Spain experienced a significant influx of immigrants from North Africa, particularly from Morocco (López García, 2003). This led to the implementation of stricter immigration controls, including the introduction of visa requirements for non-EU citizens and the establishment of a quota system for work permits (Calavita, 1998). In the 1990s, Spain's immigration policy began to shift towards a more restrictive approach, with the introduction of the "Ley de Extranjería" (Foreigners' Law) in 1999 (Li, 2017). This law established a more complex system for residence permits and introduced stricter requirements for non-EU citizens to enter and remain in the country. In the early 2000s, Spain's immigration policy underwent significant changes with the introduction of the "Reglamento de la Ley de Extranjería" (Regulation of the Foreigners' Law) (Li, 2017). This regulation established a more detailed framework for residence permits and introduced new requirements for non-EU citizens to access the labor market.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, the establishment of various illegal immigration pathways significantly contributed to the influx of Chinese migrants into Spain (Denison et al., 2009). These routes often took advantage of individuals desperate for better opportunities abroad. In contrast, evidence indicates that by the late 2000s, illegal immigration from China had started to decline. This shift was largely associated with the emergence of more legal and safer alternatives for migration to Spain, allowing individuals to pursue their aspirations without resorting to clandestine methods (Latham & Wu, 2013).

Spain's current immigration framework is primarily based on Organic Law 4/2000, which addresses the rights and freedoms of foreigners residing in the country and their social integration. Enacted on January 11, 2000, this legislation serves as a foundational pillar for

the country's approach to immigration policies and the treatment of foreign nationals (Ley Orgánica 4/2000, de 11 de enero, sobre derechos y libertades de los extranjeros en España y su integración social). This legislation marked a significant departure from previous approaches to immigration management in Spain, introducing a comprehensive framework that addresses not only entry and residence requirements but also integration measures and social rights (Martínez, 2009). The law's subsequent modifications, particularly those implemented in 2009 and 2011, have further refined the system in response to changing migration patterns and European Union directives (Solanes Corella, 2015). The evolution of Spanish immigration policy reflects broader changes in the country's position within the European and global context. Following Spain's transition to democracy and its integration into the European Union, immigration policy has increasingly been shaped by both national interests and supranational obligations. This dual influence has resulted in a complex regulatory framework that must balance domestic concerns with European standards and international commitments (Schain, 2009).

The primary mechanism for regular migration centers on employment-based entry, wherein prospective immigrants must secure work authorization before entering Spain. This process involves a careful assessment of labor market needs and the potential economic impact of foreign workers (Mato Diaz & Miyar-Busto, 2017). The system operates through a national catalog of hard-to-fill occupations, which is regularly updated to reflect current labor market demands. This approach represents a significant evolution from earlier policies, as it attempts to align immigration flows with economic requirements while protecting domestic employment opportunities (Czaika & De Haas, 2013).



The educational dimension of Chinese immigration to Spain has grown significantly in importance. Chinese students now constitute one of the largest groups of non-EU international students in Spanish universities, particularly in business, engineering, and Spanish language programs (Guillén Navarro, 2018). The framework governing student migration has evolved to address the specific needs of this population. Recent modifications have expanded opportunities for post-study work experience, although research indicates that Chinese graduates face distinct challenges in transitioning to the Spanish labor market, often related to language proficiency and cultural differences in professional networking (Irún et al., 2021).

Family reunification constitutes another fundamental pillar of the current framework. The policy recognizes the importance of family unity while establishing clear criteria for eligibility and maintenance of family-based residence permits (Li, 2016; Li, 2017; Nieto, 2003). The requirements for family reunification include demonstration of adequate financial resources and suitable housing, reflecting the state's interest in ensuring successful integration and preventing social marginalization of immigrant families. The framework for family reunification has been especially relevant for the Chinese community, given the strong family-based character of Chinese migration to Spain (Li, 2017).

The introduction of the Golden Visa program in 2013 marked a significant evolution in Spanish immigration policy, representing a clear shift toward attracting foreign investment through immigration incentives (Aranda, 2018; de Haro & Gaspar, 2019). This program, formally known as the Law to Support Entrepreneurs and their Internationalization (Ley 14/2013), establishes a framework for granting residence permits to foreign investors who

make substantial contributions to the Spanish economy (Correa da Silva, 2021). This program has attracted considerable interest from Chinese investors, particularly in the aftermath of China's economic reforms allowing greater capital outflow, which has facilitated the entry of a new class of Chinese immigrants, distinct from the traditional entrepreneurial migrants (Amante & Rodrigues, 2016).

The program requires a minimum investment of €500,000 in real estate, demonstrating Spain's strategic interest in revitalizing its property market following the 2008 financial crisis. Alternative investment pathways include capital investment in Spanish companies or government bonds, or the establishment of business projects deemed to be of special economic interest (Aranda, 2018). The implementation of the Golden Visa program has had particular significance for Chinese investment in Spain, as it provides a clear pathway for wealthy Chinese investors to obtain residence permits while contributing to the Spanish economy. This aspect of the policy framework merits special attention, as it has influenced patterns of Chinese immigration and investment in significant ways (de Haro & Gaspar, 2019).

Despite these policies, Chinese immigrants still face significant challenges in integrating into Spanish society. Language barriers, cultural differences, and difficulties in accessing the labor market are among the main challenges faced by Chinese immigrants (Li, 2017). These challenges are exacerbated by the lack of effective integration policies and the limited availability of social services for immigrants (Calavita, 1998).

### ***Cultural Relations between two nations***

The cultural relations between China and Spain have significantly deepened in recent years, facilitated by various exchange programs and initiatives aimed at fostering mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's heritage. These efforts have played a crucial role in enhancing bilateral ties beyond economic dimensions (de Espinosa & Matos ; 2017; Juárez et al., 2011; Song & Dong, 2023).

Cultural diplomacy has emerged as a key strategy for both nations to promote their cultural values and traditions. Initiatives such as cultural festivals, art exhibitions, and performing arts exchanges have enabled both countries to showcase their unique cultural offerings (González Fernández, 2021). For instance, Spain has hosted Chinese cultural events that celebrate traditional music, dance, and art. A notable example is the celebration of the Chinese New Year in Madrid's Usera district, which has become a famous cultural event, attracting diverse audiences and fostering intercultural understanding (ESMadrid). The Chinese New Year celebration in Usera is a testament to the power of cultural diplomacy in fostering intercultural dialogue. It provides an opportunity for Spaniards to experience and appreciate the richness of Chinese traditions firsthand, while also allowing the Chinese community in Spain to share their heritage with a broader audience (Expat Madrid, 2017). While Chinese institutions have presented Spanish cinema and literature, fostering a greater appreciation for each other's cultural contributions (de Carlos Izquierdo, 2018; Pan, 2013).

The Chinese Ministry of Education's decision to incorporate Spanish language instruction into secondary school curricula marks a significant advancement in promoting Spanish language and culture (Conde, 2018). Spanish is now also included in the evaluation

for the national university entrance exam, known as the gaokao. This development presents a remarkable opportunity to enhance educational ties, coinciding with the growing interest in Chinese language studies in Spain (Hu, 2021). It is expected to create a substantial demand for various educational services, such as hiring native teachers, teacher training programs, educational consulting, and the development of teaching materials (Huang, 2015; Torronteras et al., 2020).

Education has also been a focal point of cultural exchange. Numerous scholarship programs have been established to encourage Spanish students to study in China and vice versa (Lien & Miao, 2023). The Chinese government offers scholarships through initiatives like the Chinese Scholarship Council, which supports Spanish students pursuing degrees in Chinese universities (Qiu et al., 2024; Fang et al., 2022). Similarly, Spanish universities provide scholarships for Chinese students to study Spanish language and culture, enhancing their linguistic skills and cultural knowledge (Milans, 2008). Many universities in both countries have developed partnerships, leading to joint academic programs and research collaborations (Cid-Leal & Recoder, 2014; Li, 2024). These partnerships often involve student exchanges, faculty visits, and collaborative research projects, enriching the academic experience for students from both nations (Melguizo & Yetano, 2021). For instance, Spanish universities have collaborated with Chinese institutions to develop programs in fields like business, engineering, and environmental studies, allowing students to benefit from diverse educational perspectives (Spain-China Foundation, 2024).

The number of students studying Spanish in China has now exceeded 60,000, a testament to the increasing interest in the language and culture (Instituto Cervantes, 2024).

This growth is bolstered by a vibrant private sector offering Spanish courses at every turn, alongside the significant contributions of the Instituto Cervantes (González, 2013). Each academic year witnesses the establishment of new Spanish departments at various Chinese universities, underscoring the rising prominence of the Spanish language. This trend not only suggests a promising period of expansion for Spanish studies in China but also reflects a broader cultural exchange that could enrich both nations (Ríos, 2019).

On the other hand, Spain is home to ten Confucius Institutes and nine Confucius Classrooms, which, in conjunction with Official Language Schools and other educational institutions, play a crucial role in disseminating the Chinese language (Wang, 2023). These efforts are further complemented by the establishment of the Cultural Center of China in Madrid in 2012, one of the first of its kind globally. Such initiatives aim to foster a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and language among the Spanish populace, creating a platform for mutual appreciation and dialogue (Li, 2024).

Despite these advancements, Spain's overall knowledge of China remains insufficient (Ríos, 2019). There is a noticeable lack of commitment from both public and private sectors to nurture a strategic mindset that is essential for fostering deeper connections (de Mazarredo, 2022). While there is an increasing awareness of China's significance across various spheres—political, economic, and cultural—this recognition has not yet translated into the concerted efforts necessary to bridge the historical gap that separates Spain from other countries in the region (Esteban, 2016). These nations have systematically invested in enhancing their understanding of China, allowing them to achieve a level of specificity and engagement that Spain currently lacks (Ríos, 2019). This gap is critical, as a comprehensive

understanding of China is indispensable for Spanish decision-makers. The "Vision 2018-2022" document emphasizes the need for a robust body of knowledge, lessons learned, and tailored analyses that can guide policymakers in making informed decisions that yield positive outcomes (de Mazarredo, 2022).

In Spain, academic centers focused on Chinese and Asian studies are relatively recent developments (Ollé, 2013). Currently, a number of universities offer programs in East Asian studies, encompassing undergraduate, graduate, and specialized courses. A notable example is the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), which established the Centro de Estudios e Investigación sobre Asia Oriental (CERAO). This center plays a crucial role in advancing the study of Chinese culture, language, and society within Spain. These programs have the potential to cultivate expert knowledge in the short to medium term, provided that they are supported by consistent funding and institutional commitment to their continuation. The growth of these academic offerings not only benefits students but also contributes to a broader understanding of Asian cultures and economies, which is increasingly relevant in today's interconnected world (Ríos, 2019).

Over the last few years, the Spanish university system has embarked on a path toward normalization, albeit with the burden of inadequate planning and contradictions arising from the prevailing political and educational tensions. What began in the 1990s as a focus on language and culture has gradually evolved into a more expansive and ambitious field of study. The emergence of second-cycle degrees in East Asian Studies, with specific tracks centered on China and dedicated programs for Chinese studies, presents a positive outlook.

However, this progress remains far from the standards set by neighboring countries that have invested heavily in similar fields (Ríos, 2019).

Tourism serves as a critical conduit for cultural exchange and soft power between China and Spain, enhancing mutual understanding while contributing to economic growth. The interplay between tourism and cultural diplomacy is evident through various initiatives that both nations have undertaken to promote their respective cultural heritages (Medina-Muñoz et al., 2013). The influx of Chinese tourists into Spain has surged, driven by the country's historical significance, architectural marvels, and vibrant lifestyle. In 2023, approximately 400,000 Chinese tourists visited Spain, making a significant impact on local economies. Major cities, including Madrid, Barcelona, and Seville, have adapted their tourism infrastructures to cater to Chinese preferences, including providing Mandarin-speaking guides, Chinese menu options, and payment systems like Alipay and WeChat Pay (IFEMA, 2024).

Within the broader context of Chinese tourism to Spain, the emergence of Chinese gay tourism represents a niche yet increasingly significant segment. This demographic not only contributes to the economic landscape but also enhances cultural exchange and understanding between the two nations (Enríquez de Luna, 2015; Martinez & Dodge, 2010). As Chinese tourists explore Spain's rich historical and cultural offerings, those identifying as LGBTQ+ find particular resonance in the country's progressive social environment. Spain's reputation as a welcoming destination for LGBTQ+ travelers is well-established, thanks to its inclusive policies and vibrant LGBTQ+ communities (Algueró Boronat et al., 2024; Melian-Gonzalez et al., 2011). For Chinese gay tourists, Spain offers both a respite from societal

pressures and an opportunity to explore their identities within a supportive framework (Qiu et al., 2024). Cities like Madrid and Barcelona, with their renowned LGBTQ+ districts—Chueca and Gaixample, respectively—serve as epicenters for this cultural exchange (França, 2015; Martinez & Dodge, 2010; Serra, 2021).

Spain has actively engaged in promoting its culture within China, recognizing the potential of cultural diplomacy to strengthen bilateral relations (Yang, 2022). Events such as Spanish Film Weeks, cooking demonstrations, and art exhibitions have showcased Spanish culture, encouraging cultural appreciation and understanding (Women of China, 2023). Institutions like the Cervantes Institute in Beijing play crucial roles in this regard by organizing language courses, workshops, and cultural events. This reciprocal relationship has created a cultural bridge, fostering dialogue and collaboration between the two nations.

### **2.3 Chinese in Spain and Diasporic Chinese Identity**

The first large wave of Chinese migration to Spain only emerged in the 1980s, but in the past few decades, it has dramatically increased, especially since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Abraira, 2021; Nieto, 2003b; Robles-Llana, 2021). As of 2020, there were 232,807 Chinese living in Spain, which makes them the sixth-largest immigrant group in Spain, making up 0.49% of the Spanish population (INE, 2020). Nonetheless, Chinese migration to Spain is not comparable with the diaspora to Southeast Asia, North America, and Australia, either in terms of population size or history of immigration (Nieto, 2003b; Plewa & Stermšek, 2017).



Chinese immigration in Spain remained largely unnoticed until the early 2000s, primarily because this migration is a relatively recent occurrence. Furthermore, the second generation of Chinese immigrants has only recently emerged as a recognizable social group. Additionally, there are only a few studies that have been conducted exploring the experience of Chinese migrants in Spain; these researches on Chinese migration in Spain have examined the history, sociodemographic characteristics, and socioeconomic activities of Chinese migrants from a large perspective.

Because the Chinese population in Spain has only just begun to increase in the past 20 years, they are still widely misunderstood by the mainstream public. Many comments regarding Chinese are not related to discrimination but rather to a lack of understanding, lack of familiarity, and ignorance surrounding the matter. This unawareness of Chinese or Asians can lead to certain prejudices and stereotypes (Robles-Illana, 2019; Wladyka & Morén-Alegret, 2015).

### ***The history of Chinese migration to Spain***

The earliest records of Chinese people in Spain dates back to the colonial era (Beltrán Antolín, 1997; Lai, 2010), the first significant group of Chinese from Qingtian, a county in southeastern Zhejiang Province of China, arrived in Spain in the 1920s and 1930s, who were mainly hawkers who manufactured and sold handcrafted items (Nieto, 2003b). Some vaudeville performers from the same province came to Spain around the same period, these pioneers from Qingtian are considered to have paved the path for future emigrants from that province to Europe (Thunø, 1999), and they are now considered the largest group among

Chinese migrants in Spain. It is noteworthy that during the Spanish Civil War, a group of Chinese citizens fought for the II Republican government's defense through the International Brigades (Beltrán Antolín & López, 2002; Nieto, 2003a).

Following the inauguration of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, a wave of Chinese Christian clergy members made their journey to Spain by way of Hong Kong. In the wake of geopolitical shifts, these religious emissaries sought to establish a presence in Spain, fostering cultural and spiritual connections between the two nations. Subsequently, in the mid-1950s, several Taiwanese students came to Spain through cultural exchange programs (Beltrán Antolín & López, 2002; López, 2005; Nieto, 2003b). Following the establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations between the PRC and Spain in 1973, several PRC citizens arrived in Spain immediately from the mainland (Nieto, 2003b).

Chinese immigration to Spain remained intermittent and uneven due to the fact that they supplied fewer economic resources than other European nations; Spain wasn't a major immigration-receiving country. However, this situation has changed since the early 1980s, and some scholars have highlighted a variety of factors that contributed to the transformation. First, the democratic transition in Spain following the Franco dictatorship boosted the country's economic growth, and it gradually transitioned from a labor-exporting to a labor-importing country (Nieto 2003). As the economy grew, there was a high demand for foreign labor, mostly to fill low- or semi-skilled occupations (Arango, 2012). Secondly, Spain's lax immigration policies and comparatively minor visa control, combined with several amnesty programs implemented in Spain, facilitated in attracting more foreign labor (Beltrán Antolín 1997; Nieto 2003).

At the same time, the People's Republic of China has loosened controls on people's mobility as a result of economic opening and reforms. The development in China led to significant changes in Chinese emigration around the world (Achgill, 2017; Nieto, 2003b). Chinese restaurants are arguably the most visible mark of Chinese immigration in Europe. They first gained popularity in countries like the United Kingdom, France, and Belgium; when the restaurant sector became saturated in the aforementioned countries, some Chinese moved to Spain to expand their business (Beltrán Antolín, 1997; Benton & Gomez, 2014; Christiansen et al., 2018). The establishment of migration networks by earlier Chinese immigrants from Qingtian and Wenzhou significantly facilitated the expansion of the Chinese community within Spain. Due to the increasing demands of their businesses, they actively supported and facilitated the relocation of family members and friends to Spain as well (Beltrán Antolín, 1997; Nieto, 2003b).

The expansion of the restaurant sector promoted the growth of Chinese migrants' enterprises and employment in supporting services, such as construction, decoration, grocery stores, etc (López, 2005; Nieto, 2003a; Wladyka & Morén-Alegret, 2015). In the 1990s, with the saturation of the restaurant sector, Chinese immigrants intended to expand their business to other sectors, such as clothing and shoe stores, or small groceries (Nieto, 2003a). Conversely, individuals from various regions of China have migrated to Spain, each demonstrating unique traits and collectively identified as the second wave of Chinese migration (López, 2005).

In the first decade of this century, Chinese immigrants experienced the most significant population growth in Spain (Wladyka & Morén-Alegret, 2015; Zhou, 2017). In

1991, there were around 6500 registered Chinese immigrants in Spain (Nieto 2003), and in 2002, there were an estimated 80,000 Chinese living in Spain, including irregular (primarily student and tourist visa overstayers) and naturalized immigrants. During the following ten years, this number doubled and increased to 230,000 in 2015 (Zhou, 2017).

### ***New Trends and Profiles of Chinese Immigrants in Spain***

#### **Demographic overview**

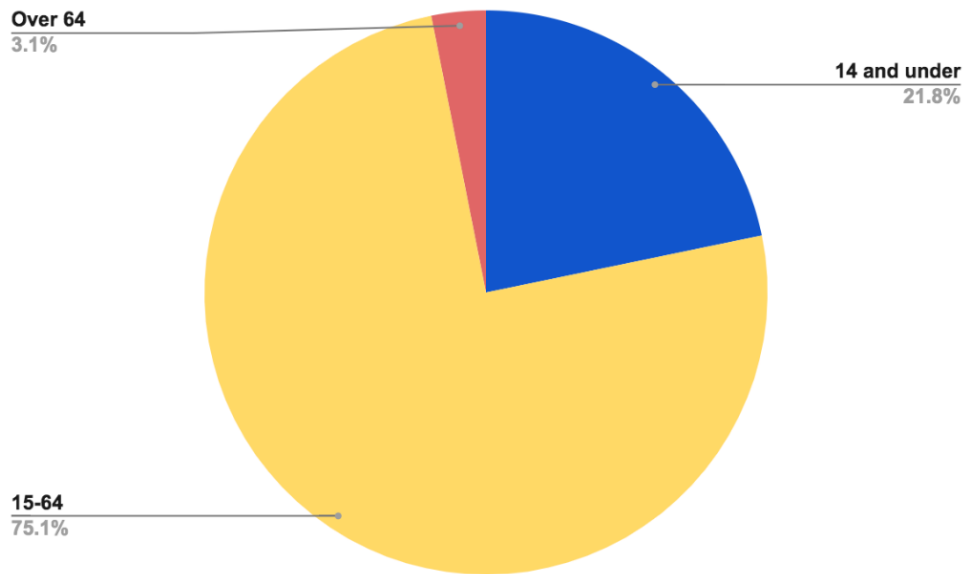
In 2021, Spain's population was approximately 47.4 million, including over 5.3 million foreign residents, accounting for 11.34% of the total. Of this foreign population, there were 232,807 individuals of Chinese descent; however, this number excludes undocumented immigrants and those who have acquired Spanish citizenship (INE, 2021). Following immigrants from Morocco, Romania, Colombia, the United Kingdom, and Italy, the Chinese community ranked as the sixth-largest group in the country.

On average, Chinese immigrants in Spain are younger, with a mean age of 32.92 years, compared to the median age of 36.63 years for the general Spanish population and the overall foreign-born demographic. Most Chinese immigrants fall within the productive age range of 15 to 64 years, highlighting their significant presence in the labor force (refer to table 2.1 and figure 2.1 for more details).

**Table 2.1** Age structure of the Chinese immigrants in Spain, 2021

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>0 a 4</b>	11,918	6.03%
<b>5 a 9</b>	14,818	7.50%
<b>10 a 14</b>	16,275	8.23%
<b>15 a 19</b>	12,998	6.57%
<b>20 a 24</b>	17,066	8.63%
<b>25 a 29</b>	16,430	8.31%
<b>30 a 34</b>	16,923	8.56%
<b>35 a 39</b>	18,896	9.56%
<b>40 a 44</b>	18,100	9.16%
<b>45 a 49</b>	18,695	9.46%
<b>50 a 54</b>	14,974	7.57%
<b>55 a 59</b>	9,552	4.83%
<b>60 a 64</b>	4,891	2.47%
<b>65 a 69</b>	2,897	1.47%
<b>70 a 74</b>	1,530	0.77%
<b>75 a 79</b>	809	0.41%
<b>80 a 84</b>	519	0.26%
<b>85 a 89</b>	299	0.15%
<b>90+</b>	115	0.06%
<b>14 and under</b>	43,011	21.76%
<b>15-64</b>	148,525	75.12%
<b>Over 64</b>	6,169	3.12%
<b>Total</b>	197,705	100.00%

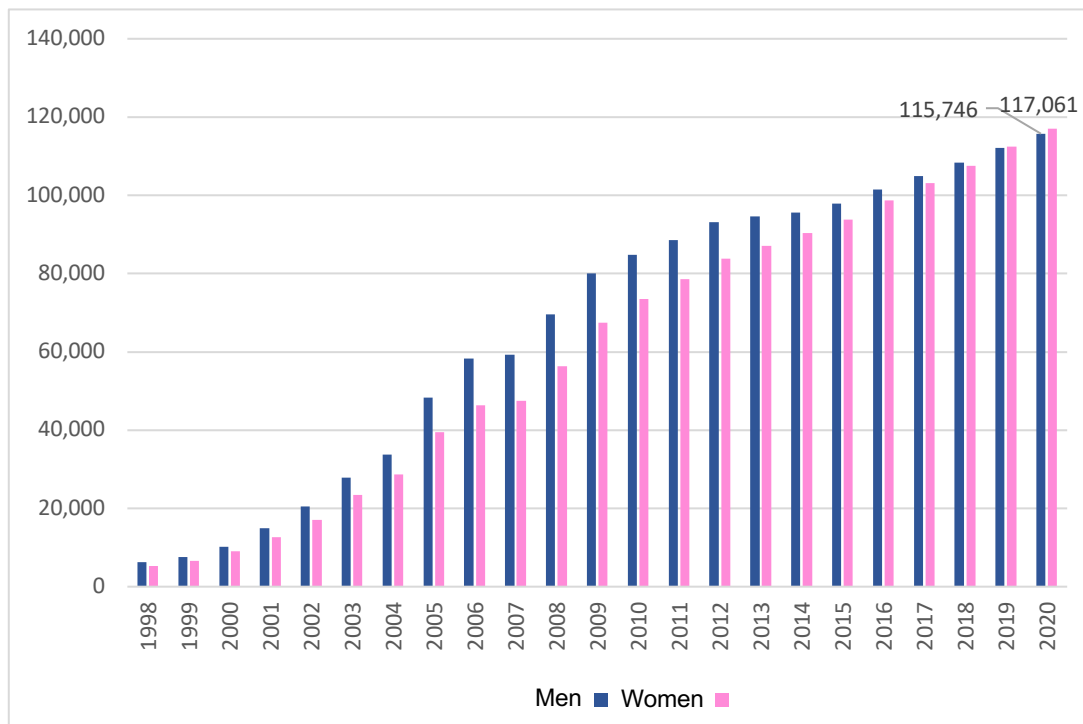
**Figure 2.1** Age structure of the Chinese immigrants in Spain, 2021



Resource: Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE.2021)

In 2020, the sex ratio at birth among the Chinese population in Spain was reported as 0.989 (INE, 2021), signifying a slightly higher number of male births per female births. However, a noteworthy change occurred in 2019, marking the first instance where the Chinese community in Spain saw a higher representation of women than men.

**Figure 2.2** Distribution of Chinese women and men in Spain



A substantial portion of the Chinese immigrant community in Spain is concentrated in urban centers, with approximately 27.8% residing in Madrid and 24.1% in Barcelona. Other cities with notable Chinese populations include Valencia, Alicante, Malaga, and Las Palmas, as shown in table 2.2. The preference for urban living among Chinese immigrants is evident, as these locations offer more opportunities for employment and social connections. In Madrid, specifically, a striking 71% of immigrants arrived directly from China, while 29% transitioned through other countries before settling in the Spanish capital (Zhou, 2017). This trend highlights the significant ties that exist between the Chinese diaspora and their homeland, as many seek to establish their lives in areas with established communities.

**Table 2.2** Residence of Chinese immigrants in Spain

<b>Province</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>TOTAL Spain</b>	232,807	100.00%
<b>Madrid</b>	64,690	27.79%
<b>Barcelona</b>	56,017	24.06%
<b>Valencia/València</b>	14,625	6.28%
<b>Alicante/Alacant</b>	10,258	4.41%
<b>Málaga</b>	8,643	3.71%
<b>Palmas, Las</b>	6,181	2.65%
<b>Balears, Illes</b>	5,967	2.56%
<b>Sevilla</b>	5,682	2.44%
<b>Zaragoza</b>	5,481	2.35%
<b>Santa Cruz de Tenerife</b>	4,644	1.99%

The Chinese community in Spain is predominantly composed of individuals hailing from the southeastern provinces of Zhejiang and Fujian. According to a nationwide survey conducted by the Qingtian Overseas Chinese Affairs Office in March 2010, approximately 62% of Chinese immigrants come from Zhejiang. Within this group, a significant portion—about 65%—originates from Qingtian, while nearly 32% are from Wenzhou.

This demographic trend highlights the strong connections that these regions maintain with their diaspora in Spain. Additionally, immigrants from Fujian Province account for around 21.5% of the Chinese population, further illustrating the influence of these provinces



on the broader Chinese community in Spain. The clustering of these immigrants in urban centers not only fosters the establishment of vibrant cultural networks but also supports economic endeavors, as many set up businesses that reflect their heritage and cater to both the local and immigrant populations. The cultural richness brought by these communities contributes to the diverse social fabric of Spain, enabling them to navigate their new lives while retaining a connection to their roots.

**Table 2.3** Hometowns of Chinese Immigrants in Spain, 2010

Province/City	Number	Percent
Zhejiang	100,530	61.72%
Qingtian	65,400	
Wenzhou	32,000	
Other Counties	3,130	
Fujian	35,000	21.49%
Shanghai	5,200	3.19%
Shandong	4,500	2.76%
Liaoning	3,000	1.84%
Taiwan	2,800	1.72%
Henan	2,600	1.60%
Guangdong	1,980	1.22%
Jilin	1,800	1.11%
Heilongjiang	1,700	1.04%
Other provinces	3,779	2.32%
Total	162,889	100%

Source: Association of Chinese in Spain (Asociacion de Chinos en Espana).

## **Entrepreneurs from Qingtian and Wenzhou**

Zhejiang province (in particular Qingtian and Wenzhou) is home to more than half of the Chinese in Spain (Beltrán, 1997; Antolín & López, 2002, 2003). Those from Qingtian form an absolute majority and are involved in a dense network of internal links that are frequently unknown to the rest of their compatriots.

Qingtian is a prefecture-level city. With a total area of 2,492 square kilometers, it has a total of twenty-one villages and ten towns or urban districts, known as “乡” (xiang) and “镇” (zhen) in Chinese, respectively. Those from Wenzhou are the main minority. They indicate a successful entrepreneur and evoke the image of the newly affluent (Torruella & López, 2017; Zhou, 2017). Wenzhou is a prominent and affluent city recognized for its residents' exceptional entrepreneurial skills. In fact, they have earned the nickname "Chinese Jews" due to their notable business acumen and success in trade (Villarino, 2012).

Spain was the most popular destination for Qingtian people, according to the data. More than 39 countries were visited by Qingtian migrants during the 15-year period, although Spain was the most popular destination for 44.5% of those who arrived during the peak of the wave (See table 2.4).

**Table 2.4** Annual Report on Qingtian Residents Granted Emigration Permission by the Qingtian Public Security Bureau (1986–2000)

Year	Spain	Italy	Austria	Germany	Portugal	Others	Total	Spain/Total (%)
1986	960	325	283	167	111	540	2386	40.2
1987	1392	158	315	198	145	920	3128	44.5
1988	156	376	404	193	50	939	2118	7.4
1989	N.A.	385	418	325	81	1528	N.A.	N. A
1990	284	1240	645	1076	304	908	4457	6.4
1991	659	1661	767	828	265	1036	5216	12.6
1992	774	509	395	828	153	1472	4131	18.7
1993	590	344	330	763	158	2794	4979	11.8
1994	392	319	201	147	60	1230	2349	16.7
1995	937	553	297	253	96	2070	4206	22.3
1996	2322	799	400	354	210	4372	8457	27.5
1997	3572	2511	358	366	283	4824	11,914	30
1998	8920	3473	516	392	782	8835	22,918	38.9
1999	7944	3784	878	333	860	9537	23,336	34
2000	8754	8917	888	531	938	9952	29,980	29.2
Total	37,656	25,354	7095	6754	4496	50,957	132,312	28.5

Source: Editorial Board. *A History of Qingtianese Abroad*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2011, 94.

People from Zhejiang bring their Confucian traditions with them to Spain, where they practice their social and family norms. To ensure their survival and success in the new society, they demonstrate strong work ethic in establishing their own businesses, showcasing remarkable adaptability and willingness to make sacrifices (Villarino, 2012).

There were a variety of ways in which Zhejiang Chinese left China. Family reunions are permitted in most Western European countries at the outset. “Family” (jia) is a broad notion in Chinese culture, encompassing both siblings, married or single, along with their offspring. Since the opening policy in the 1980s, Qingtian and Wenzhou residents of Zhejiang province seized the opportunity to travel to Spain from mainland China. During this fresh wave of pioneers, a migratory chain was established (Zhou, 2017).

### **Second-Generation immigrants**

The second generation of Chinese immigrants in Spain mainly comprises the offspring of the initial group that migrated from Zhejiang Province during the 1980s. This generation frequently faces a range of challenges, including lower socioeconomic status, a strong desire to create family-run businesses, and difficulties in assimilating into Spanish society (Nieto, 2003a). The migration experience of Chinese individuals from Zhejiang commonly begins with employment within the Chinese community, where they remain until they have accumulated sufficient savings to establish their own businesses. When these enterprises succeed, they typically expand over time (López, 2005). To realize their aspirations for autonomy and self-employment, many of these migrants lead lives filled with self-denial and significant sacrifices (Abraira, 2021; Beltran & Saiz López, 2001). At least at the beginning, they dedicate nearly all their time to work, often leaving their young children in China with grandparents, relatives, or at boarding schools. These children are commonly referred to as "sent-back children." In the context of Chinese families, they are often labeled "satellite babies" due to the young age at which they are sent back to China (Bohr & Tse,

2009), to later meet with the nuclear family in the country of destination of the migration. For children of migrant parents, the experience of separation significantly impacts their adaptation to a new environment, with the social dynamics of their home country playing a pivotal role in this process (Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

The family business also plays a major part in the work attitude of Chinese migrants from Zhejiang, especially for the younger generation. Everyone in the household must contribute to its creation and operation because they are both time-consuming and difficult tasks. Unfortunately, the reality can be quite grim. Many find themselves working long hours for meager pay, often in subpar conditions that lack basic safety and support. This pervasive struggle underscores the harsh challenges that accompany the pursuit of success in their entrepreneurial endeavors (Sanders & Nee, 1996). The children of the first generation are affected by the migration project's central role in the family company. Due to their long hours at work, many migrant parents are unable to offer their children the emotional support they need to help them succeed academically, emotionally, and psychologically (Marsden, 2014; Qin, 2006, 2008).

Secondly, children in Chinese migrant families are frequently expected to help with household chores, work at the family restaurant, or take care of the family business. To help their parents communicate with broader society, they frequently assume roles as translators, counselors, and guides (Smith, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Garcia, 2014; Lee, 2015; Martinez, 2016). Compared to the traditional parent-child relationship, this is the exact opposite, burdening children with responsibilities that do not seem appropriate to their age and likely increases their levels of mental stress.

### **Other Chinese groups**

Other than the Qingtianese and other unskilled laborers who travel directly from China to Spain, three other Chinese ethnic groups should be mentioned. Since the 1990s, a growing number of Chinese immigrants have been arriving in Spain, which has helped to diversify the typical migratory patterns. On one hand, the number of Chinese university students is substantially bigger. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Education, in 2019, there were 12.571 Chinese students at Spanish universities, Madrid is the region where these students prefer to pursue undergraduate or master's degrees (MEFP, 2020), probably due to the absence of local languages other than Spanish.

The growing presence of Chinese university students is shifting the narrative away from the earlier waves of migration, which were predominantly characterized by rural migrants from Zhejiang Province. This new wave marks a transition in the demographic landscape, highlighting a shift from labor-driven migration to a focus on education and professional development among Chinese youth. The majority of the graduates return home after graduation, although a small percentage of them decide to remain. Those who are well-educated and fluent in Spanish are more likely to land high-paying professions or start their businesses, and they often marry locals (Beltrán Antolín & López, 2002).

Finally, China's growing economic strength has led to the emergence of a new affluent class. In early 2014, when the Spanish government introduced its "buy property, get residency" initiative, the first wave of Chinese investors, primarily from major cities in China, secured automatic residency in the country (Zhou, 2017).

## **Economy Activities**

One of the features of the Chinese community is its commitment to self-employment and entrepreneurship, to the point that the migratory project is frequently characterized by one's own business. According to the Yearbook of Statistics of the Ministry of Labor, Migration, and Social Security, 54.1% of self-employed employees of Chinese nationality were registered with Social Security in the entire Spanish State in 2019 (Güell, 2021). The economic activities of the Chinese community in Spain have historically concentrated on the catering sector, much like those of their counterparts in various European regions. However, since the late 1990s, there has been a notable diversification in these activities. It wasn't until the 2008 global economic crisis that China's immigrant economy in Spain started to decline (Latham & Wu, 2013; Zhou, 2017). As a result of the growth of the restaurant industry, Chinese migrants' businesses and employment in supporting industries, including construction, decorating, and grocery shops, grew. Businesses in China's restaurant sector were closely linked to these Chinese businesses, which had a similar family-business structure (López, 2015; Nieto, 2003a).

Moreover, recent Chinese immigrants have engaged in diverse industries, contributing to a variety of services within Chinese neighborhoods. This includes the presence of travel agencies, law firms, language schools, and even vegetable farms (Wladyka & Morén-Alegret, 2015; Zhou, 2017).

## ***Role of Confucianism in Chinese Culture***

While few Chinese families consciously adhere to Confucian ideologies in contemporary society, the influence of these teachings continues to manifest in various cultural practices and beliefs. The roots of Chinese culture are deeply embedded in the social and ethical philosophies articulated by Confucianism, which emphasizes the importance of balance, social cohesion, stability, male authority, and cultural customs (Ng, 1999; Wu & Chao, 2005). This enduring legacy shapes interpersonal relationships and societal structures, guiding behaviors and values that still resonate within the fabric of modern Chinese life. As such, even in the absence of explicit adherence to Confucian principles, the teachings have left a lasting imprint on the collective consciousness and cultural identity of Chinese communities today. These cultural values play a significant role in shaping an individual's self-concept and influencing their perspectives and behaviors (Ng, 1999). They establish a framework through which people interpret their experiences, interact with others, and navigate their social environments. As a result, these values profoundly affect decision-making processes, relationships, and overall life choices, reflecting the deep-rooted influence of cultural norms on personal identity and social dynamics.

In terms of identity, the self is primarily defined through connections with important individuals including family and close relations (Tamura & Lau, 1992). A person's sense of value is more closely associated with fulfilling their family's needs and contributing positively to society, rather than relying on personal achievements or talents. This cultural perspective pervades Chinese social practices as well. Individuals are supposed to display selflessness and self-control, putting the interests of others ahead of their own personal



preferences or desires. Central to Chinese culture is the concept of filial piety, deeply intertwined with the idea of interdependence. This principle encompasses the obligations, respect, and duties individuals have toward their families, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing family members' desires over personal wishes and needs (Ikels, 2004).

Expressions of filial piety can be seen in various behaviors, including showing deference to elders, preserving the family's reputation, and encouraging children to excel academically (Koh et al., 2008).

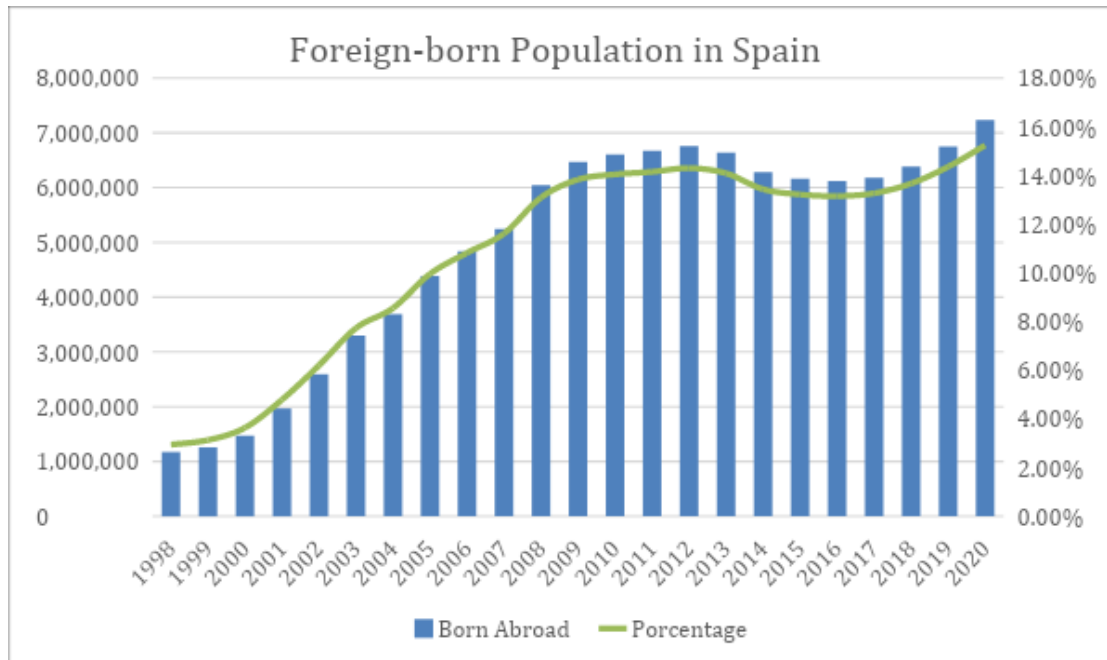
For many Chinese individuals, culture and traditions are integral to their identity, leading them to prioritize the preservation of behaviors and values from their cultural heritage (Juang & Umana-Taylor, 2012; Koh et al., 2008). Even after spending considerable time in Spain, many Chinese people continue to uphold elements of their native culture, reflecting a strong connection to their roots and an enduring commitment to their cultural practices. Simultaneously, if immigrants are to succeed in Spain, they must adjust to cultural norms from at least two places. Balancing two (or more) cultures has been known to be difficult owing to the cultural conflicts that occur (Berry, 1997). Overall, the majority of immigrants tend to adapt successfully to their new environments as time progresses (DeAngelis, 2011).

### ***Spanish attitudes towards Chinese immigrants***

During the last decade of the 20th century, due to economic growth, Spain witnessed one of the largest waves of migration in the European Union (Lafleur et al., 2017). Until 1998, The share of the immigrant population was less than 3% of the total population, whilst in 2020, there were more than seven million foreign-born residents in Spain, which accounts

for over 15% of the total population (INE, 2021). in addition to a considerable undocumented population (See Figure 2.3).

**Figure 2.3** Foreign-born Population in Spain



Prior to 1980, Spain's immigrant population largely consisted of Europeans, along with a smaller group of immigrants from Latin America and North America. This demographic landscape set the stage for subsequent waves of migration that would diversify the country's immigrant communities. By the second half of the 1990s, a change had occurred in which migrants, particularly from North Africa, Latin America, and China arrived and regarded Spain as a destination where they might begin a better life. While the number of Romanians and Moroccans declined in the first half of 2017, the number of Italians and Chinese increased in absolute terms. It should be emphasized that the Chinese population in Spain has grown steadily since 2006 despite declining immigrant numbers from other nations as a result of Spain's economic crisis since 2008 (Permanente & Las, 2017).

Chinese are generally perceived as an exotic minority in Spanish society. To some degree, there exists a lack of political correctness in the general discourse regarding Chinese or Asians that can be tackled in jokes, parodies, and other forms of negative representation. This lack of political correctness may stem from a variety of factors, including historical stereotypes, cultural misunderstandings, and the perpetuation of exoticism in media portrayals. Moreover, the notion of what is considered acceptable discourse regarding minority groups is often shaped by dominant cultural norms, which may inadvertently marginalize or stereotype minority communities. Therefore, while it is acknowledged that not all instances of non-politically correct discourse are driven by ill intentions, it is essential to critically examine the impact of such language and representations on marginalized communities. Through promoting increased awareness and understanding, society can strive to cultivate a more inclusive and respectful atmosphere for everyone, irrespective of their background or ethnic identity (Guo et al., 2020; Rincken, 2021).

### ***Local Perspective***

Many opinions regarding the Chinese population, in general, are neutral or mildly favorable, whereas those in regard to second-generation Chinese immigrants appear to be more positive. The majority of people perceive them to be quiet, courteous, and respectful in public areas (Wladyka & Morén-Alegret, 2015). On the other hand, despite the fact that Chinese immigrants do not pose a threat to the general living environment, their rapidly expanding economic activity is seen as a possible cause of conflict (Ángel & Sancho, 2008; Wladyka & Morén-Alegret, 2015). As the Chinese community in Spain became more visible,

the term “invasion” was frequently stated among Spanish locals living near Chinese neighborhoods (López, 2015). The emergence of Chinese-owned enterprises is seen as a potential threat to the economic survival of the neighboring Spanish-owned firms. At the same time, the poor participation of Chinese in locally organized groups causes tension, particularly among those involved in local trade (Nieto, 2003a; Wladyka & Morén-Alegret, 2017). Locals often attribute blame to the belief that Chinese immigrants receive special advantages when launching businesses, largely due to the perception that the products they import are often untaxed and sold in violation of regulations (Ángel & Sancho, 2008; Li, 2017; Nieto, 2003b).

While it is acknowledged that there are concerns and mistrust towards the Chinese community in Spain, particularly regarding aspects of economic competitiveness, it would be inaccurate to categorically assert the presence of xenophobic attitudes. Criticisms directed at the Chinese community often center around perceptions of isolationism and a perceived lack of assimilation into Spanish society (Wladyka & Morén-Alegret, 2017). However, it's essential to note that attitudes and perceptions can vary among individuals and are influenced by a myriad of factors. As such, the portrayal of the Chinese minority in Spain is nuanced and multifaceted.

### ***Stereotypes and Racism***

Several exaggerated stereotypes and urban legends about Chinese immigrants circulate in Spanish society, they are often seen as a hard-working yet insular community, characterized by a tendency to remain closed off from outside influences. This perception

highlights a degree of distance and mystery, as their strong work ethic and focus on self-sufficiency may contribute to a reputation for being unapproachable or exclusive (Beltrán Antolín, 1997). Exoticism also pervades Spanish natives' attitudes toward the Chinese community. Chinese and other Asian women are frequently portrayed as objects of sexual desire, but rarely as subjects or agents of that (Yamamoto, 2000). Chinese men often face depictions as asexual or lacking in masculinity, contributing to perceptions of physical unattractiveness. Such portrayals lead to experiences of exclusion and rejection, ultimately fostering a sense of racial isolation and symbolic disempowerment among this group (Chou, 2010). This dynamic highlights the significant impact that societal stereotypes can have on the identities and self-perceptions of Chinese men, reinforcing harmful narratives that perpetuate feelings of inadequacy and marginalization.

Various misunderstandings about Chinese culture have been disseminated by mainstream society. A prevalent myth is the belief that Chinese people do not conduct burial rituals, stemming from the lack of documented burials within the Chinese community in Spain. This assumption can be clarified by considering the demographic context: many Chinese migrants are relatively young, and it is common for them to wish to return to China upon retirement, which accounts for the limited presence of burials (Ángel & Sancho, 2008).

Another common perception is that Chinese migrants are unwilling to learn Spanish and do not actively seek to integrate into Spanish society (Beltrán Antolín & López, 2002). However, this view oversimplifies the challenges faced by first-generation Chinese immigrants. The struggle with Spanish often stems from significant language difficulties and communication barriers, rather than a simple lack of desire to learn. Many Chinese migrants

may lack access to language classes, and the demands of work can leave little time for study. Additionally, they often feel more comfortable communicating in their native language within their own communities, which further isolates them from opportunities to practice Spanish. This creates a cycle where limited language skills hinder social interactions, making it challenging to build relationships outside of their immediate networks. A significant portion of Chinese individuals struggling with the Spanish language consists of newcomers from Zhejiang Province who often have limited educational backgrounds. Many of them find the task of acquiring a language that differs so greatly from their own to be overwhelming and sometimes even beyond their reach. This challenge is particularly acute during the early stages of their migration journey, where their primary focus centers on generating sufficient income to start their own businesses. As a result, language acquisition often takes a backseat to immediate economic survival, further complicating their integration into Spanish society (Beltrán Antolín & López, 2002).

Stereotypes and preconceptions have resulted in discriminatory actions toward the Chinese community in some circumstances. Research has shown that Chinese children in Spain encounter significant peer discrimination within the school environment. This discrimination often arises from pervasive stereotypes about their culture. Many classmates might harbor misconceptions about their background, leading to exclusion or bullying. Additionally, the language barrier plays a crucial role; these children often struggle to communicate effectively in Spanish, making it challenging to form friendships and integrate with their peers. This combination of cultural stereotypes and linguistic difficulties not only

affects their social interactions but can also have long-term implications for their academic performance and mental well-being. (Beltran & López, 2001; López, 2006).

A notable incident occurred in 2004 when violent protests erupted against Chinese-owned shoe shops in Elche. Spanish shoe manufacturers accused these businesses of engaging in unfair competition, leading to heightened tensions and hostility within the community (Beltrán Antolín & López, 2006). During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase in racial discrimination against the Chinese community, fueled by media references to the virus as the "Chinese virus." In response to such discrimination, there were numerous grassroots initiatives by Chinese merchants who distributed masks at a time when they were difficult to obtain during the pandemic (EL PAÍS, 2020). These initiatives aimed not only to provide practical support but also to foster a sense of solidarity and community resilience.

### ***Racism during the COVID-19***

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, there has been a notable surge in Sinophobia, accompanied by heightened prejudice, xenophobia, discrimination, violence, and racism aimed at individuals of East Asian and Southeast Asian backgrounds across the globe (Guo et al., 2020; Misra et al., 2020).

The first incident that jumped to the media in Spain was in 2020, when a notable incident unfolded, drawing widespread attention to issues of discrimination against Chinese individuals. Five Chinese students, were prohibited from entering a bar in Huelva because of their nationality (Huelvaya, 2020). This incident sparked outrage and ignited discussions about xenophobia and discrimination in Spanish society. Notably, it exemplifies the

intersectional challenges faced by Chinese in Spain, who contend with racial and ethnic biases.

According to a study conducted by the Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS), amid the pandemic, a majority of the Spanish population expressed negative opinions about China (43% negative, 29.8% positive, 27.2% neutral), indicating a decline in their perceptions of the Asian country over the last three years. However, perspectives towards Chinese citizens are not largely affected by China's increasingly unfavorable image linked to the pandemic. In general, Spaniards have positive attitudes toward Chinese students, Chinese tourists, and the Chinese population as a whole, but they have negative attitudes toward Chinese politicians (González Enríquez & Rincken, 2021).

Some researchers argue that discrimination in Spain is not a widespread issue, suggesting that overt racism tends to manifest only in isolated incidents, often influenced by specific contexts and circumstances (Beltrán Antolín & López, 2002). While others (Hughes, 2014) were concerned that discrimination had worsened in Spain in recent years. This perspective underscores the importance of ongoing research and analysis to understand the evolving dynamics of discrimination and prejudice in Spanish society. By delving deeper into these complexities, scholars can uncover the underlying factors contributing to discriminatory attitudes and behaviors, as well as identify effective strategies for combating discrimination and promoting inclusivity.

## **2.4 Chinese Queer diaspora in western societies**

### ***Being “Chinese” and “Gay” in Western Countries***



There has been limited literature and research on the intersections of sexuality within the Chinese community (Huang & Brouwer, 2018; Huang & Fang, 2019; Mao et al., 2002; Poon & Ho, 2008). The majority of studies regarding gay men have been done on White, middle-class populations (Cass, 1984; Rosario et al., 2006; Troiden, 1988). In recent years, the limited research on the LGBTQ+ ethnic minority community has mostly focused on Black and Latino groups (Crocetti et al., 2008; Cyrus, 2017; Datta et al., 2017; Ramirez & Paz Galupo, 2019). As a result, relatively few studies have been undertaken with Asian gay males, and even fewer have taken into account their experiences (Chan, 1989; Chung & Szymanski, 2006; Hart et al., 2021).

In general, there have been four approaches in the studies of Chinese queer diaspora in Western nations. The first approach started in the 1990s with ethnic sexuality studies (Fung, 2005). Ethnic sexuality research primarily examines how queer members of the Asian diaspora are depicted in Western mainstream culture, focusing on the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Studies by Caluya (2006), Chuang (1999), and Daroya (2013) highlight the ways these representations influence the experiences and identities of queer Asians. Conversely, Eguchi (2011), Poon & Ho (2008), and Riggs (2013) delve into how societal perceptions shape identity formation, emphasizing the interplay between race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Some research, particularly in media studies, focuses on the representation of Chinese male gender and sexuality in Western media. Chan (2020) and Fung (2005) examine how Asian men are often depicted in subordinate roles, particularly in gay pornography. Fung (2005) points out that Asian men are typically portrayed as less central in anal intercourse, with their pleasure often overshadowed by that of white men.

Additionally, this desexualized and emasculated portrayal of Chinese men has persisted in Hollywood films since the early 1990s, as noted by Marchetti (2012).

In recent years, a rising number of academics have begun to pay attention to dating app studies that focus on the experiences of sexual and ethnic minorities (Dhoest, 2016, 2019; Shield, 2017). In the Chinese context, several researchers have explored the use of these apps among Chinese gay men (Li & Chen, 2021; Miao & Chan, 2021; Sundararajan, 2015; Wu & Trottier, 2021). Scholars have found that gay dating apps (for example, Blued, Grindr, and Jack'd) provide vital digital places for the Chinese gay diaspora to interact with the local community, such as seeking romantic connections or casual encounters and forming intercultural friendships and relationships (Chen, 2021). However, aside from opening doors for cross-cultural encounters, gay dating apps have also raised concerns about racial bias and discrimination towards Chinese gay men (Chen & Liu, 2021).

The second approach emphasizes the mental and physical health of the Chinese gay diaspora. Much of the existing literature focuses on the medical dimensions of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, particularly among men who have sexual relationships with other men within the diasporic community. This body of research aims to examine the health challenges encountered by these individuals and the broader implications for public health strategies and interventions (Chan, 1989; Gupta et al., 2014; Hahm & Adkins, 2009; Hart et al., 2021; Rogers-Sirin & Gupta, 2012). Researchers highlighted that sexual and ethnic minorities are exposed to a high risk of HIV; in particular, those who migrate to a new country may endure social and economic turmoil and loss of family and social support (Choi et al., 2005; Lewis & Wilson, 2017). Racial and ethnic prejudice, language hurdles, and

cross-country career changes contribute to the instability that often is associated to substance abuse, poor mental health, and HIV infection among Chinese gay migrants who are also ethnic minorities (Nehl et al., 2015).

While a limited amount of social science research has examined Chinese homosexual men's identity construction and coming out experiences in Western countries (Bie & Tang, 2016; Chan, 1989; Hahm & Adkins, 2009; Kong, 2016; Leung, 2021). Many studies have been conducted to demonstrate that Chinese gay men people are likely exposed to minority stress (Kertzner et al., 2009; Meyer, 2010) and experience other psychological symptoms or identity crises (Huang et al., 2009), these health disparities can be associated with the contrasts between the more collectivist nature of Asian cultures and the individualistic tendencies often observed in Western gay culture (Mao et al., 2002). Traditional Chinese values, on one hand, can contribute to stress and evoke feelings of exclusion and marginalization for a sexual minority within the Chinese community. Identifying as a lesbian or gay person can be perceived as negative conduct and bring disgrace to the family, especially among those who must uphold traditional Chinese values (Boulden, 2009; Szymanski & Sung, 2010). Conversely, while many Chinese gay men often find themselves marginalized within the broader gay community, some actively seek to integrate into these spaces. However, this desire to join gay social circles can lead to a disconnection from their ethnic communities. Within these ethnic groups, heterosexuality is often seen as the prevailing social norm, which can complicate their sense of belonging and identity (Peacock et al., 2001).

Recent research has explored the transnational experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals from China, examining their journeys within the broader context of globalization and the evolving dynamics of China's interactions with Western nations. (Bao, 2012; Kong, 2012). These research efforts also delve into how migrants reshape local social networks and cultivate hybrid cultures. The interplay between power dynamics and personal choices is examined through the dual lens of international migration and localized social practices.

Nevertheless, much of the research and academic inquiry into Chinese and Asian sexual minority communities has primarily occurred in Anglosphere nations, which host the largest populations of Chinese individuals, resulting in a notable interest in studying these experiences. Research conducted in Canada (Poon & Ho, 2008), Australia (Mao et al., 2002), the United States (Operario et al., 2008), and New Zealand (Adams & Stephen, 2020) suggests that gay Asian men frequently face stigma concerning their identity within their cultural communities. Challenges in revealing one's sexual orientation to family members are common, primarily stemming from deeply ingrained traditional values and cultural norms that reinforce heteronormativity. They also often feel overlooked and marginalized within predominantly White LGBTQ+ communities and frequently face rejection from their desired sexual partners (Ro et al., 2013).

Additionally, stereotypes associated with race and ethnicity contribute to the perception of Asian gay men as being less dominant and exhibiting traits often deemed effeminate (Eguchi, 2011). Chinese men, often viewed as less masculine due to their smaller, slimmer physiques (Chow, 2008), may face additional stigma in homosexual communities that prioritize hypermasculinity and muscularity (Kong, 2012). This sexual objectification

can lead to various negative psychological impacts, such as heightened body anxiety, feelings of body shame, and issues with sexual function (Calogero et al., 2011).

Internalized racial discrimination is considered an additional source of stress for racial and ethnic minorities, who navigate societies that privilege Whiteness and deem it superior (Blea, 2003). This reflects "an individual's recognition of a racial ordering that persistently ranks White individuals above people of color" (Huber et al., 2006). Among Chinese gay men, this can appear through preferences for dating only White partners (Poon & Ho, 2008), a tendency to distance socially from their own ethnic community, and feelings of discontent with their own physical characteristics (Ayres, 1999).

Furthermore, internalized racial discrimination for Chinese gay men encompasses a complex interplay of societal norms and personal perceptions. This includes not only the conscious and subconscious recognition of racial hierarchies but also the internalization of societal beauty standards that often prioritize Western features. As a result, Chinese gay men may internalize feelings of inadequacy or inferiority regarding their physical appearance, leading to a sense of self-directed loathing (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010).

In addition to these psychological and relational challenges, internalized racial discrimination also manifests in the unequal power dynamics inherent in sexual relationships. Chinese gay men may find themselves navigating precarious situations where they are vulnerable to mistreatment and violence from potential sexual partners, particularly if these partners hold prejudiced attitudes towards their race or ethnicity (Plant et al., 2022). Thus, internalized racial discrimination for Chinese gay men in Spain involves a multifaceted struggle against societal norms, personal insecurities, and the inherent power imbalances

within intimate relationships (Sosoo et al., 2020). Recognizing and addressing these multifaceted issues is vital for enhancing mental well-being and creating a society that values inclusivity and equality for all individuals. This applies to everyone, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. By fostering understanding and support, we can work towards a more equitable community that empowers all members to thrive (Elmer et al., 2022).

Gay men of color face a high rate of racial discrimination, which has the potential to have a severe impact on their health. It is generally known that racism has a negative impact on people's mental health, resulting in feelings of poor self-esteem, anxiety and even depression (Bista & Broman, 2018; Grossman & Liang, 2007; Zhang & Hong, 2013).

As it has been said earlier, to the best of my knowledge, there has been no empirical research in Spain focusing on the lived experiences of Chinese gay men. Although Chinese homosexual men are often an elusive group, studying this community offers numerous advantages. While these individuals share many of the broader challenges faced by heterosexual Chinese individuals, unique obstacles arise, particularly within the gay community.

### ***Coming out as Chinese diaspora***

Revealing one's sexual orientation, commonly known as 'coming out', remains a significant challenge for individuals in the Chinese diaspora today. The primary hurdles to disclosure encompass the fear of potential rejection or causing embarrassment to the family, as well as concerns about jeopardizing professional advancement (Ocampo & Soojinda, 2016). Additionally, traditional gender roles within Chinese culture place considerable

emphasis on the expectations of men as providers and upholders of familial honor (Xie, 1994). This societal pressure to fulfill the role of the 'ideal' son, which includes providing financial stability and ensuring the continuation of the family lineage, further complicates the process of coming out for Chinese men (Blair & Madigan, 2016; Tang et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the intersectionality of race and gender has the potential to impact the experiences of individuals identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community, while also having to conform to societal expectations of masculinity that align with heterosexual standards for Chinese men (Ng, 2016). This intersectionality creates a unique set of challenges, as individuals may feel compelled to adhere to rigid gender norms in order to gain acceptance within both their cultural and LGBTQ+ communities. Thus, the fear of deviating from traditional masculine roles, coupled with concerns about familial honor and financial responsibility, creates additional barriers to coming out for Chinese gay men in Spain (Hu & Scott, 2016; Xie, 1994; Han, 2012).

There are challenges that the Chinese gay diaspora may overcome. According to a number of reports, it was difficult for Asian sexual minorities to find a sexual identity that was compatible with their ethnic identity (Hahm & Adkins, 2009). During the process of self-identification as both gay and Asian, Chinese gay males experienced internal pressures. Some expressed negative perceptions of themselves because they felt doubly marginalized in the context of the LGBTQ+ community and their own ethnical community (Mao et al., 2002).

Gay Chinese men may consider the benefits and risks of coming out. Pressures from family and society led some of them to believe that being gay was something they should keep secret (Mao et al., 2002). Coming out as gay has the potential to cause shame and

humiliation to the family, which might vary from the collective mentality of the family and also go against the normative expectations of heterosexual society. The idea of "losing face" holds particular importance within Chinese cultural contexts, symbolizing social reputation and respect, and often governs interpersonal dynamics and self-perception (Chang & Holt, 1991; Leung & Wong, 2001; Ren, Howe, & Zhang, 2018; Ting-Toomey, 1994), as Chinese males are traditionally expected not only to marry but also to assume the role of fathers, contributing to the perpetuation of the family lineage and ensuring the continuity of ancestral traditions. The importance of fatherhood is deeply ingrained in Chinese societal norms, with men being revered for their ability to provide for and protect their families (Chan, 2019). This expectation extends beyond mere biological reproduction to encompass the responsibilities of nurturing and guiding future generations, instilling in them the values and virtues that uphold familial and cultural integrity (Liong, 2017; Tan, 2020). As such, the decision to come out as gay can be particularly challenging for Chinese men, as it may be perceived as a deviation from the traditional path of family-building and the fulfillment of patriarchal duties.

As a show of gratitude for their parents' efforts, Chinese children are expected to do well in school and land a high-paying profession (Ocampo & Soodjinda, 2016). Consequently, measures are taken to avoid such situations, as individuals feel compelled to fulfill social responsibilities and uphold the principles of filial piety. This cultural expectation can lead to significant pressure, as individuals strive to balance their personal desires with the demands of their families and communities, often resulting in internal conflict and a reluctance to express their true selves (Ren et al., 2018). In addition, individual happiness is less important to the Chinese than the harmony of the family as a whole. Consequently,



individuals of Chinese descent often find themselves preoccupied with the potential repercussions that their coming out may have on their families. Due to the stigma surrounding homosexuality within Chinese culture, many gay men from this background opt to conceal their sexual orientation, prioritizing familial harmony over personal authenticity. This decision is deeply influenced by societal expectations and the fear of bringing shame or disappointment to their loved ones. Many of them are afraid of disappointing their parents by coming out. In addition, this "secret" causes a dilemma for the family as to how it should be handled. Many Chinese gay men choose to remain closeted to avoid troubling their parents, who are similarly affected by prevailing cultural norms and heterosexist ideals. This approach enables them to shield their families from these challenges, sustaining familial harmony and safeguarding their reputation among others.

Findings suggest that gay people are particularly concerned about the potential stigma or damage to their professional prospects that may result from coming out. Gay men use a variety of behavioral reactions to protect themselves against employment discrimination and control their own social stigma (Embrick et al., 2007). Discrimination in the workplace remains, despite widespread public acceptance and inclusive policies. The findings indicate that numerous gay men choose to conceal their sexual orientation to evade stigma from their colleagues and enhance their chances of advancing within the corporate hierarchy. This decision often stems from the desire to maintain a favorable professional image and avoid potential discrimination or bias in the workplace. Gendered male stereotypes and hegemonies are implemented in masculinized work environments, putting psychological stress on Chinese

gay men to navigate their identities and gender expressions in ways that guarantee job security.

One of the main challenges for Chinese gay men is the process of coming out. In response to this challenge, they often use various coping strategies, primarily choosing to conceal their sexual orientation from family and colleagues. Chinese gay men often lead dual lives, keeping their sexual identities hidden from the public while seeking same-sex connections in private. This concealment allows them to navigate societal expectations while pursuing intimacy away from the watchful eyes of their communities (Ho et al., 2018; Wang, 2019; Yu & Blain, 2019; Zheng, 2015).

### ***Living in Double Lives***

When discussing the living situations of gay men in China, various research has proposed the concept of "double lives." (Wang, 2019; Yu & Blain, 2019). According to several studies, Chinese gay men who are still in the closet and have kept their sexual orientation a secret feel as if they have lived in two distinct worlds for a long time, being heterosexual in front of their family, while being queer in an inner community or on social applications.

To understand the immense pressure Chinese gay men face, it is essential to comprehend Confucian views on family. In Chinese culture, masculinity is deeply intertwined with notions of familial responsibility and honor (Cao, 2021). Men are expected to embody traits such as strength, stoicism, and success, with an emphasis on fulfilling their duties as sons and eventually as fathers. Confucianism places great importance on the

preservation of family lineage and the continuation of ancestral traditions, with men serving as the primary stewards of these legacies (Xie, 1994).

For men who identify as gay, or have sex with men, this societal expectation of fulfilling traditional masculine roles poses an additional layer of pressure (Sánchez, 2009). In addition to facing scrutiny from their families for deviating from heterosexual norms, they also grapple with the perceived failure to uphold the family bloodline. This conflict between personal identity and familial duty often leads to a sense of alienation and internalized shame (Brown & Trevethan 2010).

Furthermore, the expectation of maintaining family honor further complicates matters for Chinese gay men. Disclosure of one's sexuality is often viewed as a threat to the family's reputation and social standing, leading many individuals to conceal their true selves to preserve familial harmony (Ren, 2018). This pressure to live a double life, conforming to familial expectations while navigating their own identity, takes a toll on the mental and emotional well-being of Chinese gay men (Hua et al., 2019).

Chinese gays and lesbians who find themselves unable, either explicitly or implicitly, to reject a heterosexual marriage often employ two primary coping strategies to manage the stress. One approach involves a publicly negotiated 'fake' marriage, or a formality marriage, between a lesbian and a gay male, commonly referred to as Xinghun (形婚:形式婚姻) in Chinese. Gays and lesbians who are unwilling to join a heterosexual marriage seek mutually beneficial agreements with each other to meet family and society expectations for marrying at a specific age and, in some cases, having children (Liu, 2013). For some gay men, Xinghun is like delving into a beautiful deception that is also a ticking time bomb. There is a risk of

emotional instability due to the anxiety, remorse, regret and anguish caused by uncertainty about the future (Zhu, 2017).

Another approach involves individuals concealing their same-sex attraction and entering into a marriage with an unsuspecting partner of the opposite sex. This practice is commonly referred to as "marriage fraud" or Pianhun (骗婚). It describes a scenario where a closeted gay man presents himself as heterosexual by marrying a woman who is unaware of his sexual orientation. In this context, the woman is referred to as a Tongqi, which literally translates to "a homosexual man's wife." The phenomenon of Tongqi (同妻) has gained prominence as a complex social issue, reflecting the intersection of traditional values, familial expectations, and the struggles faced by those in the LGBTQ+ community. This situation not only impacts the lives of the men involved but also has profound effects on their wives and families, creating a topic worthy of further exploration and understanding (Zhu, 2018).

These coping mechanisms create a delicate equilibrium for Chinese gay men, enabling them to meet familial obligations while mitigating personal moral dilemmas and managing stress arising from both social-political and interpersonal interactions. Crucially, these marriages serve a dual purpose: they help individuals preserve their public image and that of their families while concealing the reality of their homosexuality and the family's hidden truth of having a gay son. Such behaviors contribute to the emergence of a face-saving culture that emphasizes appearance and formality over genuine authenticity in contemporary society (Hu & Wang, 2013).

### *Chinese gay males in Spain*

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Spain emerged as a major destination for immigrants from all around the world (Arango, 2012). Despite the enormous growth in the number of immigrants in Spain, some studies have focused their attention on Queer migrants. The vast majority of these studies emphasize Moroccans and Latinos (who are coming from countries such as Colombia, Chile, Argentina, and Mexico). On the other hand, so far there has been no research into the experiences of sexual minority migrants originating from China.

This is most likely due to the Chinese community's lack of visibility in Spanish society. Another reason could be that homosexuality is still a taboo in Chinese traditional culture, and as previously stated, the majority of Chinese living in Spain are from rural areas in China, where conservative values may have a large impact on how they view homosexuality, making it extremely difficult for them to come out as a sexual minority.

In the absence of comprehensive social research, certain Chinese Spanish artists provide insight into the lives of Chinese gay men. For example, Chenta Tsai Tseng, who is widely recognized in Spain by his stage name "putochinomaricón." (which translates to "fucking Chinese fag" in English), is gaining recognition in Spain for his sharp critique of various issues, including racism within the LGBTQ+ community and other broader societal concerns. In his music and autobiography, titled *Arroz Tres Delicias: Sexo, raza y género* (2019), Tsai Tseng has related his experiences growing up as an Asian gay man in Spain. In interviews, Tsai Tseng has addressed the increasing instances of racial discrimination and fetishization experienced by individuals in Spain's digital dating environment. He recounts

experiences where individuals either reject him based on his ethnicity or fetishize him solely because he is Asian (Marcos, 2019). Much like the previously discussed literature on Chinese male sexuality, Asian men often face stereotypes portraying them as passive, undesirable, or exotic. The various manifestations of racism present significant challenges that men of Asian descent and other racial minorities, particularly those attracted to the same sex, must continually confront in Western societies. Moreover, the artist mentioned experiencing both race-based rejection and fetishization in the online dating landscape in Spain. "People either dismiss you because of your photo or they idealize you, wanting to date you solely because of your Asian background." he explains (The Local, 2019).

Overall, leveraging the work of "putochinomaricón" provides a unique opportunity to explore the lived experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain and engage with critical issues of race, sexuality, and identity in contemporary society.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In the methodology section, I outline the overall framework of the research design. Next, I briefly summarize the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and why I chose qualitative over quantitative approach and grounded theory. Followed by the researcher's reflexivity and bias. Procedures, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness conclude the methodology chapter.

### **3.1 Qualitative Research Approaches**

A qualitative approach has been deemed the most suitable method to achieve the objectives of this study. Qualitative research highlights the importance of understanding how individuals engage with the world and how they interpret these interactions (Frost, 2011). In qualitative research, the units of analysis are the subjective experiences, including the participants' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behaviors, and motivations (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Several factors influenced my decision to employ a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative one. First, as highlighted in Chapter 2, there is a scarcity of research focusing on the experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain. Theoretical exploration of this yet unexplored subject needs to be improved. Qualitative approaches are deemed more suitable for exploratory studies, particularly in areas that have received insufficient attention. (Ritchie et al., 2013). Secondly, collecting in-depth information about the experiences of a highly vulnerable and marginalized population necessitates a more open-ended and personalized method of inquiry than typical survey methods provide (Gale et al., 2013). In addition, because access to informants is limited, it is vital to obtain as much data as possible from a

small sample rather than attempting to collect a larger number of shorter responses (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). Additionally, quantitative research often examines aspects of identity separately or concurrently, rather than exploring their intersection (Narváz et al., 2009). Given that this study centers on the interplay between ethnicity and sexuality, qualitative methods seem more fitting. Furthermore, this approach is advantageous when participants are hesitant to share information on sensitive subjects like non-normative sexuality and gender norms, as it allows the researcher to encourage more in-depth responses.

### **3.2 Grounded Theory Approach**

This research seeks to examine the everyday lives of Chinese gay men, emphasizing the interplay between their ethnic and sexual identities. The utilization of grounded theory is fitting, as it allows researchers to clarify social processes through an ongoing cycle of collecting and analyzing data (Charmaz, 2006). For the present study, grounded theory would have provided a framework within which to investigate the coming-out experiences, discrimination experiences, and other life events of Chinese gay men. An important distinguishing feature of the analytical technique taken in grounded theory research is the emphasis on testing hypotheses using data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Given the dearth of prior empirical research in this area and the intention to have a better grasp of the lived realities of this group, the current study employs grounded theory to theorize "how participants generate meaning and actions in specific settings" (Charmaz, 2006).

Grounded theory emphasizes the inductive development of theories directly from the data, rather than testing preconceived hypotheses against existing theories. This approach



ensures that the resulting theories are firmly rooted in empirical evidence, allowing for a more authentic understanding of the phenomena being studied (Glaser, 1998). Grounded theory, developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s, marked a significant methodological advancement in the social sciences. This qualitative research approach employs systematic and rigorous procedures to analyze data, aiming to formulate a theory that conceptually elucidates an action, process, or interaction within a particular context (Creswell, 2009). It quickly garnered widespread acceptance among experienced qualitative researchers as well as those new to the field, posing a substantial challenge to the prevailing dominance of quantitative methodologies in the social sciences when it first emerged (Charmaz, 2014).

A key aspect of grounded theory is that researchers can begin analyzing data almost immediately after it is collected, rather than waiting until all data has been gathered. This approach, highlighted by Kathy Charmaz (2006), allows for a more dynamic and responsive research process. Continuous comparisons are conducted between these data, for instance between two interviews, to identify patterns and outliers. Theoretical sampling is an approach to gathering data with the aim of constructing a theory, and it may be directed by the emergence of themes or the development of new concepts. The constant comparative method entails the ongoing process of comparing newly collected data with existing data, as well as contrasting incidents with both data and categories, facilitating the refinement of concepts as the research progresses. This process continues until saturation is reached, meaning no new concepts can be derived from the data. Additionally, grounded theory incorporates memo writing, which facilitates the development of theory throughout the research project. This

practice allows researchers to document insights, thoughts, and reflections after reviewing interviews, helping to build concepts and categories during the analysis phase.

Grounded theory has evolved significantly since its inception, leading to three prominent approaches: classical grounded theory, Straussian grounded theory, and constructivist grounded theory (Holt et al., 2022; Weed, 2017).

Classical grounded theory, developed by Barney G. Glaser in 1998, is based on the methodology established in the seminal publication, "Discovering Grounded Theory" (1967). Over time, differing views on the application of grounded theory led to a rift between Glaser and Strauss, culminating in their respective interpretations of the methodology. This methodology prioritizes a factual understanding of reality and an objective approach to knowledge. Glaser (1992) asserts that theories should be "discovered" instead of constructed. Researchers are encouraged to fully engage in the field, collecting data without predefined goals and postponing any review of the material until an emergent theory is identified. The aim is to generate theories that are objective, generalizable, and applicable for quantitative analysis.

In contrast, Straussian grounded theory, developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and later expanded by Corbin and Strauss (2014), introduces a more structured methodology for data analysis. This version advocates for a systematic coding process and imposes stricter guidelines on researchers. Glaser (1992) criticized this structured approach, arguing that it introduces rigidity and shifts grounded theory from an inductive to a deductive framework. Additionally, Straussian grounded theory acknowledges the value-laden nature of research, emphasizing the importance of reflexivity throughout all stages of data analysis. While it

adopts a post-positivist epistemology, it diverges from the realist ontology of classical grounded theory (Weed, 2017).

Recently, Charmaz (2006) proposed a constructivist approach to grounded theory, challenging Glaser's idea that theory emerges solely from evidence waiting to be "found." Charmaz argues that researchers actively construct theories through their interactions with participants and the data, emphasizing interpretation over mere discovery. Emphasizing the importance of researcher reflexivity, she asserts that concepts should be integrated into the analysis based on their relevance and significance. Charmaz highlights that the primary aim is to develop grounded theories that authentically reflect the perspectives of the individuals involved in the study. Consequently, constructivist grounded theory prioritizes an interpretive understanding of their experiences, in contrast to the more traditional objectives of classical grounded theory (Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

### **3.3 Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach**

Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach is a great fit for this study due to the objective of understanding people's experiences through their own words (Schwandt, 1994, 2000). In other words, the data collecting and analysis process focuses on the value of the participant's perspective (Mills et al., 2006).

In contrast to approaches influenced by the researcher's hypotheses, Constructivist Grounded Theory is notable for its focus on allowing categories and concepts to emerge organically from the data, rather than being established in advance by predetermined hypotheses (Hallberg, 2006). This approach allows for a more organic development of

theory, as researchers analyze and interpret data in a way that reflects the complexities and nuances of participants' experiences. Constructivist Grounded Theory utilizes iterative processes that facilitate a back-and-forth engagement involving the researcher, the data, and the evolving insights (Charmaz, 2014). These strategies help the researcher maintain a strong emphasis on the participants' viewpoints throughout the study.

Unlike the objectivist grounded theory method, the constructivist grounded theory approach offers researchers an analytical framework that emphasizes the creation and interrogation of data rather than providing routes to understanding an objective external reality (Charmaz, 2008). Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory is distinct in its proposal of a researcher's active, interpretive involvement in the research process. As a result, an unbiased investigation is seen as unrealistic or impossible because of the presumed presence of mutual influences between the researcher and the participants. This research is consistent with constructivist grounded theory because of the special positionality of the researcher.

According to the constructivist grounded theory, a researcher must acknowledge that a research inquiry cannot be conducted without considering both facts and values. For this reason, it is crucial for a constructivist grounded theory researcher to be self-aware and to consider how one's own values, cultural background, and prior experiences may shape the findings (Charmaz, 2006).

### **3.4 Reflexivity**

In a constructivist grounded theory investigation, it is essential for the researcher to recognize the potential impact of their biases and preconceptions on the outcomes (Charmaz,

2006). Recognizing my positionality is crucial during the research process to maintain trustworthiness and consistency. By managing perspectives in both data collection and analysis, I can enhance the integrity of the research (Levitt et al., 2018). This awareness of my own background and biases contributes to a deeper understanding of the data and promotes transparency in the findings. Constructivist grounded theory stresses that it is essential to practice reflexivity during the research. As a result, prior to conducting the planned research, I had to first determine and comprehend my own subjectivities.

It is important to note that my social location as a person who shares the commonalities with the participants in terms of sexual and ethnocultural identities may resonate with the participants. In addition, I acknowledge that the research process—from choosing this research topic, identifying and reviewing the literature to framing research questions to finding participants to collecting participants' narratives to analyzing and presenting data—has been influenced by my lived experiences as a Chinese gay man and my perceived knowledge of intersecting marginalization. My experience of living in Spain has also helped me understand what might assist these Chinese gay men in overcoming the obstacles and challenges of the migration journey.

Gair (2011) describes the insider/outsider concept as a measure of how a researcher positions themselves in relation to the group being examined. This concept reflects the varying levels of familiarity and connection a researcher may have with the participants, influencing their insights and interpretations during the study. 'Insider' researchers may share specific experiences with participants, which can significantly influence the shared understanding developed among them (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). On the one hand, I

considered myself an "insider" in the sense that, like my research participants, I also self-identify as gay and Chinese. I initially thought that having a shared sexual orientation would enhance my ability to empathize with participants and better understand the challenges they face. However, this belief is flawed, as it assumes that my identity as a gay man provides a complete understanding of others' experiences. Being a man does not guarantee that I fully appreciate what it means for others to identify as men. Similarly, sharing a sexual orientation does not guarantee that I can fully comprehend the complexities surrounding others' experiences of embracing their sexuality.

Lastly, I have the advantage of being a doctorate student studying at a major Catalan university. With this status, study participants may have seen me as an outsider with more knowledge/power. The interview process, when viewed as a social interaction mediated by the power relations (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009), is essentially a scenario full of power negotiations between the interviewer and interviewees.

### **3.5 Participants**

#### ***Sampling Strategy***

To recruit participants, purposive sampling was applied, targeting individuals who could provide insights into the central research focus: navigating life in Spain as a Chinese gay man. Most grounded theory research begins with reaching out to reflective, articulate, and willing participants who can supply rich data for the research subject (Morse, 1991). Purposive sampling is essential for studies involving LGBTQ+ individuals due to the unique challenges associated with accessing this demographic. Participants in such research are

frequently described as "hard-to-reach, stigmatized, and hidden" (Guest et al., 2006, p. 61). By intentionally selecting individuals who meet specific criteria, researchers can ensure that they gather rich, relevant data that reflects the complexities of the LGBTQ+ experience. This targeted approach allows for a deeper understanding of the issues faced by these communities, making it a vital strategy in the context of LGBTQ+ research. The study utilized a purposive sampling approach to deliberately select a diverse group of Chinese immigrant gay males, aiming to capture a range of perspectives on the research question under consideration.

### ***Inclusion Criteria***

In order to recruit participants, three inclusion criteria must be met. First, participants had to identify with Chinese culture. Participants in this study were recruited on the basis of their self-identified "Chinese" ethnocultural identity, as the term "Chinese" is used here in a broad and inclusive sense and is not used to specify a specific nationality. The second requirement is one's sexual orientation. Participants who identified as gay men were recruited. Lastly, eligible participants individuals must meet another criteria. They should be first-generation immigrants, meaning they have relocated from their home country to Spain. Additionally, the study is open to those who have moved from various countries to Spain, encompassing a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. Importantly, individuals currently living in Spain can also participate, irrespective of their immigration status. This inclusivity allows for a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of

those within the community, providing valuable insights into their unique challenges and stories.

### ***Sample Size***

It was essential to center the research on giving voice to each participant and conducting a detailed analysis of each interview to understand the lived experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain (Guetterman, 2015). Saturation, or the stage of data gathering where new elements of a conceptual category cannot be added by additional data, eventually determines the end of the data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Saturation ensures that sufficient samples are obtained for content validity in interview studies (Francis et al., 2010). The number of participants in a grounded theory study is not fixed in advance and will fluctuate as needed to reach theoretical saturation. McLeod (2001) suggests that a sample of fewer than eight participants may lack sufficient diversity to capture social processes, while a sample exceeding twenty can generate too much data for effective theory development. Consequently, this study sought to gather a significant sample size within the suggested range.

### ***Sample Sourcing***

As soon as I had settled on a sampling strategy, sample size, and target population, I could begin recruiting individuals from the real world. This process took place between December 2022 to November 2023. Advertising, financial incentives, and consideration of ethical issues all played roles in recruiting participants.



## **Advertising**

A number of sources were used to attract participants: (1) recruitment advertisements on smartphone applications (e.g., Grindr, Blued, Tinder, and Jack'd); (2) "Gay Chinese men in Europe" Group on WeChat (the most popular social media messaging apps in Chinese society). (3) Online social media (e.g., Facebook, Reddit, Twitter).

Most participants in the study came from online postings in gay Chinese communities across various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WeChat, Reddit, and Twitter. Both the pros and cons of using the Internet to disseminate research are discussed by Hamilton and Bowers (2006). One of the main benefits of utilizing the Internet for recruitment is its ability to connect with a diverse array of populations. However, a notable drawback is that this method often attracts individuals from higher socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, leading to potential sampling bias. To counteract this imbalance, I implemented snowball sampling techniques, encouraging participants to share research notifications with their friends or acquaintances who might also meet the criteria for participation. When people are not inclined to respond to advertising, these strategies are especially helpful, according to Heckathorn (2002). Recruiting Chinese gay men was challenging because of the group's minority status within the LGBTIQ+ community and larger society. In order to reach this underrepresented and difficult-to-reach group, a combination of snowball and purposive sampling was necessary.

## **Incentivizing**

One of the most important considerations in recruiting participants for an interview study is whether or not to compensate them monetarily (Robinson, 2014). Robinson stresses that while incentives can enhance engagement, there is also a risk that the practice can lead to dishonesty in the pursuit of financial gain. To address these concerns, participants were reassured that the incentive was purely a form of time compensation. Recognizing the limited research focusing on their community, it was essential to clarify early on that the study's primary goal was to gain insights into the experiences of Chinese gay men. This transparency helped to build trust and encourage open participation. It was essential to emphasize the value of each participant's unique experiences in shedding light on broader community insights, making this focus clear to inspire engagement. Participants were invited to turn on their video cameras during interviews, enhancing rapport and encouraging a more open dialogue. To bring greater depth and authenticity to the conversations, they were also encouraged to share specific examples from their personal lives, providing vivid, first-hand accounts that highlighted the nuances of their lived experiences.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Because Chinese immigrant gay men are a minority population in terms of sexual orientation, ethnicity, and racial identification, this study aimed to address a few ethical concerns.

**Voluntary Participation:** When approaching a potential participant, I described the objective and method of this study and requested verbal agreement, following which a

meeting for an interview was planned. When I meet a participant in person, I reaffirm the study's objective and method, as well as the description of possible risks and compensation measures. The participant then is required to sign the consent form if he agreed to participate in the study with full knowledge of the prospective, but carefully minimized risks of unexpected disclosure and psychological burdens.

Psychological Distress: During or at the completion of the interview process, some research participants may experience psychological and/or emotional distress or discomfort. Under such circumstances, I have a few years of social work practice experience doing focused, in-depth interviews with members of the sexual minority group. Using my social work abilities, I can detect the presence of discomfort in participants during an interview. Recognizing that I am not a mental health professional, I was also able to recommend appropriate referral sources to provide psychological support, such as the Beijing LGBT Center, Chinese Rainbow Network (CRN), PsicoLGBT, and Asociación ACATHI.

Confidentiality: to safeguard the confidentiality and well-being of participants, all gathered personal information was entered into an electronic file and stored on a computer disk with password protection and encryption. Additionally, I reassured participants that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable with the questions. Upon completion of the study, I shared a summary of the research findings with them. The confidentiality of participants was also secured by removing/altering any identifiable information from any reports or publications linked with this study. The PhD dissertation will be offered to the participants, as well as the possibility to come to the defense at the university.

## *Materials*

**Recruitment Poster for Participants:** An advertisement poster (see Appendix 1) was designed and shared across popular smartphone apps among Chinese gay men (such as Grindr, Scruff, Hornet, Jack'd, and Blued), the "Gay Chinese Men in Europe" WeChat group, and various social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, X).

**Consent Form:** To obtain participants' informed consent for the interview, a Participant Consent Form (Appendix 2) was given to each participant and reviewed with them beforehand.

**Interview Guide:** Following the approach described by Charmaz (2006, 2014), I drafted an Interview Guide (Appendix 3) to use while engaging in semi-structured interviews with participants. This guide served as a flexible tool to select questions aimed at drawing out participants' perspectives, concerns, and experiences in an empathetic and non-judgmental way, rather than as a rigid list to be followed in a set sequence.

### **3.6 Data Collection**

When potential participants contacted me via email or other online communication apps during the recruiting process, I provided them with a comprehensive description of the study, the research procedure, and the possible risks and benefits of participating. In my email, I recommended the individual think thoroughly about whether or not to take part in the study. Participants who showed interest were requested to complete a demographic information questionnaire (refer to Appendix 4); This form served the purpose of confirming eligibility against inclusion criteria and aiding in participant selection through purposive and

snowball sampling, encompassing various demographic aspects such as age, location, and socioeconomic status.

Upon contact via email or social media, potential participants were provided the chance to pose any study-related inquiries and arrange an interview. Participants were asked to choose a time, date, and place that would be convenient for them, and agreements were reached. Two in-person interviews were held in a private and quiet setting. For the interview, initially, eight of the participants indicated a preference for staying anonymous during the interview process by opting to conduct it via Zoom. As the research progressed, the need for a larger and more diverse sample became evident to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis. So, I recruited the remaining six participants, totalling 14 individuals, and they participated in the onsite interviews.

Before each interview, consent forms were distributed to all participants in advance to ensure they provided informed written consent (see Appendix 2 for the consent form). Participants confirmed their consent by replying to the email, indicating that they had reviewed the consent form and agreed to participate in the interview.

To structure the conversation at the start of each interview, I used the Interview Guide. The process began with a set of introductory questions, which then led to more in-depth inquiries (Charmaz, 2006) and concluding questions. This guide was applied flexibly, allowing for adaptation to the participants' experiences during the discussion.

Conducting semi-structured interviews aimed at collecting information about participants' experiences living in Spain requires a researcher to approach the research field with an open mind and a specific level of theoretical sensitivity, as emphasized in the

guidelines for a constructivist grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2006). To that purpose, semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate for this study since they allowed me to construct ahead of time a set of open-ended questions based on the research emphasis, my preconceived assumptions, and conceptually sensitising themes. At the same time, a semi-structured interview allows a participant to share his personal experiences and interpretations of those experiences. In addition, in the context of a grounded theory study, the data collection process is iterative, enabling the adaptation and inclusion of interview questions and exploratory prompts as emerging themes unfold. The order of interview questions can also be modified to align with the organic progression of the interview.

Each individual in-person interview lasted one to two hours and was conducted in either Mandarin or Spanish, depending on the participant's preference. Each interview was audio-recorded and then completely transcribed. The audio file was then transferred from the recording device to a secure computer. To ensure confidentiality, the recording device was subsequently cleared. Each interview recording was securely uploaded to Amazon Transcribe, a platform designed to keep audio data private, so that I was the sole person with access to the participants' voices. Leveraging Amazon's advanced voice recognition technology allowed for an efficient transcription process, ensuring minimal handling of sensitive data. To maintain high-quality results, I carefully reviewed each transcript, correcting errors where needed, and verifying the overall reliability of the service in accurately reflecting participants' responses. As I listened, I would make modifications to the transcripts by adding any missing words, correcting spelling errors, and standardizing the format for data analysis. It is essential to note that by transcribing the interviews myself, I

was able to develop a stronger relationship with the material and become more receptive to the emerging themes. It also encourages me to remain attentive to the conversational thread beyond words, evaluate my own interviewing approach, generate alternative questions, and analyze the progression and content of the interview (Charmaz, 2006).

### ***Overview of Participants***

This part presents details about each of the fourteen individuals whose stories I have gathered. Pseudonyms have been employed throughout the thesis to enhance confidentiality and protect privacy. All additional identifying information has been altered or omitted to safeguard the integrity of the participants' overall narratives. This approach ensures that their stories remain authentic while maintaining confidentiality.

Although the purpose of this qualitative study is not to produce generalizable findings, providing detailed participant information enhances the study's rigour and transferability by allowing the reader to contextualize findings and assess the applicability of findings in other settings or among other populations. This information is also necessary for the researcher to contextualize interview data and organize future studies (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

The fourteen gay males who participated in this study were all born and raised in East Asia prior to coming to Spain, with eight from mainland China and two from Taiwan. Their ages ranged between 20 and 38, with a mean of 28 ( $SD \approx 4.04$ ). Their length of residency in Spain ranged from 1 to 18 years. Regarding their present residence status in Spain, four participants were Spanish citizens, seven were permanent residents, one was a temporary

worker (i.e., he held a work permit), and two were international students. This is a highly educated population, with the majority of men holding bachelor's degrees or being enrolled in college or university. Five individuals have postgraduate degrees, while only three have a high school degree. Their employment status also differed. Currently, two individuals were full-time students, eleven were employed full-time. One participant mentioned having a part-time job, while five were self-employed. Additionally, two men were full-time university attendees. Furthermore, it is notable that the majority of participants reside in Catalonia and Madrid, reflecting the regional diversity within the sample. This geographical concentration may have implications for the experiences and perspectives shared during the interviews, particularly considering the cultural and social dynamics specific to Catalonia. Furthermore, the youthfulness of the participants is a relevant factor that warrants consideration in the analysis. Their age demographic may influence their experiences, attitudes, and perceptions regarding various aspects of their identity as Chinese gay men in Spain. The demographic information is succinctly summarized in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1** Participant Demographics

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Country of Birth</b>	<b>City of residence</b>	<b>Time in Spain</b>	<b>Status of residence</b>	<b>Education level</b>	<b>Employment status</b>
Jaime	32	Shaanxi, China	Madrid	7	Permanent Resident	Postgraduate	Full-time work
Wei	28	Beijing, China	Barcelona	2	Student	Postgraduate	Student
Liu	26	Taipei	Barcelona	4	Citizen	Postgraduate	Full-time work
Peng	28	Fujian, China	Barcelona	6	Permanent Resident	Postgraduate	Full-time work
Fer	33	Hunan, China	Valencia	5	Permanent Resident	College/ University	Full-time work
Eric	27	Beijing, China	Madrid	5	Permanent Resident	College/ University	Part-time work
Alex	20	Taipei	Barcelona	1	Student	College/ University	Student



Diego	24	Anhui, China	Madrid	2	Work visa	College/ University	Full-time work
Chen	30	Zhejiang, China	Barcelona	8	Permanent Resident	Postgraduate	Full-time work
Johnny	26	Zhejiang, China	Tarragona	12	Citizen	High school	Self-employed
Carlos	33	Zhejiang, China	Barcelona	16	Citizen	High school	Self-employed
Daniel	30	Zhejiang, China	Seville	18	Citizen	High school	Self-employed
Xiang	29	Guangdong, China	Madrid	10	Permanent Resident	College/ University	Self-employed
Li	36	Zhejiang, China	Barcelona	12	Permanent Resident	Middle School	Self-employed

### 3.7 Data Analysis

Since the interviews were done based on the participants' preferred language, either English or Mandarin, this study first had to address the difficulty linked to translation that is inherent in cross-cultural research. I had to decide quickly whether to translate the Chinese transcripts into English. Sheila Twinn (1997) compared qualitative analyses that were conducted in either English or Mandarin while addressing the same problem. The findings demonstrate how difficult it is to prevent changing sentence meanings due to translation because of the large grammatical and lexical differences between Mandarin and English. Meanwhile, Twinn (1997) also discovered that these two linguistic mediums do not differ much in the primary categories arising from the data. In other words, consistency exists between the outcomes of analysis conducted in various languages. Hence, Twinn (1997) advised that it would be better to record, read, and code an interview in the language spoken. Chinese phrases are translated into English when the results are presented.

In constructivist grounded theory, data analysis involves an ongoing process of comparison. This approach enables researchers to examine the data through both inductive and deductive methods, employing cross-level coding techniques to uncover underlying themes and the connections among them. Also, data analysis is integrated into the whole data

collection process. It starts with the first interview and continues until all of the data is processed (Charmaz, 2006).

As per Charmaz's approach (2006), constructive grounded theory coding typically involves a dual-step process. Firstly, there's an initial phase where each word, line, or data segment is identified. Secondly, a focused coding phase aids in pinpointing participants' experiences with events or processes that hold paramount significance for the research. Through focused coding, the ability to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize the broader data set is facilitated. The categorization process within the coding structure adheres to four rules outlined by Charmaz, which involve elucidating the category's properties, specifying the conditions influencing its emergence, maintenance, and changes, describing its consequences, and illustrating its relationships with other categories.

### ***Analytic Process in Grounded Theory Studies***

In order to develop a grounded theory of the phenomenon under investigation, a rigorous and iterative analytic process was employed. As illustrated in Figure 3.1, this process involved multiple rounds of gathering information, coding, memo writing, and developing theories. After each interview concluded, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and underwent thorough examination through repeated reviews. This process aimed to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. Initial impressions and thoughts were documented in memo form, providing a platform for reflection on the data and generating potential insights.

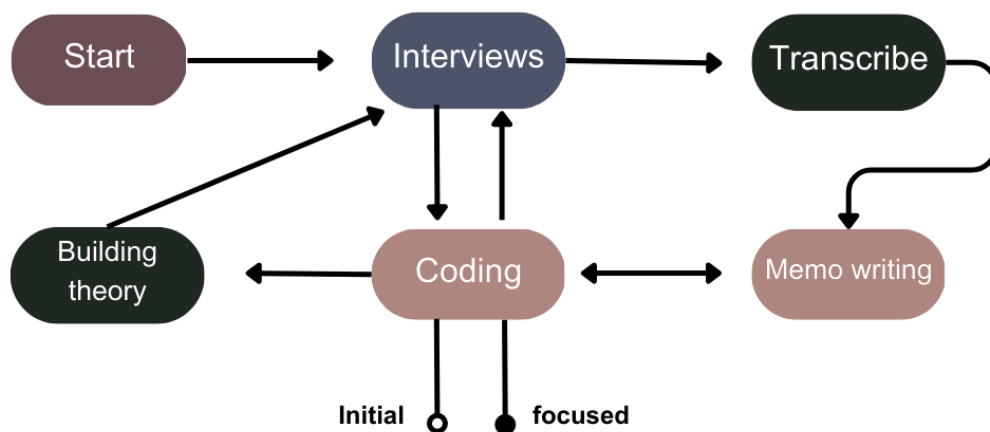
The next step in the analysis was to conduct a line-by-line coding of each interview transcript. This involved a systematic and detailed examination of the text to identify

incidents, events, and concepts relevant to the research questions. Charmaz's (2006) guidelines for initial coding were followed, such as staying close to the data, keeping codes simple and active, and remaining open to what the material suggests.

As codes were generated, they were organized into categories and compared with one another to identify similarities and differences. This allowed for the emergence of higher-level concepts and themes that could be used to build a theoretical framework.

Memo-writing was an integral part of the analytic process, allowing for the documentation of emerging ideas, theoretical hunches, and connections between categories. These memos served as a reference point throughout the analysis and were revisited and revised as new insights were gained.

Throughout the analytical process, there was a continuous and dynamic progression, with each cycle building upon the one before. This iterative approach resulted in a grounded theory that furnished a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.



**Figure 3.1** Process of data analysis

### *Initial coding*

In the initial coding phase, I utilized the line-by-line coding approach to analyze the data. Following Charmaz's (2006) recommendation, this method involves maintaining openness to the data's suggestions and creating codes that are brief, straightforward, active, and analytical. This process allowed me to capture the thread of each participant's experience and the accompanying meaning behind it. By coding each interview line by line, I was able to identify both implicit concerns and explicit statements, which helped me to refocus on later interviews. This approach also enabled me to identify gaps in the data that were relevant to the theory-building process.

To stay as close to the data as possible, I followed Charmaz's (2006) suggestions in reflecting on several questions. These questions encompassed the focus of the study, the implications of the data, the perspective from which the insights were derived, the theoretical category indicated by specific data points, the processes under examination, and the definitions of these processes. Additionally, they explored the conditions under which the processes evolved, the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the research participants during their involvement, as well as the timing, reasons, and nature of any changes in the processes and their consequences.

This approach resulted in a large number of codes, which at times felt overwhelming. However, by using a memo and keeping my research aims in mind, I was able to stay focused on my analysis. I evaluated the constructed codes in relation to each other and subsequent codes to identify patterns and trends, which facilitated the establishment of connections among them.

To maintain a fresh perspective on the data, I consciously avoided indulging in theoretical speculations. Although some theory-driven concepts seemed relevant, the initial coding phase was kept open to allow for the creation of descriptive tags that accurately reflected the content of the data. An example of line-by-line coding is presented in Table 3.2 below, with a more detailed illustration available in Appendix 5.

**Table 3.2:** A segment showcasing line-by-line coding taken from an interview

Transcript	Line-by-Line Coding
Question:	
Can you describe your experiences navigating your Chinese cultural identity with your LGBTQ+ identity in Spain?	
Participant:	
It has been a difficult journey for me. In China, being gay is not widely accepted, and it was even harder to come out to my family. When I came to Spain, I felt a sense of freedom to explore my sexuality, but at the same time, I didn't want to lose touch with my cultural identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Challenges of being gay in China</li><li>● Difficulty coming out to family</li><li>● Feeling liberated to discover sexuality in Spain</li><li>● Desire to maintain connection with Chinese cultural identity</li></ul>

***Focused coding***

The process of focused coding, which is the second crucial phase in the constructivist grounded theory analysis, involves a systematic and deductive approach of examining data. As proposed by Charmaz (Charmaz, 2006), this phase enables the coder to refine, synthesize, or scrutinize the existing coding framework using the most substantial and frequent codes generated from the initial coding stage. Focused coding involves a more engaged approach from the researcher, who actively interacts with the data instead of merely reading it passively. This active participation facilitates the discovery of deeper insights and encourages a critical examination of preconceived notions related to the research topic.

My experience with focused coding involved continuous attention to researcher reflexivity to avoid any potential biases that could lead to "forcing" the data, as Charmaz (Charmaz, 2014) suggests. I engaged in an ongoing comparison between the focused codes and the initial codes, identifying patterns and distinctions. This allowed me to elevate the focused codes into preliminary categories and establish analytical connections. Illustrations of this process can be found in Tables 3.2 and 3.3, along with Appendix 6 of my research.

Moreover, I found that focused coding allowed me to take a more active role in the data analysis process, which was crucial for gaining a deeper understanding of the topic under study. Through this iterative process, I was able to inspect my preconceptions about the topic and identify gaps or correspondences between existing theories and the emerging themes from my data. This resulted in a continually revised coding framework that was refined and sophisticated, which gave me confidence in the theoretical rigor of my findings.

In the later phases of data collection, I discovered that employing focused coding proved instrumental in reaching theoretical saturation. As indicated by Charmaz (2006), theoretical saturation occurs when acquiring additional data about a theoretical category fails to uncover new properties or offer further theoretical insights into the emerging grounded theory. This aligns precisely with my experience—participants did not present novel ideas challenging the core categories and theoretical themes. The collected data resulted in a cohesive depiction of the intersecting identity development trajectories of the study participants.

**Table 3.3.** An example of changing initial codes into focused codes

Initial codes	Focused codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Had a strong interest in Western popular culture (music, movie etc.)</li> <li>• Strong interests in English/Spanish language</li> <li>• Holding Western values, such as individualism and freedom of expression</li> </ul>	- Influenced by the Western culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asians are tending to be stereotyped as being a bottom (i.e., a receiving position in an anal sex)</li> <li>• Asian are not very muscular</li> <li>• Did not want their Chinese ethnicity to be an obstacle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Marginalization in dating/finding a partner</li> <li>- Masculinity norms impact dating for Chinese gay men</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging in heterosexual relationships</li> <li>• Expressing negative attitudes towards gay individuals</li> <li>• Overcompensating with hyper-masculine behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Struggling to come out</li> <li>- Internalized homophobia</li> <li>- Masculinity norms impact their behavior</li> </ul>

### ***Memo writing***

Memo-writing is widely recognized in constructivist grounded theory as a crucial analytical tool, allowing researchers to capture and develop their reflections, observations, and insights on interviews, coding, and theoretical categories at each stage of the research process. This practice supports deeper analysis and fosters a continuous connection with emerging concepts, enhancing the researcher's engagement with the data (Charmaz, 2014). In



my study, I began memo-writing early in the recruitment phase and continued through data analysis. These memos captured impressions of participants' experiences, reactions to their narratives, and a critical look at initial assumptions related to interview questions. This ongoing reflection helped sharpen insights and kept the research approach flexible and adaptive as new data emerged.

As the interviews advanced, I started comparing memos to form both initial and focused codes. Conceptual memos were created to capture evolving thoughts on these codes and the fluid aspects of participants' experiences. This process allowed for deeper insights into themes and patterns emerging from the data. Through these memos, I was able to identify similarities and differences between the data, participants, and codes to further refine my questioning and enrich the data.

I found memo writing to be a vital aspect of data analysis, echoing the insights of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Glaser (1992). This approach enabled me to conceptualize categories and contributed significantly to theory development. After conducting interviews, I wrote memos to record my initial impressions, and after transcribing, I engaged in memo-writing to reflect on the data and construct tentative categories. Throughout the analysis process, memos were used to identify relationships between categories and to further develop the grounded theory. Ultimately, memo writing played a crucial role in the data analysis process, significantly shaping the grounded theory that emerged from my research. This practice not only facilitated deeper insights but also allowed for the exploration of various theoretical dimensions. An example of a memo reflecting my analytical process can be found in Appendix 7.

### **3.8 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a crucial aspect of any research study, especially for constructivist grounded theory studies. According to Nagel, Burns, Tilley, & Aubin (2015), to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and the integrity of the theories generated from the data, researchers need to address four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

To address the credibility criterion, the researcher needs to gather, analyze, and report the data and findings without manipulation. In this regard, the researcher needs to remain closely attentive to the interview process, exhibit an open and non-judgmental attitude, and avoid disclosing personal stories or backgrounds that could limit the participants' narration (Cope, 2014). Prolonged engagement can also help build rapport and a sense of trust with research participants to facilitate their exploration of their identity development during the interview process. Moreover, maintaining memos and field notes during the research process enhances dependability and confirmability by capturing the researcher's spontaneous responses during interviews and tracking the development of their assumptions.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of a study can be generalized or applied to other contexts outside of the specific environment in which the research was conducted. To enhance this aspect, researchers should provide detailed and rich descriptions of the participants and the context, enabling others to evaluate the relevance of the findings in different environments. In addition, employing diverse data sources and gathering feedback from participants can enrich the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding. Engaging in critical analysis of varying perspectives further bolsters the reliability of the

study's conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, implementing strategies such as cross-checking information, maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process, and delivering thorough and nuanced descriptions all play a crucial role in minimizing biases and elevating the overall quality of the research. These practices collectively contribute to a more robust understanding of the research outcomes and their applicability in varied contexts.

Dependability pertains to the stability and consistency of research findings over time. To achieve this, researchers can implement several strategies, such as maintaining audit trails and engaging in peer reviews. An audit trail consists of meticulous documentation that captures the research process, including decisions made and data collected, which promotes transparency and enhances the potential for replication. In addition, peer review allows fellow researchers to evaluate the study's methodology and findings, providing critical feedback to ensure the conclusions drawn are valid (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2009) highlights the significance of researchers reflecting on their own beliefs and biases prior to data collection, as this introspection is vital for obtaining thorough and accurate information. Consequently, during the data collection phase, a strong emphasis was placed on crafting detailed and vivid descriptions to enrich the findings, ultimately contributing to the dependability of the research. By prioritizing these approaches, researchers can enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of their work.

Confirmability pertains to the degree to which research outcomes are objective and remain uninfluenced by the biases of the researcher. To establish confirmability, researchers can use methods such as reflexivity and an audit trail. Reflexivity involves reflecting on the researcher's role and biases in the study and how they may have influenced the findings. An

audit trail documents the research process, including decisions made and data collected, to ensure transparency and allow for an assessment of researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **Chapter 4 Findings and Results**

### **4.1 Crossroads of Migration, Race, and Sexuality**

The objective of this chapter is to analyze the interviews carried out, delving into the intersections of migration, race, and sexuality, and how these influence the daily experiences of the participants. As previously mentioned, the current literature on the experiences of Asian gay men in Western societies tends to portray them as predominantly powerless, caught between an Asian culture that often adheres to heteronormative values and a xenophobic LGBTQ community in the West. However, the detailed interviews conducted for this study unveiled a more intricate reality, emphasizing how experiences are shaped by the subtle interplay of migration, race, and sexuality.

Despite encountering various forms of discrimination and suppression, participants were continually redefining their identities and lifestyles while in Spain. To develop a deeper insight into how these various factors converge in the lives of gay men within the Chinese diaspora, it is essential to explore their unique experiences and contexts. Firstly, the focus is directed towards the intersectional experiences of participants concerning their sexual orientation and their migration journey. Secondly, I examine their experiences as migrants and as part of a racial minority in Spanish society. Finally, I examine how race and sexuality intersect, focusing on the participants' identities as 'Chinese/Asian' and 'gay' within the larger Spanish gay 'community.' This perspective seeks to disrupt the notion of uniformity often associated with this demographic, highlighting their varied experiences and the resilience they exhibit.

### *At the Intersection of Sexuality and Migration*

In this section, we delve into the complex interplay between sexuality and migration found in the interviews. The focus is to understand how these two fundamental aspects of personal identity interact and influence each other in the context of the participants' experiences. Our participants' narratives offer rich insights into how their sexual identities have not only shaped their motivation to migrate but also how the process of migration has in turn influenced their relationship with their sexual identity. This dual interaction underlines the complex dynamics of sexuality and migration, indicating their non-linear and intertwined relationship.

Upon inquiring about the motivations behind migrating to Spain among the participants, several common themes were identified in the interviews. These included family-oriented reasons, such as parental decisions leading to migration, and economic factors, like seeking superior work or educational opportunities. Beyond these common factors, some participants hinted at more discreet motivations related to their sexual orientation. These less openly discussed reasons encompassed a desire to escape from a heteronormative sexual culture prevalent in their home country or area of origin. Alternatively, it included the aspiration to pursue intimate connections, especially with individuals from the local community. This underlying sexual motivation added another dimension to the factors influencing their migration decisions.

## **Escape from Heteronormative Society**

Numerous participants shared experiences of feeling out of place, ostracized, or marginalized within their home societies due to the predominance of heterosexual norms. This resulted in a sense of disconnection and a lack of acceptance, which created a powerful push factor towards migration. The desire to escape from a society that did not accept or understand their sexual orientation often led them to seek out new environments. The participants frequently perceived these new locations as being more open and accepting of diverse sexual orientations. The laws and societal norms in these places aligned better with the participants' lived experiences and identities.

For instance, consider Chen's case. In his early twenties, while living in China, he experienced significant pressure to conform to traditional expectations of marriage from his family. To escape this, he decided to move to Spain to pursue his postgraduate studies. During his education, he found the environment in Spain more tolerant and supportive of his lifestyle. After graduation, he was drawn to the acceptance he felt, leading him to make the decision to stay and work full-time:

“I grew up in a family that was, and still is, deeply rooted in conventional values. The societal norms were very rigid, and there was a lot of pressure to conform. And in my early twenties, my family started pushing me to get married. It was like a clock started ticking, and suddenly everyone was expecting me to find a wife, settle down, and start a family. But that wasn't what I wanted. I mean, I could feel this deep-seated discomfort with the idea.”

Similar to Chen's experience, Wei primarily aimed to study abroad for the benefit of an international education. However, his sexual orientation also intensified his determination to leave his home country. When questioned about his motivations to move abroad, he openly revealed:

“I realized there was little room for me to express my sexual orientation openly back home. I had opened up to my parents about my sexuality, and I understood that living in Mainland China, as a gay man, would be incredibly challenging.”

While he admitted that societal attitudes in Mainland China have gradually become more accepting towards homosexuality, the stress and difficulties associated with living as a gay man in China remained too demanding. Hence, he felt compelled to seek a more accepting environment overseas, leading him to Spain.

Eric shared his experience that even though he had been open about his sexual orientation among his friends back in China, he struggled with revealing his sexuality to his parents. To him, they seemed to embody the attitudes of the older generation in Mainland China. This discomfort fostered a desire to relocate to a place where he could be more authentic, which led him to Spain:

“When I thought about the accepting environment in Spain, and my desire to eventually get married, I felt a pull towards this country. These considerations played a significant role in my decision to move here.”



Similarly, Johnny felt encouraged to stay in Spain partly due to the country's legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005. He expressed:

“Given my attraction to men, it just made sense to me that staying in Spain would make my life easier in the long run. The societal institutions and general acceptance of homosexuality here is definitely a huge plus.”

### **Pursuit of Romantic Interests**

Some participants indicated that their motivation to migrate was heavily influenced by their pursuit of romantic relationships. This was particularly pronounced in instances where participants had romantic partners residing in different countries, creating a strong pull towards migration. Additionally, the allure of living in countries perceived to have a more vibrant and accepting LGBTQ+ community was also a significant driving factor. For these individuals, the act of migration was seen as an opportunity to fully express and experience their sexuality in a supportive environment.

During an interview with Fer, I inquired about his preconceived ideas about Spain before he moved. His response was quite illuminating:

“Since high school, I've been using dating apps. I noticed that the pool of gay men in my location [back in Taipei] was quite limited. So, part of my dream of living abroad was fueled by the idea that there would be many attractive men there.”

He also shared that his inclination towards the aesthetics of foreign individuals contributed to his motivation to pursue higher education in Europe. Participant Eric also highlighted that before moving abroad, he believed it would be easier for him to find his ideal partner in Spain. As our conversation progressed, it became evident that his ideal partner was characterized by the physical appearance often associated with white men:

“My parents always emphasized the value of Western education. They believed it could lead to better job prospects and financial stability. Personally, I was quite excited about the opportunity, mainly because being gay was challenging in China. Also, considering the global influence of Western culture, I had developed this perception that people who are European or white were somehow superior. Therefore, I imagined that moving to Spain might open up the possibility of finding a white boyfriend, or mingling with the white community here. It was a sort of dream for me.”

### **Sexuality and Return Migration**

The findings of this study suggest that sexuality can motivate some Asian gay men to consider returning to their countries of origin, despite much research primarily focusing on sexual attraction as the reason for migrating away from their home countries (T. Kong, 2012). While Spain presents an appealing environment for those attracted to white partners, individuals who seek connections with Chinese or Asian counterparts may struggle to find fulfilling relationships in a predominantly white society. This lack of an ideal environment may lead them to seek opportunities that better satisfy their sexual and emotional needs, prompting thoughts of returning home. An intriguing trend among some participants was a

preference for Asian partners. This desire had a profound impact on their decision to migrate, especially in terms of return migration. For these individuals, the cultural and physical attractions of Asians were significant enough to influence their decision to return to China.

Chen shared his journey as a gay man navigating life in Spain while holding a deep attraction to Chinese men. He reminisced about his life in China, where he felt more comfortable expressing his romantic inclinations. “I’ve always been drawn to Chinese culture and the warmth of our shared experiences,” he explained. “Moving to Spain was exciting, but I often find myself longing for that connection. Here, it feels like I’m in a different world where I’m often overlooked. I’ve tried dating, but my heart seems to gravitate toward men who understand my background. Sometimes I think, if I were still in China, I might have had a partner by now who shares my values and dreams.”

When I asked has he ever regretted coming to Spain, he stated:

"It's a mixed bag. Overall, moving to Spain has been beneficial. Life here has been a positive experience overall, much improved compared to my time in China. However, as I reflect on my journey, I realize that this pursuit of a better existence has come with a significant sacrifice. While I appreciate my independence and the opportunities around me, I often find myself feeling isolated. It's the meaningful connections with others that I truly miss, leaving me with a sense of longing for relationships that can enrich my life. So, I guess I'll stay in Spain for now. But maybe in the future, I might consider relocating to China or somewhere in Asia—especially when my financial stability isn't a

major concern, and after my mother passes away... I traveled to China a few years ago and was captivated by the culture and the warmth of the people."

### **Changing Chinese Society**

While many participants initially migrated due to the perceived lack of acceptance in their home countries, they also noted observable shifts in Chinese society over time. This included growing acceptance and visibility of diverse sexual orientations, and more protective laws and policies for the LGBTQ+ community. This perception of a changing society made the prospect of return migration more appealing to some participants. As Jaime stated:

"I believe there's an undercurrent of change in China. While sex and sexual orientation are considered taboo topics in more traditional circles, the younger generation is challenging these norms. We're more accepting and inclusive, but the echoes of the older generation's conservative views are still pervasive. Over time, as the old gives way to the new, I believe we'll see even more progress".

Fer reflected on how years ago, conversations around homosexuality were scarce and often fraught with negative assumptions. However, he recounted observing a shift towards greater acceptance of homosexuality, particularly online and within his digital social circles. This made him feel more at ease about disclosing his sexual orientation to his friends in Mainland China. Given the youthfulness of the sample, it's important to consider their perspectives on the evolving social acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, as they are often at

the forefront of societal changes in this regard. As he put it, "it seems that everyone's ideology and perspective are evolving and becoming more forward-thinking."

During a visit to Shanghai one year ago, he was pleasantly surprised by the open atmosphere he found. "China's environment is more accepting than I had anticipated. Shanghai is thriving with gay pubs and clubs, so you're never left without an entertaining venue to visit." Certainly, some interviewees highlighted that while there has been significant advancement towards more acceptance, this progress is predominantly concentrated in metropolitan areas or coastal cities. Unfortunately, homophobic mindsets still prevail in more remote or rural regions.

The significance of digital platforms and the Internet in promoting the visibility and acceptance of sexual minority communities in China cannot be understated. Peng, who moved from Mainland China to Spain six years ago, shared his experience of coming out to his high school friends who remained in China. Their responses were supportive and open-minded, a shift he attributes to the influence of the Internet. He also received information that his former school had revised its previously restrictive stance on homosexuality.

Even though a handful of participants recognized that Mainland China is slowly becoming more open towards sexual diversity, there's still a shared apprehension that it is far from being truly inclusive towards the LGBTQ+ community. For many, the prospect of returning to their home country remains less than ideal. This sentiment was echoed by Johnny, who expressed:

“Certainly, China has changed a lot when you compare the past with the present. However, if we juxtapose China with Spain, it's clear that China still holds more conservative views. Personal circumstances have allowed me to come out and be true to myself, but I am conscious that not everyone in China can do so, given the societal attitudes that persist.”

This analysis suggests that the perceptions of the West and their home country among these young gay Chinese immigrants living in Spain have evolved, in response to Mainland China's rapid societal changes. The increased visibility and acceptance of sexual minorities have played a significant role in reshaping their views of Chinese society. As a result, their prior notions of a hierarchical distinction between the West and China are being reevaluated, based on their personal experiences in Spain and the growing acknowledgment of China's socio-economic progress. Consequently, many participants have fostered a more balanced, unbiased perspective of their homelands, moving away from the previously held belief that "the West is superior".

### **Migration's Impact on Sexuality**

The impact of migration on participants' experiences extends beyond changes in their relationship with their sexuality to encompass shifts in their understanding of what it means to be gay. It is conceivable that the process of relocating to a new country may lead individuals to adopt a more Westernized understanding of their sexual identity, viewing it less as a mere sexual practice or emotional bond and more as a core aspect of their overall identity (Manalansan, 2006; Luibhéid, 2004; Cortés, 2023). This shift could be influenced by

exposure to Western LGBTQ+ culture and norms prevalent in the host country, which may shape participants' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding their sexual orientation.

Exploring how migration influences the cultural context of participants' identities as gay men can provide valuable insights into the intersectionality of migration, sexuality, and cultural identity.

Because Western and Spanish societies interpret, discuss, and practice sex in different ways. After migrating, many participants reported an increased sense of comfort and acceptance of their sexuality. This shift was often attributed to the relative openness and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations in their destination countries. They noted the existence of supportive communities, the visibility of LGBTQ+ culture, and societal norms that were more accepting of diverse sexual identities. two participants—Chen and Diego expressed that their move to Spain allowed them to gain more clarity and confidence in their sexuality, resulting in a newfound comfort in expressing it.

Chen: “In China, I often found myself wrestling with my identity. It was a confusing time; I knew I was attracted to men, but there was so much societal pressure that made it hard to accept. Conversations about sexuality were taboo, and I felt completely isolated.”

“When I arrived in Spain, everything changed. I met a fellow migrant named Jun at a community event, and we quickly became friends. We decided to share an apartment—just two guys navigating life in a new country. Living with Jun opened doors for me. He was more open about his own experiences, which encouraged me to explore my feelings

Diego: “It was just few months after I moved here when I encountered my first gay couple. I was in a café, sitting by the window, when I noticed two men sharing a lively conversation. They were so relaxed and open with each other, and it caught my attention. Back home, I never really saw that kind of interaction between men. I often questioned myself and felt lost, wondering if my feelings were somehow abnormal. I didn’t know that relationships like that could exist, let alone be celebrated. Observing their genuine connection sparked something in me—a desire to learn more about what it meant to be gay. That moment became a catalyst for my journey, prompting me to explore my own feelings and understand the diverse expressions of love that surrounded me.”

Despite the overall positive impact of migration on their comfort with their sexuality, some participants noted a distinct reluctance to reveal their sexuality within their local Chinese community in their destination countries. This underlines the complex dynamics between migration and sexual identity, demonstrating that while migration can enhance comfort with sexuality on a broad level, specific cultural contexts may still influence individuals' decisions to openly express their sexual identities. Fer chose to keep his 'Spanish' sexual identity concealed within the Chinese group:

"I’m working in a Spanish company where I feel comfortable bringing my significant other to social events. My colleagues are aware of my sexual orientation, and there are other openly gay individuals in the office. However, I wouldn’t share this part of my life



with my family or friends from China. Conversations like this are rarely accepted there, and I doubt they would even want to know about it."

It seems that certain Chinese gay men maintain a 'double life' in Spain. While they are comfortable with openly expressing their homosexuality within the broader Spanish community, they prefer to conceal their sexual orientation within the Chinese community, both in Spain and beyond.

To sum it up, it is noteworthy that the sexuality of the participants was an integral factor influencing their decisions to emigrate to Spain or contemplate a potential return to their countries of origin. Not only did Spain open up new vistas for academic advancements and job prospects for these Chinese gay men living in Spain, but the open and accepting sexual culture of Spain also presented them with an array of opportunities that was perhaps not available in their home countries. These opportunities include offering a respite, even if just temporary, from the societal and cultural pressures that they faced in their home countries to get married. Moreover, living in Spain has also provided them the space to explore their desires for a relationship with "Western" men, something that was largely driven by their perception and fantasy of the West and the appeal it held for them. On a deeper level, moving to Spain has also allowed these men to delve into their sexual identities more freely and openly. This newfound freedom to explore their sexuality can be liberating, especially considering the conservative social norms they grew up with in their homeland.

However, an important point of contention emerged for those who did not have a specific sexual preference for "Western" men. For these individuals, Spain may not be

completely satisfying their emotional and sexual needs. In such cases, these men may face the quandary of contemplating a return to their countries of origin, seeking a place where they feel their emotional and sexual desires can be fulfilled more effectively. Consequently, the balance between the allure of the West, the opportunities it provides, and the emotional and sexual needs of these individuals may ultimately sway their decision to stay in or leave Spain in the future. For these individuals, navigating cultural differences and encountering instances of racism in Spain may contribute to feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction with their emotional and sexual experiences. The intersection of cultural differences and racial dynamics could exacerbate their sense of not fully belonging or being accepted in Spanish society, further complicating their decision-making process.

#### ***At the intersection of race and migration***

Examining the intersection of race and migration provides a crucial perspective for comprehending the intricate experiences of individuals as they navigate new cultural landscapes. This intersection illuminates the nuanced ways in which racial identities are shaped, negotiated, and experienced within the context of migration. By delving into this dynamic interplay, we gain invaluable insights into the multifaceted lives of migrants, particularly within the context of Chinese gay men residing in Spain.

The experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain are deeply influenced by the interplay of their racial identities and sexual orientations. Understanding the nuanced process of forming and negotiating racial identities within this demographic is crucial for comprehending the multifaceted nature of their lived experiences.

## **Negotiating Racial Identities in Spain**

Chinese gay men in Spain grapple with the intricate process of forming their racial identities within a cultural context that may differ significantly from their country of origin. These identities are not static, but rather dynamic and evolving constructs shaped by various social, cultural, and personal factors. Often, individuals may navigate a complex terrain of self-identification, influenced by their familial background, cultural heritage, experiences of migration, and interactions with the broader Spanish society. As Fer stated:

“When I first arrived in Barcelona, it was a bit of a culture shock. Back in China, being Chinese was just the norm for me. But here, suddenly, I was acutely aware of being seen as different. It prompted me to think more deeply about what it means to be Chinese in a predominantly European setting. At work, there are times when I'm the only Asian person in the room. It's a reminder of my difference, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's making me more aware of my racial identity and how it interacts with my new environment. “

Another participant Eric also shared his experience similarly:

“In China, I was surrounded by people who shared my racial background, so I never really thought deeply about it. But here, I'm part of a wonderfully diverse community. It's made me reflect on what it truly means to be Chinese, not just as a cultural identity, but as part of a larger global tapestry. And in Spain, people often don't immediately recognize me as Chinese. They see us (me and my boyfriend) as a bi-

racial couple, which has led me to think more about what being Chinese means to me, especially in the context of a mixed-cultural relationship.”

### **Exploring Racism and Discrimination Within Spanish Culture**

Racism and discrimination within Spanish society are complex issues intricately linked to the nation’s historical and contemporary landscapes. As elucidated by Dan Rodríguez-García (2022), the concept of race, entailing the interpretation of phenotype and other physical attributes, exerts a substantial influence on present-day social dynamics and discriminatory processes (Rodríguez-García, 2021). Survey and ethnographic data unequivocally demonstrate that daily life in Spain remains marked by enduring racial divides. Several individuals shared accounts of experiencing various manifestations of everyday discrimination, xenophobia, and institutional racism, from encounters in public spaces to interactions within workplaces and educational institutions.

#### **Everyday discrimination and xenophobia**

"Everyday discrimination and xenophobia" encompass the routine instances of discrimination that participants regularly encounter. These incidents typically took on subtle and indirect forms, often manifesting as racist jokes or casual remarks. While these occurrences were noted, they generally did not profoundly impact the participants' sense of self, as many had developed strategies to overlook or dismiss such comments. For instance, Sheng and Alex shared similar experiences in this regard:

Alex: “Discrimination is unfortunately a part of my reality. I've learned to navigate it, but it can be draining. It's a reminder that there's still work to be done in terms of acceptance and understanding, both within the LGBTQ+ community and society at large. I've certainly had my share of small, random incidents that could be considered as racist experiences. However, the specifics of what was said often blur together. It's more about the recurring subtle remarks or jokes.”

Sheng: “There have been moments when people have teased Chinese individuals, often centered around language and accents. It's a minor inconvenience, though it does leave a certain disheartening feeling. While I wouldn't label them outright racists, it's clear there's a lack of awareness. Nevertheless, I've learned to navigate these situations, choosing to brush them off, and continue on my path.”

### **Institutional Racism in the Workplace**

Institutional racism assumes a prominent role, particularly within the dynamics of the workplace. It encapsulates the nuanced yet deeply ingrained forms of discrimination, control, and systemic barriers that confront racial minorities within the structural framework of community organizations (Hollinsworth & Pettman, 1988). Participants' narratives shed light on the pervasive nature of these biases.

Many participants shared accounts that resonate with the broader issue of racial minorities encountering challenges in career progression. They highlighted instances where they faced obstacles in ascending to higher positions, despite possessing commendable

qualifications and accomplishments. It becomes evident that pathways to leadership roles remain disproportionately narrow for individuals from non-dominant racial backgrounds. As Jaime stated:

“In my experience, navigating the professional landscape as a racial minority in Spain has been a multifaceted journey. While I've encountered welcoming colleagues and mentors, there have been instances of subtle biases that can't be ignored. These range from offhand comments to more systemic challenges in accessing higher-level positions.”

Peng also shared the same experience:

“The workplace can sometimes feel like a delicate balancing act. While I appreciate the efforts towards diversity and inclusion, there are moments where I've felt a sense of 'otherness'. This highlights the importance of ongoing conversations about diversity and policies that promote equal opportunities for everyone.”

Furthermore, participants' experiences revealed the existence of microaggressions and subtle biases in their day-to-day interactions within the workplace. These ranged from dismissive comments to the perpetuation of stereotypes, collectively contributing to an environment where individuals of non-dominant racial backgrounds often felt marginalized or undervalued, Chen expressed:

“While there has been progress in workplace inclusivity, there's still room for improvement. I've faced microaggressions at times, and dealing with them can be

draining. It's essential for organizations to cultivate a culture of respect and understanding, ensuring all employees feel appreciated for their contributions irrespective of their racial background.”

### **Perceptions of Racism and discrimination in Spanish Society**

Even with the previously mentioned occurrences of discrimination based on race, it's important to highlight that many individuals involved in this research did not regard racism as a significant concern within Spanish society. Their narratives echoed the prevailing notion that Spain, particularly in urban centers like Madrid or Barcelona, exhibits a diverse cultural landscape, with the belief that only a limited segment of the population harbors explicitly racist attitudes. However, it is imperative to scrutinize their interpretation of this diversity, which seems to predominantly hinge on the coexistence of various racial and ethnic groups in Spain, rather than a recognition of the underlying power dynamics and systemic imbalances at play. This nuanced perspective underscores the need for a deeper exploration of how this cultural diversity is understood and experienced by different segments of the population within the Spanish context.

As we delve further into the experiences of individuals in this study, it becomes evident that their perceptions of diversity in Spain are shaped by a range of factors. The urban centers, being focal points of cultural exchange and interaction, play a significant role in influencing these perspectives. Participants often emphasized the vibrancy and dynamism of cities like Madrid and Barcelona, where encounters with people from various backgrounds are a daily occurrence.

Moreover, it is essential to take into account the impact of socio-political contexts on these perceptions. Spain's history of migration, both within Europe and from former colonies, has played a significant role in shaping the diverse tapestry of cultures present in the country today. However, the nuances of power dynamics and systemic issues related to race are not always at the forefront of discussions around diversity. This underscores the need for a deeper examination of how individuals navigate and understand these complexities in their day-to-day lives. Some interviewees shared insights based on their experiences:

Alex: “Being part of a minority in this country, you quickly learn to adapt and appreciate the nuances of their culture. Racism is a global issue, not exclusive to any particular place. There's a spectrum, and Spain is far from the worst. I believe it's a small fraction of the population that holds prejudiced views here. It's important to remember, it's not just a Spanish thing.”

Chen: “We come here seeking a better life, and we're faced with the reality of being part of a minority. It's a learning experience. Racism is a deeply ingrained issue worldwide. I'd say Spain handles it relatively well, but it's not immune. The key is education and understanding. It's on us to change perceptions.”

At the heart of these narratives lies the conception that 'racism' transcends national boundaries, constituting a dynamic and transnational phenomenon. Chinese men may exhibit prejudiced views toward individuals from Western backgrounds or other racial groups, influenced by their geographical area and specific circumstances. Consequently, within the



broader scope, numerous men within this study do not perceive Asian men solely as passive recipients of racial prejudice.

In essence, despite encountering various forms of racial discrimination, the participants in my study did not view Spain as an exceptionally or distinctly racist country. Rather, there was a prevailing sentiment that progress had been made in addressing racism in recent decades, coinciding with Spain's journey towards a more culturally diverse society. This evolving landscape, characterized by an embrace of multiculturalism, was seen as a catalyst for positive change.

Furthermore, a significant number of individuals in the study approached the racial dynamics between different ethnic groups with a perspective characterized by dynamism and relativity. They recognized that these dynamics were not static but influenced by a range of factors including socio-political shifts, economic fluctuations, and evolving cultural attitudes. This nuanced understanding allowed them to appreciate the complexity of racial interactions, moving beyond simple dichotomies.

To these individuals, 'racism' emerged as a discernible phenomenon, not confined to any specific racial or ethnic group. They acknowledged its presence as a regrettable facet of human behavior that could manifest in various forms, regardless of one's background. This perspective challenged conventional notions of 'racism', emphasizing its universality rather than confining it to a particular race or nationality.

Within the experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain, this outlook provided a framework for understanding their encounters with discrimination. It encouraged a nuanced examination of the socio-cultural landscape, highlighting the intricate interplay of race,

sexuality, and cultural diversity within the Spanish context. This comprehensive understanding is crucial for advancing discussions on inclusivity and acceptance within the LGBTQ+ community, especially for individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds.

### **Exploring the Intersection of Migration and Racial Identity**

The intersection of migration and racial identity emerges as a crucial focal point in understanding the experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain. The participants' racial identities serve as lenses through which they perceive and navigate their sense of belonging in their adopted homeland. For these individuals, racial identity is not a static construct, but a dynamic force that evolves in tandem with their migration experience. It encompasses a complex interplay of cultural heritage, shared experiences, and the negotiation of identity in a foreign context. As they traverse the complexities of migration, their racial identity becomes an integral aspect of their sense of belonging.

Wei, a participant in the study, reflects on the evolving nature of his racial identity: "Being Chinese in Spain, it's like straddling two worlds. I cherish my cultural heritage, but I'm also learning to embrace this new part of me that's shaped by Spain. It's a process, and my sense of belonging is a mosaic of these experiences." The racial identity of the participants profoundly influences their sense of belonging within Spanish society. It shapes their interactions with both their own ethnic community and the broader social milieu. Those who hold a strong connection to their Chinese heritage often find a sense of belonging within their diasporic communities, finding comfort in shared cultural practices and traditions.

Simultaneously, they navigate their place within the wider Spanish society, where they grapple with the challenges and opportunities presented by their racial identity.

Lu emphasizes the significance of his connection to the Chinese community:

“Our community feels like a family away from home. We celebrate our traditions, speak our language, and support each other. It's a source of strength and belonging that anchors me in Spain.”

Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that racial identity is not a monolithic construct. The experiences and perceptions of participants regarding their racial identity vary widely, influenced by factors such as age, socio-economic background, and individual life trajectories. Some may experience a strong sense of belonging within the multicultural tapestry of Spain, while others may face barriers and challenges rooted in racial prejudice.

Chen reflects on the nuances of his racial identity:

“Being racially visible can lead to both moments of connection and instances where I feel like an outsider. It's about finding spaces and people who value my unique perspective and experiences.”

The intersection of migration and racial identity, therefore, becomes a dynamic process of negotiation and adaptation. It shapes the participants' understanding of their place in Spanish society and informs their strategies for establishing a sense of belonging. By delving into this intersection, we gain valuable insights into the intricate ways in which race

and migration coalesce to influence the experiences and identities of Chinese gay men in Spain.

Within the experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain, it becomes evident that social interactions often revolve around various cultural traditions that hold significance within the Chinese community. These practices shape how participants form and maintain their social connections in their adopted homeland. Wei shared his perspective:

“Our community places great value on traditions like communal gatherings and festivals. It's a way for us to hold onto our cultural roots while living abroad. These shared experiences create bonds that are incredibly meaningful.”

These cultural traditions extend beyond communal dining and encompass a range of activities, including festivals, language exchange groups, and community events. Participants actively seek out opportunities to engage in these practices, as they provide a sense of cultural continuity and a platform for building meaningful connections.

Chen reflects on the role of cultural traditions in his social life:

“Being part of a community that cherishes these traditions helps me feel at home, even in a foreign country. It's about finding spaces where we can be ourselves and celebrate our shared heritage.”

While many participants find comfort and connection within their communities, there are instances where individuals may grapple with feelings of not fully fitting in. Jaime shares:

“I've had moments where I felt like an outsider, even within my own community.

There's a pressure to conform to certain expectations, and when you don't, it can be isolating.”

These sentiments resonate with others in the study, highlighting the complexities of belonging. The intersection of racial identity and migration can sometimes lead to a sense of otherness, particularly in environments where individuals may be a minority within a minority.

Diego reflects on his experiences, stating:

“I came here hopeful to find acceptance and fit in, but there were times when I felt like I didn't belong. Dealing with the different languages and cultures around here can be isolating. It's a constant struggle to find where I truly fit in.”

Participants frequently experience feelings of alienation due to language barriers and cultural disparities. Those who lack proficiency in Spanish often encounter significant communication challenges, which can result in their marginalization in both social and professional environments. This sense of disconnect can exacerbate their difficulties in forming meaningful relationships and fully engaging in the community around them.

Chen reflects on language as a barrier:

“It's frustrating when I can't express myself as fluently as I'd like to. Sometimes it feels like I'm missing out on deeper connections because of the language gap.”

Moreover, the intersection of race and sexual orientation can add another layer of complexity. Some participants share experiences of being subjected to prejudice or exclusion within both the LGBTQ+ community and the broader Spanish society, making it challenging to cultivate a sense of belonging on multiple fronts.

Peng reflects on societal attitudes:

“Society's expectations and prejudices often make it difficult for those of us who don't conform to stereotypes. It can be disheartening, and it sometimes feels like we're fighting to fit into spaces that should be inclusive.”

In summary, understanding the complexities of not fitting in is essential for a holistic examination of the sense of belonging among Chinese gay men in Spain. These experiences shed light on the need for greater inclusivity, empathy, and cultural sensitivity within both the LGBTQ+ community and Spanish society at large. They also emphasize the importance of recognizing the intersectionality of identity in shaping individuals' experiences and feelings of belonging.

### **Cultural Adaptation: Navigating Language Proficiency and Social Norms**

The process of cultural adaptation for Chinese gay men in Spain is a nuanced journey marked by two pivotal aspects: linguistic mastery and adeptness in understanding and assimilating societal norms. Mastering the Spanish language is the cornerstone of cultural adaptation. It not only facilitates seamless day-to-day interactions but also grants a deeper understanding of the cultural subtleties woven into everyday life. As the participant Wei shared:

“Learning Spanish was a crucial step for me. It opened up avenues for deeper connections with locals and allowed me to engage more fully in Spanish society. It's not just about words, but understanding the nuances of expressions and the subtleties of humor. One instance was when I was able to participate in a local community event and hold conversations with neighbors. It was a turning point for me, realizing how mastering the language opens up opportunities for genuine connections and cultural integration”.

Chen echoed Wei’s experience:

“Language is more than just talking – it's like a door that opens up the real feel of the culture. It's what helped me get the jokes, the customs, and the whole vibe of Spanish society way better”.

The linguistic capacity to engage in Spanish broadens the spectrum of potential social interactions. Those who have mastered the language often find themselves with a wider array of social connections, extending beyond the bounds of specific cultural or linguistic communities. This proficiency opens the door to deeper integration into the broader Spanish society, facilitating interactions with locals and enabling participation in a more diverse range of social activities.

Conversely, for individuals who may not have prioritized the mastery of Spanish, their experience can be different:

Chen: “Well, to be honest, I don't really know Spanish all that well, even though I've been living here for a significant amount of time. The thing is, most of the people I hang out with aren't Spanish either; there's a lot of Chinese community here. So, I haven't felt a strong need to fully master the language. I know some basic words and phrases—enough to get by. I can order food, ask for directions, and handle basic interactions. But beyond that, I haven't invested heavily in becoming fluent. It's worked for me so far, and I feel like I can navigate daily life just fine with the level I have.”

For those individuals who like Peng, due to the prevalence of non-Spanish social circles, their network may be more limited in scope. In these instances, the predominant language of communication often aligns with the shared linguistic background, fostering a sense of familiarity and comfort. While this may result in a more insular social circle, it can also provide a vital support system, particularly for those navigating the complexities of living in a foreign country. This nuanced interplay between language proficiency and social circles exemplifies the multifaceted nature of cultural adaptation. It underscores the importance of language as a dynamic tool that not only facilitates communication but also shapes the social landscape, offering both opportunities for broader integration and the comfort of familiar connections.

Harmonizing with the social norms and customs of Spanish society is a multifaceted aspect of cultural adaptation for Chinese gay men. This entails an exploration of greetings, expressions of respect, and the subtleties inherent in non-verbal communication. The process demands keen observation, open-mindedness, and a genuine desire to integrate into the fabric of Spanish daily life. As Diego stated:



“There are subtle differences in how people express themselves, how they show respect, and even in their body language. It took some time, but I've grown more comfortable in navigating these nuances. Initially, it was a bit overwhelming. The way people interact here can be quite different from what I was used to. For example, the level of formality in greetings was something I had to get accustomed to. But over time, through observation and practice, it's become more natural.”

The journey of understanding and assimilating Spanish social norms represents a vital aspect of cultural adaptation for Chinese gay men in Spain. Through keen observation, open-mindedness, and a genuine desire to integrate, individuals navigate the intricate tapestry of greetings, expressions of respect, and non-verbal cues. As evidenced by the experiences shared, the initial challenges gradually give way to a sense of comfort and familiarity. This process not only fosters a deeper connection with the local community but also serves as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of these individuals. It is within the delicate balance of preserving one's cultural heritage while embracing the customs of the host country that a rich tapestry of belonging and acceptance begins to unfold.

### **Sense of Belonging**

Within the intricate tapestry of race and migration, Chinese gay men in Spain find themselves at a unique juncture, weaving together their cultural heritage with the prevailing Spanish milieu. For these individuals, the melding of Chinese heritage with the fabric of Spanish society provides a foundation for a sense of belonging. Cultural festivals and exchange initiatives serve as bridges, uniting diverse identities. Through shared celebrations

and mutual appreciation, individuals discover a space where their cultural roots are not only acknowledged but celebrated.

Jaime gave a poignant example of this cultural fusion is seen in the annual Lunar New Year celebrations in Spain.

“Last year, during the Mid-Autumn Festival, we organized a cultural exchange event in collaboration with a local Spanish organization. We shared stories, enjoyed mooncakes, and even taught them some traditional Chinese games. It was a beautiful blend of our cultures, and it made me feel deeply connected to both my Chinese roots and my Spanish friends.”

Balancing the complexities of being both Chinese and a migrant in Spain necessitates a nuanced approach. While there may be moments of tension or negotiation, this intersection of identities also offers a unique perspective. It allows for the contribution of diverse insights to the broader discourse on race and migration.

Peng's experience serves as a testament to the enriching perspective that emerges from this dual identity. As an active member of the local LGBTQ+ community in Barcelona and a Chinese migrant, Peng has contributed profoundly to discussions on inclusivity and cultural diversity within the broader Spanish society. He said:

“It's provided me with a unique vantage point. I've seen first-hand how different communities intersect and how their narratives interweave. I believe this perspective is invaluable in fostering understanding and unity among diverse groups.”

Community support and acceptance play a crucial role in nurturing a sense of belonging within this intersection. The Chinese community in Spain and networks of migrants provide a safety net for individuals to connect, share experiences, and find camaraderie. These support systems acknowledge the challenges and triumphs inherent in the dual identity of being Chinese and a migrant. For example, Casa Asia in Barcelona serves as a hub for individuals like Fernando. Through language courses, cultural events, and support groups, it creates a nurturing environment for those navigating the complexities of being Chinese migrants in Spain. He stated:

“It's been a lifeline, really. Knowing there's a community that understands the challenges we face as Chinese migrants is incredibly reassuring. We share our experiences, help each other navigate life in Spain, and celebrate our successes together. It's a powerful support system.”

The concept of "home" undergoes a profound transformation for many within this intersection. It expands from a singular, geographical location to a mosaic woven from the threads of cultural heritage and the embrace of Spanish society. This redefined notion of home signifies a broader and more inclusive understanding of belonging for Chinese gay men navigating the intersection of race and migration in Spain.

Chen's journey exemplifies this evolving notion of home. While he cherishes his memories of China, he now finds a profound sense of belonging in the vibrancy and inclusivity of Spanish society. His home is no longer defined by borders, but by the rich tapestry of experiences and connections he has woven in Spain.

“It's become something much more expansive. Home isn't just where I was born, but it's also the place where I've grown, learned, and connected with others. Spain has become a second home to me, and it's where I've found a true sense of belonging.”

The narratives shared by the participants illustrate the intricate interplay of identities among Chinese gay men in Spain. These experiences, ranging from moments of joyful cultural exchange to instances of delicate negotiation, reflect the diverse tapestry of their journeys. It is important to recognize that while some find seamless integration and celebrate the fusion of cultures, others face challenges in being fully understood and accepted. The interplay of identities, though enriching, can at times be accompanied by a sense of balancing between expectations and assumptions associated with dual cultural belonging. In this mosaic of experiences, it is evident that the path to belonging is not linear but sometimes ambivalent or even contradictory; it is marked by moments of connection and, at times, moments of friction. Each individual's story adds a unique thread to the broader narrative of cultural adaptation and integration.

In Spain, there isn't a dedicated space or venue specifically for Chinese gay individuals. Instead, the community consists of small groups who often gather at friends' houses or occasionally visit bars and clubs. The absence of a centralized location means that socializing among Chinese gay individuals is more decentralized and relies on informal gatherings. Additionally, many people within the community utilize social networking apps such as Blued and Grindr to connect and interact with others. As Jaime stated:

“Spain's known for its LGBTQ+ scene, but as a Chinese guy, finding my groove hasn't always been easy. There aren't many places just for us, so I mostly hang out with friends at home or hit up the local bars now and then”

### *At the intersection of race and sexuality*

In the intricate tapestry of human relationships, the threads of race and sexuality are interwoven in ways that are both profound and complex. This chapter delves into the dynamic interplay between race-based stereotypes, objectification, personal preferences, and societal ideals within the realm of intimate partnerships. As we embark on this exploration, it is imperative to recognize that these issues are far from black and white. The experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain, influenced by their dual identities, exist within a vast spectrum of nuance and ambiguity. It is within this gray area that we find the crux of our inquiry - the often unspoken but deeply ingrained societal norms and personal inclinations that shape their romantic inclinations.

### **Race-based stereotypes and racism**

While earlier in the study, some participants did not perceive racism as a prevalent issue within Spanish society, further exploration uncovers a nuanced landscape. My research reveals a persistent pattern: Chinese gay men in Spain consistently encounter negative stereotypes rooted in their ethnicity. These stereotypes, deeply ingrained in societal perceptions, contribute to a complex landscape of interpersonal relationships.

This revelation prompts a reconsideration of earlier perceptions. While some participants may not perceive racism as overt or pervasive, their encounters with negative stereotypes underscore underlying systemic issues that warrant deeper examination. It is crucial to recognize the complexity of perceptions and experiences regarding racism within Spanish society. By acknowledging diverse perspectives and experiences, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of race and ethnicity in Spain

For instance, Eric shared his experience of encountering stereotypes, particularly those surrounding Asian men:

“There’s this misconception that we’re all super quiet, and passive. It's like, come on, we're a diverse bunch with all sorts of characters and personalities.”

Zheng also described instances where individuals assumed certain traits based on his ethnicity:

“In my dating experiences, I've noticed that some individuals express a preference for partners who are more assertive or traditionally masculine. Unfortunately, this doesn't always align with my personality. I've had instances where people have explicitly stated that they're not interested because of their preconceived notions about Asians.”

Among the most prevalent stereotypes is the portrayal of Asian men as passive and submissive, as I have described earlier in this dissertation. This perception, while entirely unfounded, has regrettably endured, casting a shadow on the diverse range of personalities and roles within the Asian community. This stereotype not only distorts the true essence of

these individuals but also hinders genuine connections and intimate relationships. When Peng came to Spain, he candidly discussed the instances of rejection and exclusion he encountered due to his ethnicity. He shared experiences of feeling overlooked or dismissed based on assumptions about his background. He emphasized:

"It's tough when people don't see you for who you are, but just make assumptions based on where you're from."

Wei, too, reflected on moments of rejection tied to his ethnicity after arriving in Spain. Wei recalled feeling isolated and rejected:

"It was a bit of a challenge to find someone, to put it bluntly. It seemed like the only men interested were usually older guys, which wasn't really my preference. Even with a great group of friends, there were times when a sense of isolation crept in... Watching my friends easily find companions for the night, while I was struggling... I did have moments where I felt a bit undesirable, and I think a big part of it was because of my ethnicity".

Alex spoke about his early experiences in Spain, where he navigated situations of exclusion based on his ethnicity. He shared that he felt like an outsider due to preconceived notions about Asian individuals. He remarked, "It's not easy when people have these fixed ideas about you." When Fer navigated the gay community, he candidly expressed how his confidence sometimes wavered: "You start feeling a bit less sure of yourself... It's like this feeling that they might not be interested in you, just because you're Chinese." In a similar

vein, Jaime and Johnny expressed comparable feelings about how their ethnic identities shaped experiences in nightlife venues. Jaime observed, "Being Asian often means you're not the one people are looking for." Johnny elaborated, "Engagement tends to be minimal unless a couple of guys show a particular interest in Asians."

Most of the participants have reported encountering hate comments against Asians on dating apps, and profiles bearing statements like "No Asian" were distressingly prevalent. Jaime echoed this sentiment, sharing, "It's sadly common to come across profiles declaring 'No femmes, no Asians...'"

Another example of hate comments can be found in another interview in which Peng recalled a particularly hurtful incident, where he shared: "I once received a message from a profile without any photos. 'te mataré, chino' - he remarked. It left me feeling upset and puzzled, I simply didn't know what to say".

### **Objectification, fantasy and fetishization**

In addition to overt forms of discrimination, there is a substantial presence of statements on dating apps that reveal a fascination and fetishization of Asian gay men. Liu, for instance, shared his experiences of being approached with a narrowed perspective. He recounted, "There were times when it felt like I was seen more as an exotic curiosity than a person with my own thoughts and feelings." Similarly, Fer articulated the ambivalence of being rejected and being of objectified, two extremes of an Othering experience:



“Profiles on dating apps often feature declarations like 'no Asian'. Conversely, there are instances where, normally, older Spanish guys consistently express their preferences in their profiles, stating, 'I'm very into Asian, only Asian.' This stark contrast gives rise to a deep-seated sense of confusion. You find yourself objectified, stripped of your individuality, and reduced to a physical characteristic. You're no longer perceived as a person, but rather defined by your skin color, a factor that can either lead to immediate dismissal or attraction. It's unsettling; nobody should have to endure it. It sparks self-doubt, making you question whether your attractions are influenced by race, and if someone's interest in you is solely due to your skin color.”

Interestingly, having a Chinese background can sometimes serve as an advantage in attracting Westerners, as noted by Fer. "If we were to arrange all individuals on a spectrum based on perceived attractiveness, there may be a tendency to rate Asians as less attractive compared to, let's say, Latinos, or individuals of other ethnicities. However, it's important to recognize that there are some individuals who do have a preference for Asians or people from diverse ethnic backgrounds.”

Jaime draws a clear distinction between instances of facing rejection due to his skin color and those where he is sought after primarily because of it. He expressed:

"You get the impression that 'he's just looking for an Asian, not necessarily me.'" There are individuals out there, often referred to as 'rice queens', who have a strong preference for Asians, often having predominantly dated Asians in the past..."

It was intriguing to uncover a shared experience among the participants. They consistently found themselves perceived as highly appealing to predominantly older gay men, while feeling less desired by younger counterparts. I delved deeper into this with Diego, and he mentioned:

"I wondered if they perceived young Chinese or Asian men as more accessible. Maybe they thought that young Chinese students would be drawn to their professionalism, financial stability, or the power dynamics of interracial relationships, but it's difficult to know for certain."

Furthermore, the participants shed light on how sexual stereotypes influence the ways they are desired. Liu provided valuable insights, remarking:

"Younger Spanish men don't usually express attraction towards Asians... But older individuals often do. There's a prevailing perception that Asians are more reserved in their behavior... We're seen as more inclined towards certain roles... And there's often an understanding that our connections may be temporary, lasting about a year and a half."

Moreover, participants highlighted how being treated based on sexual stereotypes can profoundly affect their sense of self-worth and belonging. The constant reinforcement of these stereotypes can create a cycle of self-doubt and internalized prejudice, leading individuals to question their own values and identity. For instance, being objectified or reduced to a sexual stereotype can evoke feelings of shame, inadequacy, and alienation, as individuals struggle to reconcile their authentic selves with society's narrow perceptions of

desirability. This internal conflict can erode self-esteem and hinder meaningful connections with others, perpetuating a sense of isolation and disconnection from one's own community. Addressing the impact of sexual stereotypes on self-perception is crucial for fostering a culture of acceptance, where individuals are valued for their unique identities and not reduced to superficial labels. As Peng added:

“When people see you through the lens of stereotypes, it's like they don't really see you at all. They just see this image they've created in their heads, and it can make you feel pretty worthless sometimes. Like, am I only valued for fitting into this narrow idea of what someone finds attractive? It messes with your head, makes you doubt yourself, your worth. And it's not just about how others see you; it's about how you see yourself too. You start to internalize those stereotypes, and it's like a constant battle to remind yourself that you're more than just a stereotype.”

### ***‘It’s just my personal preference’***

While all participants have experienced instances of racism within dating apps, some, both within the study and among the users they've interacted with, tend to dismiss overt racism and race-based choices as mere 'personal preference'. There was unanimous agreement that this notion of personal preference is predominantly confined to the realm of online dating platforms, and rarely permeates their day-to-day lives. This phenomenon appears to be unique to online dating, where the term 'personal preference' is frequently used by users as a means of rejection. It's crucial to emphasize that in these interviews, 'personal preference' often specifically refers to favoring one ethnicity over another and isn't linked to

one's personality or interests. Participants expressed discomfort when encountering profiles that explicitly state racial preferences, particularly when it directly contradicts their own interests. However, in addition to a general sense of helplessness and an inability to effectively challenge these racial biases on these apps, they often rationalize someone's race-based partner selection as nothing more than a matter of personal preference. Some participants also acknowledged having their own preferences when it comes to deciding whom to engage with on these apps. It could be argued that this attribution of the racism experienced by gay men interviewed as a 'preference' can be understood as an individualization and privatization of a structural problem, which is racism against Chinese gay men in Spain. Also, this dismissal can be understood as a way of 'not making a big deal' out of these experiences of violence which, on the other hand, can contribute to interiorizing a negative image of not being desirable, being used as a fetish, or just been less than other white gay men. For instance, Peng provides insight into the process of rationalizing racial biases as mere personal preference:

"I guess it could be seen as a preference. Maybe it's not fair for me to expect everyone to be open to everyone. It ultimately boils down to treating people with respect, you know? What if you did come across someone who's Asian and you really hit it off? Are you going to dismiss them just because of what you wrote on your profile? In doing so, you might be missing out on connecting with a whole group of potentially great matches. If that's what works for you, then so be it... It's definitely impolite, though. It's kind of like when some people start off with 'I'm not racist,' but then what they say next ends up

being offensive. Maybe it really is just a preference. If that's how you see it, that's your business. I'm not here to change your mind or how you feel."

Peng offers an intriguing perspective by delving into the intricate web of cultural influences that may have shaped his preferences. This brings to light the challenge of discerning between personal preferences and the impact of societal and cultural conditioning:

"Reflecting on it, I sometimes try to step into their shoes and ponder - would I also turn away from a black guy? Could I, over time, unwittingly develop biases against other racial backgrounds? It's possible that my upbringing, coupled with my experiences in these environments and exposure to certain adult content, may have subtly influenced the way I perceive race. I'm uncertain whether these elements have, on a subconscious level, guided me towards consciously gravitating away from other Asians. It's as if I've become somewhat oblivious to my own ethnicity. In addition, there's the complex issue of fetishization. Some individuals exhibit a distinct preference exclusively towards Asians. It's a multifaceted matter."

Another participant Fer also suggests that his attractions may be influenced by broader social and cultural factors. Residing in a 'Western' country, he feels that his standards of beauty have been shaped by the host country and possibly by the implicitly Western-centric adult content he has been exposed to. Significantly, our participants' statement highlights that an individual's preference is intricately linked to their social standing and the specific cultural and political milieu they inhabit. To the extent that they even question whether they have become "blind to their own race".

Furthermore, Fer's attempt to empathize with others' race-based preferences underscores how pervasive this notion is. It also underscores the challenge individuals face in disentangling a 'personal' preference from its potentially racist undertones. Within Fer's statement, we not only discern how these subjective inclinations, shaped by broader cultural attitudes, also render gay Asian migrants less desirable. This sets the stage for a scenario in which gay Asian men may perceive each other as less desirable, leading to a competitive dynamic among gay Asian migrants in their pursuit of potential partners.

While some participants decry the idea of personal preference as discriminatory on dating apps, others readily admit to having their own dating inclinations when using these platforms. This paradox is quite thought-provoking, as some who outwardly reject the concept of personal preference find themselves practicing it in their own interactions. However, those who do acknowledge their preferences often characterize them as subtle, unconscious biases, refraining from explicitly stating them on their profiles to avoid influencing responses. For example, Alex shared his views, saying:

“I must confess, I do have my own set of preferences, and it wouldn't be honest of me to say otherwise. However, even if I were to make these preferences explicit on my profile, it's doubtful anyone would take notice. You catch my drift? Preferences only hold weight when there's an audience, a public that acknowledges them. But when my profile is consistently overlooked or blocked, the relevance of my preferences dwindles, doesn't it? Very few people seem inclined to pay a visit.”

Chen shared a similar perspective:

“At the end of the day, it really does come down to personal preference, not unlike one's palate for food. Take carrot, for example. If someone doesn't care for it, repeatedly offering it to them would be rather peculiar, wouldn't it? I, too, have a range of preferences. Age, for instance, plays a role in my choices; I tend to avoid dating someone significantly younger. Even though I don't explicitly state this on my profile. As for the issue of racism on these apps, I'm well aware of its existence, and I've certainly encountered it. However, I've learned to acknowledge it without allowing it to have a significant impact on me. I've grown somewhat indifferent. I understand that I, too, hold certain biases.”

Some individuals explained their inclination towards Asians by pointing to the significant cultural distinctions and the perceived challenge of bridging these gaps. This perspective underscores their recognition of the value of shared cultural experiences in fostering intimate relationships.

Diego expressed that he leans towards dating Chinese or Asians due to his perception that they are more approachable, highlighting the importance of shared cultural experiences in forming intimate connections. In a parallel vein, Chen linked his preference for Chinese to the intriguing cultural distinctions, underlining the enriching potential of such diverse backgrounds in a relationship. These viewpoints underscore a recognition of the role cultural commonality can play in nurturing deep and meaningful connections. For instance, Chen stated:

“You know, I'm from the south of China, and I might find it a bit challenging to relate culturally to someone from Colombia. We might have different tastes in music, and

striking up a conversation might not be as smooth. It's not about judging, it's just about finding that common ground.”

In response to the racial dynamics in dating, certain participants emphasize the need to transcend ethnic boundaries. As Eric pointed out, "As long as there's a genuine attraction, I'm not concerned about someone's background or ethnicity." Others went further, asserting that categorizing individuals by culture or race oversimplifies and creates issues. In fact, they see these labels as contributing to racial hierarchies. Wei elaborated on this perspective.

"You know, when it comes to attraction, I really don't get caught up in where someone's from or their ethnicity. It's about that connection, that spark. These categories we use, like race or culture, they're just too narrow. They end up creating more problems than solutions. It's like Wei said, they feed into this whole racial hierarchy thing."

### ***Summary***

In examining the lives of Chinese gay men in Spain, it becomes evident that their experiences are deeply entwined with the complex interplay of sexuality, migration, and race. As both sexual and racial minorities, and migrants in a foreign land, these individuals navigate a multifaceted terrain, contending with societal norms and expectations within both the broader society and the LGBTQ+ community.

Sexuality, a deeply personal and intimate aspect of one's identity, intertwines with the challenges and opportunities presented by migration. As individuals traverse borders, they



navigate new landscapes of acceptance and self-discovery. Their sexuality is both a source of empowerment and vulnerability, as it intersects with broader societal norms and attitudes.

Race, another critical element, permeates every facet of their existence. From encounters in the dating world to experiences of prejudice and exclusion, participants grapple with the complexities of being perceived through a racial lens. Stereotypes, objectification, and fetishization contribute to a layered narrative of identity, where their ethnicity intersects with their sexuality.

These intersecting identities form a rich tapestry of experiences. As participants forge their paths, they negotiate the intricate relationships between these facets, each influencing and shaping the others. The narratives presented here underscore the importance of recognizing the multi-dimensionality of identity and the need for inclusive spaces that honor and celebrate these complexities.

## **4.2 Challenges and Resilience: Chinese Gay Men's Odyssey in Spain**

In the vibrant tapestry of experience, individuals often find themselves at the crossroads of identity, where the threads of culture, sexuality, and migration intersect. For Chinese gay men in Spain, this juncture unveils a complex web of challenges and triumphs, woven together by the intricate dance between tradition and modernity, familial expectations and personal freedom. This chapter embarks on a journey into the nuanced lives of our participants, exploring the intricate process of deconstructing labels such as "Chineseness" and "Spanishness." As we delve into their experiences, we will unravel the fading binaries

that once defined these identities, discovering the fluidity and dynamism that characterize the rich tapestry of their lives.

Beyond the cultural dichotomies, we navigate the deeply personal terrain of the coming-out process—a journey often fraught with tension as individuals negotiate the delicate balance between tradition and modernity. In this exploration, we uncover the subtle art of living a double life, a strategy employed by many who navigate the intricate dance between personal authenticity and societal expectations. Others choose to come out and face the consequences of revealing their identity. This chapter also sheds light on the resilience of the participants as they build supporting networks, forging connections that bridge the gaps between cultural worlds. Finally, we delve into the multifaceted philosophy that underpins their approach to life—embracing elements of tradition, drawing strength from modern values, and, at times, choosing to keep calm and carry on, navigating the complexities of identity in a foreign land.

### ***Exploring the Dynamics of "Chineseness" and "Spanishness"***

In the mosaic of identity construction, our participants draw upon a multifaceted palette of cultural and ethnic markers. These defining elements intricately shape their self-perception. For numerous participants, the Chinese concept of family and kinship stands as a foundational cornerstone of their cultural identity. Inherited traditional values, passed down through generations, foster a profound sense of continuity and connection. The significance of place of birth emerges as a pivotal determinant, weaving a narrative thread that intimately

links individuals to their cultural origins. The diverse landscapes and rich histories associated with their birthplaces contribute to the intricate tapestry of their identity.

Legal affiliations, particularly nationality and citizenship, also wield influence in shaping the participants' identity. Several participants emphasized the pivotal role of language as a potent conduit for cultural expression. Furthermore, food and traditions serve as powerful cultural emblems, carrying the weight of heritage. From distinct culinary preferences to the observance of time-honored practices, these elements act as markers through which participants intricately define their cultural identity.

The idea of Chineseness and its importance varied depending on the context, but it was evident that for the men involved in this study, identifying as 'Chinese' was a fundamental and inseparable aspect of their lives. Through exploring their answers to questions like 'How do you see yourself?' and 'Do you identify more with being Chinese, Spanish, or something else?', four distinct forms of identity emerged: hybridity, sojourn, liminality, and in-betweenness. Understanding identity as a fluid concept is crucial. Various elements of these identity forms frequently intersect, and participants articulated different facets of their self-perception as they moved through diverse social contexts and life phases.

### **In-betweenness**

In the exploration of cultural and ethnic identity among our participants, a significant manifestation that surfaces is the state of "In-betweenness." The participants navigate the delicate balance of being both Chinese and Spanish, embodying a complex fusion that defies easy categorization. This sense of "In-betweenness" arises from the simultaneous

acknowledgment and incorporation of cultural elements from both their Chinese heritage and their Spanish environment while also engaging with the nuances of Chinese culture within Spain. It reflects the dynamic interplay between traditions inherited from their ancestry and the contemporary influences of their current surroundings. The participants find themselves straddling two distinct worlds, embracing the richness of their heritage while actively engaging with the cultural dynamics of their adopted home.

A prevalent expression of duality within the context of our study echoes sentiments similar to those shared by participants in the reference. Participants often articulate their dual identity through a blend of national and cultural affiliations. This nuanced expression is exemplified in responses such as, 'In terms of nationality, I identify as [current nationality], and I feel a connection to Spain, but culturally, I retain a significant aspect of my Chinese heritage.' For instance, when prompted about his self-identification, Jaime expressed:

"I would describe myself as both Spanish and Chinese. I can comfortably inhabit both identities. As a citizen, I am Spanish by definition. However, my daily life is deeply rooted in Chinese culture. So, when people inquire about my origin, I might respond with 'I am Chinese.' I have no qualms sharing my Chinese identity because it genuinely reflects a part of who I am."

In alignment with the experiences shared by Jaime, our participants similarly navigate the intricate interplay of nationality and cultural identity. Another participant, Chen illustrates this coexistence, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between his Spanish nationality and Chinese cultural roots. Chen, much like Jaime, maintains a strong connection to his Chinese

identity through daily practices. He converses in Chinese at home and during interviews, indulges in Chinese television programs, and cultivates friendships within the Chinese community in Spain. When discussing his sense of self, Chen articulated:

"I identify myself as Spanish, considering this is where I reside, study, and build my life. However, I don't negate my Chinese identity; it's an integral part of me. It's imprinted on my being and plays a crucial role in shaping who I am. My identity is dual, one facet tethered to my nationality and the other to my cultural heritage."

Johnny's narrative, akin to Chen's, reflects a nuanced Western lifestyle intertwined with a persistent acknowledgment of his Chinese identity. Despite primarily identifying as Spanish due to his life experiences and established connections, Johnny acknowledges the enduring influence of his Chinese heritage. He shared:

"I see myself as Spanish—it's my home, where I studied, and built my career. Yet, I recognize that I am Chinese. It's an essential part of my identity, not the predominant force, but undeniably significant. When interacting with my nephew and niece, born in Spain, I emphasize the importance of embracing both their Spanish and Chinese sides."

These narratives underscore the complexity of dual identity, where participants seamlessly navigate their national belonging and cultural heritage, embracing the coexistence of these two integral facets. Moreover, the dichotomy between Chinese and Spanish identities was often portrayed as distinct and separable entities. Men frequently shifted between these identities in response to various circumstances and events, showcasing the fluid nature of

their self-identification. Peng, for instance, offered an illuminating perspective on how social contexts influenced his articulation of identity:

“The way I describe myself varies depending on the situation. Typically, I might identify as Chinese. However, in a job interview, I would present myself as Spanish.”

Peng believes that highlighting his Spanish identity during a job interview could positively impact his opportunities. This underscores the participants' nuanced use of identity, not only as context-dependent but also as a strategic tool, employed in situations involving ethnic dynamics to potentially gain socio-economic advantages.

### **Hybridity**

Participants in the study often embody a state of hybridity, where their identity becomes a fusion of Chinese and Spanish influences. This blending of cultural elements is evident in the ways they navigate their lives. For instance, Eric seamlessly incorporates both Chinese and Spanish practices into his daily routines. He expressed: "I celebrate Chinese New Year with my family, and then I also enjoy traditional Spanish festivals with my friends. It's like having the best of both worlds."

Carlos, also born and raised in Spain, shared a similar perspective. Reflecting on his experience working in mainland China, he noted the challenges of being perceived as both a foreigner and Chinese:

"During my time in China, my role as a foreign worker led many to perceive me as a foreigner. However, there were also those who viewed me as Chinese. This dual

perception created a dilemma. I found myself grappling with the question of how to navigate these contrasting perceptions.”

Carlos's narrative reveals a significant theme of 'double foreignness' that resonates with several participants. In their everyday experiences, individuals often perceived their Chinese and Spanish identities as separate constructs, each linked to specific cultural traits. The label 'Chinese' was often associated with attributes like 'Eastern,' 'diligent,' and 'traditional.' In contrast, 'Spanish' was often characterized as 'Western,' 'relaxed,' 'open,' and 'individualistic.' Johnny explicitly acknowledged these expectations, stating, “It seems that many Chinese people living in Spain feel a sense of being Spanish, yet they struggle to fit into the usual idea of what it means to be Spanish. For those caught in this in-between space, it can be tough, as they might feel like they don’t quite belong to either group.” Alberto, another Spanish-born participant, recalled feeling culturally distinct from other Spanish students during his school years:

“Growing up in a relatively small city, I found myself as the only Asian among predominantly Spanish peers. The sense of being different was palpable during those years. Going to a friend's place often left me feeling a bit surprised by the cultural differences. Back home, Chinese food was the norm for us, with rice as a staple on every table, and I thought that was how everyone lived. But I soon realized that their lifestyles and meals were worlds apart from mine.”

Caught in a cultural limbo, Alberto found himself feeling like an outsider in both the Spanish and Chinese communities. At home, he leaned into a Chinese lifestyle, but he

couldn't shake the feeling that he didn't fully belong to the Spanish side of his identity. On the flip side, among his Chinese friends, he often felt inadequate because he struggled with the language, making him feel less connected to his roots.

### **Liminality**

In exploring the notion of liminality, participants often described their identity as being in a state of transition or suspension, hovering between the boundaries of Chinese and Spanish affiliations. This sense of liminality manifested as a dynamic process, where individuals found themselves betwixt and between cultural categories.

For instance, Carlos articulated this transitional state when he remarked:

“I often feel unsure about my cultural identity. At first, I thought I should connect more with my Chinese background. But when I visited China, I felt like a stranger and couldn't quite fit in. On the other hand, living in Spain makes me comfortable, even though I wonder if I'm as independent-minded as Spanish people. Sometimes, I find myself agreeing with things I don't truly agree with, which seems less common in Spain where people freely express their opinions. Over time, I've started speaking up more, but I still have this lingering feeling. Even though I get how things work in Spain, I still feel a sense of comfort in Chinese society. So, figuring out how to describe myself is still a bit confusing for me.”

For Jaime, even after living in Spain for more than seven years, he believed that there were major cultural factors involved, he said:



“I've been asked why my closest friends aren't Spanish, given my long stay in Spain. The answer is simple – it's just not my idea of fun. To elaborate, they tend to favor pubs and clubs, while I have a preference for KTV (karaoke). While I won't claim fluency in Spanish, I can understand and communicate with them without any issues. The real challenge lies in the cultural disparities, making it difficult to seamlessly integrate into each other's social circles. For instance, at university, my Spanish peers often party on Fridays and Saturdays, even when assignments are due on Monday. In contrast, we, the Chinese or Asians, diligently work in the library, striving for excellence. This divergence in priorities prompts us to hesitate to include them in our project groups, as their focus on having a good time can be frustrating for us.”

Another participant Chen also found it hard to fit in Spanish social circles, he stated:

“Our activities rarely extend beyond shopping, and traditional Spanish cuisine is seldom on our menu. Our preferences lean toward shopping for designer brands and enjoying movies, whereas Spaniards often engage in cultural gatherings, like tapas outings. I've come to realize that language alone doesn't bridge the gap; there are fundamental differences in values. Our distinct tastes and life priorities underscore these disparities. Additionally, I foresee potential challenges in navigating these differences with my Spanish friends' families. Despite numerous attempts to assimilate, there comes a point when you have to question the purpose of such endeavors.”

## Sojourn

Navigating between China and Spain, some participants describe their experience as a sojourn, a temporary stay entailing unique challenges and adaptations. This transitory phase, marked by a sense of impermanence, manifests in various aspects of their lives. For instance, having acquired Spanish citizenship several years ago, Jaime couldn't find a sense of belonging in Spain over the years. Consequently, he's contemplating a return to China soon:

“I've been in Spain for quite a few years now, and while I did obtain Spanish citizenship, the feeling of fitting in has eluded me. It's been a journey of trying to find my place in this society. Besides that, talking to my friends in a second language just feels a bit off, you know? It's not like when I chat with someone in Mandarin, that feels natural, like I'm really being myself. Some folks say you should make an effort to fit in, but honestly, I'm just not into the things they're into. So, why bother trying to force myself into that?”

Jaime's contemplation of returning to China underscores a perceived temporality in his stay in Spain. This sentiment of impermanence is not merely a logistical consideration but resonates deeply in his daily interactions and relationships. The ongoing struggle to establish a profound sense of belonging in Spain contributes to a narrative of sojourn, shaping his perspective on life within the Spanish cultural milieu. His story adds a nuanced layer to the exploration of the complex interplay between cultural identity, migration, and a pervasive feeling of transience experienced by Chinese diasporic gay men in Spain.

In the face of a challenging job market and restricted entrepreneurial prospects, a subset of Chinese gay men in Spain found themselves compelled to consider alternative

paths, including the prospect of returning to China or seeking opportunities in different countries. The economic landscape, marked by its limitations and barriers, played a pivotal role in shaping the decisions and trajectories of these individuals. This economic dimension adds another layer to the multifaceted challenges faced by Chinese diasporic gay men in Spain, highlighting the intricate interplay between economic considerations, cultural identity, and migration experiences. For instance, Diego expressed his desire to move out of Spain soon:

“My main motivation to return is to secure better job opportunities. Finding a good job in Spain is quite challenging. I believe that the working conditions in China are more favorable now, providing the potential for higher income, and the cost of living is comparatively lower.”

In summary, our participants provided a comprehensive exploration into the dynamic interplay of "Chineseness" and "Spanishness" in the lives of Chinese gay men in Spain. From the foundational influence of family and kinship to the complexities of citizenship, language, and cultural emblems, the participants' identities are shaped by a rich tapestry of influences. The manifestations of in-betweenness, hybridity, liminality, and sojourn have emerged as integral threads in the fabric of their identities, revealing the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, East and West. The participants, situated at the crossroads of cultural influences, grapple with the challenges of belonging and the nuanced negotiations required to navigate their dual identities.

As we progress in this exploration, the narratives of our participants will continue to unfold, illuminating the intricate interplay between "Chineseness" and "Spanishness" in the experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain.

### ***Coming out process***

Within the realm of sexuality disclosure, the journey of coming out stands as a formidable challenge for many participants in our study. We unravel the intricate dynamics that shape their struggles, as they carefully guard the closet against the disclosure of their sexuality. The decision to keep this aspect of their identity hidden is influenced by a myriad of factors, reflecting the intersection of personal authenticity and cultural expectations.

#### **Exploring the Closet: Struggling to come out to the family**

The participants grapple with deeply rooted cultural stigmas and traditions that often view homosexuality as incompatible with family values. Concerns about dishonoring the family and the intense societal expectations to adhere to heterosexual norms serve as significant obstacles, driving individuals to conceal their sexual orientation. As Chen shared:

“I just can’t do it. It would cause them immense pain. It would tarnish the family's reputation. I don't want to put them through that. My parents live in a small city, I feel like everybody knows each other, being gay is essentially considered an “abnormality”. If I were to reveal my sexual orientation to my parents, I would essentially be confessing, 'Your son is a freak.' And if they sought support or guidance, it would be nearly impossible, as discussing it would label me as abnormal and disgusting.”

While participants acknowledge the potential emotional and psychological challenges their families may face upon learning about their sexual orientation, the primary concern among Chinese gay men is the societal challenges that the disclosure might impose on their families. Chen, for instance, expressed his desire for his parents to be aware of his sexual orientation. Despite this wish, he has refrained from revealing it to them due to:

“I worry about their aging and the potential impact on their health, and I generally care about their well-being. “If they found out my secret, it would place the burden of secrecy on them, and I wouldn’t want them to struggle with the choice of whether to keep it confidential or tell others. I’m worried that it could create chaos, and I aim to spare them the burden of my truth if I were to come out.”

These individuals find themselves under the weight of parental expectations, pressured to align with traditional Chinese norms that emphasize heterosexual ideals and also maintain the appearance of complying with dominant social norms of masculinity. Concurrently, the parents grapple with societal expectations and the scrutiny of their own parents, all demanding adherence to established values and standards. Consequently, the family's collective success or failure is intricately tied to the achievements or shortcomings of its members. Upholding the family's reputation within the larger familial and community network is crucial, and any potential threat to this, risking a loss of 'face,' is vigilantly averted. The imperative of maintaining a facade holds the utmost importance in navigating these cultural dynamics. Another participant Diego Added:

“If you live in China, more specifically in small cities, not Beijing or Shanghai, I don't encourage people from coming out. Sometimes your disclosure can inadvertently make your parents feel like they need to keep things hidden. Even though your parents were never secretive before, when you proudly come out, in a community that values tight family bonds, your parents may have to keep your disclosure a secret, going through what it's like for a gay person in the closet.”

Participants frequently cited culture as the key factor influencing their decision to come out. Many emphasized that being gay goes against Chinese cultural norms surrounding marriage and family duties. Additionally, perceptions of masculinity as inherently heterosexual and homosexuality as inherently feminine were also significant factors. Within Chinese culture, traditional notions of masculinity often equate being heterosexual with being masculine, while homosexuality is viewed as feminine or effeminate, and consequently, as something negative. This rigid gender binary perpetuates stereotypes and stigmatizes LGBTQ+ individuals, making it challenging for them to come out and live authentically. The challenges in coming out were largely linked to societal and familial expectations, particularly regarding marriage and having children. In Chinese culture, there is immense pressure to marry and have children to uphold family traditions and lineage. Coming out as gay often clashes with these expectations, as it may be perceived as a deviation from the norm and as potentially jeopardizing the continuation of the family bloodline. The desire to fulfil familial duties and expectations, including the expectation to marry and have children, adds an additional layer of complexity for individuals navigating their sexual orientation and coming out process. Johnny stated that:

“I believe that a lot of us experienced significant societal pressure, and the issue of marriage becomes inevitable. This pressure increases as I age. Numerous gay men opt to marry women due to the overwhelming pressure, while only a minority muster the courage to come out. After all, coming out requires courage, and it's not a step everyone can take.”

Interestingly, many participants mentioned “xinghun” (contract marriage), where a gay man marries a lesbian to maintain the appearance of a conventional married couple, a phenomenon that emerged in recent years within the Chinese LGBTQ+ community. They have formulated this strategy to navigate and challenge the constraints imposed by heteronormative norms, as well as societal and familial pressures while also pursuing their desires for intimacy and connection with others.

### **Unveiling the Personal Narrative: Participants' Coming Out Stories**

While some participants grapple with the challenges of coming out to their families, a significant number have embraced the journey, sharing compelling narratives of self-discovery and authenticity. The participants' path toward coming out unfolds as a tapestry of diverse motivations and deeply personal stories, each contributing to the evolving canvas of LGBTQ+ experiences within Chinese communities. These stories reflect the richness and complexity of individual journeys toward self-discovery and acceptance, illustrating the mosaic of resilience and identity within this cultural context.

Revealing one's sexual identity through coming out holds profound importance in the sexual identity development of these gay men. For many participants, the initial disclosure

marked a pivotal moment, a decision laden with potential pressures. The choice to come out was often a result of meticulous consideration, weighing the anticipated reactions of others. Despite the perceived risks and fears of potential rejection, a growing internal desire to come out emerged for some participants, prompting them to take this significant step at a particular juncture in their lives.

Peng firmly stated, "Coming out is imperative for me; I always knew that one day I would come out to my parents." Their inclination toward disclosure often sprang from a deep-seated aspiration to embrace an authentic, honest and transparent existence rather than dwelling in a realm of discontent, secrecy, or solitude. In a distinct narrative, Alex linked his decision to unveil his identity, both to himself and others, to the profound impact of the movie "Pray for Bobby (Mulcahy, 2009)." This film depicts the tragic story of a young gay man driven to suicide by his parents' inability to accept his sexual orientation. Reflecting on his motivation, he remarked, "It's as straightforward as watching that movie, and I delved into a multitude of coming-out videos thereafter."

In a parallel vein, Jaime reached a pivotal realization about the necessity of coming out when he turned 24: "I acknowledged that I could no longer avoid confronting this issue. Whether identifying as heterosexual, bisexual, or gay, there was no escaping the imperative to define myself."

The prospect of living in perpetual solitude spurred him to address and resolve this matter. After internal deliberation, Jaime unequivocally acknowledged his gay identity and took the initial step of confiding in himself: "Several years later, I decided to come out to my parents. It didn't end up well, we had a huge fight and a substantial disagreement." Later, he



clarified that having a well-defined and openly expressed sexual identity was crucial for him because it meant he no longer had to pretend to date girls. Particularly after his move to Spain and opening up to some friends, he remarked, "I became comfortable using that concept (being gay) to describe myself."

Alex also emphasized the significance of coming out, highlighting its various advantages for both individuals and family relationships. He expressed:

"I would encourage people to come out because I felt that I was not a complete person until I came out. Sexual orientation is a genuine aspect of you. When it is concealed, and your parents and friends are unaware of it, it can profoundly impact one's personality development."

Eric also underscored the positive outcomes stemming from his decision to come out. After revealing his sexual orientation to his brother, he experienced a profound sense of relief, motivating him to extend his coming out to others. Despite anticipating that his parents might not accept his homosexuality, he chose to come out to them. Reflecting on this, he expressed: "Coming out did create some differences between me and my mother, but I don't want to go back to the past anymore. If it's like a door, once it's been opened, I don't want to close it again."

### ***Living a Flexible Life***

In the intricate web of societal expectations and personal desires, a subset of participants navigated the challenge of living a flexible life. Confronted with the formidable

pressure to conform to marital norms and the societal expectation of fulfilling heterosexual roles, these individuals chose a path of compromise. Rather than explicitly coming out to their parents, they embarked on a delicate journey to harmonize familial expectations with their same-sex desires. This approach involved a nuanced balancing act, where participants sought to appease parental expectations regarding marriage while simultaneously ensuring the fulfilment of their own same-sex needs. In the absence of a direct disclosure of their sexual orientation, these participants adopted a flexible lifestyle, allowing them to maintain a delicate equilibrium between societal norms and their authentic selves. This intricate dance between societal expectations and personal identity showcases the diverse strategies individuals employ to negotiate the complex terrain of family, tradition, and personal authenticity.

Xinghun, a marriage formed by gay and lesbian individuals with the primary objectives of fulfilling societal expectations, avoiding social stigma, and appeasing parental wishes, emerges as a prevalent choice among the Chinese LGBTQ+ community. The decision to refrain from disclosing their true identity to their parents stems from the fear of potential rejection or the apprehension that such revelation could adversely impact their parents' well-being. Yet, opting for a conventional heterosexual marriage is not considered a viable alternative, as it would lead to feelings of despondency and inner turmoil. Consequently, many participants contemplate or have already engaged in xinghun, imbuing this choice with a positive moral significance. They perceive it as a demonstration of profound filial piety, illustrating their willingness to sacrifice personal happiness for the sake of honoring their parents. Li expressed this sentiment, stating:

“I can't reveal my true self to my parents; they might even consider something extreme like suicide because they'd be so ashamed. Their concern about what others think is more important to them than my own happiness. So, my best move seems to be finding a lesbian partner, marrying her, and keeping up appearances to bring some peace to my parents while still living my truth.”

Another participant Daniel came out to his parents less than one year before the interview, he also believes that this contract marriage will be a solution for his family and himself:

“I don't expect their beliefs to change, but I've been clear with them that I won't enter into a heterosexual marriage—I won't marry a woman. However, we might find some middle ground. If they're concerned about what people around them might think about people like me, then I'm open to the idea of bringing a girlfriend and having a symbolic celebration together. It might feel like just going through the motions, but I'm receptive to it. If there's a wish for children later on, I could consider options like surrogacy.”

Another gay participant Li, who entered into a contract marriage, explained that this form of marriage not only met his parents' expectations but also allowed him to maintain a same-sex identity while living abroad in Spain. They upheld an open relationship in their daily lives, navigating the complexities of maintaining familial ties across cultural and geographical distances. Accompanying each other when visiting each other's parents became a crucial aspect of their relationship, especially in the context of being gay men navigating societal expectations in a foreign country. Li shared:

"My parents believe that my marriage is a demonstration of my filial piety, as that's what they did at my age. However, I can never express to them that true filial piety doesn't always mean blindly following parents' opinions and meeting their expectations. All I can do is to make them content, considering their age and health, while gradually introducing them to modern culture. Eventually, when they realize the sacrifice of my happiness for their expectations and societal norms, they may feel remorse, as all parents inherently love their children no matter what."

Some other participants in the study are familiar with the concept of xinghun, but they don't endorse it, viewing it as a form of deception and an evasion of reality. For these individuals, honesty remains a priority, even when faced with societal expectations and familial pressures. These participants opt for a different approach when confronted with questions from parents or relatives about their relationship status. As Eric stated:

"I understand why some people might consider it. There's this societal and family pressure to conform to certain expectations, especially when it comes to relationships and marriage. But personally, I don't think it's the right path for me. When my parents asked about my relationship status, I chose to tell a small lie, like saying I'm focused on my career, rather than committing to a contract marriage. I feel that maintaining honesty, even if it involves a minor fabrication, is crucial."

Interestingly, the geographical distance from their homeland, China, where their parents reside, adds another layer to this complex situation. Some participants find it more manageable to navigate this delicate balance of truth and concealment while living abroad.

The physical separation from their parents' immediate environment provides a certain level of detachment that facilitates the maintenance of this strategic approach to disclosure. For some gay Chinese men, establishing this distance through a migratory project can be a strategic choice, as it reduces social control from their family and other relevant community members in China.

### *Masculinity and Gay Identity*

For many Chinese gay men in Spain, navigating traditional masculine norms presents a unique set of challenges. The pressure to conform to hegemonic ideals of masculinity, characterized by traits such as stoicism, dominance, and heteronormativity, can create internal conflict and external scrutiny. In the quest for acceptance and belonging, some individuals may find themselves adopting performative behaviors to align with societal expectations, while others may resist these norms, seeking to redefine masculinity on their own terms. As Wei stated:

“In Chinese culture, there's a strong emphasis on saving face and upholding traditional gender roles. As a gay man, I've had to navigate between honoring my cultural heritage and forging my own path. It's a constant balancing act.”

Another participant Fer echoed the experience: "Growing up, I always felt pressure to fit into society's idea of what it means to be a 'real man.' But as I embraced who I am, I realized that true masculinity isn't about conforming to stereotypes—it's about being authentic to yourself."

The concept of "passing" or the ability to blend into heteronormative spaces undetected, looms large in the experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain. Whether consciously or unconsciously, individuals may engage in acts of passing to navigate social environments where their sexual orientation may be met with prejudice or discrimination. This phenomenon underscores the fluidity and adaptability of identity in response to external pressures, highlighting the complex interplay between authenticity and survival. Chen shared his experience:

“Pretending as straight has its advantages, especially in professional settings where being openly gay could hinder my career prospects. But there's a sense of isolation that comes with hiding my true self, a constant fear of being discovered.”

“As I remembered, this (acting as a straight man) became a survival strategy for me, I've spent years perfecting my passing skills, meticulously crafting a facade of heterosexuality to navigate a world that often feels hostile to queerness. But as I've grown older, I've realized that true liberation comes from embracing my authentic self, regardless of societal expectations.”

Amidst these complex dynamics, Chinese gay men in Spain demonstrate resilience and resourcefulness in navigating the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. Through acts of self-expression, community building, and cultural affirmation, individuals carve out spaces of belonging and affirmation where their identities are celebrated rather than marginalized. While challenges persist, the lived experiences of this community underscore

the fluidity and diversity of masculinity, challenging monolithic narratives and paving the way for greater inclusivity and acceptance in society.

The visibility of gay identity among Chinese gay men in Spain is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by cultural, social, and personal factors. While some individuals may openly embrace their sexual orientation and express their identity without inhibition, others may navigate a process of concealment or strategic disclosure. This spectrum of visibility reflects the diverse strategies employed by individuals to negotiate their identities within the Spanish cultural landscape.

For instance, Peng relocated to Barcelona seeking new opportunities and a sense of belonging. In his hometown of Fujian, he lived a life of secrecy, concealing his true identity beneath a facade of conformity:

"In China, I used to keep my true self hidden, buried under layers of societal expectations and family pressures. But since landing in Spain, it's like I've been given permission to breathe freely, to be unapologetically me. Away from the watchful eyes of tradition and judgment, I've discovered a newfound sense of liberation. Sure, my flamboyance might draw some curious looks, but frankly, it doesn't bother me at all. I'm embracing my true self and won't apologize for it anymore."

Another participant, Wei, grew up in a traditional household in Beijing, where expectations for conformity loomed large. He shared a similar experience:

"Even though I was out to my friends in Beijing, there were still parts of myself I kept hidden. I felt like I had to censor certain aspects of my personality to avoid standing

out too much. It wasn't until I moved to Spain that I realized how much I had been holding back. However, even here in Spain, things aren't always easy. I remember this one incident vividly. I was just walking down the street, not bothering anyone, when suddenly, this well-dressed Spanish guy passed by and called me 'maricon.' It was completely unexpected and caught me off guard. It just shows that no matter where you are, there are still people who will judge you based on how you express yourself."

Several factors influence the visibility of gay identity among Chinese gay men in Spain. Cultural backgrounds, familial expectations, and societal attitudes towards homosexuality all play significant roles in shaping individuals' decisions regarding self-disclosure. Additionally, experiences of discrimination, both real and perceived, may impact individuals' willingness to openly express their sexual orientation in public spaces.

The intersection of ethnicity, sexuality, and gender identity further complicates the visibility of gay identity among Chinese men in Spain. Intersectional experiences may amplify feelings of marginalization or invisibility, particularly for individuals who occupy multiple marginalized identities. Moreover, the intersectional nature of visibility underscores the importance of recognizing the diverse experiences and perspectives within the Chinese gay community.

### ***Navigating Support Networks***

Within the complex tapestry of personal identity and societal expectations, participants in this study embarked on a journey to find and establish support networks that transcended conventional norms. Faced with the challenges of being gay in a foreign land,



these individuals crafted connections that became essential pillars of strength. This exploration delves into how friendships outside the LGBTQ+ communities and the vibrant tapestry of the gay social circle played pivotal roles in shaping their narratives of acceptance and belonging.

In the absence of physical family presence, friends play a pivotal role in providing essential support, both practically and emotionally. Participants often found solace in friendships established outside the LGBTQ+ communities. These friends, while not directly sharing the same sexual orientation, offered a unique perspective and understanding, becoming a valuable pillar of support during challenging times. For Johnny, the importance of choosing the right friends went beyond simple companionship; it represented a core element of his identity.

“What matters is not only your identity, but also the company you keep. I have many friends who value and depend on me, and that truly brings me joy. I have a diverse circle of friends who come from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. I appreciate the richness that different perspectives bring to our friendships and actively seek connections with individuals from all walks of life. I seek individuals who resonate with my personality, fostering genuine connections and friendships. In that aspect, I consider myself quite conservative.”

Another participant Fer shared the same experience: “When I moved here, finding a job, a place to live, just navigating through life, it was friends who supported me and got me

through it." Peng, in reflecting on the composition of his social circle, elaborated on the depth of his connections:

"For me, the circle of friends I cherish the most is primarily composed of females. I find their friendships to be more authentic, less complicated. With them, I don't sense any hidden agenda, just genuine companionship. There's a sense of comfort and trust that I've cultivated with my them over the years. It goes beyond societal expectations and judgments, I don't have many gay friends because I feel like they might want something beyond friendship."

Indeed, the bond between heterosexual women and gay men mirrors the closeness experienced by heterosexual women and gay men in Spain. There's something about the intimacy and understanding shared in these relationships that provides a welcoming space for some gay men, where they feel free to express themselves without the need to conceal aspects of their identity, such as flamboyance or femininity.

Another crucial aspect of participants' support network is the concept of "Quanzi" or the gay social circle. The term "quanzi" translates to "circle" in English. Within the Chinese gay community, this term describes the social dynamics and connections formed among men who identify as gay. The 'circle' serves as a supportive environment, allowing members to openly communicate, exchange experiences, and discover shared interests in their paths toward self-acceptance and personal growth.

Within the 'Quanzi,' individuals have the freedom to embrace different aspects of their identity, whether it's expressing femininity or masculinity, discussing topics related to

sexuality or emotions, or simply being themselves without fear of judgment. This inclusivity extends to the concept of 'pluma,' which refers to the flamboyant or effeminate traits that some gay men may display. In the 'Quanzi,' individuals are accepted and celebrated for their authenticity, regardless of whether their expression aligns with traditional gender norms.

Conversely, the concept of 'passing' presents a contrasting experience within the broader societal context. 'Passing' refers to the ability of some individuals to conceal or downplay their sexual orientation in order to conform to heterosexual norms and avoid discrimination. Many gay individuals may feel pressure to 'pass' as heterosexuals in certain social situations, whether it's in professional settings, with family members, or in public spaces where they fear judgment or prejudice. However, this practice of 'passing' can be emotionally taxing, leading to feelings of invisibility, disconnection, and internal conflict as individuals navigate the tension between authenticity and societal expectations.

In this close-knit social circle, participants found a refuge where they could openly discuss their challenges, triumphs, and the nuances of navigating their dual identities. Within the "quanzi," the mutual understanding fostered an atmosphere of acceptance, empowering individuals to discover and embrace their authentic selves without the fear of judgment, they discover a chosen family—a network of unwavering support and understanding that transcends mere friendship. As Jaime stated: “My friends are like my chosen family. We have a unique connection that goes beyond mere friendship. It's a circle of understanding, acceptance, and authentic support that I value every day”. The "quanzi" became more than just a social network; it evolved into a support system where participants leaned on each other during moments of uncertainty and celebrated together in times of joy. This

camaraderie extended beyond casual interactions, evolving into profound friendships that transcended the limitations of physical presence.

While the primary focus of these groups is emotional support, they also serve as networks for sharing resources and assistance. Whether it's offering financial aid during times of need, providing practical advice and assistance in navigating bureaucratic processes, or simply being there to lend a helping hand, members of the 'quanzi' often extend their support beyond emotional boundaries. In this sense, these groups function as chosen families, offering not only emotional solace but also material and economic support when needed. Through mutual aid and solidarity, participants form bonds that resemble those of a familial network, relying on each other for various forms of support and solidarity in navigating the challenges of life.

### **4.3 Working things out**

#### ***Agency and Decision-Making among Chinese Gay Men***

In addition to the themes discussed, it's crucial to acknowledge the agency and strategic decision-making exhibited by Chinese gay men throughout their journeys. From the initial decision to migrate to Spain to navigating the complexities of coming out, forming relationships, and confronting racism, these individuals continuously demonstrate agency and resilience. They make conscious choices that shape their lives, opting to embrace their authentic selves despite societal pressures and adversities.

The decision to migrate to Spain itself is a strategic one, often driven by aspirations for a more inclusive and accepting environment where they can freely express their sexuality.

Similarly, the choice to come out, albeit fraught with challenges, reflects a deliberate assertion of identity and a refusal to hide or conform to societal norms. For instance, for Jaime, moving to Spain wasn't merely a geographical relocation; it was a strategic maneuver:

“When I made the decision to move to Spain, I knew it would be a challenge. But for me, it was also a strategic move. I saw it as an opportunity to break free from the constraints of my conservative upbringing and live authentically as a gay man. Despite the uncertainties and hardships I faced along the way, I'm proud of the choice I made. It wasn't just about seeking freedom; it was about taking control of my own destiny and shaping the life I wanted to live.”

Moreover, the decisions these individuals make within the context of relationships are equally significant. Whether it's choosing to marry a lesbian woman to fulfill familial expectations or navigating the complexities of interracial relationships, Chinese gay men exhibit agency in shaping their romantic lives according to their own values and desires.

For Xiao, marriage wasn't just a declaration of love; it was a strategic move aimed at protecting himself from a society that too often fails to recognize or respect his identity:

"Marriage is supposed to be a celebration of love and commitment. But for me, it became a strategic move—a means of protecting myself from the harsh realities of a society that often fails to understand or accept people like me. When I made the decision to do this (marry a woman), it wasn't out of convenience or deceit. It was a survival tactic—a way to shield myself from the scrutiny and judgment of those who would seek to tear me down. It's not the life I imagined for myself, but it's the life I

chose in order to preserve my safety and sanity in a world that can be cruel and unforgiving."

By recognizing the agency inherent in these decisions, we move away from viewing Chinese gay men solely as victims of circumstance. Instead, we acknowledge their resilience and empowerment, highlighting their capacity to navigate complex social dynamics and assert their identities in the face of adversity. This recognition not only honors their experiences but also underscores the importance of agency in fostering psychological well-being and personal fulfillment

### ***The Interplay of Chinese Heritage and Resilience in Spain***

In the intricate tapestry of their lives in Spain, participants frequently turned to their 'Chinese-ness' and ethnocultural backgrounds as sources of resilience in the face of daily challenges. The fusion of cultural and familial values served as a robust foundation, empowering them to confront and overcome various hurdles.

For many participants, cultural and familial values acted as guiding lights, illuminating pathways through adversity. The rich tapestry of Chinese customs provided not only a sense of identity but also a source of strength. Drawing on traditions, they found solace and determination to navigate the complexities of being both Chinese and gay in a foreign land. In this regard, Chen shared his experience, stating:

"I've noticed a cultural distinction. Western values often prioritize individualism, while in Asian cultures, the emphasis lingers on familial and societal ties. It shapes our approach—

perhaps more resilient, quietly persevering through challenges, adapting, and moving forward.”

The participants' narratives reflected a transformative process wherein challenges were not merely obstacles but opportunities for growth. The values instilled within the Chinese family system encouraged resilience, prompting them to view difficulties as catalysts for personal development. Peng viewed through the lens of family values, illustrating a resilient and adaptable mindset:

“Growing up gay in a society that sometimes doesn't quite get it, you face challenges. But in my family, we've learned to turn those challenges into stepping stones. It's like my grandma used to say, 'Every storm runs out of rain.' So, you face the struggles head-on, finding strength and growth in being true to yourself.”

While honoring cultural traditions, participants adeptly balanced their individual identities, finding a unique blend that resonated with both their Chinese heritage and their identity as gay individuals. This delicate equilibrium allowed them to navigate challenges with a sense of authenticity and purpose. Eric shared insights on navigating the intersection of Chinese tradition and individual identity:

“Being gay in a traditional Chinese setting? It's a dance between honoring where you come from and embracing who you are. It's like my family's traditional tune meets my unique beats. When they questioned my choices, it wasn't a clash; it was a chance for me to blend tradition with my individuality, creating a unique harmony that defines who I

am as a gay individual. The challenges make the journey richer, shaping not just me but the narrative of our family”.

In essence, the 'Chinese-ness' embedded in their daily lives became a source of empowerment, enabling participants to confront, transcend, and even redefine the challenges encountered in their journey as gay individuals in Spain.



## Chapter 5 Conclusions

As we delve deeper into the intersections explored in this chapter, we navigate beyond the superficial to explore the personal journeys of Chinese gay men in Spain grappling with societal expectations, personal desires, and the pursuit of acceptance. This exploration goes beyond mere identities, delving into the societal structures that both shape and are shaped by the diverse lives within this community.

This study serves as a poignant exploration into the lives of Spain-based Chinese gay men, offering nuanced insights into their experiences. While illuminating the challenges and triumphs within this community, it also acts as a catalyst for future research and societal introspection. As these narratives unfold, they invite broader dialogue on inclusivity and acceptance, transcending academia into societal conversations. Beyond its academic contribution, this PhD dissertation advocates for a more empathetic and understanding society, one that celebrates the rich diversity encapsulated in the narratives of Spain's Chinese gay community.

Following this, I will address the main conclusions: Migrating for a (sexual) reason, Seeking Belonging, Confronting Racism within the Spanish LGBTQ+ Community, Navigating Coming out (or not) while being Chinese, and Working things out. Then, I will focus on the implications.

## 5.1 Discussion of the Findings

### *Migrating for a (sexual) reason*

The migration experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain constitute a multifaceted journey that intricately weaves together the dynamics of sexuality and identity negotiation. Participant narratives unveil a transformative process wherein challenges are viewed not as impediments but as opportunities for personal growth, resonating with values deeply embedded in the Chinese family system.

Escaping the confines of heteronormative societies becomes a pivotal element in this migration narrative, echoing the sentiments explored by Sandibel Borges (2015) and Floya Anthias (2014) in their research on identity negotiation during migration. The migration experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain unfold as a complex tapestry, intertwining themes of sexuality and identity negotiation. Participant narratives reveal a transformative process wherein challenges are viewed not as impediments but as opportunities for personal growth, resonating with values deeply embedded in the Chinese family system.

The migration experience allows these individuals to redefine their sexual identities within the cultural context of their host country, affording them the freedom to navigate and express their sexuality beyond the constraints of their country of origin. Similar results were voiced by certain Chinese gay men in this study, aligning with consistent findings observed in other ethnic minority populations (Cortés, 2023; Jaspal, 2012; Choubak, 2014). Return migration introduces a distinctive chapter, bringing forth new challenges and discoveries. Participants grapple with the intersection of evolving sexual identities against the backdrop of

a changing Chinese society. The narratives depict a nuanced engagement with cultural shifts, highlighting perceptions of sexuality influenced by evolving norms and expectations in their homeland.

This intricate process of adapting and negotiating personal and cultural values underscores the dynamic impact of migration on sexuality, as explored by Han (2017) in their examination of the fluid nature of sexual identity in cross-cultural contexts. As these individuals navigate migration, their stories resonate with resilience and adaptability rooted in Chinese cultural values. Challenges are embraced as transformative opportunities, illustrating a mindset that harmonizes tradition with individual identity, echoing Mao et al. (2002) exploration of cultural adaptation and resilience among Chinese migrants. Furthermore, the negotiation of sexual identities within a foreign culture suggests a nuanced interaction between individual agency and the impact of societal expectations, aligning with the discourse on the negotiation of sexual identity in diasporic communities (Farahani, 2010). In summary, the intertwining threads of sexuality and migration dynamics weave a narrative transcending geographical boundary, offering a profound glimpse into the complex journey of identity negotiation among Chinese gay men in Spain.

### ***Seeking Belonging***

Navigating racial identities in Spain presented complexities for participants, echoing broader challenges faced by ethnic minorities in diasporic settings. Research by Gyberg et al. (2019) emphasizes the multifaceted nature of identity negotiation, suggesting that individuals often grapple with conflicting aspects of their identity when situated in a new cultural

context. Similar findings were also reported by Rodríguez-García (2019) who studied on ethnoracially mixed descendants in Catalonia, Spain, which underscore the complexities individuals face in navigating mixed identity, particularly when their outer characteristics align or deviate from the native majority population. This research aligns with the understanding that individuals often grapple with conflicting aspects of their identity when situated in a new cultural context, providing valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of identity experiences among diverse populations.

Encounters with racism and discrimination within the broader Spanish society underscored challenges consistent with findings in studies on the experiences of other minority groups. Agudelo-Suárez et al. (2009) highlight the pervasive nature of discrimination in Spanish societies, with ethnic minorities frequently facing systemic barriers. The participants' narratives align with this research, demonstrating the universal nature of challenges related to racism and discrimination encountered by the Chinese diaspora in Spain. Research by Agudelo-Suárez et al. (2009) investigates the impact of discrimination on the health of Spain's immigrant population. The findings underscore the importance of integration policies, recognition of labor and social rights, and further research into individual and social factors influencing the health of immigrant populations. The findings by René (2015) reveal that reports of nationality-based discrimination decrease over time in Spain due to cultural assimilation, while race gains prominence as the primary explanation for discrimination experiences, particularly among second-generation immigrants. This research contributes to understanding the evolving nature of symbolic boundaries and the salience of

racial factors in the immigrant experience, aligning with the complex interplay of identity and discrimination observed in the study's findings.

Perceptions of racism influencing participants' sense of belonging and integration resonate with the broader discourse on the impact of racism on immigrant communities. Berry and Sabatier (2009) argue that perceived discrimination can significantly affect individuals' integration into a new society. The participants' experiences align with this research, highlighting the interconnectedness between perceptions of racism and the broader socio-cultural adaptation of Chinese gay men in Spain.

In their exploration of cultural adaptation, the participants confront challenges related to language proficiency and social norms. This intersection of migration and racial identity underscores the complexities of adapting to a new cultural milieu while grappling with the racial dynamics at play. The sense of belonging becomes a central theme, with Chinese gay men seeking acceptance and understanding in a society that sometimes perceives them through the lens of racial stereotypes.

A study conducted by Zlobina et al. (2004) delves into the cultural clash and its role in the adaptation of foreign immigrants in Spain. Through qualitative and quantitative methods, the perceived cultural differences between immigrants from various cultural backgrounds. The findings unveiled underlying dimensions of cultural clash perception and concludes with practical recommendations serving as guides or orientations for intercultural communication, offering valuable insights for understanding the challenges faced by Chinese gay men navigating cultural differences in Spain. Another research by Liu (2015) investigates cross-cultural adaptation among various segments of the Chinese community in Spain, and it

revealed that socioeconomic status and generation significantly impact acculturation mode, with close ties between acculturation mode and socio-cultural adaptation competence.

Marginalized immigrants struggle with dual identification and fear return adaptation challenges in a rapidly changing China. The assimilated group, primarily second-generation individuals of higher socioeconomic origin, indicates a trend towards increased identification with the host culture. The study concludes by recommending practical measures for effective guidance to facilitate the integration of the Chinese community into Spanish society.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by the participants in this study resonate with broader trends observed in the immigrant experience. The intersectionality of race and migration adds layers of complexity to their journey, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches in addressing the multifaceted nature of identity and belonging within the Spanish cultural landscape.

### ***Confronting Racism within the Spanish LGBTQ+ Community***

In the realm where race intersects with sexuality, the participants' stories weave a complex tapestry of experiences, revealing the distinctive hurdles encountered by Chinese gay men in Spain. Their accounts offer insights into the complex interplay between racial and sexual identities, revealing the intricate dynamics within the broader LGBTQ+ community and society at large.

Negotiating racial identities in the context of their sexuality presents intricate complexities for the participants. This corresponds with previous research emphasizing the difficulties encountered by individuals navigating the intersection of race and sexual

orientation. Research, exemplified by Gerard Coll-Planas (2022), underscores biases present in sexual and gender diversity policies in Catalonia, Spain, specifically addressing the intersection of cultural and religious diversity. The participants' narratives resonate with the broader theme of race-based stereotypes and racism within the LGBTQ+ community. This echoes findings from Shield (2018), which illuminate the prevalence of racial biases and discrimination within gay communities.

Chinese gay men participating in this study expressed sentiments of rejection and exclusion within the mainstream. These feelings of exclusion manifest in various ways, including direct or indirect encounters with sexual racism in gay venues and online spaces. Additionally, participants reported experiences of being sexually objectified based on their skin color or ethnicity, coupled with the imposition of various sexual stereotypes. The participants grapple with race-related stereotypes and the objectification associated with fetishization, highlighting the intricate interplay of their experiences. This observation is consistent with earlier research that points to instances of sexual racism faced by gay men of color within gay communities (Han et al., 2015; Ruez, 2016).

Chinese gay men face the intricate task of navigating racial identities in Spain, where stereotypes perpetuate preconceived notions. These stereotypes contribute to the objectification, fantasy, and fetishization of these individuals. Research has consistently demonstrated that racial bias affects individuals' experiences in the realm of sexuality, reflecting broader societal issues. A study by Bostwick et al. (2014) found that people of color, including those in the LGBTQ+ community, frequently face discrimination based on racial preferences. Similarly, the work of Yan (2014) highlights how racial bias permeates

dating preferences and contributes to the marginalization of certain racial groups. These studies collectively support the finding that individuals, including the participants in this study, often contend with the impact of others' racial preferences on their experiences in the realm of sexuality.

In the narratives shared by participants, the impact of racial bias extends into the realm of online gay sex and dating apps. The virtual space, while providing a platform for connection, also serves as a mirror reflecting the prevalent issue of sexual racism. Interestingly, distinctions emerge when comparing the visibility of racism in offline versus online spaces. Offline encounters often manifest as subtle feelings of undesirability linked to ethnicity, with participants describing a sensed rather than overt discrimination.

However, the online sphere presents a stark contrast. Participants engaging with dating apps frequently encountered explicit forms of racism, such as profiles boldly stating "No Asians". Additionally, exchanges within these platforms included disheartening messages expressing disinterest based solely on ethnic backgrounds, with users stating phrases like "I'm not into Asians, it's just my personal preference" These experiences parallel findings by Robinson (2015) and Dhoest (2016), who contend that gay men of color commonly face racial prejudice in online spaces. The use of racialized language becomes a tool to enact and perpetuate discriminatory attitudes in these virtual environments.

Beyond the online realm, participants also recounted instances of discrimination and marginalization in offline settings. These included experiences of being excluded from social gatherings, facing microaggressions in the workplace, and encountering stereotypical assumptions about their cultural background and sexual orientation. These findings



underscore the pervasive nature of racial prejudice and its impact on the personal journeys of Chinese gay men in Spain. Despite progress in some areas, systemic racism continues to shape social interactions and perpetuate inequalities within broader society.

This contrast between subtle offline biases and overt online racism highlights the complex challenges encountered by Chinese gay men in Spain. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that there is a continuum between online and offline behavior rather than a clear dichotomy. The discriminatory attitudes and biases expressed in virtual spaces often mirror and reinforce those prevalent in physical environments. For example, the racial preferences articulated on dating apps may reflect broader societal norms and stereotypes regarding attractiveness and desirability. Similarly, the microaggressions and exclusionary behaviors experienced offline may find their roots in the same underlying prejudices perpetuated online. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the interconnectedness between online and offline realms and address discrimination comprehensively, considering how attitudes and behaviors in one domain may influence and exacerbate those in the other. This underscores the importance of addressing not only overt forms of discrimination but also the deeply ingrained, sometimes imperceptible biases that shape their experiences in both physical and virtual realms.

In summary, the intersection of race and sexuality for Chinese gay men in Spain is a multifaceted terrain marked by unique challenges and opportunities. Understanding and addressing these complexities are imperative for fostering inclusivity and creating supportive environments that embrace the diversity within the LGBTQ+ community.

### *Coming out (or not) while being Chinese*

This section unravels the multifaceted challenges participants encounter in their daily lives, offering a nuanced understanding of their struggles and the resilience they exhibit in the face of adversity. The narratives highlight the participants' endeavors to adapt to Spanish society, showcasing the dynamics of negotiating between their Chinese identity and the intricacies of a foreign cultural landscape. The process of cultural assimilation, coupled with the pursuit of a sense of belonging, becomes a central theme in their stories.

The participants' journeys in coming out to their families unfold as a crucial aspect of their experiences. It underscores the complexities of the coming out process, exploring the participants' struggles, fears, and motivations. The key findings indicate that Chinese gay men encounter considerable challenges when revealing their sexual identity, both in familial settings and at their work. The predominant obstacles to coming out arise from apprehensions about rejection, the risk of bringing shame to the family, and worries about negatively impacting their professional growth. Although there is a strong desire to be honest with parents and other family members, many choose to conceal their sexual identity as a strategic approach to avoid stigma within the family and protect them from societal judgment. This tactic of remaining silent is similarly applied in professional environments to navigate potential hostility and bias.

These findings align with previous research that highlights how cultural and societal influences can create additional challenges for gay individuals when revealing their sexual orientation to their families. A study by Joseph R. Merighi and Marty D. Grimes (2000) investigated the process of young gay men disclosing their sexual identity to family members

and explores the responses they receive. The findings indicate commonalities in how these individuals across different racial and ethnic groups come out to their families and the subsequent responses they encounter. Worries about experiencing discrimination and being rejected were common obstacles to coming out. Specifically, many individuals from Asian backgrounds expressed fears of not meeting their parents' expectations concerning marriage and family. These concerns reflect the experiences of Chinese gay men in this research and align with observations among other minority groups (Quinn & Dickson-Gomez, 2018; Bhugra, 1997; Jaspal, 2012). Furthermore, studies indicate that views on homosexuality remain conservative in various regions of Asia, including specific areas known for traditional beliefs. Hence, the caution observed among the participants in this research regarding coming out is in line with these broader cultural contexts. Thus, the hesitance displayed by participants in this study about revealing their sexual identity aligns with these broader cultural contexts, further supporting the conclusions of this research.

A noteworthy aspect of this PhD dissertation lies in its in-depth exploration of the complex considerations that Chinese gay men grapple with when contemplating the act of coming out. The significance of this decision is magnified by the potential and substantial impact it could wield on their families, especially concerning how their parents would navigate this revelation. Participants expressed genuine concerns about the possible negative repercussions of the prevalent stigma attached to homosexuality in Chinese societies, fearing its toll on their parents' well-being and the family's societal standing. The deeply ingrained concept of 'losing face' in Chinese cultures, as elucidated by Ren, Howe, and Zhang (2018), adds an extra layer of complexity. Individuals, motivated by the imperative of fulfilling social

obligations and upholding filial piety, strive diligently to avoid the stigma associated with deviating from societal norms.

In navigating the intricate terrain of their lives, participants in this study often found themselves constructing a flexible existence, a delicate equilibrium born out of the interplay between the pressures of societal expectations, particularly in the realm of marriage, and the fulfillment of their same-sex desires. Faced with formidable marital pressures, these individuals embarked on a nuanced journey, eschewing explicit coming-out conversations with their parents. Instead, they opted for a more subtle strategy, a phenomenon called "xinghun" (contract marriage), seeking to strike a harmonious balance between meeting parental expectations and satisfying their inherent same-sex needs. My findings are coherent with numerous other studies that have reported this phenomenon, research by Niu (2017) underscored Chinese gay men navigate this complex landscape through dynamic strategies, including "keeping silent about one's sexual identity" and engaging in "xinghun" (refers to a practice where LGBTQ+ individuals enter into arranged or contractual marriages with members of the opposite sex) as a compromise. These strategies serve as a negotiation between traditional family obligations and the pursuit of a queer life deemed "tolerable." Chou's (2001) "Coming Home" approach, which highlights familial piety and the concealment of queer desires, provides a decolonial reaction to the global circulation of coming out discourse. On the other hand, Huang and Brouwer's (2018) "Coming With" model captures the challenges faced by Chinese queers in distancing themselves from the family institution, presenting an alternative to the nationalist impulse.

The participants in this PhD dissertation, recognizing the potential tension between their same-sex identity and societal expectations, chose to tread a path of compromise, in accordance to their cultural Chinese heritage. This path, while challenging, allowed them to navigate the complex terrain of marriage expectations without sacrificing their own happiness entirely. It underscores the intricate negotiations individuals engage in when societal norms clash with their authentic selves, leading to the crafting of a life that accommodates both familial expectations and personal fulfillment.

The navigation of support networks emerges as a crucial theme for the participants. These networks prove to be lifelines for Chinese gay men in Spain, especially in the absence of traditional familial structures. The participants reveal a multifaceted approach to building support networks that extend beyond the confines of the LGBTQ+ community. Drawing strength from friendships outside the LGBTQ+ circles, the participants emphasize the significance of allies who may not share their sexual orientation but provide essential practical and emotional support. The narratives echo a sentiment that true friendships transcend boundaries, reflecting a broader human connection that aids in overcoming the challenges of living in a foreign land. Within the LGBTQ+ community, the concept of "Quanzi" or the gay social circle takes center stage. This circle becomes more than just a social space; it evolves into a platform for genuine self-expression, shared experiences, and mutual understanding.

### *Working things out*

Amidst the myriad challenges faced by Chinese gay men in Spain, the process of "working things out" becomes a testament to resilience and adaptability. The participants navigate a delicate balance between cultural expectations, personal desires, and the pragmatic realities of their lives. The intricate dance of concealing a gay sexual identity, especially in the familial and workplace domains, is a strategic choice made by these individuals. The fear of stigma and potential repercussions drives a conscious decision to work within the confines of societal norms, reflecting a nuanced negotiation between personal authenticity and cultural expectations.

The outcomes of my research support Gock's earlier hypothesis (2001), which proposes that individuals navigating conflicts between their cultural backgrounds and sexual identities often adopt a strategy of prioritizing one identity over the other. This process involves prioritizing one identity over the other based on contextual considerations. Chinese gay men in this research show a preference for their cultural identity rather than their sexual identity, particularly in familial and professional contexts, strategically navigating these situations for perceived benefits. Instead of completely rejecting their sexual identity in these environments, they compartmentalize it. Conversely, in different situations, they may prioritize their sexual identity over their cultural background.

The participants employ diverse coping mechanisms to address the challenges encountered. From maintaining silence about their sexual identity to entering into 'xinghun' or contract marriages, these strategies serve as adaptive measures, allowing individuals to lead what they perceive as a "tolerable" queer life within the cultural context. In essence, "working

things out" becomes a dynamic process of negotiation, compromise, and, above all, survival. It underscores the agency of Chinese gay men in creating spaces that accommodate their identities within the intricate web of cultural expectations and personal aspirations. The findings underscore the need for nuanced approaches in understanding the challenges and resilience of individuals at the intersection of multiple identities. By exploring the lived experiences of Chinese gay men, this study contributes to a broader understanding of migration and sexuality within diverse cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in addressing the needs of these communities.

## **5.2 Implications**

The narratives shared by Chinese gay men in Spain reverberate beyond individual experiences, carrying significant social and cultural implications. Their stories contribute valuable insights into the intersectionality of migration, sexuality, and cultural identity, shaping a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and triumphs faced by this unique demographic. By delving into the personal narratives of these individuals, this study serves as a bridge of understanding between different cultural spheres. The vivid accounts of challenges and resilience humanize the experiences of Chinese gay men, fostering empathy and challenging preconceptions. This increased awareness has the potential to dismantle stereotypes and contribute to a more inclusive societal fabric.

The narratives highlight the tension between traditional expectations and the quest for authentic self-expression. These challenges prevail heteronormative assumptions not only within the Chinese diaspora but also in broader societal contexts. It underscores the

importance of acknowledging diverse expressions of sexuality and the need for societies to evolve in embracing these differences.

These stories offer a unique opportunity for cultural exchange, fostering a deeper appreciation for the diverse tapestry of human experiences. Engaging with the intersectionality of Chinese and LGBTQ+ identities encourages dialogue and mutual respect. It creates spaces where cultural norms can be examined, questioned, and ultimately enriched by the diversity within the LGBTQ+ community.

These narratives contribute to a more comprehensive global perspective on migration and LGBTQ+ experiences. As stories transcend borders, they connect individuals from different corners of the world, fostering a shared understanding of the universal quest for acceptance, love, and self-realization. In essence, the social and cultural impact of this study lies in its potential to foster empathy, challenge societal norms, promote cultural exchange, inspire collective action, and contribute to a more interconnected and inclusive global society.

### ***Safe Space for Gay Chinese Men***

In exploring the implications for community support, the study underscores the critical role that tailored initiatives can play in enhancing the well-being of Chinese gay men as they navigate the intricate intersections of race, identity, and migration in Spain. Central to this is the recognition that community support extends beyond mere acknowledgment of shared identities; it involves the development of proactive strategies that address the multifaceted challenges faced by this demographic.



One prominent recommendation is the establishment of cultural centers and safe spaces explicitly designed to meet the unique needs of Chinese gay men. These spaces should function as more than physical locations; they should embody a sense of community and serve as platforms for shared experiences, mutual support, and the celebration of both Chinese and LGBTQ+ identities. This approach recognizes the importance of creating environments where individuals can authentically express themselves while fostering a collective spirit.

Mentorship programs emerge as a significant avenue for providing guidance and support to Chinese gay men, particularly those who are newer to the community or the country. By connecting experienced individuals with newcomers, these programs can facilitate a smoother integration process, offering insights into cultural nuances, local LGBTQ+ dynamics, and emotional support. The mentorship model acknowledges the value of shared experiences and emphasizes the importance of intergenerational connections within the community.

Language and cultural exchange initiatives further contribute to community cohesion by fostering interaction between Chinese gay men and the broader LGBTQ+ community in Spain. These programs are not only about breaking linguistic barriers but also about building bridges of understanding. Through such exchanges, stereotypes can be dispelled, and mutual appreciation can be cultivated, contributing to a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Online support platforms are recognized as crucial components of the community support landscape, but also a space for hate speech. These digital spaces provide avenues for individuals to connect, share experiences, and seek advice, especially valuable for those in

more remote or isolated locations. Strengthening these platforms ensures that community support is not constrained by geographical boundaries, fostering a sense of unity and shared identity.

Collaborative events that celebrate both Chinese and LGBTQ+ cultures offer tangible opportunities for community engagement. These gatherings can spark cultural expression, encourage artistic exploration, and facilitate the building of connections. By embracing and highlighting the diversity of identities, these events contribute to cultivating a sense of pride and belonging within the community.

Educational workshops form another key pillar of community support, addressing the intersectionality of identities. Sessions focusing on navigating dual cultural influences, understanding diverse sexualities, and promoting mental health are integral to empowering individuals within the community. Education becomes a tool for dismantling stereotypes, fostering inclusivity, and promoting overall well-being.

Participation in LGBTQ+ advocacy and representation is encouraged as a means for community members to actively contribute to broader discussions on LGBTQ+ rights. By empowering individuals to be vocal advocates, the community can challenge stereotypes, promote inclusivity, and assert its presence within the broader LGBTQ+ movement.

Lastly, fostering intersectional support networks is imperative for recognizing and addressing the unique challenges arising from the intersection of race, sexuality, and migration. By creating targeted assistance programs, these networks acknowledge the multifaceted nature of individuals' identities, providing specific resources and support mechanisms.

### *Academic Implications*

In considering the academic contributions of this PhD Dissertation, several key facets emerge that contribute to the broader landscape of LGBTQ+ and migration research. The intersectional lens through which the experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain are examined adds nuance to our understanding of the intricate dynamics between race, sexuality, and migration.

It is imperative to underscore the unique methodological approach employed—constructivist grounded theory. This methodological choice represents a distinctive contribution to the research landscape, providing a nuanced lens through which to explore the intersectionality of race, sexuality, and migration among Chinese gay men in Spain. The adoption of constructivist grounded theory allowed for an in-depth examination of the participants' narratives, facilitating the construction of a theory that emerged from the data itself. This methodological stance aligns with the constructivist paradigm, emphasizing the co-creation of knowledge between the researcher and the participants. By acknowledging the active role of both parties in shaping the research outcomes, the study contributes to methodological pluralism within the field of LGBTQ+ migration research.

Moreover, the use of constructivist grounded theory inherently recognizes the fluid and dynamic nature of identity construction. It allows for a more flexible and context-dependent understanding of how individuals navigate and negotiate their identities within the complex interplay of migration, race, and sexuality. This methodological choice serves as a beacon for researchers seeking to unravel the intricate layers of identity within the broader LGBTQ+ migration discourse.

Furthermore, the study extends the discourse on the diasporic experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals by emphasizing the significance of cultural and familial dimensions. By unpacking the intricate negotiations Chinese gay men undertake to reconcile their ethnic and sexual identities, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in the diasporic LGBTQ+ experience.

### **5.3 Strengths and Limitations**

The study's distinctive contribution lies in its pioneering exploration of the lives of Spain-based Chinese gay men. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first comprehensive study to delve into the nuanced experiences of this particular demographic. By filling this crucial gap in existing research, the study not only expands scholarly understanding but also provides a platform for amplifying the voices of an often-overlooked community.

The adoption of constructivist grounded theory as the methodological framework is a noteworthy strength. This approach facilitated an in-depth and iterative analysis, allowing themes and patterns to emerge organically from the participants' narratives. The iterative nature of the study ensures a holistic understanding of the complexities of the intersection between race, sexuality, and migration dynamics.

A distinctive feature of the study is its commitment to an intersectional perspective. Recognizing and exploring the intricate interconnections between race, sexuality, and migration adds depth to the analysis. This approach enriches the study by capturing the multifaceted nature of the participants' identities and experiences.

The qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews contribute to the richness and texture of the study. The depth of the narratives allows for a comprehensive exploration of the challenges, resilience, and adaptive strategies employed by Chinese gay men in the Spanish context.

The study's participant diversity further strengthens its validity. Encompassing a varied group based on factors such as age, socioeconomic background, and length of stay in Spain, the diversity enhances the richness of the data. This comprehensive approach contributes to a nuanced understanding of the experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain.

In summary, the study stands as a pioneering effort, not only in shedding light on the lives of Spain-based Chinese gay men but also in its methodological rigor and commitment to intersectionality. This research is set to significantly enrich academic discourse, providing valuable insights that not only address the specific context but also contribute to broader conversations about the intersections of race, sexuality, and migration.

Nonetheless, a few limitations inherent to this study should be acknowledged. The study acknowledges the limitation associated with the sample size, which, while providing rich and diverse narratives, may not fully represent the heterogeneity within the Spain-based Chinese gay community. Additionally, the recruitment process might have inadvertently favored participants who were more comfortable sharing their experiences, potentially overlooking those with different perspectives.

Furthermore, the intersectional identity of being both Chinese and gay poses a unique challenge in recruitment. The study recognizes that individuals who identify with both of these characteristics might be more challenging to locate and engage. Consequently, the

findings may not capture the experiences of those who chose not to participate or who were not accessible through the chosen recruitment channels. In addition, the majority of participants were well-educated and residing in urban centers, potentially skewing the findings towards a more urban and educated demographic. This bias may limit the generalizability of the study's conclusions to a broader spectrum of the Spain-based Chinese gay population, including those in rural areas or with different educational backgrounds. The specific context of Spain, the socio-cultural dynamics, and the unique experiences of Chinese gay men in this location may limit the applicability of the findings to other geographical and cultural settings. Care should be taken when extending the study's conclusions beyond the Spanish context.

The research recognizes the potential influence of cultural sensitivity on participants' responses. Despite efforts to create a safe and open environment, cultural factors may have led some participants to share or withhold certain aspects of their experiences. The study acknowledges the inherent challenge of fully capturing the intricacies of cultural nuances.

Another notable limitation of this study is the predominantly young age of the participants, ranging from 20 to 36 years old. This demographic skew might affect the generalizability of the findings, as younger individuals may have different perspectives and experiences compared to older age groups. For instance, younger participants may be more comfortable with digital platforms like dating apps, which could influence their experiences with self-expression and coming out. On the other hand, older participants may offer unique insights shaped by their distinct life experiences and cultural contexts. While younger individuals may feel empowered to embrace their identities in today's more accepting society,

it's essential not to overlook the perspectives of older generations. Future research could benefit from including a more diverse range of age groups, including older participants aged 45 and above, to capture a broader spectrum of experiences and insights.

While it can be considered as a limitation, the researcher's identity as a gay individual of Chinese descent can be also understood as a strength for the research. From the election of the research topic, the entrance in the field and trust from interviewees, as well as being able to observe firsthand many of the phenomena described by the participants, are facts that must be taken into consideration. From a more positivistic perspective, it can be considered that this positionality may introduce bias, both conscious and unconscious, into the study, influencing data collection, interpretation, and analysis.

In addition, the study's findings are situated within a specific temporal context. Cultural attitudes, legal frameworks, and societal perceptions can evolve. Consequently, the study's conclusions may not fully capture the experiences of Spain-based Chinese gay men in future years. Acknowledging these limitations is crucial for a nuanced understanding of the study's scope and implications. These considerations should guide future research endeavors to address these gaps and enhance the depth and breadth of knowledge in this field.

#### **5.4 Recommendation for the future research**

As we navigate the complex terrain of Spain-based Chinese gay men's experiences, it becomes evident that the exploration is but a glimpse into a multifaceted reality. To further unravel the intricacies of their lives, it is imperative to chart a course for future research that not only deepens the understanding but also broadens the scope of inquiry. The following

recommendations outline promising avenues for researchers to embark upon, each offering a unique lens to illuminate the diverse facets of this vibrant community's existence. In charting these territories, I aim not only to fill gaps in knowledge but to foster a richer, more inclusive dialogue that resonates with the varied narratives within the Spain-based Chinese gay experience.

Future research could delve deeper into the intersectionality of identities, considering how factors such as age, class and socioeconomic status, and regional differences intersect with being Chinese and gay in the Spanish context. This nuanced exploration would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences within this community.

Comparative studies between the experiences of Spain-based Chinese gay men and those in other European countries or regions, as well as other Chinese communities, could provide valuable insights into how varying cultural, legal, and social contexts influence their lives. This approach would contribute to a broader understanding of the impact of migration on the experiences of this community.

Another important aspect to consider in future research is the diversity within the Chinese community itself. It would be valuable to delve into the differences between various subgroups within this population, including those who have grown up in Spain, recent migrants from China, and Chinese individuals who have been adopted into Spanish families. Exploring the unique experiences and challenges faced by each subgroup could provide valuable insights into the intersections of cultural identity, migration, and sexual orientation. For instance, examining the acculturation processes of Chinese individuals who have grown



up in Spain compared to those who have migrated later in life could shed light on how different socialization contexts influence their perceptions of cultural identity and experiences of belonging. Furthermore, understanding the experiences of Chinese adoptees within Spanish families could offer insights into the complexities of identity formation and family dynamics in transnational contexts.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking the experiences of Spain-based Chinese gay men over an extended period would offer a dynamic perspective on their lives. This approach could capture changes in societal attitudes, legal frameworks, and individual experiences, providing a more nuanced understanding of the evolving challenges and opportunities.

In addition, future research should strive for more inclusive representation by actively seeking participants from diverse backgrounds, including those in rural areas, with different educational levels, and varied socioeconomic statuses. This would enhance the applicability of the findings and provide a more thorough representation of the Chinese gay community in Spain.

As digital spaces play a growing role in shaping social interactions, future research could delve into the online experiences of Chinese gay men in Spain. By adopting a digital ethnography approach, researchers can explore the intricacies of their virtual lives, capturing the unique ways they navigate online environments. This approach would allow for an examination of how various online platforms facilitate social connections, foster support networks, and influence their personal identities in a multicultural context. Understanding

these dynamics can provide valuable insights into how digital interactions complement or challenge their lived experiences within broader societal frameworks.

These recommendations aim to guide future research endeavors, fostering a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the personal experiences of Chinese men who identify as gay residing in Spain and contributing to the broader discourse on migration, sexuality, and identity.

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## Appendix 1: Participant Recruitment Poster

### Se necesitan participantes

#### 采访者要求

¿Eres un hombre chino mayor de 18 años que se identifica como gay?

年满 18 岁的华人（地区不限中国大陆）并且自我认同性取向为非异性恋的男性

Si es así, ¿estaría dispuesto a participar en una entrevista confidencial de 90 minutos (aproximadamente) en un entorno privado sobre sus experiencias de ser chino y gay aquí en España?

采访时间不超过 90 分钟，地点为线上或者线下私密场合，采访主题关于作为在西班牙的性少数群体华人，你有哪些经历

Soy un estudiante de doctorado que cursa un programa de Antropología en la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, España. Estoy realizando una investigación sobre la vida de los hombres homosexuales chinos sobre sus experiencias de la vida diaria y cómo estas experiencias facilitan o dificultan la identidad positiva y el bienestar. Ejemplos de experiencias de la vida diaria incluyen: cómo es para ti vivir como chino en España; su(s) experiencia(s) de salir del clóset ante familiares, amigos o compañeros de trabajo; su participación o no participación en la comunidad 'gay'; amistades, citas y relaciones; sexo y salud sexual; bienestar físico y emocional; etc.

本人是巴塞罗那自治大学人类学在读博士，研究方向为在西班牙中国男同性恋者的生活经历，以及这些经历如何影响自我认同和日常生活的其他方面。

Si está interesado en participar en este estudio, puede ponerse en contacto conmigo en la dirección de correo electrónico o cuenta de redes sociales a continuación. Las entrevistas se



llevarán a cabo en un momento y lugar convenientes para usted y se grabarán en audio con el fin de transcribirlas.

如果你有兴趣参与这项研究，你可以通过下面的电子邮件地址或社交媒体账户 (WeChat, Instagram)与我联系。为方便研究采访内容可能会录音，我们会隐去您的姓名和其他可以定位到您的个人信息，并保证访谈结果只用于本研究

Tenga en cuenta que todas las entrevistas se realizarán en chino, español o inglés.

采访将以中文或西班牙文或英文进行 (采访者决定)。

Zihan Wang

王子涵

Email: [stefanozihan@gmail.com](mailto:stefanozihan@gmail.com)/[zihanwang2@e-campus.uab.cat](mailto:zihanwang2@e-campus.uab.cat)

## Appendix 2: Consent Form

### 知情同意书

尊敬的被试：

您好！我们诚挚的邀请您参加一项线上干预的研究。您需要仔细阅读知情同意书的所有内容。您的参加是完全自愿的，您对于本研究所有问题都得到满意答复后再确认同意本知情同意书，您可以随时选择退出该研究。您的所有信息将得到保密，请您在独立安静不受打扰的空间内参与本项目。

研究背景和目的：

本人是巴塞罗那自治大学人类学在读博士，研究方向为在西班牙中国男同性恋者的生活经历，以及这些经历如何影响自我认同和日常生活的其他方面。

被试招募信息：

本研究的招募对象为年满 18 岁自我认同为 LGBTQ+ 群体的男性，且目前或者最近 3 年生活在西班牙。

研究过程：

采访时间不超过 90 分钟，地点为线上或者线下私密场合，采访主题关于作为在西班牙的性少数群体华人的经历。

参与研究的要求：

- 1.如需要通过视频会议进行，请您打开视频和音频，保持网络通畅，保证空间的私密性，我们会保存讨论的音频；
- 2.在本次项目中，您所接受的任何资料都不能泄漏。

参加本研究的风险和权力：

本研究无明显的风险，如果您在干预中感到任何躯体或精神上的不适，可以随时终止，退出此项研究。您也可以在干预结束后随时要求退出本研究，与您有关的音频和文字资料也将会被销毁。

隐私和保密：

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紧急联系人：

如果您有任何与项目有关的问题，请联系：

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我已经仔细阅读并完全理解知情同意书的所有内容，自愿参加此研究，签字为证。

参与人签名：

日期：

## Appendix 3: Interview Guide

### Interview Guide

This guide has been developed based on principles for conducting interviews in constructivist grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2003). The presence of similar questions is intentional, as it provides the interviewer with the opportunity to revisit earlier discussions for additional insights or to eliminate questions that may be irrelevant or uncomfortable.

- What inspired you to get involved in this research project?
- Please share a bit about your background (e.g., your hometown, how long you've been in Spain, your work, and what brought you here).
- How would you characterize your experience as a Chinese individual in Spain?
- Can you describe any significant experiences you've had here, both good and challenging?
- Who are the most influential people in your life, and how do they support you?
- What aspects of your cultural identity do you feel are most prominent in your daily life?
- Have you encountered any challenges related to your identity since moving to Spain?
- In what ways do you feel your experiences here differ from your expectations before arriving?
- How do you personally identify in terms of your sexual orientation?
- What experiences or moments helped you understand your sexuality?
- Can you recall your feelings when you first encountered the concept of homosexuality?
- What was your first exposure to sexual education, and how did it impact you?
- Describe your first experience of intimacy. What emotions did it evoke?
- When did you first explore same-sex relationships, and how did that feel?
- What cultural or familial beliefs about sexuality influenced you growing up?
- Who do you confide in about your sexual orientation, and why did you choose them?
- What prompted you to come out, and how did you approach that process?
- What fears or concerns have you faced regarding coming out?
- What do you think would help others feel more comfortable coming out?
- Can you share your most meaningful relationship experiences? What made them special?
- How do you navigate dating as a gay man in your community?
- Have you found connections with individuals from different cultural backgrounds? What was that like?
- How do you engage with the LGBTQ+ community here in Spain?
- What has your experience been like at LGBTQ+ social events or venues?
- In what ways has living in Spain changed your view of yourself and your identity?
- What positive developments have occurred in your life since you embraced your identity?
- Have you faced any challenges or setbacks since coming out or being in a relationship?

- How do you cope with stress or adversity in your life?
- What aspects of your identity as a Chinese gay man bring you pride?
- Are there any societal pressures that make you feel uneasy about your identity?
- Reflecting on your journey, are there pivotal moments that shaped your understanding of yourself?
- What insights have you gained about life and relationships through your experiences?
- How has your perspective on love and relationships evolved since coming out?
- What personal growth have you experienced since acknowledging your identity?
- What strengths have you discovered in yourself throughout your journey?
- What guidance would you offer to someone from a similar background who is coming to terms with their sexuality?
- What aspirations do you have for your future, both personally and professionally?
- Did our conversation spark any new thoughts or reflections for you?
- Is there anything else you believe is crucial for me to understand about your experiences?
- Do you have any questions or topics you'd like to discuss further?

## Appendix 4: Demographic Data Form

### Información Demográfica

1. Fecha de Nacimiento: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Nombre a Usar en el Estudio: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Nacionalidad: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Idioma(s) hablado(s) en casa: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Nivel educativo más alto:
  - Secundaria
  - Licenciatura
  - Maestría
  - Doctorado
  - Otro (especificar): \_\_\_\_\_
6. Estado laboral actual:
  - Trabajo a tiempo completo
  - Trabajo a tiempo parcial
  - Estudiante a tiempo completo
  - Estudiante a tiempo parcial
  - Otro: \_\_\_\_\_
7. ¿En qué año emigraste/mudaste a España? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Estado actual de residencia:
  - Ciudadano
  - Residente permanente
  - Estudiante internacional (es decir, permiso de estudio)
  - Trabajador extranjero temporal (es decir, permiso de trabajo)
  - Otro: \_\_\_\_\_
9. País de origen: \_\_\_\_\_; Ciudad/Zona: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Estado Civil:
  - Soltero
  - En una relación
  - Casado
  - Divorciado
  - Viudo
  - Otro (especificar): \_\_\_\_\_
11. ¿Te gustaría recibir un resumen o informe final de este estudio? \_\_\_\_\_ (Sí o No)

## 受访者信息

1. 出生日期：\_\_\_\_\_
2. 在采访中希望使用的化名：\_\_\_\_\_
3. 国籍：\_\_\_\_\_
4. 在家中使用的语言：
5. 最高教育水平：
  - 高中
  - 本科学士学位
  - 研究生硕士学位
  - 博士学位
  - 其他（请具体说明）：\_\_\_\_\_
6. 当前就业状况：
  - 全职工作
  - 兼职工作
  - 全日制学生
  - 兼职学生
  - 其他：\_\_\_\_\_
7. 您何时移民/搬到西班牙？\_\_\_\_\_
8. 目前身份状态：
  - 西班牙公民
  - 永久居民
  - 国际学生（即学生签证）
  - 临时外国工作者（即工作签证）
  - 其他：\_\_\_\_\_
9. 出生地：\_\_\_\_\_；城市/地区：\_\_\_\_\_
10. 感情状况：
  - 单身
  - 恋爱中
  - 已婚
  - 离婚
  - 丧偶
  - 其他（请具体说明）：\_\_\_\_\_
11. 您是否希望收到本研究的摘要或最终报告？\_\_\_\_\_（是或否）