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Understanding Family Dynamics of
Chinese Migrants in Spain: Carework
Negotiations, Parenthood Experiences,
and Childbearing Decisions

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Una aproximación a la dinámica familiar
de migrantes chinos en España: arreglos
en el cuidado de los hijos, experiencias
de paternidad y decisiones reproductivas

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Abstract

Based on a large-scale ethnographic project of 105 semi-structured interviews, this thesis presents four studies of Chinese migrant family dynamics in Spain from three perspectives: carework negotiations, parenthood experiences, and childbearing decisions. The first two studies focus on the (re)construction of migrant families' carework strategies both within and across states. Specifically, Chapter 2 disentangles the complex interplay of cultural, economic and institutional factors related to migration that shaped Chinese parents' collaboration, negotiation, and even conflict over caregiving decisions across family generations. It highlights the importance of kinship as a resource for reconciling work and family life. Chapter 3 introduces the conceptual framework of (im)mobility regimes, and explores the impact of global mobility restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic on Chinese transnational migrants' family life. It finds that transnational families are deeply affected by and vulnerable to the immobility or highly conditional mobility produced by the pandemic, and that the disruptive life experiences caused by COVID-19 have raised awareness of the distance between migrant parents and led Chinese families to rethink their transnational parenting practices. Chapter 4 explores the father involvement, fathering practices and father-child relationships of Chinese migrant families in Spain. It shows that the changes brought about by migration, such as women's increased participation in the labour market and the growing demand for childcare, reshaped migrant fathering practices in the host country, as men began to seek new fathering practices beyond their traditional breadwinner role and to embrace a more involved caregiving fatherhood. Chapter 5 looks into the childbearing outcomes of young Chinese migrants, examining how women's singleton status and migrant motherhood experiences interact to influence women's fertility expectations and childbearing decisions in a new socio-cultural environment. The novel empirical findings of this thesis advance current knowledge of family dynamics among the Chinese population in Spain, and the qualitative research design contributes to the literature on how ethnicity, immigration, and family involvement affect the social integration of the ethnic community in the host society.

Resumen

El objetivo de esta tesis doctoral es analizar las dinámicas familiares de los inmigrantes chinos en España. Para ello, se abordan tres aspectos esenciales en la investigación mediante metodología cualitativa: la negociación sobre el cuidado de los hijos, la experiencia de paternidad y las decisiones reproductivas. Esta tesis se compone de cuatro estudios. Los primeros dos estudios se centran en la (re)construcción de las estrategias de cuidado infantil entre las familias inmigrantes. En concreto, el segundo capítulo explora los procesos de toma de decisiones de las familias chinas en términos del cuidado de niños en España, teniendo en cuenta el estatus migratorio y la disponibilidad de redes familiares. Los resultados muestran que las decisiones sobre el cuidado de los hijos por los padres inmigrantes chinos se negocian y elaboran estratégicamente en función de una interrelación de factores culturales, económicos y familiares, y destaca la importancia de las redes familiares como recurso para conciliar la vida laboral y familiar. El tercer capítulo introduce el marco conceptual de los regímenes de (in)movilidad y explora el impacto de las restricciones a la movilidad global relacionadas con la pandemia COVID-19 entre las familias chinas. Se observa que las familias se ven profundamente afectadas por la inmovilidad producida por la pandemia debido a la separación prolongada de sus hijos. Además, la incapacidad de proporcionar cuidados en el contexto de inmovilidad reconfiguró las percepciones de los padres sobre el cuidado transnacional y llevó a las familias a reflexionar sobre las estrategias respecto al cuidado de los niños. El cuarto capítulo explora la implicación paterna de las familias chinas en España. Los resultados muestran que los cambios provocados por la migración, como la mayor participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral y la creciente demanda de cuidado infantil, han modificado las prácticas de paternidad de los inmigrantes. Los padres empezaron a buscar nuevas prácticas de paternidad más allá de su papel tradicional de sostén de la familia y a adoptar una paternidad más implicada en el cuidado de los hijos. En el quinto capítulo se analizan las pautas reproductivas de las jóvenes inmigrantes chinas. Se examina cómo las responsabilidades familiares relacionadas con el hecho de ser hija única y las experiencias de maternidad en el contexto migratorio interactúan y afectan las expectativas reproductivas de las inmigrantes chinas en un nuevo entorno sociocultural. En general, esta tesis contribuye a la literatura sobre la etnia, la inmigración y la familia, y los novedosos resultados empíricos de este estudio contribuyen, a su vez, a la mejor comprensión de la dinámica familiar y el proceso de integración entre la comunidad inmigrante en España.

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Harsh Choices: Chinese migrant families' childcare strategies in Spain

Abstract

This study explores Chinese immigrant parents' decision-making processes regarding childcare arrangements in Spain based on migration status and the availability of kinship networks. Drawing on 33 in-depth interviews with Chinese parents who have preschool-aged children during the early stages of parenthood, this study reveals that Chinese immigrants' childcare management is largely based on informal childcare provided by extended family members in both the host society and home country due to its high quality and flexibility, and because it transfers cultural values to the second generation. Moreover, migrant parents'

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childcare needs are constantly negotiated within extended families due to the roles of grandparents' care in other family members' wellbeing. By exploring Chinese families' collaborations, negotiations, and even conflicts in the childrearing decision-making process following families' migration to a receiving country, our research contributes to a better understanding of the complexity of migration and the role of kinship networks in ethnic minority groups' childcare choices.

Keywords

Immigrant families, childcare, grandparents, Chinese community, Spain.

2.1 Introduction

Immigrant families' childcare strategies have attracted growing interest in recent years (Furfaro et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Santero & Naldini, 2017) because migrant families' access to childcare is more limited than that of local families (Bonizzoni, 2014; Song & yuan Dong, 2018), which can be explained in two ways. First, to a large extent, long working hours and inflexible working schedules after migration constrain migrants' childcare provision (Wall & Sao José, 2004). In particular, females' increased participation in the labour market and the absence of family support reduce migrant couples' ability to reconcile childcare and paid work in immigrant countries (Peng & Wong, 2016; Zamberletti et al., 2018). Second, studies show that compared to their native counterparts, migrants are more likely to be exposed to socioeconomic disadvantages such as unemployment (W. C. Ho & Cheung, 2012) and low earnings (Santero & Naldini, 2017). In addition, limited access to affordable, formal childcare services increases migrant families' economic costs in many countries, making it more difficult for them to manage childcare responsibilities (Del Boca et al., 2005). Therefore, extended family networks, particularly grandparents' support, become

crucial resources in combining parenthood and paid work among young migrant parents (Santero & Naldini, 2017).

However, migrant families' childcare arrangements can also vary across ethnic groups (Ryan et al., 2009; Wheelock & Jones, 2002) based on different migration patterns (Da, 2010; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009), culture-specific values (L. S. Liu, 2018), and the availability of social-support networks in immigrant countries (Furfaro et al., 2020). The literature suggests that Chinese immigrant families show a special preference for grandparents' provision of childcare (Ceccagno, 2007; Saiz Lopez, 2011), either by sending children back to China as a pattern of transnational parenthood (Salaff & Greve, 2004) or by hosting migrant grandparents for intensive childcare (Xie & Xia, 2011).

Nevertheless, few studies have provided in-depth analyses of this higher uptake of informal childcare among Chinese migrant families, which are crucial for understanding the impacts of migration and kinship networks on their childcare practices in immigrant countries. In this regard, Spain provides a particularly relevant setting to understand these outcomes, given that the growing number of immigrants from China in recent decades makes the Chinese community the largest Asian community in the country, characterised by family reunification (Plewa, 2020) and a high level of female labour-force participation (Badanta et al., 2020). However, similar to other southern European countries and Portugal, the Spanish welfare state is framed within the Mediterranean or familist model (Ferrera, 1996), while money transfers are not universal, thus providing insufficient public-childcare services. Therefore, the Spanish case results in a peculiar difficulty in achieving a work-life balance for Chinese immigrants' family members (Gandasegui et al., 2017). It is therefore crucial to gain insights into the strategies that Chinese immigrant families adopt to cope with work and family in a transnational setting with limited, formal childcare support.

To fill this gap, this study aims to explore Chinese immigrant parents' decision-making process regarding childcare arrangements in Spain based on migration status and the availability of kinship networks. We conducted 33 in-depth interviews with Chinese immigrant families in Spain, each of which had at least one preschool-aged child, regarding their migration experience, family norms, and everyday practice of parenthood in the host country. Through the participants' narratives, this study provides a detailed analysis of immigrant families' collaborations, negotiations, and even conflicts behind the decision-making process regarding childcare management in Spain.

2.2 Background: Chinese immigration to Spain

Compared to the well-documented literature on new China-born immigrants in other Western countries, the profile of the Chinese community in Spain (as in other Southern European countries) remains understudied, which explains their childcare arrangement patterns. First, compared to other Chinese immigrants in those New World countries (i.e. United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) who are often professionals with middle-class background and engage in well-paid jobs (L. S. Liu, 2018; L. S. Liu & Ran, 2021; Man & Chou, 2020), most first-generation Chinese immigrants in Spain are from the rural areas of China with lower level of education and socio-economic positions (Saiz Lopez, 2011). Thus, migration from China to Spain has been motivated by economic reasons (Robles-Llana, 2018), and most of them are engaged in low-skilled jobs such as catering, clothing retail shops, and bazaars (Badanta et al., 2020).

Second, Chinese immigrants' settlement processes in Spain are primarily based on social networks (Ceccagno, 2007). In most cases, Chinese newcomers' labour trajectory starts with working in ethnic-based employment (i.e. a friend's or relative's business) to accumulate 'migrant capital' (i.e. their human, social, and

economic capital) until they establish their own businesses (Antolín, 2002). In this regard, co-ethnic employers always offer newcomers assistance in obtaining family-reunification visas from the host country and, more importantly, provide financial support for young immigrants' trips to Spain. Research points to the fact that this ethnic niche, however, can also be seen as employers' recruitment strategy for a 'cheap workforce' from co-ethnic networks (Saiz Lopez, 2011). Therefore, during the early settlement process, newcomers are often engaged in low-wage or even unpaid jobs to pay off their migration debt (Cologna, 2005). Although employers normally assume responsibility for their everyday needs, such as transportation, housing, and meals, previous research has found that newcomer immigrants' labour conditions are always associated with long working hours, a precarious legal status, and limited housing space (Krause & Li, 2020). For example, living in shared flats with other family members or co-regionals (*tongxiang*) is a common experience for most Chinese newcomers (Saiz Lopez, 2011). In this case, unfavourable labour and living arrangements add another layer of challenge to Chinese migrant families' care practices.

Third, Chinese people's migration to Spain shows a prevalent family-migration pattern (Badanta et al., 2020; Saiz Lopez, 2011). Once Chinese newcomers establish their own family businesses and achieve economic autonomy, the left-behind nuclear family members often join them in Spain (Sáiz López, 2012). At this point, it is important to note the active labour-force participation of Chinese females in Spain. Compared to their female counterparts in New World countries, who are the most highly educated female professionals but always face downward occupational mobility or even unemployment after migration due to language barriers, culture shock, or unrecognised foreign qualifications (C. Ho, 2006; L. Liu, 2004), Chinese mothers always integrate into family businesses immediately after migration and begin to adopt the main labour role or work on equal terms with

their spouses given their better Spanish proficiency (Badanta et al., 2020; Saiz Lopez, 2011). Moreover, like other immigrant groups who migrate with children, Chinese females play important roles as mothers and caregivers in the families (Xiao & Cooke, 2012), which require them to devote substantial amounts of time to childcare activities (Del Boca et al., 2005). Therefore, reconciling work and childcare in a new country is a priority for Chinese families.

2.3 Theoretical perspective: Kinship networks and immigrant families' childrearing

In recent years, the growing interest in migrant families' childcare strategies has been motivated by increased maternal labour-force participation after migration, since the high costs associated with migration and labour-market difficulties among male migrants always create higher demands and expectations for migrant females to work (Toma, 2016). However, migrant mothers' entry into the labour market may not only increase females' childcare burden (Bonizzoni, 2014), but may also lead to conflict between their family responsibilities and paid work. For instance, previous research on Albanian immigrants in Greece suggests that during migrant families' transition to parenthood, migrant mothers always undertake the primary responsibility for childcare and must adjust their working lives to accommodate their children's demands, which is seen as a 'mother-centred strategy' (Xhaho et al., 2022). In this regard, kinship-childcare assistance becomes a provisional solution to migrant parents' work-childcare dilemmas, which substantially contributes to alleviating females' childcare responsibilities and allows them to pursue economic opportunities (F. Chen et al., 2011; Salaff & Greve, 2004). Research conducted in the United States (J. Kang & Cohen, 2018) showed that married, first-generation, Asian immigrant females' employment

rates were higher when they lived with parents or parents-in-law, as they usually received childcare assistance from extended families.

More importantly, kinship-childcare support is especially critical for migrant families living in countries with limited, formal childcare services characterised by insufficient facilities (Bonizzoni, 2014; Bünning, 2017) or reduced opening hours (Del Boca et al., 2005). Research on immigrant parents' access to formal childcare in Belgium (Biegel et al., 2021) showed that the complexity of the childcare system and long waiting lists led to a lower uptake of formal care services among migrant families. In this case, kinship networks, particularly grandparents, play a central role in providing low-cost and flexible childcare support (Wall & Sao José, 2004), which, to a large extent, compensates for the lack of accessibility and flexibility of the formal service system in receiving countries. Moreover, migrant parents' childcare practices are related to family values among different ethnic groups and nationalities. Coherent with Confucianism, Chinese society features strong social norms concerning family solidarity, which plays a crucial role in shaping families' intergenerational relationships (Albertini et al., 2019; L. S. Liu, 2018; L. S. Liu & Ran, 2021).

From the perspective of social exchange theory, grandparents' childcare provision is also seen as a reciprocal intergenerational dynamic between older parents and their adult children (L. S. Liu & Ran, 2021), as children may provide grandparents with filial support in terms of necessary care and company to their daily lives (Bedford & Liu, 2003). Moreover, the family solidarity norm plays an important role in Chinese migrant families' childcare arrangements (Qi, 2018) as Chinese grandparents continue the tradition of providing care to grandchildren in the destination country, seeing it as a normative responsibility towards family members (Xie & Xia, 2011). Similar evidence was observed by Fu et al., 2006, who found that, during the first year of resettlement in Hong

Kong, Chinese mothers were more inclined to seek instrumental support from kinship members for childcare support instead of formal networks, seeing it as family members' obligations to help one another. Additionally, there is evidence that Chinese parents show a particular preference for grandparents' childcare provision (Qi, 2018), considering them the most reliable caregivers (Peng & Wong, 2016) in terms of flexible arrangements and the transmission of cultural values to the second generation (Lie, 2010).

The literature indicates that kinship support for childcare may take place in multiple locations as migrant families constantly evaluate available care resources both at home and abroad (Bonizzoni, 2014). Given migrants' disadvantaged socio-economic positions during the early settlement process (W. C. Ho & Cheung, 2012), transnational parenting has become a prevalent family strategy for parents who face difficulties in balancing work and childcare in destination societies (Bohr & Tse, 2009). In particular, research has shown that compared to other immigrant groups, Chinese migrants always have more limited kinship ties in immigrant countries (Furfaro et al., 2020); thus, transnational family networks have become important, on-going sources of practical and emotional support for migrant parents and play a crucial role in their family-strategy decision-making process (Ryan et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the manner in which Chinese parents construct their childcare arrangements based on the availability of both local and transnational kinship networks during their transition to parenthood following migration may involve a complicated process of negotiation between migrant parents and extended family members. Thus, the present study draws insights from Chinese families' narratives on immigration, ethnicity, and family commitments to frame an examination of the childrearing decision-making process after family migration in receiving countries, which may contribute to a better

understanding of the complexity of migration and kinship networks in ethnic minorities' childcare choices.

2.4 Methods and sample

2.4.1 Data collection

We present 33 interviews with Chinese parents each of whom has at least one preschool-aged child. Qualitative data were collected by the first author between May 2021 and August 2022. Their shared cultural background and immigrant status facilitated access to the participants and enhanced rapport. Participants were recruited through researchers' personal visits to Chinese businesses, such as restaurants, grocery stores, technology stores, and hair salons. Most interviews were conducted in the participants' workshops during their work hours.

Prior to the interviews, we explained the purpose of our study to the participants, with verbal or written consent obtained in all cases. The interviews were conducted in the respondents' Chinese mother language, Mandarin, while the duration of each interview ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded with the informants' permission, fully transcribed verbatim, and coded using the ATLAS.ti software for thematic analysis. To protect the participants' identities, all the names in this study are pseudonyms.

This study adopted insights from the life course perspective, as it provides a comprehensive analysis framework to elucidate the interaction between immigrants' behaviours and societal structures (L. S. Liu & Ran, 2021), thus facilitating our understanding of Chinese migrant families' parenthood in transnational settings. To capture parents' perspectives of childrearing and understand how childcare strategies were collectively framed, mothers and fathers were interviewed together. Data analysis was based on migrant parents' narratives, which provided

an opportunity for Chinese immigrant families' voices to be heard (Hsiao & Schmidt, 2015).

The interview guide comprised five major topics: migration history, employment regimes, kinship networks, childcare arrangements, and future parenting plans. In particular, we asked parents a series of questions regarding their childcare decisions, such as the following: Where does your child(ren) reside? How do you arrange for childcare? What are the reasons for your childcare strategies? This interview structure provided us with the opportunity to examine the role of local and transnational social networks in providing childcare and related support for Chinese parents in Spain; in addition, it allowed us to understand the degree to which parenting practices could be accounted for by their immigrant statuses as well as work conditions, which has rarely been addressed in previous research due to a lack of information.

2.4.2 Sample

Our sample showed a diverse profile of the migration background, whereas most participants were first-generation immigrants who migrated to Spain in the 2000s through family reunification. All the participants worked in the service sector, either self-employed or working in relatives' family businesses. Nearly all the families came from rural areas, except for two families from urban areas. Among the 33 families, 11 parents had completed primary education, 22 had completed secondary education, and none had received tertiary education. Most interviewees reported a low-medium family income of approximately €21,600 per year. This finding is consistent with the low socioeconomic status of Chinese family immigrants in Spain, as previously discussed.

Regarding family background, our sample comprised one family with four children, 14 with three children, 15 with two children, and three with only one

child, whereas all the families had at least one preschool-aged child each at the time of the interviews. However, in relation to their childcare arrangements, we have a mixed profile: of the 33 families interviewed, eight hosted migrant grandparents in Spain with intergenerational co-residence arrangements, who provided intensive childcare to young migrant parents; 16 families chose to send their children back to China for grandparents' or other kin members' childcare; and nine migrant parents raised their migrant children on their own in the host country. The participants' diverse family backgrounds enabled us to explore the factors that impacted childcare strategies at different stages of settlement and Chinese immigrants' perceptions of ethnic identity, parenthood, and family value in a transnational context.

2.5 Results: Childcare choices and family negotiation

In this section, we discuss the negotiation process between migrant parents and extended family members regarding childcare arrangements from three perspectives: (1) parents' preference for grandparents' provision of childcare, (2) Chinese families' migration trajectory and socioeconomic status, and (3) grandparents' childcare availability.

2.5.1 Preference for grandparent's provision of childcare

Grandparental support in childcare is a common phenomenon among Chinese families (C. Zhang et al., 2019), based on a traditional familistic culture. Our interview data revealed that Chinese immigrant families showed a strong preference for grandparent-provided childcare, which can be explained from two perspectives. First, from the perspective of cultural norms, childcare is still considered a private issue rather than a societal task in East Asian societies (Sung, 2003), which

requires trust and mutual understanding (Wheelock & Jones, 2002). Thus, paid childcare by domestic providers can be distrusted due to the unstable nature of informal work, while concerns about their children being ill-treated in the absence of parents were sometimes expressed by the informants. For example, Li (35 years old) cared for her son by herself during the interview due to the unanticipated absence of the son's domestic caretaker. She stated that although they contracted a native domestic helper to care for the child, the girl was absent from time to time and only informed them 'at the last minute', which left Li and her husband no choice but to take care of the child themselves while working in the store. The risk of having a paid care provider withdrawing from the job at any moment troubles migrant families, particularly those who have demanding work schedules and intensive working hours, making it difficult for them to manage unexpected emergencies and nearly impossible to reconcile work and childcare.

In contrast, grandparents are seen as trustworthy caregivers who provide stable and high-quality care. This perception, to some extent, involves migrant parents' positive recognition from their own childhood experience, seeing grandparents as 'experienced caregivers' and 'best choice' for childcare, which is consistent with previous studies on working migrants (Wheelock & Jones, 2002). Meanwhile, grandparents also reported greater life satisfaction when engaging in grandchild care to cultivate and maintain close ties with their grandchildren (Strom et al., 1999; C. Zhang et al., 2019). In this regard, grandparents' involvement in childcare extends beyond the family obligation (L. S. Liu & Ran, 2021; Ran & Liu, 2021; Xie & Xia, 2011) and becomes a reciprocal interaction between childcare needs and emotional rewards among multigenerational families.

Second, from the within-family perspective, grandparents' provision of childcare is characterised by high flexibility that, to a large extent, can compensate for migrant parents' irregular working hours and heavy workloads. According to

our interviews, parental or maternal grandparents' visits to Spain for intensive childcare became the first choice for most Chinese families. This was, for instance, the case for Hui (42 years old), a mother of four children. Cohabiting with her parents-in-law, Hui could work with her husband in their phone stores during the day. Hui described her parents-in-law as 'responsible' and 'reliable' caregivers, who dedicated all of their time to taking care of the four grandchildren and never complained. According to Hui's husband, as his parents were retired and still in good health, they volunteered to come to Spain to assume responsibility when their first child was born. Thence, they stayed in Spain with Hui's family. During the interview, Hui expressed her full appreciation of her parents-in-law's support:

I have to say that I am so lucky to have my parents-in-law here; they have been helping me with childcare since the birth of my first child. I never worried about our children when I was absent from home because I knew that my parents-in-law were both experienced caregivers and would wholeheartedly take care of their grandchildren. Sometimes, they also helped me with the daily housework; for example, whenever I came back late from work, the dinner would always be prepared and children put to bed. There are many things like that, and that is why I am so thankful to them.

Grandparents who assist young parents in childcare, such as Hui, are called coparenting grandparents (Goodman & Silverstein, 2002). Coparenting grandparents always assume the primary caregiving responsibility in a family and, to a large extent, their intensive childcare provision supports young parents' work/family reconciliation, particularly in the immigrant context, allowing migrant mothers to participate in paid work and improve family income. Moreover, in addition to instrumental support for daily childcare, research shows that grandparents who co-reside with migrant families also help maintain grandchildren's ethnic identity and transfer cultural values in a transnational context, which is consistent with findings in previous studies on Chinese communities in other countries (Da, 2010;

Lie, 2010; Pang, 1998). According to our participants, maintaining their mother language and Chinese ethnicity is crucial for most Chinese families. Robles-Llana, 2018's research (2018) suggested that Chinese migrant children in Spain reinforced their Chinese identities by being exposed to the Chinese language and values through family and peers, as parents hoped to provide the second generation with the best chance of having the knowledge and skills to develop and achieve their life goals in the two socio-cultural environments in Spain and China (Masdeu Torruella, 2020).

In this regard, grandparents play an important role in constructing grandchildren's Chinese identity and creating a Chinese-speaking home environment. This is mirrored in the case of Mu (38 years old), a mother of two children. Working in their wholesale businesses, Mu and her husband had little time to teach their children Chinese. Since their two sons were both born and raised in Spain, they used to speak Spanish both at home and at school, and it worried Mu that they would forget their Chinese identity and native language. However, things began to change after her parents arrived, as Mu stated:

... my parents began to teach them (my two sons) Mandarin from the very beginning, and continuously asked them to speak Chinese at home; little by little, my sons began to say some words in Chinese, such as television, telephone, cake, etc. Now, they can construct simple phrases, which surprised us. I think having a Chinese-speaking environment is quite important to 'push' them to learn Chinese, and thereby, we hope that they can be bilingual in the future, as it can offer them more opportunities to choose their lives either in Spain or in China.

In addition to teaching the language, our interviews show that grandparents who live in a co-residence arrangement with their adult children also like to celebrate traditional Chinese festivals during their stay in Spain. Such a transfer of cultural values, to a large extent, helps foster migrant children's Chinese identity in

the host country (Da, 2010). These findings suggest that Chinese migrant families' preference for kinship childcare, especially grandparent-provided childcare, reflects both the practical needs for childcare support and culture-specific considerations based on family values. Thus, grandparents' engagement in childrearing is a family strategy and a collective collaboration among Chinese family members.

2.5.2 Changing childcare strategies and transnational parenthood: Socioeconomic constraints and settlement process

Previous research in Spain divided the Chinese family-business path into three phases: start-up, consolidation, and business expansion (Saiz Lopez, 2011); it suggested how family members contributed to family well-being by adjusting their productive and reproductive roles according to family needs. Similarly, our findings show that despite the predominant preference for childcare provision by relatives, Chinese families' childrearing arrangements are not static; on the contrary, parents tend to adapt different childcare strategies depending on families' changing economic statuses and living conditions during their settlement process (Cologna, 2005).

As noted in the preceding sections, most new arrivals were engaged in co-ethnic workshops and provided with unfavourable housing conditions and labour arrangements. In particular, the absence of a private sphere in living in workshops with the owners and their families (Ceccagno, 2007) largely constrains new parents' parenthood practices and, in most cases, leads to family separation between parents and migrant children. Faced with the incompatibility between paid work and childcare, most young parents choose to send their new-born children back to China as 'satellite babies' for grandparents' provision of childcare. In this regard, a kinship-based network becomes an important family resource that frees migrant parents from childcare responsibility, allowing them to pursue economic

opportunities in the host country. This was, for instance, the case with Lei (38 years old), a mother of three daughters.

Lei came to Spain when she was 21 years old, with her aunt's help, who both paid the expenses for the trip and supported Lei's regulation process in Spain. However, everything came at a price. Lei worked in their restaurant for two years without pay. During this time, Lei's two Spanish-born daughters were sent back to Qingtian for the grandparents' care. Referring to their decision, Lei stated the following:

At that time, my husband and I lived with my aunts' family, who offered us a room that could accommodate only two people. Obviously, it was not a good place for my little daughters. Moreover, our work at that time was quite heavy; we had to work in the restaurant all day, from 8 am to 10 pm, and barely had time to feed or care for them. Because we worked as employees for others, it was difficult to take them to the restaurant with us during the daytime. During that time, the most important thing for us was to pay back the debt for our trip to Spain, and that is why we did not have money to pay for the kindergarten service. Sending them back to China was a hard decision, but that was the only choice for us...

To a large extent, the unfavourable living and working arrangements in the initial stage of settlement challenge Chinese parents' fulfilment of childcare responsibilities. Therefore, apart from an adaptive strategy for Chinese parents to reconcile work and family, grandparents' intensive childcare engagement is an arrangement more out of necessity than an ideal option for most families. A previous study on transnational families also shows that Chinese parents' separation from their infants always leads to negative feelings such as sorrow, hardship, and guilt (Bohr & Tse, 2009), which is consistent with our findings. In Lei's case, she talked about this parenting decision with regret due to the disrupted bonding with children; however, she also described it as a 'strategy without choice' to achieve economic stability. Indeed, soon after taking her elder

daughter back to Spain when she reached 3 years of age, Lei and her husband closed down their own clothing store due to unfavourable economic conditions and had to find other paid jobs. Then, once again, they decided to send their daughter back to China, with the perception of incompatibility between work and family. Lei's story is a widespread experience among the interviewed families, while transnational parenthood is considered as a temporary strategy among Chinese migrant families with a dual-earner family model to adapt to their childcare needs, and the availability of grandparents' childcare turns out to be a coping strategy to maximise the well-being of the whole family in the process of resettlement.

Once parents established their independent family businesses, which allowed them to more flexibly combine work and childcare, most Chinese parents chose to take their children back to Spain. However, the adverse socioeconomic conditions were another constraint for Chinese families' childrearing choice. Most interviewees expressed their concern about formal childcare costs, especially migrant families with more than two children.

As in most European countries, although it is more widespread, Spanish public childcare is, on average, less expensive, and even provides subsidies to low-income families ("Women's Employment and Childcare Choices in Spain Through The Great Recession", 2019). However, the limited opening hours, to a large extent, constrain Chinese migrant families' use of public childcare, given their self-employment characteristics with irregular schedules and shift-work patterns. In particular, parents who engage in catering services, such as restaurants and bars, endure long and inflexible working hours, which makes it difficult for them to reconcile full-time work and childcare. Meanwhile, regarding the private childcare service, which normally provides flexible opening hours and is of a high quality, however, parents often face high costs that could be unaffordable for low-income families (Baizán, 2009).

In the case of Chinese immigrants, after opening up their family based businesses, the economic burden remains among the major concerns among Chinese families because remittance is an important resource for paying off emigration debts and supporting extended-family members' well-being in the home country. Therefore, migrant-labour families usually need low-cost and responsive care services that consider their income as well as family-unfriendly working hours (Wall & Sao José, 2004). Thus, grandparents-provided childcare becomes a preferred strategy among Chinese migrant families, particularly during the initial phase of their family businesses. This was the case with Jia (42 years old), who operated a Chinese restaurant with her husband in Valencia. At first, due to the high cost of a private day-care centre, the couple chose to play the custodial childcare role themselves. However, due to their restaurant's increasing workload, Jia and her husband barely had time to care for their two sons; finally, they decided to take their two six-month old sons back to China to be cared for by their grandparents. Jia related the story as follows:

The main reason remains money; for two children's care in a day-care centre, it costs us nearly €400 per month, almost one-third of our income, which is too expensive for us. Additionally, the kindergarten closes at 2 pm, which is the peak time for our restaurant; it is impossible for us to pick them up at that time. Of course, you can choose to pick them up late by paying more; however, our economic conditions do not allow us to do that. That is why we decided to initially care for them ourselves; however, it was not an easy task. We took them in a stroller, and as my husband is the chef, I had to then take all the responsibility of taking care of them while attending to customers, but it was really difficult... sometimes I even asked our customers to help me take care of the kids for a while... (laugh). Finally, we simply decided to take them back to China to my parents-in-law's care; it was a difficult decision for us to separate from our new-born children, but there was no other choice...

A previous study on the Chinese community in Spain shows that when a new enterprise begins operation, all family members' intensive work is crucial in

reducing enterprise costs as much as possible and maximising family well-being (Saiz Lopez, 2011). In this regard, Jia and her husband's experience shows that Chinese family businesses in the start-up phase always result in increased work time and limited economic resources that, to a great extent, reduce parents' childcare ability. Thus, grandparents' low-cost provision of childcare becomes a primary source of help for most migrant families and substantially contributes to their adult children's financial capital by saving on the childcare cost and making it possible for both parents to continue working (Xie & Xia, 2011). However, it should be noted that according to our interviews, grandparents' 'free' childcare support is only temporary, because after repaying their debt and achieving economic stability, Chinese adult children often economically compensate their grandparents for their delegated care. Interestingly, these remittances not only cover grandparents' childrearing expenses as a form of 'time-for-money' exchange (Cong & Silverstein, 2008), but are also seen as a way to express their gratitude for their grandparents' time and support. As Jia stated, this economic compensation is not required by their parents, but derives from their appreciation of their grandparents' efforts and a sense of guilt for not being able to fulfil their family obligations. Such regular remittances provide critical financial insurance for the livelihood of transnational family members in the country of origin.

2.5.3 Availability of grandparental support: Overlap of care responsibilities

Despite the crucial role played by grandparents in the provision of childcare, this option is not readily available to all migrant families, and parents' childcare strategies vary greatly depending on the availability of grandparent-provided childcare in both China and Spain. In this section, we provide details on Chinese grandparents' care responsibilities and analyse how the availability of intergenerational support may shape migrant families' childcare arrangements.

Grandparenthood in China is universal and occurs more than ten years earlier than in their Western European counterparts: over 80% are grandparents by the time they are 55. This early transition to grandparenthood always leads grandparents to assume multiple caregiver roles for other family members. Among them, the sibling structure largely influences the allocation of grandparents' childcare assistance among families (Zhao & Zhang, 2019). Despite the implementation of the one-child policy from 1979, given the strong patriarchal norms in rural China, rural families with first-birth daughters are allowed to have a single additional birth (Ebenstein, 2010). Consequently, according to studies on Chinese grandparenthood, rural Chinese grandparents aged 60 years or older have four to eight grandchildren, and each child has more than 1.5 children themselves (J. Zhang et al., 2020).

The large number of grandchildren reduces grandparents' childcare ability and leads to fewer available resources per child within a family. Therefore, the allocation of grandparents' provision of childcare becomes a concern among family members. In this regard, the predominantly patrilineal tradition in China, especially the prevalent preference for sons among older generations (i.e. grandparents), severely constrains migrant families' access to grandparents' provision of childcare (Zhao & Zhang, 2019). Yang (37 years old) is a mother of two children (3 and 5 years old). Following the birth of her first son, although she had high expectations of her parents' provision of childcare, due to her nephew's overlapping birth and limited time, Yang's parents finally chose to care for her brother's son, who cohabited with them in China. In Yang's case, the grandparents' provision of childcare was a precious family resource that had to 'compete' with that of their siblings', which has previously never been explored. Finally, Yang's family had to resort to in-home childcare provided by Chinese immigrants in Spain. Again, Yang's experience indicates that kinship assistance

with childcare remains the first choice among Chinese families, and if not, they learn to seek alternative strategies (Da, 2010).

Additionally, grandparents in China are more likely to face role conflicts between grandparenthood and assuming filial obligations towards their parents (J. Zhang et al., 2020), especially among four-generation families. In our sample, 6 of the 33 families have 'sandwiched' grandparents who have to navigate among multiple family responsibilities. However, eldercare is always considered as a priority among Chinese grandparents because adult children can still seek alternative strategies for childcare while older parents are always vulnerable dependents of their families. Nevertheless, grandparents' filial responsibility always constrains their transnational mobility to provide childcare support for their adult children.

Chen (42 years old), a father of three children, explained how they negotiated with their parents regarding managing childcare assistance and eldercare responsibilities after the birth of their first child. Having achieved economic stability in Spain, Chen and his wife intended to invite his parents to Spain for the provision of childcare. As the family's only child, Chen supposed that his parents would be more than happy to spend their retirement life with grandsons in Spain; however, it turned out to be a difficult decision for them. Chen's grandparents were in their 80s, and both needed special care due to their health condition. However, a nursing home is not an ideal choice for Chinese families since the strong family commitments mean that sending elderly parents to nursing homes violates the traditional value of filial piety, while family-based eldercare is seen as a cultural norm in multi-generational households given younger generations' obligations towards their older family members (Ran & Liu, 2021). Finally, Chen's parents decided to stay in China for the eldercare of their own parents and

asked Chen to take the grandchildren back to China for their childcare provision.

Chen related the story as follows:

I asked them to come with us, but they said no...because they needed to take care of my grandparents who were then both sick. My grandfather suffered from lung cancer and my grandmother suffered from Alzheimer's disease and needed special care. That is why my parents finally decided to stay in China to care for them, and asked us to take our children back to China if we needed their help. Now, my grandparents have both passed away, while my parents are old; they said that they had become accustomed to their life in China and decided not to come.

Chen's experiences indicate that rural grandparents in China always face role overlaps concerning different family members, which reduces the likelihood of providing grandparents' childcare to migrant families. Therefore, in the absence of grandparenting and economic constraints, self-employed Chinese migrant families tend to manage childcare alone and often take their children to work (Badanta et al., 2020). However, this extreme flexibility entails a radical compression of private life and childcare time (Ceccagno, 2007). In our sample, nearly half of the migrant families choose to combine work and family by taking the custodial childcare responsibility in their commercial establishments. Moreover, as Chinese migrant families' parenthood practice remains based on a gendered labour division, migrant mothers always assume the primary role of childcare in the family (Lamas-Abraira, 2021), which results in a dual burden of childrearing and paid employment among female migrants. Consequently, migrant mothers' caring for their children while attending to their customers becomes a common phenomenon among Chinese families in Spain. In most cases, the care burden is increased when facing the challenges of adaptation in an unfamiliar society with a new language and sociocultural environment.

2.6 Discussion and conclusions

This study reveals that Chinese migrant parents' childcare decisions are carefully negotiated and strategised based on an interrelation of cultural, economic, and family factors. Focusing on the role of local and transnational social networks in providing childcare and related support for Chinese families in Spain, this study stresses the importance of the availability of kinship as a resource in shaping migrant families' childcare arrangements. Despite the literature on the Chinese community's parenting practices to reconcile paid work and family responsibilities in Spain (Lamas-Abraira, 2021; Saiz Lopez, 2011; Torruella & López, 2017), little is known about the negotiation mechanism behind the different childcare options among Chinese families. Thus, to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first attempt to explore the family collaborations, negotiations, and even conflicts in the decision-making process regarding Chinese immigrants' childcare strategies in Spain.

Chinese immigrants' childcare management is mainly based on informal childcare provided by extended family members both within and outside the host country. Our results suggest that Chinese parents show a high preference for grandparents' provision of childcare due to its high quality and flexibility and because it transfers cultural values to the second generation. Most importantly, compared to other childcare providers, Chinese grandparents are always seen as trustworthy childcare givers who can provide migrant families with regular childcare support, which helps in alleviating and coping with adult children's burden during their transition to parenthood in Spain. This finding is consistent with those in previous studies on migrant parents in other countries (Ryan et al., 2009; Xie & Xia, 2011). Moreover, our analysis suggests that Chinese families' kin-based childcare arrangement reflects a complex decision-making process, and parents tend to adopt different childcare strategies depending on

families' changing economic statuses and living conditions during their settlement process. Especially, the precarious housing resource after migration and non-standard working schedules of self-employment, to a large extent, reduce migrant parents' childcare ability in the host country. Therefore, grandparents' provision of childcare represents an adaptive strategy among family members regarding the entire family's collective goal (C. Zhang et al., 2019).

Our study also examines a wide range of recent migrants' diverse experiences and the different ways in which family networks, connections, and obligations may influence the availability of intergenerational support. Compared with other Chinese immigrants in New World countries, who are mostly from single-child families (L. S. Liu & Ran, 2021; Ran & Liu, 2021), rural grandparents always face role overlaps with different family members, which significantly affects their ability to provide care. Therefore, migrant parents' childcare needs are constantly negotiated with extended family members such as other siblings and even their grandparents. Drawing insights from Chinese families' narratives, our findings show that Chinese immigrants' transnational parenthood and compression of personal life are based on a variety of factors, while migrant parents tend to navigate among different childcare strategies depending on the availability of informal childcare, immigrant status, and economic conditions at different stages of settlement.

Given that previous research on the Chinese community in Spain mainly focused on families from Qingtian and Wenzhou, the diversity of the participants' places of origin allows us to explore the childcare strategies employed by other immigrant groups with fewer kinship networks in Spain, which contributes to a better understanding of the Chinese population. Moreover, the inclusion of migrant fathers in this study allows us to understand how the participants manage childcare within the whole family, and the role played by the support networks

from both extended families, which is in contrast to the large body of literature that only focuses on migrant mothers.

Finally, although our findings provide insights into parents' preference for kinship childcare in the receiving society, the family dynamics related to childrearing practices within Chinese migrant families remain unclear and need particular attention in future research. This may include, for example, mothers' and fathers' different parenthood experiences in a new country, grandparents' perspectives of their involvement in grandchildren's care in both multigenerational households and transnational settings, and the intergenerational relationships between migrant parents and grandparents concerning childcare issues, which may involve conflict or role ambiguity in childcare issues. All these matters pave the way for further empirical enquiry and theoretical speculation and deserve closer examination in future research.

5

Ideals and realities: Chinese singleton daughters negotiating family size preferences and migrant motherhood in Spain

1

Abstract

Chinese young women's fertility choices have attracted growing interest in the last years, however, the causal effects of women's singleton status and transnational motherhood experience on their fertility behaviours remain understudied. Using 26 qualitative interviews with Chinese migrant mothers in Spain, we examine how women's family size preferences are constructed by their singleton status

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associated with changing gender norms and strong normative expectations of future family caregiving obligations. Further, it explores the challenges faced by participants toward realising their fertility expectations in transnational spaces from a gendered perspective. We find that although singleton status can contribute to women's larger ideal family size, their gendered roles as only-daughters and migrant mothers increase care responsibilities, which negatively influence their childbearing decisions.

Keywords

Motherhood, one-child generation, transnational migration, Chinese immigrants, Spain.

5.1 Introduction

Over the past decades, the one-child policy's implementation has dramatically impacted Chinese families. It has affected the family structure with a dramatic reduction in family size and crucially, and challenged traditional gender relations within Chinese households (Feng et al., 2014). The one-child generation singletons born during this policy grew up as the "centre" of the family (Blair & Madigan, 2021), receiving substantial parental investment and facing higher expectations (Abrahamson, 2016). In particular, singleton daughters enjoyed unprecedented parental support for their education, helping them realise high academic or professional aspirations (Fong, 2002). This transformation has encouraged women's labour force participation (Cai & Feng, 2021), raising it to some of the highest in the world (Yang, 2017). Meanwhile, it may also significantly transform young women's fertility attitudes and beliefs about ideal family size (P. Wang et al., 2022).

With the economic reforms since the late 1970s, China has undergone various economic and social changes in recent decades. During this period, many middle-class families sent their only child abroad for better educational opportunities (Tu, 2019). This has been an important pathway for children's upward mobility in China's post-reform era (Bian, 2002). Many of these young adults remain in the host country for work after their education and have even established their own families. Nevertheless, transnational mobility means settling in a different reality, which can disrupt social and family networks (Wall & Sao José, 2004). In particular, the lack of social networks to provide childcare can severely constrain migrant women's ability to reconcile family responsibilities and paid work (Wu & Del Rey Poveda, 2024), further reducing young women's fertility choices. Moreover, the host country's family support policies may shape Chinese women's reproductive strategies, as the socioeconomic context may affect the prospects of realising positive fertility intentions, creating a significant gap between the desired and actual family size (Gauthier, 2007).

Spain provides an interesting context for understanding these findings. On the one hand, the growing number of Chinese immigrants since the 1980s has made it the largest Asian community and second-largest non-European Union community in the country (Spanish National Institute of Statistics, 2022). On the other hand, the Mediterranean or familist model of the Spanish welfare system (Ferrera, 1996), which emphasises the family's role in providing care (Fahlén, 2013), may create particular difficulties for the one-child generation women in navigating multiple roles as mothers, daughters and migrant women considering transnational realities.

This study aims to focus on migrant mothers from Chinese one-child families who are currently studying or working in Spain. Using interviews with twenty-six singleton women, we adopt a life course approach to uncover, first, how do the changing family dynamics in the context of contemporary China influence

young urban singletons' attitudes towards desired family size. Second, we explore migrant singletons' motherhood experiences in managing work and family in a transnational setting. Third, we examine whether and to what extent their gendered roles as migrant mothers and siblingless daughters shape their fertility choices, which may contribute to a 'fertility gap' (Philipov, 2009) between desired and achieved fertility. In doing so, we contribute new empirical evidence to the fields of gender, migration and family by providing insights into how family policies, sociocultural contexts, and migration affect women's family life and fertility dynamics at the individual level.

5.2 Literature review

5.2.1 Urban daughters of the one-child generation in China: female empowerment, changing gender expectations and increased caregiving responsibilities

Since the one-child policy's implementation from 1979, the Chinese family structure has changed fundamentally, with an increasing prevalence of a three-member family, especially in urban areas (Feng et al., 2014). This new fertility regime has led to a child-centred care ideology (C. Zhang et al., 2019), whereby children have become the family's focus and their needs are prioritised. Parents, especially those from urban working-class families, mobilise all their resources to invest in their only child's education to increase their competitiveness in China (Fong, 2002). This shift in sibling composition has also unintendedly challenged the male-centred patrilineal norms (C. Zhang et al., 2019) and helped empower singleton daughters in receiving parental support (Dupta et al., 2003). Regardless of gender, singletons are seen as their parents' 'only hope' for their families' continuation (Feng et al., 2014). Importantly, parental support continues after the daughters' marriage by providing childcare and housework to support

their children's well-being and career advancement (Croll, 2006; Feng et al., 2014; C. Zhang et al., 2019). Consequently, young Chinese women's status within the family and in the wider culture has been improved, coupled with increases in educational and occupational attainment (Blair & Madigan, 2021). Further, it has changed traditional gender norms as young women begin to seek social roles outside the home.

Nonetheless, traditional family norms of filial duty and expectations of elder care, rooted in Confucian values, remain salient in contemporary China (Tsui & Rich, 2002). Consistent with Confucius' philosophy of family solidarity and commitment, Chinese society has strong social norms concerning the filial obligation to care for elderly parents (Albertini et al., 2019), and the belief of "bringing up children to support parents in their old age" has been deeply rooted in Chinese culture for centuries (Gui & Koropeckyj-Cox, 2016). Historically, the eldest son was expected to live with and care for ageing parents, while married daughters were excluded from the succession (C. Zhang et al., 2019) and only expected to provide emotional support (Feng et al., 2014). However, the changing sibship structure under the one-child policy has challenged gendered filial norms (Kane & Li, 2021). As women from one-child families have no siblings to share or negotiate expected caregiving obligations, they tend to assume stronger normative expectations of future family caregiving obligations (Feng et al., 2014). Faced with the "double burdens" of caregiving obligations for older parents and high career aspirations, singleton daughters may experience attitudinal shifts regarding the ideal family size in both upward and downward directions (C. Zhang et al., 2021).

5.2.2 Theoretical perspective: immigrant motherhood and fertility

Women's careers after migration and attitudes towards childbearing

Despite increased maternal labour force participation after migration, an intensive motherhood ideology remains prevalent within migrant families (Phan, 2022), which emphasises mothers' sacrifices for their children and care work (Rao, 2020). Thus, after the child's birth, migrant mothers often experience a 'motherhood penalty' with reduced earnings and employment opportunities (Budig et al., 2012), especially for those who are highly educated or in professional occupations (England et al., 2016).

On the other side, while the challenges posed by the burden of balancing paid work and childcare are common to all working mothers, migrants' experience differs from that of native-born counterparts in the lack of kinship networks in immigrant countries, which are directly linked to women's ability to combine work and motherhood (Furfaro et al., 2020). In particular, while grandparents' childcare work can facilitate mothers' reconciliation between work and care responsibilities, this option is not readily available to migrant families due to geographical distance and immigration policies in host countries (Wu & Del Rey Poveda, 2024). Consequently, childcare difficulties always force migrant mothers to reduce their labour market participation or even drop out (Luppi, 2016). For instance, previous study suggests that the challenges of settling into a new country and loss of childcare support following migration increase skilled Chinese women's 'mothering' duties in Australia, as women remain the primary caregivers in Chinese families (C. Ho, 2006). Similarly, in New Zealand, early Chinese migrant mothers experienced considerable hardships in adapting to their new environment because of the burden of traditional female values, language barriers, culture shock, and their restricted roles as housewife and mother (L. Liu, 2004).

These challenges associated with immigrant motherhood may influence women's fertility choices. Fertility desires can change over an individual's reproductive life (Heiland et al., 2008). The transition to first-time motherhood, as measured by subjective well-being changes, is an important determinant of further fertility (Margolis & Myrskylä, 2015). Notably, new mothers may revise their fertility plans based on previous motherhood experiences (Newman, 2008) concerning the domestic labour division (McDonald, 2000), work-family reconciliation (Mills et al., 2008), and partnership quality (M. Chen & Yip, 2017). A decline in well-being around childbirth due to work-family conflict, gender inequality within households, and absence of affordable childcare options is significantly associated with women's lower fertility intentions (Luppi & Mencarini, 2018). Findings from Canada, for example, revealed that Chinese migrant mothers' experience of reconciliation difficulties and perceived loss of career prospects negatively affected their child-rearing decisions during the migration process (Tang, 2004). In particular, these challenges are intensified for women with better educations and high-income jobs, as they tend to lower their fertility expectations due to the high opportunity costs in terms of career development (Karabchuk et al., 2022).

The effect of migration on fertility desire within a transnational context: disruption hypothesis

In recent years, a substantial amount of research has been conducted on the disruptive effect of migration on migrants' fertility behavior (Grande & Del Rey Poveda, 2017; Kulu & Milewski, 2007), suggesting that migrants record particularly low levels of fertility immediately before and after migration (González-Ferrer et al., 2017). This is due to related factors, such as separation from spouses (Chattopadhyay et al., 2006; Kraus & González-Ferrer, 2021), increased costs of childbearing (Kulu & Milewski, 2007; Toulemon, 2004), and the psychological stress of settling into a new environment (Milewski, 2007; Singley & Landale,

1998). However, despite the existing literature, little attention has been paid to the absence of family support on the disruption of migrant fertility. Transnational movement always interrupts social and family networks (Impicciatore et al., 2020), whereby both male and female migrants experience a sharp decline in parental support (Clark & Cotton, 2013), which in turn will affect their adaptation to the host society, and consequently lead to their delayed parenthood.

Previous research on Chinese migrants' reproductive behavior shows that the lack of support systems in host countries, such as members of an extended family or hired help, exacerbates the workload of middle-class working women, making life increasingly difficult for them (Man, 1995). In particular, early Chinese migrant women always experience additional hardships in adapting to their new environment due to the burden of traditional female values, language barriers, culture shock, and their restricted roles as housewife and mother (L. Liu, 2004). Similar difficulties of adaptation among Chinese families have also been observed in other European countries. Studies conducted in the UK have found that the issues Chinese migrants face regarding childcare in terms of language transfer, religious development, and cultural identification have a negative influence on their childrearing decisions (Lie, 2010). Previous research in Spain suggests that not all Chinese migrant women have family support, and the absence or presence of such support informs much of their productive and reproductive strategies (Saiz Lopez, 2011) as family networks play a key role in relieving their childcare load (F. Chen et al., 2000; Waynforth, 2012).

5.2.3 Fertility ideals, intentions, and the desired-intended 'fertility gap'

Although both are important predictors of childbearing behaviour and used interchangeably, fertility ideals and fertility intentions are different concepts in the demographic literature (M. Chen & Yip, 2017). Specifically, fertility ideals

are more abstract concepts that reflect people's attitudes and desires about having children, as measured by 'ideal family size' or 'ideal number of children', which are influenced by the fertility regime in which they grew up and therefore, reflect societal norms and remain relatively stable (Goldstein et al., 2003). In contrast, fertility intentions measure a more actionable fertility plan and are more susceptible to changes in contextual and individual factors (M. Chen & Yip, 2017). The 'fertility gap', referring to the macro-level disparity between the average ideal and achieved family size (Philipov, 2009), may reflect the extent to which individuals have modified their family size intentions away from their family size desires due to external constraints (T. Miller, 2011). Thus, it provides important implications for policymaking and interventions to address the unmet need toward realizing reported fertility intentions (Bhrolcháin & Beaujouan, 2015).

Drawing on the Traits-Desires-Intentions-Behaviour (TDIB) theoretical framework (T. Miller, 2011), this study aims to explore how Chinese singleton daughters' fertility ideals are structured within institutional and sociocultural dynamics, how their fertility intentions are reconstructed within the macro-level conditions of migration, and address the fertility gap shaped by the challenges and dilemmas young Chinese women face in negotiating care work, career prospects and family ideals.

5.3 Methods and sample

5.3.1 Data collection

We adopted a qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews with migrant Chinese women. Originating from a larger ethnographic project on family life and childcare among Chinese immigrants in Spain, the eligibility criteria for this study included: (1) female respondents from urban one-child families, (2) born in the 1980s or 1990s, (3) having at least one child, and (4) studying or working

in Spain at the time of the interviews. All interviews were conducted between April and December 2020. A ‘snowball sampling’ procedure was also used to recruit more potential informants, asking the respondents for further contacts. The data collection process continued until theoretical saturation was reached (Roy et al., 2015), and 26 participants were included in this study. This research was approved by the university ethics committee. Prior to the interviews, the researcher also explained the purpose of our study to participants, with verbal or written consent obtained in all cases. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin, and lasted between 30 to 100 minutes.

The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants’ permission, fully transcribed verbatim, and coded using ATLAS.ti for thematic analysis. Pseudonyms are used here to protect participants’ identity. The interviewers started with general questions about the participants’ personal backgrounds prior to migration and gradually moved on to their childhood experiences, migratory trajectories, family dynamics, previous mothering practices in the host country, and future childbearing expectations. Fertility ideals and expectations were measured using the questions, ‘How many children do you want ideally?’ and ‘Do you intend to have another child in the future?’, respectively.

5.3.2 Sample

Participants’ ages ranged from 27 to 39 years, with an average of 31. At the time of the interviews, all participants had lived in Spain for more than five years and built their nuclear families. As they came to Spain for higher education and stayed after graduation, all participants were university educated, and the majority worked as professionals and came from a middle-class Chinese family background. Specifically, 8 had bachelor’s degrees, 12 had master’s degrees (two with a double master’s degree), 2 was a PhD holder, and 4 were currently doing their PhD.

Regarding family background, 18 respondents had one child, 7 had two, and one had three. Most respondents had a spouse or partner of Chinese nationality, except four with Spanish spouses. Only three respondents' parents lived in Spain with their only daughter, with others' parents still in China.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Childhood experience, changing gender roles, filial responsibility, and increased ideal family size

This section discusses how only-daughter's experience contributes to the ideal number of children in three ways: (1) feeling of loneliness, (2) intergenerational transmission of parents' fertility expectations, and (3) parental eldercare burden in adulthood. By citing the informants' own words, we show how a particular family background influences only-daughters' fertility decision in adulthood.

Feeling of Loneliness

Our informants report a strong sense of loneliness in childhood, with some interviewees agreeing that although this feeling of solitude to some extent can be alleviated by their parents' or cousins' companionship, the protection and care provided by siblings is unique and cannot be replaced. According to one respondent:

When I was little, I really wanted to have siblings because it would be great to grow up together with someone within the same family. We could share secrets with each other, and it would make me feel protected and secure (Xu, 30 years old).

In fact, a previous study shows that compared to non-only-children, singletons are inclined to lack a sense of security, especially females (Fan, 2016). In this regard, the desire for siblings out of emotional necessity since childhood increases only-daughters' intention to have more than one child in adulthood, which is

consistent with prior findings among non-migrant singletons (C. Zhang et al., 2021). Besides, in contrast to the prevailing preference for male offspring in China, where families with firstborn sons have a low second birth intention (Zhou & Guo, 2020), our sample shows that the singleton-daughter experience also has an effect on women's gender attitude. In particular, some respondents with firstborn sons expressed their second birth intention because of their own expectation toward older siblings since childhood. Wei (married, 41 years old), mother of a twelve-year-old boy, manifested that she and her husband intend to have their second child within a year in the hope of a daughter:

My husband and I have recently been thinking about having a daughter. When I was little, I really envied my friends who had an older brother, you know, girls always dream of having a brother as a protector. Now my son has grown up and can help us to take care of her, which was my childhood dream.

As Wei's example illustrates, most women express their desire to have two children in the hope that they will support each other and not feel lonely as they grow up. Few respondents reported being satisfied with their only-daughter childhood experience, which nonetheless allowed them to enjoy more financial resources and a better education. As regards their ideal number of children, only two of them revealed a one-birth preference. Most participants expressed their intention to have a larger family to fulfil their expectations toward siblings in childhood.

Intergenerational transmission of fertility expectations

In addition to the direct consequence of a lack of companionship, our findings show that only-daughters' second birth intention is also shaped by the intergenerational transmission of parental fertility desire. Indeed, several informants reported their mothers' unwanted abortion due to the family planning program's restrictions.

According to the one-child policy, any breach of the birth quota by urban women led not only to fines (John & Greenhalgh, 1985) but also to the loss of formal employment in the public sector or state-owned enterprises. Along these lines, our interviews show that their parents' child-loss experience has left a lasting sadness on the only-children. Consequently, parents' regret over not having more children underpins only-daughters' fertility intention to have more children.

When I was in junior high school, one day, my mom asked me if I would like to have a little brother or sister, and I later found out that my mom had fallen pregnant unexpectedly. I really looked forward to this new life; however, my parents decided on a termination in the end, because at that point the second-child policy hadn't been repealed and my mom, as a public-school teacher, would lose her job if she kept the child... it's a pity for my family. Now, as the one-child policy has been revoked, I would like to have two children because my parents at that time didn't have the opportunity to have a second child, I would like to make the most of this opportunity (Yi, 28 years old).

Fertility norms and values are transmitted across generations (Bao et al., 2017). In this case, our finding shows that women's fertility intention shifted in an upward direction to fulfil their parents' unrealized fertility preference and compensate for their childhood expectation toward siblings. In this sense, women's fertility intentions are not affected by pressure from their parents or parents-in-law, but instead by integrational family norms transmitted by a singleton daughter's own experience with her parents.

Burden of filial responsibility

The one-child policy has strengthened the bonds between Chinese daughters and parents while being associated with a significant increase in the expectations of singleton daughters' caregiving. Our respondents voiced concerns about ageing parents in China, emphasising the emotional need for children's provision of

care. Most informants expressed guilt towards their parents for being unable to provide companionship and hands-on care because of geographical distance. This is exemplified by Fei, a 30-year-old singleton woman who married a Spanish national and formed her own family in Spain. In 2013, after completing her second master's degree and marrying her husband, Fei decided to stay in Spain to pursue her career ambitions. However, as the only-child in the family, her parents constantly express their loneliness over being left behind in China.

I am the only child in my family, and my parents are not in good health. During our weekly video call, they often tell me of their feeling of loneliness. I feel deeply indebted to them because I know they need me, but here in Spain, I can do nothing. . . only call them whenever I can, listen to their complaints, and try to give them some comfort.

Being the only child signals strong normative expectations of future family care obligations, which constitute an emotional burden for migrant singletons. Notably, these perceived filial obligations towards elder parents strongly influence young women's fertility attitudes. When asked about the ideal number of children in a family, Fei said,

I will say two, because with a brother or sister, you have someone to share the responsibility of caring for the elderly parent. If I have a sibling, I won't worry about my parents as much as I do now because I know there's someone in China to take care of them, and I can feel relieved while I'm in another country.

Fei's accounts show that migrant singleton daughters' fertility expectations are associated with their experiences as the only-child in relation to filial obligations. As a migrant, it is related to their inability to fulfil the expected eldercare responsibilities. Together, these perceptions influence their fertility desire for a larger family size. Besides emotional work to maintain relationships with their parents, singleton daughters' awareness of family obligations became particularly acute in the face of stressful life events, like parents' disability, illness and even

death. This happened with Ying, a 32-year-old mother of two children who came to Spain in 2009. After finishing her Bachelor and Master's degrees, she and her husband decided to stay in Spain. She recounted the experience of facing her father's death in 2020:

Since childhood, I had been well-protected by my parents; they never let me worry about domestic affairs, but with my father's death, suddenly I became the backbone of my family and, most importantly, my mother's emotional support. I pretended to be strong in front of her, but actually I felt overwhelmed because I had no one to reveal my depression and grief.

Faced with both affective and practical care needs related to filial responsibility, singleton daughters became more aware of their caring responsibilities towards their parents and began realising the importance of sibling in terms of parental care. These changes challenged women's upheld fertility ideals and raised their fertility intentions. Two years ago, feeling fulfilled by her only daughter, Ying did not plan to have any further children. However, her fertility decisions changed after her father's death. She reflected:

After my daughter's birth, I told everyone that I would not have any more children because no one could be better than her. But my father's death changed my mind because it made me realise how important it is to have a sibling; for example, if I had a sibling, things might be easier, I would have someone to talk to and share the caring responsibilities with. That's why I'm now planning to have another child because I don't want my daughter to have to shoulder the burden of caring for the elderly alone when we're old.

These narratives reflect how the one-child family policy has challenged traditional gender patterns, and how family responsibilities regarding the burden of caring for the elderly in adulthood influence Chinese women's fertility norms, values and beliefs.

5.4.2 Motherhood experience in a transnational context

In this section, by drawing on women's lived experiences of motherhood in transnational contexts, we discuss their reproductive decision-making process toward negotiating their fertility ideals and the challenges regarding (1) the gendered division of domestic labour, (2) a lack of childcare support, and (3) work–life conflicts after childbirth. In contrast to their fertility expectation, these unexpected obstacles after immigration led to a downward shift in women's childbearing decisions, and created a mismatch between ideal family size and fertility intentions.

Persistent gender-based division of labour

Despite singletons daughters' empowerment and their educational achievements, gendered domestic labour division within the household remains unchanged in Chinese families, with women being the primary caregivers and undertaking the day-to-day childcare responsibilities (Cao & Lin, 2019). While our participants were highly educated immigrants, and some even earned more than their partners, the majority of the respondents reported that after childbirth, they did most of the housework and childcare tasks. Wen, a 32-year-old mother of a nine-year-old daughter, reported:

Interviewer: Who usually takes care of the child?

Wen: I look after the child myself, although sometimes when my husband is at home he also helps.

Interviewer: Who is mainly responsible for household chores at home?

Wen: I do almost everything, but sometimes my husband helps with the washing-up.

Wen's narratives show that gender differences in childcare, housework and family responsibilities are still shaped by traditional gender ideologies in the private sphere of life. Women are still more likely to be responsible for care

provision, with paternal involvement generally being low in most cases. Yet, childcare is described as physically and psychologically demanding, with many migrant mothers acknowledging that they feel overwhelmed by their caring responsibilities, which further reduces their fertility intentions. As Wen stated:

Sometimes I feel that 24 hours is not enough, and every day passes very quickly. Before my daughter was born, I thought that the ideal number of children would be two, but now I don't think I have the time and energy to have another child, so I just gave up that idea.

As McDonald (McDonald, 2000) suggests, women opt out of childbearing if the division of labour in the home remains unequal. Informants' accounts of family responsibilities and domestic care demonstrate that life satisfaction following childbirth influences women's future fertility intentions (Margolis & Myrskylä, 2015). In this regard, the unequal division of household labour based on persistent traditional gender ideology, to a large extent, discouraged women's decision to realise their fertility expectations.

Lack of childcare support

In contemporary China, childcare responsibilities are shared within the extended family (F. Chen et al., 2011). Grandparental childcare can help offset the negative consequences of the gendered division of domestic labour (Shen & Jiang, 2020). Our findings show that this is particularly true in the transnational context, where singleton female migrants who received childcare support from grandparents had significantly reduced childcare burden and improved life satisfaction after childbirth. Zheng's experience illustrated this. After divorcing her first husband in China, Zheng married her current husband in 2005, along with her six-year-old daughter. As Zheng was the only-child, after her father's death, her mother migrated to Spain to live with the family and helped her daughter. Thanks

to her mother's substantial support in childcare and housework, Zheng could devote herself wholly to her own business.

My mom helped us a lot in childcare, especially during the breast-feeding period. And as she has already retired and is in good health, she also helps me by sharing the housework, which largely reduces my workload and permits me to work full-time in my company.

This suggests that parental support for childcare, in terms of emotional and practical support, facilitates migrant mothers' reconciliation of work and care responsibilities, and allow mothers to pursue career opportunities. Importantly, positive maternal experiences with intergenerational care encourage adult children to achieve ideal fertility plans. Five years after her migration, Zheng decided to have another child, considering that with her mother's help, another birth would not put much parenting pressure on her in the sphere of family life.

Nevertheless, as our sample shows, this option is not readily available to all migrant families because most singleton daughters do not have parents in the host country for intergenerational support. Recent literature suggests that due to the difficulties in adapting to a new country, such as language barriers and lack of a social network, most grandparents choose to stay in China rather than migrate to Spain with their adult children (Wu & Del Rey Poveda, 2024). This lack of family support poses a challenge for migrant mothers, particularly first-time mothers, who lack parenting skills and knowledge, making it difficult for them to cope with the demands of reproductive work in a new country. This was the case for Ya, a 28-year-old mother who gave birth to her son in Spain during the pandemic while being physically separated from her parents by cross-border mobility restrictions. Not having intergenerational care evoked anxieties for Ya as she confronted the fear of bringing a child into the world. It also created a high level of parental stress as she cared for her child without her mother's

guidance and practical help, particularly when the child fell ill. Reflecting on her motherhood experience, Ya recounted:

For me, the most difficult moment was when the child got sick. You know, the newborn child is very vulnerable; my husband and I are both new to childcare and with no elders around to teach us, we have to deal with problems on our own. I remember once the baby had a fever at midnight, and we took him to the emergency immediately because we didn't know what to do; it was a terrible experience for me. In Spain, nobody helps us (with childcare), so we just have to figure out how to raise our child by ourselves.

Being overwhelmed by the emotional strain of maternal challenges in the immigrant context without family support, some migrant women become more hesitant about moving forward with their fertility plans. The narratives of Han, mother of two sons, illustrate this. Due to her own parents' health problems and her parents-in-laws' other family duties, she and her husband did not have parents to care for the children. When asked her intention to have another child, Han stated:

No, the previous experience of bringing up the two children alone was so exhausting for me that I don't want to repeat it (have more children) again.

Downward occupational mobility and career interruption

As noted above, all respondents were highly educated and skilled women who had higher career ambitions and a dual-earner family model before becoming mothers. However, demanding childcare tasks, combined with limited family support and the gendered division of domestic labour, negatively affected women's work-family balance and influence their ability to return to work. Many experienced a 'motherhood penalty', with reduced labour force participation and, in some cases, even stopped working. Lu's story illustrates how women's new family roles as mothers changed their career trajectories. In 2018, Lu (32 years old)

obtained a double master's degree and married her Spanish husband. Before marriage, Lu worked in a consultancy firm in Barcelona. However, after their daughter's birth two years ago, Lu and her husband decided to move back to her husband's hometown, a small city in northern Spain, expecting childcare support from her in-laws. Nevertheless, internal movements and the motherhood duties led to unexpected career interruption for Lu owing to the scant job opportunities in the new city. Compared with the better job opportunities in Barcelona, Lu found it increasingly difficult to find a job that matched her qualifications in the small town. Consequently, since her daughter's birth, she has remained at home caring for the child. Lu talked about her experience involuntarily becoming a stay-at-home mother during full-time motherhood:

At that time, the child was very small and needed us constantly. So, I just decided to look after her myself. However, when the child reached the age to go to day-care centre, I decided to look for a job, but suddenly I found that everything has changed. Since I still have to arrange my time in the afternoon to pick up the child, there's no suitable job that accommodates my childcare time. It also has a lot to do with the city, because here (in the new city), it's really difficult to find a qualified job for immigrants compared to Barcelona.

Lu's narratives are echoed by other respondents, which demonstrates that the constraints imposed by childcare responsibilities during the transition to motherhood entail higher opportunity costs than anticipated. Furthermore, singleton daughters, who are regarded as the 'privileged daughters' in the family (Tu & Xie, 2020), always have high career aspirations in professional roles. Most mothers perceive their professional success an important way to reward parental investment (Y. Liu, 2023; won Kim et al., 2018) and, most importantly, closely linked to their sense of self-worth. Meanwhile, the reduced participation or disruption of career trajectories after childbirth leads to anxiety, self-doubt and a sense of frustration. As Lu stated:

Sometimes I feel really frustrated and even indebted to my parents for their huge investment in me. Since childhood, they organised various extra-curricular classes, such as musical instruments, sports, and languages, in the hope that I would be able to achieve my life goals when I grew up. I also made every effort to study and work, but now, after becoming a migrant mother, I cannot even find a job.

Most participants, like Lu, expressed a strong desire to return to work. The high cost of having children in terms of labour market uncertainty plays a crucial role in their fertility decisions. Many felt that another birth would prevent them from returning to work, thus leading them to make adjustments and compromise their fertility plans. For example, Lu and her husband planned to have two children before their transition to parenthood, but she is now unsure because of the perceived opportunity costs:

Before marriage, my husband and I planned to have at least two children, but now I am really not sure if I can handle it. We might have another child in the future, but obviously not now.

Employment interruptions after childbirth are a critical point in mothers' fertility decision-making process. Based on previous experience of incompatibility between career aspirations and motherhood, most career-oriented women became more concerned about the potential sacrifices to make to accommodate another child's childcare demands, which discouraged them from realising their childbearing ideals.

5.5 Discussion and conclusions

By focusing on changes in the one-child generation migrant women's childbearing desires, expectations, and outcomes from a gender perspective, this study captured the dynamics of their fertility decision-making processes in transnational spaces. Our focus on these middle-class professional women's motherhood experiences

and work-family trajectories reflects how their childbearing decisions are shaped by an ongoing process of negotiating their career aspirations, personal needs and family care work demands under conflicting social expectations.

The empirical findings suggest that, first, women face the prospect of even greater future care responsibilities because of changing family structure and gender norms. These changes encourage singleton daughters to express a desire or expectation for larger family size to share the realities of eldercare pressures in adulthood.

Nevertheless, single daughters' new roles and responsibilities as migrants, mothers and wives after immigration lead to various struggles that significantly affect their fertility choices. The gendered division of labour particularly persists in the family domain, where family and domestic responsibilities still fall disproportionately on women. Yet, unlike most of their counterparts in China who can always receive childcare support from their parents or in-laws (Y. Z. Chen, 2019), the lack of family support for migrant women creates more challenges to cope with demanding childcare responsibilities. This is especially true for new mothers without parenting information and experienced unexpected downward career mobility after childbirth. In this context, singleton daughters' ambivalent maternal feelings, many of whom saw children as desirable but obstacles to their careers, challenged participants' expectations of their fertility ideals. This further constrained a migrant mother's ability to perform her family ideals and contributed to women's expectation-outcome mismatch.

Our findings make several theoretical contributions to the gender, migration and family literature. First, by situating singleton daughters' experiences within a wider institutional and sociocultural context, our study offers a unique opportunity to examine how changing gender norms, care and responsibility structure the fertility norm of one generation at the micro level. Second, the life course approach

adopted in this article helped us to gain a deeper understanding of how major life events such as migration shape Chinese singleton women's fertility attitudes over time. These findings have important policy implications in addressing the gap between immigrant groups' childbearing ideals and practices. For example, favourable family policies can positively influence women's decisions regarding the ideal number of children (Bueno, 2020; Díaz Gandasegui et al., 2021) by reducing childrearing's financial and opportunity costs (Wesolowski & Ferrarini, 2018). Third, this study is among the first to investigate singleton migrant daughters' fertility patterns in a transnational context. Despite the growing Chinese community in Spain, only-daughters' childbearing status remained overlooked as scholars focused mainly on economic migration (Lamas-Abraira, 2021; Masdeu Torruella, 2020). Our findings show that the only-child generation is a specific group in a transnational setting that records its particular reproductive behaviour. As a 'privileged' group in China, singleton daughters enjoy increased parental support and high educational attainments. Nevertheless, as a disadvantaged group in the host country, they are more likely to struggle with increased care responsibilities for parents and offspring. Therefore, more attention is needed in future research to address the conflicting voices of motherhood in marginalized groups.

Finally, the limitations of this study suggest a few promising directions of future research. Because our focus has been on singleton daughters from urban China and the sample was relatively well-educated, findings may not generalize to all Chinese families. Future research could expand the scope to focus on a wider range of one-child generation adults with different hukou status and socioeconomic backgrounds. Last, the lack of statistics on Chinese singleton adults' fertility information in destination countries complicates the assessment of their childbearing decision-making process in the context of migration from

a macro perspective. Thus, more quantitative data are needed to advance the field in future research.

6

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to analyse the changing family dynamics within Chinese migrant families from three perspectives: carework negotiations, parenthood experiences, and childbearing decisions. Each study focuses on a different aspect of this aim. The first two studies focused on the (re)construction of migrant families' carework strategies both within and across states by drawing on parents' own narratives. The third study addressed the parenthood facet of family dynamics in Chinese families by capturing the fathering practices of migrant fathers. The findings shifted attention away from the dominant 'mother-centred' literature and highlighted the changing gender role expectations in the context of transnational migration. The final study looked at childbearing outcomes, examining how women's fertility expectations are both negatively and positively influenced by their unique family roles as urban single daughters and the challenging experiences of migrant motherhood in a new socio-cultural environment.

Chapter 2 disentangled the complex interplay of cultural, economic and institutional factors related to migration that shaped Chinese parents' collaboration, negotiation and even conflict over caregiving decisions across family generations,

and highlighted the importance of kinship as a resource for reconciling work and family life. Prior research on Chinese migrant families showed the prevalence of kin-based care arrangements within this ethnic community, while the role of different social mechanisms behind this care-work pattern remains unclear. The results suggest that Chinese parents' high preference for informal childcare is due to its high quality and flexibility, and because it transfers cultural values to the second generation. Moreover, Chinese migrants' carework is a changing process, where parents constantly navigate among different childcare strategies based on the availability of informal childcare, immigrant status, and economic conditions at different stages of settlement in the destination society.

Chapter 3 explored how transnational parent-child relationships are shaped by (im)mobility regimes and state interventions in times of crisis by examining changes in Chinese migrant parents' perceptions of transnational parenting and their responses to prolonged separation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggest that transnational families are deeply affected by and vulnerable to the immobility or highly conditional mobility produced by the pandemic, which dramatically changes the context in which migrant parents perform caregiving and emotional labour across borders. By focusing on the major changes in the lives of transnational families caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the findings highlight the importance of the physical proximity of family relationships and call attention to the inequalities embedded in cross-border mobility that condition access to transnational parenthood.

Chapter 4 examined migrant men's experiences of negotiating caring responsibilities and their ideals of fatherhood as they move to a new context. In particular, one of the key contributions of this study is its emphasis on the employment characteristics of this migrant community, taking into account the dominant labour market activity of self-employment among Chinese families, which has

created both opportunities and challenges for the performance of their fathering roles. The findings show that the changes brought about by migration, such as women's increased participation in the labour market and the growing demand for childcare, have reshaped traditional gender roles and care responsibilities within migrant families, where fathers began to seek new fathering practices beyond their traditional breadwinner role, and these new fathering practices result in a more intimate relationship with their children.

Chapter 5 focused on the one-child generation women's childbearing expectations in the context of migration. The aim of this study is threefold: to explore how changing family dynamics in the context of contemporary China influence young urban singletons' attitudes towards desired family size, to uncover these young singletons' motherhood experiences in a transnational setting, and to examine whether and to what extent their contrasting family roles as migrant mothers and siblingless daughters shape their fertility expectations about ideal family size. The results show that while the family background of single-child families tends to encourage singleton daughters to express a desire for larger family size, the challenging realities of unequal division of household labour, lack of social networks, and downward occupational mobility as migrant mothers in a new country largely discourage women from realising their fertility expectations. These empirical findings provide a deeper understanding of how changing gender norms, care and responsibility reconstruct the fertility norm of one generation at the micro level.

Despite the increasing relevance of Chinese population in the country, in-depth analyses of the changing family dynamics of this community remain absent. This is largely due to the lack of appropriate data at both national and local levels, as well as the relative difficulty of approaching this ethnic niche, which has traditionally been viewed as a 'closed and somewhat mysterious community' in destination societies (Laczko, 2003). However, the fieldwork undertaken for this

this thesis provides a unique opportunity to examine the challenges and opportunities, cohesion and tensions, vulnerability and resilience experienced by migrant parents within families and across generations that cannot be fully captured or explained by existing empirical and theoretical work. In this regard, this thesis emphasizes the importance of qualitative research, which can provide a richer description of the complex family dynamics that operate within transnational households. Future research can also apply these methods to examine the family dynamics of the Chinese community in other countries, in order to better understand the extent to which institutional factors explain cross-national differences in migrant family life. As the findings of this thesis show, the carework and childbearing decisions of Chinese migrant families are always carefully negotiated and strategized based on a complex interplay of cultural, economic, and family factors. Therefore, I argue that future initiatives to improve access to childcare services among this minority community must be based on a proper understanding of cultural differences in childrearing practices and immigration status in terms of limited social-support networks. Such an understanding would be very useful in planning specific services and intervention strategies that address the needs of migrants at different stages of their settlement and contribute to a better integration of this community into the host society.

Finally, some limitations of the present thesis need to be mentioned, which may provide a kind of roadmap for future analyses. First, the sampling technique used in the fieldwork may have discouraged respondents from expressing their negative perceptions of kin-provided childcare, as participants may have felt pressured to mention any negative perceptions of family members as this may risk their reputation in the community. And this may be why participants in our sample seemed to have fairly positive perceptions of kinship childcare, while the drawbacks of this arrangement were rarely mentioned. Second, the small

sample size of this study may not be representative of the Chinese population as a whole. At this point, future research would benefit from quantitative analyses using panel data. For example, the forthcoming microdata from the 2021 Spanish Census could be a helpful tool to examine the family dynamics of the Chinese population at the national level. Third, the findings of this study are based on one-off interviews, which may not be able to capture the unfolding experiences of parenthood over time as a longitudinal qualitative study (LaRossa, 2005). Thus, conducting follow-up interviews with some of the participants in this study to track changes over time would be an important direction for future research.

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